A

VICTIM

OF

TWO POLITICAL PURGES

by

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Translated from the Thai by David Smyth

Foreword

When a country has emerged from troubled times and is governed under a system of democracy, the word 'rebel' becomes a word of the past. But during this last world war, a new kind of rebel emerged, namely the Free Thai organization, who, during the time of *Luang* Phibun, were regarded as rebels beyond the kingdom's boundaries.[1] Elder Statesman Pridi Phanomyong and *M.R.* Seni Pramot are both heroes in the eyes of the people today, for having salvaged the honour of the nation as leaders of the Free Thai movement.[2] But looked at from a different point of view, both were leaders of a rebellion, in which they risked imprisonment, exile and denunciation by their enemies in the same way that Prince Boworadet had. The former prime ministers, Khuang Aphaiwong and Phraya Phahon Phayuhasena, and other prominent and widely respected individuals, too, have committed acts which the law at the time regarded as criminal acts of rebellion. Today, it would be extremely difficult to find a prominent person who had never been a rebel.

Whether rebellion is something honourable or not depends entirely on the viewpoint of the people, and this may fluctuate with the times. Recently, public attitudes towards the actions of those charged with rebellion have changed from negative to positive. But there are still a considerable number of people who think that the 1939 rebellion[3] and the Prince Boworadet rebellion were one and the same. The people want reconciliation; they want the two sides to forgive one another. But if the truth became apparent that the 1939 rebellion was fabricated slander, and that the execution of eighteen people was murder masquerading behind the name of the law, perhaps the people would want to know who the main brutal villain was, and they might want society to have its justice by one means or another.

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[1] For a note on *Luang* and other conferred titles, see Appendix 1.
[2] For a note on *M.R.* and other hereditary titles, see Appendix 1.
[3] In Thai this is referred to as *Kabot 2481*. At the time this memoir was written, the Thai New Year began on 1st April. Thus, the Buddhist Era year may differ from the A.D. year by either 543 or 542 years. Arrests of so-called conspirators were carried out in January, toward the end of B.E. 2481 but the beginning of A.D. 1939. The Thai calendar was adjusted to make 1st January the beginning of a new year in B.E. 2484 (A.D. 1941).

This book speaks of the 1933 rebellion too, but leaves the analysis to historians, whose duty it is to determine the purpose of and reasons for rebellions. Historians will be in no hurry to make any judgements while individuals involved in those incidents are still alive, and they also have to wait for the emotions of people involved in those incidents to calm down. It is their duty to gather facts from diverse pieces of evidence, documents, letters and memoirs, without credulously believing one side of the story; if any historian takes government communiqués on the crushing of the 1933 revolt as the full truth, without seeking out other evidence, he will gain a reputation for presenting falsehoods to mankind.

It is also the duty of historians to seek out the core truth about events. If future generations in the next century still believe the Special Court's verdict that the Prince of Chainat was really a rebel, then it is the shortcoming of historians who have been unable to assemble sufficient facts for mankind's needs.

If *A Dark Age*[4] and this book serve as a warning to historians to seek out the truth about the 1939 rebellion, without reference to the judgements of the Special Court, then it will have partly satisfied this writer's wishes, even when he may no longer be alive; but if these two books serve as a warning to today's politicians to uphold justice in society and prevent any blemish on this generation in history, then it will have completely satisfied the wishes of this writer.

M.R. Nimitmongkol Navarat 1939[5]

[4] *Yuk Thamin* by 'Phayap Rotchanwiphat' (Khun Rotchanawiphat), first published in February 1946.

[5] Although this foreword is dated 1939, a number of references, both in the Foreword and in the main body of the memoir have been added at a later date, probably just before publication in 1946.

Chapter One

Arrested

'Where's *Mom* Nimit?'

The harsh, terse voice of authority was about twenty metres away. A woman's hesitant reply, which I did not catch, followed, and then came the sound of several footsteps tramping along the hard ground.

I was lying down in an Irrigation Department barge which lay beached on the bank of Khlong Phai Phra in Ayutthaya Province. I had been delegated, together with four other political prisoners, who after being granted a royal pardon had applied to work for the Irrigation Department, to come and investigate the possibility of building a dam at Khlong Phai Phra. At 8.00 a.m. that day I should have been clearing mud from the paddy fields with my companions, as we measured the ground level on the two sides of the canal. But as chance would have it, I had a headache. It was as if fate was handing me over smoothly into the clutches of the police authorities.

The voice inquiring about me was unfamiliar. None of the workers under my control would have been so lacking in respect as to mention my name in that tone of voice, and, besides, it was not yet time for them to have returned from measuring the level of the canal.

I got up from where I had been lying. When I looked out towards the stern of the boat, my heart began to pound. A police captain, sergeant-major and a further eight constables, all armed, were questioning the cook on another barge. She looked pale with fright and was pointing in my direction.

Whatever the reason for my heart pounding, I did not feel frightened by these policemen, nor did I pay attention to the guns they were pointing in my direction. As I walked straight towards them, my boldness left them momentarily astonished. But

they quickly formed a group and released the safety catches, in readiness to use their weapons.

'You were asking for me?' I asked the police officer.

'You're *Mom Ratchawong* Nimitmongkol, right?'

'That is correct.'

'The Director-General sent me to invite you to come to Bangkok.'

'What for?'

'I don't know.'

'When does he want me to come?'

'You're to come with me, right now. Please go and get dressed.'

It was a normal conversation. It looked like an ordinary, everyday occurrence, and of no importance other than that the Director-General of the Police Department was honouring M.R. Nimitmongkol with an invitation to meet on some as yet unspecified business. I had previously met and spoken with the Director-General as a friend It was possible that on this occasion I might have to meet him on the basis that he saw me as an enemy, due to some kind of misunderstanding, which I hoped I would be able to rectify. My boldness and lack of apprehension at that time was due to truly naïve stupidity.

I led the ten policemen to my boat. The captain wanted to carry out a search, so I helped him. Every box, every bag was opened and every item of clothing unfolded and shaken. Every piece of paper with writing on it was read. But he did not find what he was looking for. He frisked me, examined my wallet and removed a piece of paper from it.

'What's this?'

'A poll tax document.'

'Do you have a gun?'

'No.'

'A knife?'

'No.'

He looked under the hull of the boat, pulled out a machete and threw it away. He sat down disappointed, with a vacant look in his eyes. Then he tore the poll tax

document into little pieces. I was about to protest (because I was afraid I would have to pay for a new one), when for the first time, a little intelligence began to flow through my brain. The police officer was ripping up my poll tax document because he thought it would be of no further use to me. He had received orders to arrest me and he was quite certain that there was no way I would regain my freedom.

'Invite' was a nice-sounding word, which was used instead of 'arrest'. It suddenly occurred to me that in 1933 I had been even more politely and gently 'invited'. But I was also quite sure that I would not suffer the same fate again that I had in 1933. On that occasion I had carried out the orders of my commander, without knowing that his orders were illegal. I was sentenced as a coup plotter (without ever having plotted against anyone at all) and then released on a royal pardon. But this time, no one had ordered me to do anything, and after I had received a royal pardon, I did not harm or consider harming anyone. Why was I going to be put in prison again? Did it mean that the country no longer had the sacred powers to protect the innocent?

Conversation on the boat

I had been ordered to gather together my belongings and board the small rowing boat, which the police had hired. The water was overflowing the banks of the canal as it followed the curve of the village. The policemen were enjoying the beauty of nature. They must have been pleased that they had been able to carry out their duties without any difficulties. They had come and arrested a coup plotter, who surely must be a significant figure. Otherwise, why would so many of them have been detailed, and armed, too? They must have anticipated that the rebel would put up a fight, or try to escape, or offer some kind of resistance, but when it became apparent that this one would go quietly, they were relieved. They began to chat and joke with one another; some whistled, others sang.

But I was thinking about an incident that had occurred the evening before. After dinner, a friend had invited me over to the home of one of his relatives. We paddled the boat along to the entrance to the canal, where his relative's house was located. There, we learned, for the first time, that three days earlier in Bangkok, a

number of important figures had been arrested on charges of plotting a coup. My friend's relative brought out the newspapers for us to read. One carried headlines about the arrest of *Phraya* Songsuradet and gave the names of several other people.[6] I read the news with a feeling of dismay, yet I felt some sense of relief that none of my relatives or friends appeared among the names of those arrested. *Chao Khun* Thephatsadin, Chao Khun Udom, *Phra* Sitthi Ruangdetphon and other individuals arrested had absolutely no political links with me. If these people really had planned to overthrow the government, there would be excitement at Bang Khwang Prison at the big increase in the number of important inmates. But if they had not done anything illegal, it was up to them to prove it in court. I understood that these cases would be settled in a court of justice.

As I read the newspaper, I had thought to myself, 'Too bad that none of us old Bang Khwang hands were involved in this revolt, too.'

Sitting in the boat under police guard, the thought occurred to me for the first time that if I could be arrested like this, without having done anything wrong, then Chao Khun Thephatsadin and Chao Khun Udom might be in the same position, too. In 1933 I had seen a lot of bootlickers emerge, who curried favour by evil means, twisting things to slander certain individuals, so that they were vilified, arrested and in some cases imprisoned. The general public still does not know the truth and tends to believe that the Special Courts acted fairly enough. Or, even if it becomes known that someone innocent has been punished, the public usually thinks, 'He's in prison because of his own bad luck. As for me, I'm not in prison, so I'm alright.'

Jean-Jacques Rousseau pointed out that the fact that people in general think this way makes it possible for those wielding power to commit unopposed acts of brutality within the country.

I felt scared when I realized that I might be vilified, that I might be put back in prison, and that people might believe that I had really done something wrong. Or else, they might say, 'Serves him right', or at the least, they might not even be interested,

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[6] For a brief biographical note on Phraya Songsuradet and other individuals who figure

leaving the unfortunate to his fate. Those unfortunates hated by a dictatorial government can neither depend on royal prerogatives nor rely on the courts, so they are the most pitiful in the world.

If you are imprisoned because a dictatorial government hates you, yet the people love and sympathize with you, this is not such bad fortune. Even in hardship there is some feeling of warmth if you know that most people feel sympathy for you.

'Please tell me just one thing,' I asked the sergeant-major. 'I've been arrested for something political, haven't I?'

He nodded.

'Do you really think I've done something wrong?'

'I don't know. You should know what you've done.'

'I haven't done anything wrong at all.'

He nodded again.

'Do you think,' I continued, 'that even though I haven't done anything wrong at all, that if I have to go before the Special Court, my chance of getting out of this is actually very slim?'

'The court will know very well whether someone has done something wrong or not.'

'The court may know, but it has to pass judgement according to the wishes of the government.'

'That's impossible.'

Our conversation came to an end. I had talked to him because I wanted sympathy. But he was probably the last person in the world to feel any sympathy for me, and continuing the conversation would only make things worse.

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prominently in this memoir, see Appendix 2.

Chapter Two

The Prince of Chainat

A large police motor launch was waiting for us at the mouth of Khlong Phai Phra. We transferred from the rowing boat to the motor launch and set off for Bangkok at about 21.00 hours. A car took us from the jetty in Bangkok to the Royal Palace Police Station. There, I was once again searched for prohibited items. Sharp or pointed items, such as my razor and nail scissors, were confiscated, together with my first aid kit and pens and pencils. The search completed, I was sent off to the cells.

But in front of one cell I stood astounded, scarcely able to believe my eyes that the Prince of Chainat should be sitting on a chair in that very cell. I raised my hands to pay respect and was about to approach him, when the sergeant on duty intervened and led me off to another nearby cell.

'You're not allowed to speak to anyone,' the sergeant said as he locked the door. 'If you need something, tell me. Please eat your food. It's been standing there all evening.'

'I'd like to take a bath first. I'm covered in sweat.'

'You can't yet. You have to wait until tomorrow.'

I turned and looked at what he had called 'food'. There was a plate of rice and a bowl of soup. Pleading to be allowed to take a bath seemed unlikely to be successful, so I drew some satisfaction simply from alleviating my hunger, having had nothing to eat all day. But once I sat down to eat, I felt bothered by the stench of excrement and the smell of putrid food. The cell was only twelve feet square. In the corner was a toilet bucket, which had not been emptied for several days. The walls were covered with traces of phlegm and spittle. The ground was covered in dust and the cracks in the bed plank were teeming with bugs. This tiny, stuffy, stifling, stinking room would be where I would live, eat and sleep for the next three months.

'But if the Prince of Chainat can put up with all this, the likes of me really shouldn't complain,' I thought.

The fact that I had seen the Prince of Chainat in the cell seemed amazing beyond belief. Had Thailand really entered the dark ages? Such was the pride and arrogance of the Luang Phibun government that it had put a son of King Chulalongkorn in prison. The government should, instead, have been ashamed at victimizing this member of the royal family, whom everyone knew was a kind man who had performed many charitable acts. His many good deeds for the nation included the founding of Siriraj Hospital, establishing a university and the Department of Public Health. He had worked himself hard to the point where he had become seriously ill and had had to retire. Since then he had become interested in supporting the arts, music and religion. Luang Phibun ought to have realized that an ambitious person who competes for political power, and a person who loves knowledge and the beauty of art, are not one and the same. But Luang Phibun was perhaps too enamoured with himself, so that he believed slanderous suggestions that the Prince of Chainat had lowered himself to become Luang Phibun's enemy.

A solution to suffering

I got through the first night in the cell by elevating my mind, like a yogi, who is indifferent to various feelings. Or if anyone were to say that my mind was not as elevated as that of a yogi, but rather had descended to the depths of that of a beast, I would agree, because yogis and beasts alone can eat unconcerned next to a toilet bucket, surrounded by filth, and then sleep with sweat streaming down their bodies.

Those who are suffering long for sleep to transport their souls from the world, even temporarily. One reason that I became able to put up with the hardship was because I was able to make my mind like that of a yogi, or a beast. Another was that I slept easily; and I was also able to allow my thoughts to drift by reading or daydreaming.

When we sit back comfortably, light up a cigarette and ask really silly questions, like, 'What should multi-millionaires like Rockefeller do?' then I think that everyone is more or less able to pursue their daydreams, although if you go too far, you will go mad. But those, like me, who have to spend a long time in a cell, are

bound to feel the need to daydream to a greater or lesser extent. However, as our minds become stronger, we may begin to ask questions which are not so silly, such as, 'Why do men wage war on one another?' or 'How could everyone be made a disciple of the Buddha, even if only in so far as abstaining from oppressing one another?' or 'Why do Thais these days think that it is alright to let Luang Phibun have such power that he has become arrogant and started to put people in prison for fun, according to his whims?'

The fault of the victim

I sat smoking a cigarette, allowing my thoughts to drift towards the question of whether my arrest on this occasion was part of some pre-determined destiny, which required no reason, or whether there was a reason that lay within my own realm of responsibility. The words of a poem I had memorized as a child came to mind:

The doctor diagnoses a cold,
The fortune teller says it's an accumulation of bad fortune
The witch says it's possession by a spirit,
The sage says, it's karma, of course, you made it yourself.

From this poem, one would have to conclude that I was arrested as a result of my own karma (actions). There is a Buddhist saying, too, that every person has their own karma. I am therefore prepared to accept that my conduct was at fault and that I have to accept responsibility, either before Thai society or Luang Phibun. But I do not feel that my conduct was evil. Why, then, in a civilized society, should I suffer the consequences?

Suppose a toad is roaming around in search of food, in its normal manner, and it comes across a child who happens to hate toads. The child beats the toad to death with a stick. Would we say that the child did wrong in beating the toad to death, or the toad did wrong in jumping into the child's view?

I incline towards the former, that it was the child who was wrong, for beating the toad to death, and not the toad.

The law takes the same line. If one person causes harm to another, he is punished. But if the person who causes harm is the law itself, then the victim is in the same position as the toad. The large numbers of people killed by Nero in Rome, King Thibaw in Burma, and King Sua in Siam, were all in the same position as the toad.[7]

But there are no exceptions in the Buddha's teaching. A person who kills a toad has unequivocally committed a sin; and the person who put the Prince of Chainat and me in prison had also unequivocally committed a sin. Siprat, the great poet of King Narai's reign, must have regarded this as fundamental. Thus, before he was executed, he said,

'This earth is my witness,
I am my master's disciple.
If I am guilty, execute me, I accept it.
If I am not guilty and you kill me,
That sword will exact its pay-back.' [8]

Happiness from suffering

The oppressiveness of the cell, other writers, such as Suri Thongwanit[9] have already told of at length, and from what I have heard, people understood that those accused in the sedition case were generally suffering more than was the case. Pessimists say that life is suffering, while optimists say life is happiness. Both are misguided. Those who can see both the good and the bad will realize that life is a mixture of happiness and suffering. Nature has created a balance for everything, throughout the world. If the balance swings one way, then it will swing back. People in prison, like me, cast aside their sorrows until they are content, and seize opportunities for happiness which nature presents to them.

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[7] The reigns of KingThibaw (1853-78)) in Burma and King Sua (1703-9) in Siam were notorious for civil strife and bloodshed.

[8] The 17th century poet, Siprat was banished from King Narai's court at Ayutthaya for his biting sarcasm and womanizing and exiled to Nakhon Si Thammarat. There he offended the governor, who had him executed on the beach.

[9] An outspoken newspaper columnist who was arrested on numerous occasions for criticizing politicians and on one occasion condemned to death, a sentence that was later commuted to life imprisonment. This appears to be a reference to Suri's columns rather than a book.

‘Can I have a smoke?’ a prisoner on a charge of robbery called out to the policeman on duty. When he was given the answer, ‘It’s not allowed,’ he pointed to me and replied, ‘So how come he can smoke, then?’

‘He’s different from you. He’s on a political charge. Do you want to join him, so you can smoke?’

‘No,’ the man on the robbery charge quickly replied.

I was meanwhile thinking that I would not have been happy to have my status changed to being on a robbery charge. I derived a certain pleasure from an inner smugness that even though I might be blamed for a crime, it was not a dishonourable crime. If people wanted to think of me as an outlaw, at least let it be an honourable outlaw.

A special privilege granted to honourable outlaws was permission to smoke in the cell. The cigarettes one had smoked simply through the power of money never tasted as good as those smoked under special privileges.

The cells at the police station did not provide water for prisoners to bathe. But they had to provide it for political prisoners. That was another special privilege. Even though we were soaked in sweat until the appointed time, the initial hardship made the final accomplishment more valuable than it would ordinarily have been.

It was not just the special privileges that I relished. Even from those rights which had been taken away from me, I squeezed such pleasure as I could. For example, the fact that I was denied the use of sharp objects was, I interpreted, because they were afraid that I might harm myself, and they did not want me to die, because I might still be of use to them. It might be that they wanted to preserve my life, so that they could use it as a stepping stone on their path to power. I would be happy if they became important through my ruin, because if I were tried in an ordinary court, I might be destroyed without making a single person more powerful. Such was the desperate pleasure, with which I consoled myself that I was of some use, even to my enemies.

Natural freedom

Although I was able to take delight in many things, I realized, from what had happened, that I was not able to derive any pleasure whatsoever from an unnatural state.

Some philosophers argue that freedom of the mind can exist, when physical freedom has been taken way. But Jean-Jacques Rousseau thought that this was just playing with words. Rousseau regarded nature as fundamental. I believe in many of Rousseau's ideas, especially his rejection of the idea of the freedom of the mind.

Just think of the Carthaginian slaves, captured by the Romans to row their warships, and flogged with leather whips if they slacked; think of the Africans captured and sent of to be sold in the slave markets of America; think of the Thai prisoners-of-war herded off to Burma, the tendons in their ankles bound together with rattan by their Burmese captors.[10] Did these slaves and prisoners-of-war have any freedom of the mind?

These slaves and prisoners-of-war perhaps did what I was doing when I allowed my thoughts to wander off in different directions. But that is not freedom. When I free my thoughts from my body, I am in a state of dreaming. It is not a state of reality that exists in space and time on this planet. Real freedom is linked to physical freedom, such as freedom of activity, the freedom to express ideas, and so on, as stated in the law.

In fact the law should grant us these freedoms as our natural birth-right, and the law should protect our freedoms and not let anyone destroy them. Physical violence and killing are animal characteristics and therefore natural. But arrest and imprisonment never occur in nature. If imprisonment is a greater torture than flogging or killing, then I should be killed or flogged. But under no circumstances should I or any other human being have to lie in a cell.

[10] In 1767 the Thai capital at Ayutthaya was torched by the invading Burmese army and tens of thousands of Thai captives led off to Burma.

But the funny thing is, most human beings readily sign away their freedom to others in the stupidest way. If you catch a bird or a cat, it will fight and struggle to find a means of escape and seek out an opportunity for escape, both openly and in secret. Arrest and imprison a human being like me, and though it is those making the arrest who are in the wrong rather than their victim, yet someone like me is stupid enough not to try to escape, either openly or secretly.

If I worshipped freedom as much as a cat, I would rush out of the cell the moment the door was opened. I might think beforehand that the police would chase and shoot, just as a cat might think that the person who caught it would chase and beat it or kill it. The cat would rather die than sacrifice its freedom. My mind is baser than a cat's.

I was forbidden, moreover, to speak to anyone. I had to sit mute for the whole of three months. No beast would allow its freedom to use its voice to be taken away. You can force a dog to do, or not do, anything except use its voice. The more you beat it, the more it cries. Human beings like me are put to shame by dogs.

I was desperate to speak to the Prince of Chainat. It is the nature of the heart to need to convey its feelings to friends. If I heard his words I would feel uplifted. If he offered words of sympathy or commiseration, my worries would be eased. One day while a policeman was taking me past his cell for a shower, the desire to speak suddenly increased, and I blurted out in English, 'I bet those men in power don't understand that your Royal Highness takes no interest in politics. Such fools!'

Before the Prince had time to reply, the policeman roughly pulled me by my arm away from the front of the cell.

'What did you say?' he asked

'I was commiserating with him.'

'Next time, don't. It's absolutely forbidden.'

'I couldn't help it. Not being allowed to speak is unbearable.'

'Please, sir. It's just that if the sergeant knew, I'd be put in prison, too. Have a bit of sympathy for me.'

I felt sorry for the policeman. I'm always more easily defeated by the low-key approach. When I passed the Prince's cell on subsequent occasions, I lowered my head and walked past quickly.

A rebel cries

When my mother learned from the newspapers that I had been arrested, she quickly requested permission to visit me. But she received a firm refusal. She was permitted only to send me food. The police guards had received orders to strictly ensure that political detainees did not 'communicate' with their families. For this reason, access to the area in front of the cells was prohibited. Policemen who were not on guard, had to take a detour. If anyone approached to speak with us, it was known that, at the very least, they would be chased away. Any civilian whose business brought him to this place was viewed with suspicion as a possible associate of a prisoner, in disguise. The sweetmeat vendors could not get any money from the prisoners and the barber was denied the honour of touching my head. When my mother handed things over to the officer to give to me at the front of the station, she was invited to go and sit in the corner of the room, out of sight of her son. But my mother tried to point out that if she were to be sent back home without seeing her son, she would rather die there. In the end the police began to feel pity for her, so my mother moved up and came and sat opposite my cell. She looked at the iron bars behind which her son was on show. We were about 30 paces apart and her gaze had to pass through the mosquito screens, so she must have seen me only indistinctly. She had to look at me as she wiped away her tears, but she probably did not know that the tears were streaming down my cheeks, too.

A monk laughing or a rebel crying does not make a pretty sight. I had faced charges of rebellion in 1933 and now I was about to face charges of rebellion once more. Tears were unbecoming, but I know that I am soft-hearted. I have never failed to help as much as I can when my friends are in need. I, a fighter Pilot Officer, have never considered owning a gun, because I would rather be killed than kill. No animal which is a friend of man has ever died at my hands. Once I wanted to be clever,

shooting birds and hunting animals. When, with trembling heart and shaking hand, I fired at a bird and missed, I was pleased that I had missed. I fired at a small tiger in the jungles of Khok Krathiam, with the same result. I am my mother's son. I love my mother and I want my mother to love me. I am a Thai citizen. I love the Thai nation and I want the Thai people to love me. The conduct of Prince Boworadet and my commander led to my entanglement with the law as a rebel, without my realizing it. I was a rebel in name only.

However, I had no wish to cry, nor I did wish to see my mother cry, either, so I instructed the police guard to inform my mother to please not come and visit me again. I begged her not to worry because I was in good health and hoped that I would be released before long. Whether or not the policeman told her, my mother came to visit me again the next day, and after that her visits became a regular occurrence. I wanted to see her, it was true, but whenever I did, I felt sad. Each time her visit left a wound in my heart.

Chapter Three

True Blue

Had we been able to talk, the pain brought by mother's visits would have been transformed to joy. The first question I would have asked her would have been, 'Mother, what have they arrested me for?'

Perhaps she would have replied, 'I haven't a clue.' Perhaps she would have asked me in return, 'What have you gone and done now?' Or perhaps she would have said, 'Because of your regular visits to that bunch still in Bang Khwang, of course'; or, 'You shouldn't have written things for the newspapers'; or, 'It's because of that book *Siamese and Foreign Political Parties*.'[11] Or she might have said the only thing that I feared: 'They've seized the whole lot of that *True Blue*[12] book you wrote while you were in prison.'

Five years ago, when the Special Court was investigating the 1933 Rebellion, several of us who were imprisoned in Bang Khwang decided to bring out a weekly news sheet, which we called *True Blue*. Each issue of this news sheet, once it had been read by all the political prisoners, was sent out of the prison for friends and relatives to read, too. The hope was that it would be passed on discretely among friends, without letting it fall into the hands of enemies who might hand it over to the police and the government. It was an 'underground' news sheet, which proved a very gratifying success, and whose secret is revealed here for the first time.

I was the founder of *True Blue*. But *True Blue* was not the first news sheet to come out in prison. On my first day in prison (while my case was being considered), Chongkon Krairuk gave me a hand-written news sheet to read. Chongkon's news sheet was written in ink on two facing pages of an exercise book by Chongkon himself. The content consisted of whatever political news from beyond the prison that Chongkon was able to gather. Chongkon Krairuk was someone who was always

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[11] *Phak Kan Muang Sayam Lae Tang Prathet*
[12] *Nam Ngoen Thae*

poking his nose into things for the benefit of others; producing this news sheet was one such instance which was a considerable service to his fellow prisoners.

I liked to poke my nose into things, just as much as Chongkon, so it occurred to me to expand upon Chongkon's idea. I had become aware that the majority of those arrested on charges of sedition were low-ranking army officers who were following the orders of their commanders without realizing they were doing something illegal. They were not politicians, nor did they know anything, not even the very basics, about politics. *True Blue* was to be a first textbook on politics for them, and instead of writing it on sheets of paper, I would write it in a hard-covered exercise book with a cellophane cover. The cover illustration and the illustrations at the beginning of articles were drawn by Phrao Phuangnak, Toem Phonwiset and Plaek Yuwanwatthana. The regular contributors to *True Blue* were So Sethaputra, Suphot Phintuyothin,Chongkon Krairuk, Phiu Butsayuphrohm and Nimitmongkol, and I would solicit further contributions from other writers such as, Phraya Saraphaiphipat, Nai Lui Khiriwat, Phra Sisuthat and other qualified individuals. A single issue of *True Blue* would come out once a week and be circulated around the cells.

Once the principles had been agreed, we began to procure stationery, writing materials and paint for the illustrations. When we made court appearances, our relatives would secretly pass exercise books to us. The supervision of prisoners was not as strict in 1933 as in 1939. We tied the books to our bodies or thighs. Although there were searches when entering or leaving through the gates of the prison, the guards could not be bothered to carry out body searches. Consequently we were able to bring a large number of prohibited items into the prison. If there was something that we were unable to get in, we pleaded with or paid the guards to smuggle it in for us. Phra Saeng Sitthikan observed that, just as a chicken cannot help but eat paddy, so the guards could not help but accept money from us dishonestly.

True Blue drew interest and praise, not only from our fellow prisoners, but also from those of our relatives who read it. Some readers became such devotees of the *True Blue* team that they sent financial contributions or gifts of food. It made the members of the *True Blue* team immensely pleased for a while. The political ideas expressed in the first issue of *True Blue* were neutral, but in subsequent issues,

criticism of the government's actions became increasingly strident. It is possible that my contributions were more forceful and antagonistic than others in my attempt to do everything to prove that there was a ruling oligarchy at that time, that the government had seized power using the constitution as a shield, had deceived the people into thinking it was a democracy, and that its cunning methods were to strengthen its own position and that of its own clique, and not for the benefit of the nation.

The demise of *True Blue*

Perhaps anger had a part in the outspoken things I wrote. At the time, I had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment by the court, so it was only natural that I should harbour uncharitable thoughts. I had no hope that the government would remove the shackles that I now wore around my ankles. For the prison doors to be opened, there needed to be a group of individuals who were real democrats, who were patriots, prepared to make a sacrifice, and who had sufficient ability and influence to topple the government, one way or another. If, as I understood it, the government really wielded power and governed the country through a fake democracy, then one day it would be unmasked and kicked out of power. When that time came, the rebels in Bang Khwang would be praised for having been right and for having done the right thing. I wanted to leave prison laughing the loudest, because I was having the last laugh.

But some of my friends saw things differently. They believed that it was indeed rule by oligarchy. But the government might last for a long time by crushing the people into fear and deference, so that no one would dare to plot against it, threatening those that might plot, and if anyone really did plot, using severe measures to suppress them. Am Bunthai said that the Chakri dynasty had survived for 150 years by threatening to behead seven generations of the family of anyone who plotted against it. Am Bunthai and most of the others hoped that if we were well-behaved and maintained a low profile, the government would grant us a pardon, as it had promised, and they were prepared to leave prison through the mercy of the government, rather than wait in the vain hope that a group of patriots would successfully instigate a revolution.

As the wishes of those who wanted to maintain a low profile strengthened, the *True Blue* team came to be seen as hardliners who might ruin their hopes of a pardon. Although there were still people inside prison who wanted to read *True Blue*, it had become a thankless task. On the outside, none of our relatives wanted to take care of the copies of *True Blue*, and in the end, it had been decided among those responsible for housing them to destroy them. Consequently they collected them all together and burnt the lot. I was devastated when I heard the news. It was as if my friends had died. *True Blue*, which had run to 17 issues, had come to its end.

Allegiance to the government

In his book, *Compound Six* [13] Chuli Saranusit has described in detail our hopes of receiving a pardon. This hope could be traced back to the government's announcement, just after fighting had broken out at Bangkhen, that they would not punish junior officers. From what I observed of the state of mind of the junior officers assembled at Don Muang on 16 October 1933, many, once they learned from the radio that the government regarded their action as rebellious and a crime of the utmost seriousness, became terrified of committing a criminal offence. The government easily crushed the rebellion through radio broadcasts, not with guns and bullets. The defeat of the rebels had begun before the fighting had even started. But the rebels did not concede immediately because many came to the conclusion that they had been accused of insurrection already, so they might as well go ahead with it. Thus, they all took up their weapons to fight the government. When the government announced that it would not punish junior officers who came over and gave their allegiance to the government, confusion and uncertainty broke out all along the rebels' front line. Junior officers who were not instigators in the plan to change the government and

[13] *Daen Hok*

who realized they had been led towards dire consequences by their commanders, began to think of deserting and switching allegiance to the government side. This situation made Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram (Din Tharap) realize the need to withdraw and make a stand at Pak Chong in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, where he would employ forces loyal to him, whom he could rely on to stand firm and fight to the end. Those whose spirits had wavered and were thinking of switching their allegiance to the government, he would leave at Don Muang, where they could do so conveniently.

Every army officer left behind by Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram at Don Muang, Ayutthaya and Saraburi, switched their allegiance, firmly believing in the government's declaration that they would not be punished. But Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram's hopes that once he withdrew to Pak Chong, his ranks would consist entirely of men ready to fight to the end, went unrealized. Officers in Nakhon Ratchasima had a change of heart and switched their allegiance to the government and Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram had no time to deploy all his capability at Pak Chong. Pak Chong fell to a rebellion within a rebellion and Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram died in the fighting.

After Prince Boworadet had boarded a plane and fled, those who had planned to fight to the death, but had not died, fought on as they withdrew, breaking through the opposition lines at Ubon and other places and crossing into Indo-China. As for all those who had switched their allegiance to the government, the state prosecution for the Special Court had begun its investigations and was filing legal proceedings against them, regardless of the government's declaration that they would not be punished.

Now, those who had switched allegiance to the government were assembled at Bang Khwang and they were joined by other individuals whom the government regarded as enemies, accusing them of having assisted the rebellion in various places and on various occasions. Civilian defendants complained that the majority of prosecution witnesses gave false testimony. When they were tried in the Special Court, there was very little chance of successfully fighting the falsehoods. Even those who had some expertise in litigation (such as Luang Prakop Nitisan) would find it extremely difficult to escape punishment. Whether the majority of defendants in the Special Court had really done anything wrong or not, in the end they were branded by

their blue uniforms and shackles as rebels. But a spirit of allegiance to the government remained, like the allegiance of forest dwellers to the spirits of the forest, based on fear of their power, not on any love for them. It was such a spirit which blocked opposition to the government, such as the production of *True Blue*, to the extent that copies were burned and its appearance came to a premature end.

Evidence in the case

All the junior officers who switched allegiance to the government had the same excuse, that they did not know of their commanders' intentions to bring about a change in the government. They had mobilized and moved in on Bangkok because their commanders had told them there were communists in the capital and they were being mobilized to suppress the communists. They thought that such an excuse would be a defence which would exonerate them from guilt. It would be difficult for the state prosecution to find evidence of what each of the defendants knew, what they thought, and how far they had acted in unison. The state prosecutors for the Special Court had tried to assemble such necessary evidence through the use of state powers, but the majority of these officers, especially those based in Nakhon Ratchasima, were loved and respected by their men, who consequently refused to divulge anything about their commanders, and there was nothing, not even offers of high positions or money, those in power could do to turn their honest hearts. This being the case, from the point of view of fighting the case in a court of justice, there was every chance of escaping guilt. All of the defendants who were junior officers were therefore confident that they would be freed. This was an additional factor, on top of their hope that the government would not punish them. But it was a foolish hope that failed to understand that the Special Court did not have to follow the procedures of a court of justice. In the 1933 Rebellion Case, especially the cases against the officers from Khorat, the state prosecution was, in some instances, able to ascertain only that the defendants had joined the forces which had descended on Don Muang, so it judged those defendants as rebels, and they were all sent to prison and put in shackles.

Conduct in the 1933 Rebellion

Allow me to divulge here that preparations for the 1933 Rebellion had been made many months in advance, under a plan called ‘Operation Encircling the Deer’. This involved getting all the provincial armies to descend on Bangkok simultaneously in order to force the government out. They hoped they would frighten the government and that it would not consider putting up a fight. But if the government were stubborn enough to put up a fight, there would be a part of the army in Bangkok which would stage a coup.

‘Operation Encircling the Deer’ would be fine if it were used against deer. I myself could not help feeling that if they were thinking of fighting tigers, they should have made more preparations and fewer underestimations. At the least, they should not have employed ‘Operation Encircling the Deer’ against tigers.

The architect of ‘Operation Encircling the Deer’ remains unclear even now. Many people have boasted to me that they were the one who conceived it. It seems that the plan arose out of a conversation over a bottle of whisky in a provincial army club and someone added a bit here, someone else a bit there, until it was complete. Then they consulted more widely before presenting it to major figures, such as Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram. Bangkok at the time was rife with rumours of coup plots. It was widely whispered that Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram was one of the leaders of a plot to overthrow the government. Opponents of the government, who were *pro* Phraya Songsuradet, were taking an interest in Phraya Sisitthi’s stance and it looked as if these two groups might be able to co-operate. But Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram appeared to expect more support from the provincial armies than from Bangkok, and since the provincial army officers had already accepted ‘Operation Encircling the Deer’, he agreed to consider the plan.

It would have been difficult to know in advance the real intentions of each of the leaders of the rebellion and what they thought they were doing it for. But as far as there had been any discussion and agreement, everyone expressed a desire to establish a democratic form of government with the King at its head. Another view was that these individuals both hated and feared communism and suspected that a majority among the instigators of the 1932 Revolution would use their influence to introduce

communism against the wishes of the people, and that the system of government would change to a republic.

I believe that among all those who plotted revolution, there was not a single one who wished to restore the absolute monarchy. Everyone realized that system was outdated, that it was like a piece of chinaware that should just be consigned to a museum.

Nowadays, if we know that someone is planning armed revolution, we surely despise and curse them, because it is an absurdity which causes trouble for no purpose. But do not forget that, now, we live in a democracy, as a result of the efforts of democrats. All dictators are like a person riding on the back of a tiger; they dare not get off the tiger's back. If we want such leaders to relinquish power, we have to force them to do so, and in those dark times, there was no other way to force them other than by the use of weapons.

Even so, Prince Boworadet and Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram still hesitated to use force of arms. Operation Encircling the Deer was a threat, not a battle plan, and to carry out the plan they would have to depend on the full co-operation of almost all of the provincial armies. Thus it was not complete nonsense to claim that this rebellion was in tune with Thai public opinion.

Almost all of the provincial armies had agreed with Phraya Sisitthi that they would mobilize according to Operation Encircling the Deer. But the fact that some armies changed their mind and did not act as agreed was due to the shortcomings of the coup plotters, who made the mistake of allowing the government to know in advance and prepare itself to fight. This form of rebellion did not amount to a coup d'état and would turn into civil war. Moreover, when it suddenly appeared that Prince Boworadet was the leader, fears arose that if the rebellion were successful, the absolute monarchy might be restored.

It is said that at the initial stage of the rebellion Prince Boworadet was not involved. But the very fact that he received a warning letter from Luang Phibun to abandon thoughts of overthrowing the government made him change his mind and

join the coup plotters. This rumour does not make Prince Boworadet look very admirable as a patriot, but it is understandable. Just think, dear reader, how any ordinary reasonable person would feel if they received such a letter, and what they would do. One kind of person would kneel before Luang Phibun and make excuses and ask forgiveness; another would flee Thailand as quickly as they could. But another kind will think, ‘May as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb’. Prince Boworadet belonged to this latter kind.

Future historians will uncover the true facts in more detail. My duty ends merely with presenting the fact that, even though the armies at Nakhon Ratchasima and Saraburi would be happy to welcome Prince Boworadet as leader of the revolution, those elsewhere who objected to him, when all told, outnumbered those who favoured him. And in the rebellion, Prince Boworadet did not in any way prove himself to be an able warrior or a clever politician. Phraya Sisitthi Songkhram was well-known for his outstanding knowledge in military matters, but when he was unable to lead his troops into Bangkok, it was as if he had the knowledge but was not able to put it into use. The halt to marshal forces, when they had only reached as far as Don Muang, whether or not it was, as claimed, in order to wait for a negotiated settlement because they had no desire to spill blood, had the effect of appearing defeatist. The ordinary soldiers, whose spirits had been bold and reckless at the outset, began to feel disheartened, because they realized their commander-in-chief dared not engage with the government army facing them, whose forces and weapons were prepared, while their own forces and weapons were not.

No one would dare to become involved in a rebellion if they had no hope of victory. Thus, in the first second of wavering morale, people began to think of how to extricate themselves from the risk. The machinery of revolution must never fall into reverse; once it does, it is destroyed. The field camp at Don Muang fell within 4 days.

Luang Phibun Songkhram’s promise

I was not one of the rebels who switched allegiance to the government, nor was I falsely slandered. My actions at Don Muang were deemed by the Special Court to amount to rebellion. But I maintain to this day that before being imprisoned by the court I was not a rebel. I only began to have the mind of a rebel once I was in prison.

From its verdict, the Special Court accepted that it was true that I had brought my aeroplane to Don Muang two days before the rebellion in order to represent the Khok Krathiam Pilots' Club in a tennis competition at Don Muang. If the announcement of the tennis competition was merely a ruse to assemble pilots and planes, I had no knowledge of it. On the day the rebellion broke out, my commander led a squadron of planes, which would normally have been under my command, to Don Muang, and then delegated me to take over responsibility for them. It was like someone taking one's children out on an excursion and returning them home, and one then taking over responsibility again. The fact that I gave orders for the planes to be maintained and serviced was because I regarded it as part of my job, which had nothing to do with the rebellion.

One of the state prosecutors asked me informally before taking me to the cells, who, in my mind, I had sided with while I was at Don Muang. I replied that I was neutral. He then explained that if I was neutral, then I was guilty, because I was a soldier, and if a rebellion occurred, I had to crush it.

I had remained silent, not pointing out that I was unable to decide for certain who the rebels were. At the time both sides were accusing each other of being rebels. The government had come to power by using weapons. Prince Boworadet was trying the same method. Whoever lost was a rebel, while the winner was a revolutionary. I was a soldier of the nation and my oath of allegiance was to His Majesty, the King. I was neither a soldier of the government, nor of any group of politicians.

I did not intentionally lend even the slightest assistance to the activities of Prince Boworadet. But when the government forces took over Don Muang, after the rebel forces had withdrawn, I was taken to meet Luang Phibun Songkhram, who had accused me and some other pilot officers, such as Luang Amphon Phaisan, Luang In

Amnuaydet, and M.R. Anuthamrong Navarat[14] of collaborating with the rebels. The four of us denied it. Some excused themselves at great length. In the end, Luang Phibun announced before a meeting of all his officers in the Don Muang Pilots' Club that he believed that all the air force officers who had not followed Prince Boworadet in taking flight, were entirely innocent and untainted by the rebellion. He promised that there would be no further investigations into our guilt and asked all the pilot officers to co-operate with the government in putting down the rebellion until the rebels were defeated, because their secure base at Pak Chong was indeed strong. Without the full co-operation of the pilots, putting down the rebellion would be a long and arduous task.

The next day I received orders to start work at the Department of the Air Chief of Staff. Shortly after the rebels' base in Pak Chong fell, I received orders from Luang Phibun to report to the Special Court.

Hope of a pardon

If I had realized that I was regarded as one of the rebels, I would have taken an aeroplane and fled. I was a stupid rebel who had been deceived into thinking that they believed I was not a rebel, simply so that they could use me for a job. Once the job was done, they put me in prison.

When the Special Court had finished examining both the witnesses for the defence and the prosecution, one of the judges in the Special Court from the Ministry of Justice who was in charge of the case and who by chance happened to be a close neighbour of a relative of mine, expressed the opinion that the evidence of the prosecution in my case was very weak. He believed that the court would dismiss the case. So I was feeling pleased with myself. Then, as the time for the verdict approached, that judge conveyed the news that 'Parut Palace' was not prepared to let my case go, so it meant I would be sent to prison for sure.[15]

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[14] Eldest brother of M.R. Nimitmonkol

[15] Parut [Paruskavan] Palace was the headquarters of military promoters of the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy.

I always recall this incident with sadness, that the Special Court not only examined the case without taking into account the evidence of witnesses, but also did not take into account the truth, because they had to obey the orders of Parut Palace.

But I was also one of those who believed there would be a pardon, because if the group of people who held power in Parut Palace had the decency of ordinary people, they would one day regret that they had arrested and imprisoned many people unjustly.

Hopes of a pardon seemed well-founded when the government responded to King Prajadhipok's letter, prior to his abdication, that it was the government's policy to pardon political prisoners after the Special Court had delivered its verdicts, in the same manner as King Vajiravudh had dealt with prisoners of the 1912 Rebellion.[16] It may have been on this basis, or because of orders from Parut Palace reiterating the point, that before reading out the judgement in my case, the court pointed out that this verdict was simply following legal procedure, and the defendant on whom judgement was being passed should not be upset, because once the court had delivered its verdicts on all the cases, the government would quickly request royal pardons.

Moreover, when the Prime Minister, Phraya Phahon had testified as a witness for the prosecution, about 20 of the defendants had surrounded him and pleaded with him to help clear them, he had said, 'Don't be alarmed. We'll let the case follow court procedure. As far as the government's duties are concerned, I shall shortly be requesting a royal pardon.'

When the Prime Minister says this, it is believable enough. But the incident which made us absolutely convinced occurred on the day that the court passed prison sentences in the cases of the Ayutthaya army officers. About 15 minutes before the

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[16] The 1912 Rebellion was an ill-conceived plot to overthrow King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910-25) involving young army officers, some motivated by grudges, others by idealism. Of the 91 tried, 3 were sentenced to death, 20 to life imprisonment and the remainder to prison terms ranging from 12 to 20 years. The day after the verdicts were delivered the King reduced all sentences: death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment and life imprisonment to 20 years, while the remainder suffered a demotion in rank and a posting to the Northeast. In 1924 those still in prison were granted a royal amnesty to commemorate the 15th years of the King's reign.

court took its seats, Luang Phibun, who at the time was Minister of Defence, turned up at the court and summoned two of the defendants from the Engineers, Ekarin Phakdikun and M.L. Chuanchun Kamphu. He told them that the Ministry of Defence would take the pair of them that day in preparation for their release. Ekarin and Chuanchun returned to prison, their faces flushed. With trembling hands, they hurriedly gathered their things together, bade us farewell, and walked to freedom that very day.

Chapter Four

Struggle for survival

If a Minister of Defence today acted like Luang Phibun, the government would be attacked, both in parliament and in the newspapers. Imprisoning someone or clearing a person's name must be through due legal process, with no government meddling. When the courts were as deferential to Luang Phibun's power as this, it was only natural that we would then assume that accusations that they were taking orders from Parut Palace to punish some defendants, despite insufficient evidence from the prosecution, were not ill-founded.

But Luang Phibun's disregard for the legal process appeared to be normal and something that no one talked about. Indeed, the majority of us in Bang Khwang wanted him to do the same for all those who remained. In any event, we believed that there would be further Luang Phibun-style releases. People therefore set their hopes on fortune smiling upon them. Attempts to pull strings with Luang Phibun and powerful individuals in the government were made openly and were quite normal. It was every man for himself. In the end even the prison officers were fawned upon, which quickly produced benefits, in that exceptions were made, allowing more comforts in the prison. The prison reported the good behaviour of the political prisoners who helped officers in various tasks, and the prisoners regarded this as helping to speed up the government's request for a royal pardon.

The feelings of those in Compound Six were split three ways. One group thought that pulling strings in order to survive was the clever thing to do and that there was nothing dishonourable in it. They thought that no matter how much one respected or despised Luang Phibun, one should conceal it until there was an opportunity to say or do something quite openly. Another group thought that they would be pardoned even if they did not try to pull strings, and that trying to pull strings was dishonourable. This group therefore remained silent. A third group thought that there was a way of pulling strings and getting out of prison in an honourable way, by supporting some of the ideas and actions of Luang Phibun Songkhram. Several of the *True Blue* team were among this third group.

Smuggling articles out to the newspapers

We regarded *True Blue*, which had come to an end, merely as an experiment in spreading our point of view to the public. With *True Blue* we knew that there were a considerable number of people prepared to listen to ideas which were hostile to the government. Thus, if we wrote articles and sent them to the newspapers, they ought to be well-received. But writing critical things about the government in the hope of disaffecting the people and bringing it down, was a distant hope; and if the government were to know in advance, it would be dangerous, with the government withdrawing any requests for royal pardon and inevitably exerting further pressure on us, too. We therefore had to consider writing in a different way.

We interpreted 'government' to mean Luang Phibun Songkhram. We observed that this man, who held the power behind the political scene, wished to be greater and superior to other people. He held grandiose nationalist ideas. The politician in him was unlikely to hold personal grudges; when someone's political ideas changed to coincide with his, that was an end to any enmity. On this basis we thought that supporting Luang Phibun was not a loss of honour. Although it would become apparent later that such support was insincere, the people would surely think that it is the nature of the politician to be cunning.

We knew that Luang Phibun was trying to introduce a system of government based on the cult of the leader. He had expressed his ideas in newspaper articles and lectures in various places as a way of changing the system of government from a democratic path towards dictatorship. But these ideas that he had expressed did not receive the support of the people and appeared to cause a drop in his popularity every time he brought them up.

We were certain that Luang Phibun wanted supporters for his ideas about a dictatorship and we also knew that even if they supported it to some extent, the people would never fully accept a dictatorship. But some aspects of dictatorship might be beneficial to Siam, such as inculcating a spirit of patriotism, health care, and nurturing

the population. Luang Phibun's propagandists had never written about these matters at all.

With the assistance of some journalists who shared our ideas, the articles which we sent out of Compound Six thus managed to appear in the pages of various newspapers nearly every day. We received reports that many of our articles had aroused considerable interest among the people. But we did not know whether the content of these articles was good enough for Luang Phibun to want to know the names of the authors or not.

In the early months of 1937, the Ministry of Defence began to take on political prisoners for re-education while they waited for royal pardons. At that time, sending articles to the newspapers and privately trying to pull strings were in full swing. We did not know to what extent trying to use private influence would affect the granting of pardons. At the same time, we did not know whether our newspaper articles led to requests for our pardons or not. All we knew, from Nai Thongkham Khlai-okat, who came to visit So Sethaputra in Bang Khwang, was that it was widely known that we were sending articles to the newspapers, and it was also known that the regular contributors were So Sethaputra and Nimitmongkol.

Secret misdemeanours in prison

The first ones to undergo re-education were the sergeants. Next it was the junior officers and in some cases, those with the rank of major. There did not appear to be a clear system. Some said it was mainly based on whether they trusted one not to plot against the government again, and also, on one's conduct in prison.

Conduct in prison must have meant whether one had a deferential or defiant manner towards powerful individuals in the government, rather than whether one followed the rules, which were so petty, that it was impossible to obey them. All of us must have broken prison rules to a greater or lesser extent, such as connecting an electric power line in the cells, bringing in a stove for cooking, or possessing

forbidden articles, such as knives and writing materials. But only So Sethaputra and I dared to perform misdemeanours in prison which had political ramifications.

Readers of this book will probably already know that So Sethaputra compiled his *New Model English-Thai Dictionary* in prison, and they may know also, that I, along with many other people, had a part assisting in the selection and copying of entries, proof-reading the manuscript and examining the proofs. Compiling a large dictionary is arduous work, and when it is done in prison, the worries are even greater. In the first place, we had to smuggle the writing materials and various reference books we would need into the prison. Secondly, we had to connect an electricity supply and conceal it quickly when we heard the sound of prison officers on their daily rounds. Thirdly, we had to find a permanent hiding place for our electrical equipment and books in the event that there was a search. As a result, it was necessary for me to climb up the wall and make a hole in the ceiling to create a space where the forbidden items could be concealed. Fourthly, we had to smuggle the manuscript out to the printers as well as communicate with them about the publication.

Readers will probably be well aware that it was the same So Sethaputra again who made a radio receiver for use in Compound Six. At first he made a crystal set using a condensed milk can with fine wire coiled round it as a condenser. When he tried it the first time, we could hear a faint sound, like the hum of an insect. But we were extremely pleased with this initial success. It was subsequently adjusted until one could hear clearly, and then modified using a valve which could pick up signals from all over the world. But in the end, So Sethaputra slipped up and was arrested for possessing an illegal radio and fined 20 Baht by the court.

But that was not all. This tiny politician with the huge brain invented lots of other utensils, such as an electric stove, and when he was sent to the penal colony on Ko Tao, he found a way to make soap from ashes on a sufficiently large scale, for it to be produced for sale in Surat Thani Province.

While in Compund Six, those of us with some literary talent did, to a greater or lesser extent, write. But few were able to smuggle them out and keep them preserved outside the prison, and almost nobody has kept anything right up to now.

Phraya Saraphaiphiphat wrote, *My True Dream*[17], but nobody knows where it is now; So Sethaputra wrote *B.E. 2481*[18], which was later burned, along with *True Blue*; and Raleuk Langkhunsaen wrote *Paying Homage to the Statue of the King* [19] which he is now trying to track down where it might be lodged.

The Fruits of Merit and Sin and *Today*

So Sethaputra's novel, *B.E. 2481*, blended entertainment with politics, portraying Siam under a communist government. So Sethaputra, as far as I am aware, is of a liberal disposition, and thus despises communism as much as he despises dictatorships. *B.E. 2481* was written in a realistic manner and incorporated worthwhile theories and ideas. But I did not agree with some of So Sethaputra's political ideas, so I wrote a similar novel which I called, *The Fruits of Merit and Sin*[20], in which I expressed my ideas about various political ideologies, such as the theory and practice of communism, dictatorship and democracy, while trying to remain neutral. I incorporated these into the story, which took the form of a long novel, written down in thirty 40-page exercise books.

Apart from *The Fruits of Merit and Sin*, I wrote many other short stories. I hoped to publish them once I was released. There was only one thing I did not plan to publish, which was called *Today*[21], and took the form of a diary. I allowed myself to give vent to my dissatisfaction with the government in this book. It was a means, I had discovered, of easing my depression at being punished.

Since there were many prohibited items that I was bringing in and sending out of prison past the security searches, I devised a food basket with a secret drawer for prohibited items. Every piece I wrote in prison I sent outside in this basket. But in the end my secret leaked out. Khun Sisarakon, who at the time was governor of the prison, had the guards seize my basket and on another day he himself came and searched my room while I was not there. By chance I had sent out everything that I

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[17] *Fan Ching Khong Khaphachao*
[18] i.e. 'A.D. !938[9]'
[19] *Kan Thawai Bangkhom Phra Barommarup*
[20] *Bun Tham Kam Taeng*
[21] *Wan Ni*

had written. Khun Sisarakon found an exercise book belonging to Suphot Phinthuyothin and one belonging to Kua Chanwirut in my room. He must have thought the books belonged to me, so he confiscated them and ordered one of my friends to tell me that he had 'borrowed' them. When I knew that the books belonged to Suphot and Kua and learned that they had not written anything that was in any way bad, I decided to let the governor think that I was the owner of the two exercise books.

I have a change of heart

No matter how, and to what extent Khun Sisarakon looked into my history of stubbornness, it seemed that he was just extremely hesitant to put my name forward for re-education.

Nevertheless, in the early months of 1937 I was moved to the Ministry of Defence, for re-education under the command of Colonel Luang Chamnan Yutthasin, who would be accused of plotting in 1939, and who later confessed to me, that of the six groups that underwent re-education, numbering about 300 individuals, there was only me that he felt could not be trusted.

In fact, while undergoing re-education, with the opportunity to talk with friends and relatives and to stay at home on official holidays, I learned that the people's faith in Luang Phibun had increased, to the extent that anyone who thought of bringing Luang Phibun down would arouse the hatred of the people. People had forgotten that Luang Phibun favoured a dictatorial system of government, and it was even possible that they wanted Luang Phibun to have absolute power. Since public opinion had become the opposite of what I originally understood, I abandoned all thoughts of future involvement in politics.

Luang Phibun urged those now undergoing re-education to completely forget their past bitterness, and start off on a new beginning, as friends. And Luang Chamnan, who was responsible for re-education, also said that he was well aware that, while in Bang Khwang, there had been those who felt ill-will and vengeful

towards the government, but that he hoped that once freed, that desire for revenge would disappear, or at least, there would be no expressions of ill-will or revenge which might bring unnecessary danger to anyone.

I decided that I would follow the advice and exhortation of these two statesmen. So when I received a royal pardon, I began to look for work, and lead a life like any other ordinary person. I abandoned the idea of publishing *The Fruits of Merit and Sin* for fear that Luang Phibun might feel that some of its contents were sarcastic, even though that had never been my intention.

But the Special Branch refused to believe that I had given up any interest in politics. Every month, uniformed or plain-clothes police from the Special Branch would pay me a visit and question me about various matters. On one occasion they advised me that going into business was not a trustworthy thing to do, because it looked as if I was still stubbornly showing an attitude of insubordination towards the government. I should apply for a position in some ministry or another which was taking on political prisoners at the request of the Minister of Defence. Apart from that, I should stop writing for the newspapers once and for all. I thanked them for their advice, but I gave no guarantee to follow it. I was happier working in business than as a civil servant, and it seemed ridiculous to suspect that people who were not civil servants were still showing insubordination to the government. As for writing articles for the newspapers, if I wrote general feature stories, and did not touch on politics, then there ought not to be any danger.

Siamese and Foreign Political Parties

While I was in prison, I admitted that I had done some things that contravened the law. But when I got out of prison and ceased to wish to topple the government, I intended to treat the law with due respect. But I should have the freedom to act as I wished in matters which the law had not designated as being wrong.

If Siam had had a democratic government, in which the people had the right to criticize the government or openly express their ideas about national affairs, I would

have wanted to exercise my right. I decided not to get involved in politics, not because of a lack of interest, but because the government denied the people their constitutional rights.

In the early months of 1937 my interest in politics was awakened when Luang Phibun said, in a newspaper interview, that if he were prime minister, he would allow there to be political parties. This meant that government would turn from oligarchy to democracy. I surmised that Luang Phibun was clever enough to know that the people were really thirsting for a taste of democracy. Nothing would make Luang Phibun more popular than handing over the power of governing to the people.

After the newspapers had printed Lung Phibun's interview, a publisher came and asked me to write a book about political parties. Thus it was that the book, *Siamese and Foreign Political Parties* was written. During that time Luang Phibun became prime minister. But news of political parties being allowed seemed to have gone quiet. When advertisements for *Siamese and Foreign Political Parties* began to appear, the police arrested and imprisoned the printer of the advertisements, and interrogated him as to whether there was any plot to set up a political party. In the course of the interrogation, my name came out and the publisher's home was searched, but I remained free. In the end, the police interrogation about the existence of a political party drew a blank and they released the printer of the advertisements. As for the book itself, which was in the process of being printed, all copies were confiscated by the police.

The fact that there had been an arrest and my book had been confiscated showed that Luang Phibun had not the slightest intention of permitting the existence of political parties. The People's Party had sought from King Prajadhipok the power to rule on behalf of the people. Now Luang Phibun intended to hold on to that power in place of the King, and it seemed as if the people accepted it. This being the case, the best thing for me to do was to distance myself from politics as much as I could.

I ceased business and put down my pen. In December I applied for a job in the Department of Irrigation. I was sent to survey Phai Phra Canal. At a time when I

thought I was as far removed from politics as possible, the police came and threw ‘politics’ back in my face.

Chapter Five

Sending a secret letter

I was inclined to think that I had been arrested because of the book, *Siamese and Foreign Political Parties*. It may have been that the police still suspected that I planned to set up a political party, and that made me a rebel. Police spies might have reported false news about me, and when the police had evidence that Phraya Songsuradet was plotting against the government, they made me out to be a fellow conspirator of his. But if this were really the case, it was not difficult to allay the suspicions of the investigating officers. I wrote *Siamese and Foreign Political Parties* by collating information from textbooks. I could point to every one of the textbooks that I had used and could prove that every single sentence, I had written honestly and truly in order to spread knowledge.

The only thing I feared was that the police may have learned that I had produced the newsletter, *True Blue*, and sent it out to be read outside prison. It was possible that, through some oversight, not all copies of *True Blue* had been burned, and that copies may have fallen into the hands of the police. The police would regard my articles in *True Blue*, which included criticisms of the government, as contravention of the law. If this were the case, it would really seem that I still had not abandoned thoughts of overthrowing the government and it would be a reason for suspecting that I was co-operating with Phraya Songsuradet. But writing articles in *True Blue* was a misdemeanour that dated back to before I received a royal pardon, or maybe even before the court passed a prison sentence on me. Once I had received the royal pardon it must have meant that the punishment was lifted for all my misdeeds in the past, as Luang Phibun and Luang Chamnan had pointed out while we were undergoing re-education.

Which, then, was the cause of me being imprisoned this time, *Political Parties ...* or *True Blue*?

Whether it was because of these two, or any other piece of writing, it surely would not go as far as me being charged in court. It would surely not be difficult to prove the truth and convince the investigating officers that since being pardoned,

getting involved in any revolt was totally out of the question. I did not even harbour any malicious thoughts. There was not a trace of wrongdoing in my actions, speech or heart.

If my basket with the secret drawer had not been confiscated, and if I had been able to send secret signals to my relatives, as I had when I was in prison, or if it had not been my mother who came to visit me, but a male or female relative who was quick-witted and bold, then it would have been extremely easy for me to ascertain the real reason why I had been arrested.

I examined the food my mother brought in meticulously to see if there was any message hidden among it. Perhaps in the rice pot there might be a slip of paper? I went through it, but found nothing. Nor did I find anything either in the rice bowl or the dessert bowl. I picked up a piece of fruit to see if there was any sign of a cut, so that something could be stuffed inside, but there was none. I was certain that those friends, who had used a variety of tricks to send secret messages to me when I was in prison, had now abandoned me. And since it was my mother who sent in food, even if my friends had still thought of sending me news, she would not have agreed to do it.

If I sent a message out, and if I got caught, then I would be subjected to more rigorous restrictions, even, perhaps, to the extent that I would be forbidden to receive food from outside. But that did not worry me. The police brought me two meals a day. It was enough to keep me alive. More worrying would be that they would think it suspicious, or at the least, they would think I was someone with lots of tricks up my sleeve. If the investigators hated me, it was possible that they would make trouble so that the case went before the court.

But after I had been locked up for two months, with no idea why I had been arrested, I felt more and more down. I had bottled up my distress until in the end I felt as if I had reached the point where I would explode. But my fear of my mother was sufficient to miraculously stop me. Even if a letter were to get through, my mother would just think that I was wicked, and it might put her in danger too, and then she would not have come to visit me again.

But it was my wish that my mother would cease her visits. There was no chance that either requesting or prohibiting her would get anywhere, other than if I were to smuggle a letter out. Then, when she did not come to visit me, another relative would take on the task instead and would surely bring me some answers.

I had a stub of pencil. It was the end of a pencil which I always kept with me. When I was searched on the first day, before they put me in a cell, and I realised that they would take my pens and pencils, I broke off the end of a pencil and kept it. Now the opportunity to use it had arrived.

In front of my cell a sergeant stood on guard, constantly monitoring my activity. I had to find some ruse whereby I could write a letter, without him noticing what I was doing. I tried writing in the toilet, but it did not work, because it was too dark to write legibly. I decided to write before his very eyes while I ate.

The food my mother sent in that day was rice and *massaman* curry. I turned my back to the policeman and placed a cigarette pack down near the plate of rice. And as I ate, I wrote a message on a piece of paper that I had torn off the cigarette packet. The message was, 'Arrested for what? Want to know.' Then I wrapped it in silver paper from the cigarette packet.

I tried to swallow two or three mouthfuls. I poured curry over the rice that was left and mixed it up so that it was all messy, and then put my 'letter' in the plate of rice.

'You haven't eaten very much at all,' the policeman said as he examined my food before returning it to my mother. He did not poke around in the pile of rice. He must have thought it was such a disgusting mess that he did not want to touch it, even with the end of a stick. Once my mother had left, I felt a huge sense of relief, as if a boulder had been lifted from my chest.

My mother did not visit for two weeks. My hopes that she would not come and visit me again proved futile; my hopes of receiving a letter of reply also proved futile.

Taken to the Special Branch

In those days the police were empowered to hold people for questioning for only fifteen days. This meant the police had to complete their questioning within the specified time. If there was a *prima facie* case, the case would be filed before the court; if there was not, the individual had to be released. This made me think, after I had been held for fourteen days, that the police must have realized there was no case, and that they would release me. But on the fifteenth day, police from the Special Branch brought an official order for the Prince of Chainat and I to sign, acknowledging that the police had requested the court's authority to hold us for a further fifteen days. My spirits dropped. I wanted them to carry out their investigations quickly, because I believed that they would release me. Fifteen days later the Special Branch brought a similar order for me to sign; my spirits sank further.

This went on for two months and then the Special Branch took the Prince of Chainat off for questioning. The Prince's happiness was apparent in his manner, which changed from slow and deliberate, to lively and active. The police honoured him by granting him a private car, with a policeman to accompany him 'for security'. When he returned that afternoon there was a happy glow on his face and he greeted me with a smile. The following morning he was questioned further, and returned even more cheerful. The next day I saw a policeman loading his personal effects into a car to send back to his palace, leaving behind only the real essentials. A policeman relayed the news that the investigators considered there was no case against the Prince.

'Nor me,' I thought. 'Once the questioning is over, it'll just be a case of getting ready to go home.'

Thus, when the Special Branch police took me off for questioning the next day, I was so pleased that I could feel the warmth of my blood coursing through all my veins. I did not object to the police vehicle, which had iron bars all round it, but I did mind a policeman trying to engage me in conversation. I just pretended to listen to him, when in actual fact I was already thinking about the day I would be free.

I did not notice which roads the car followed. Once we had reached the Special Branch division of the Police Department, I walked up the steps, my mind wandering. But I collected my thoughts and began to feel unusually nervous. A police guard took me to the investigation room.

Inside the room several police officers were sitting at their desks, working away busily at the documents piled up on their desks. The moment I walked in, everyone looked up and scrutinized my appearance with undisguised curiosity.

Chapter Six

A letter to Princess Sirirat Butsabong

I was aware at that moment that, in this situation, my every single word could help me out of danger, if I spoke cleverly. But my words would be weapons which could cut my throat, if I used them stupidly. Whatever the case, I was not going to say anything until I had carefully considered that it would be to my benefit.

Pausing for half a minute before answering an important question and taking a deep breath at critical moments in order to gather my physical and mental strength were two rules which I regularly put into practice. I reminded myself of them before stepping up to the desk of the Police Major whom I understood to be the most senior in the room.

The Major dismissed the guard and politely invited me to sit down in the chair opposite him. On his desk a large pile of exercise books lay concealed. One swift glance and I recognized them. I smiled with relief when I realized that it was *The Fruits of Merit and Sin* that they were going to question me about.

I was relieved because I still assured myself that I had not written it with the intention of criticizing the government. Even if the investigators considered it to be critical of the government, it could not be regarded as illegal, because the contents had not yet been published in any form whatsoever.

But my interrogator did not mention the exercise books. He took a letter out of a file and handed it to me. It was a letter I had written to Princess Sirirat Butsabong, recommending her to buy So Sethaputra's *New Model Dictionary*. And because I had been too eager to try to make her feel impressed by So Sethaputra's work, I had boasted of the difficulties in producing the dictionary, having to use various tricks to smuggle the manuscript out past the guards and how the authorities had been completely baffled, but since it had been their own stupidity in failing to find any trace of our activities, they had been obliged to turn a blind eye to what had happened. I had gone on to say in the letter that the authorities were only looking out for anything that was disparaging towards them. We had realized this and so we were careful, and even though we were sometimes sarcastic, we did not overdo it. At the end, I had said that I was eager for an opportunity to be of service once I was free and that there would surely be some opportunity to do so.

All this had been underlined with a red pencil.

I was shocked to come across this unexpected problem. I first had to examine my conscience in writing these things. What I had written disparaged the prison officials and made them out to be stupid and negligent in their duties. Moreover it rambled on, deviating from the subject in mentioning something along the lines that there were sarcastic references in the dictionary.[22]

I remembered that I had come across sarcastic references to dictatorship and communism in the political news which was printed on the dust cover of the dictionary. So Sethaputra had heard this news from a foreign radio station using the secret receiver he had devised and adapted so brilliantly. It was news that the daily newspapers had not printed, so it was strange and new to readers. So Sethaputra intended it to be a 'free gift' to purchasers of his dictionary.

As far as my criticisms of the prison officials were concerned, they were made out of a feeling of wanting to boast both about myself and my friends, but they were, I felt, true. The evil lay purely in whether one spoke out or kept quiet. However, if prison officials, as individuals or as a whole, thought that I was morally wrong in creating gossip, which was not a crime in law, then I would have been only too happy to apologize. In particular, I would have been happy to apologize to Khun Sisarakon, who at the time was the prison governor, because I did not feel that he fell into a category that the likes of me could criticize as stupid. Besides, we had been able to smuggle most of our prohibited items out through Khun Sisarakon's indulgence towards us in our confinement. Even though we would still have been able to trick those standing guard over us, without Khun Sisarakon's spirit of generosity, it would have been much more difficult.

Khun Sisarakon's memorandum

[22] The entry for 'democracy', for example, includes as illustrative sentences, 'Many crimes have been perpetrated under the guise of democracy' and 'He has suffered severely for his democratism'.

When I had finished reading the letter, I prepared to return it, but my interrogator had turned round and was speaking to a clerk, whose job it was to record my statement. I took the opportunity to turn over the letter to see if anyone might have written something on the back. I was correct in my guess. I found Khun Sisarakon's note. It was in his handwriting, which I recognized. My eyes must have brightened with interest. I realized that this note was the opinion he would put to his commander. It went something like this. 'This M.R. Nimit committed an act of rebellion and was sentenced to nine years. Only recently he received a royal pardon. Since it appears he has not yet learned his lesson, it would be appropriate to send him back to prison. But I am doubtful whether this is possible, so I am consulting …'

I had two different feelings. On the one hand, I was offended that Khun Sisarakon was too hasty in drawing the conclusion that I had not learned my lesson, which meant that I was still trying to plot against the government. And I feared I had lost any chance of making Khun Sisarakon believe that I respected him personally. My criticism and scorn for some officials was never intended to be directed towards him. On the other hand, I was pleased to see with my own eyes the evidence that putting me back in prison, without having to bring charges against me before the court again, would be impossible. If it had been possible, there would have been no need to waste time questioning me in a new case. Just ordering prison officers to take me away would have been easy and nice and quiet. Khun Sisarakon wanted to send me back to prison, but I suspect that this contravened the royal decree granting me a royal pardon. Khun Sisarakon's commander would have confirmed this, so if they were to put me in prison again, they would have to find clear evidence that after receiving the royal pardon, I had again committed an act of insurrection.

I was certain that they would never, ever, find that I had committed an act of insurrection. No one in this world would be capable of finding something which did not actually exist.

My gaze was still fixed on Khun Sisarakon's note. When the major carrying out my interrogation turned round and saw me reading, his brows knitted deeply and he quickly held out a hand to take the letter back.

My statement

The clerk had prepared paper and pen ready for taking down my statement. I drew up my chest and took a deep breath. I was ready to answer any question.

'The letter I showed you a moment ago was yours, written to Princess Sirirat Butsabong, the daughter of the Prince of Nakhon Sawan, yes or no?' my interrogator asked. I admitted it was.

'It's good to admit things straightaway like this. There's no need to waste time proving it is your handwriting,' he added. 'So, can you tell me what the underlined words mean?'

I:	I think the words are clear. I meant what I said, and there is absolutely nothing else behind it.
Interrogator:	No, I want you to explain the meaning in detail.
I:	I can't say it in more detail than this.
Interrogator:	Look at me in the face. You're refusing to explain, then?
I:	I'll gladly explain what I am able to explain.
Interrogator:	Good. Then I'll ask you one thing at a time.

He looked at the letter and then began to question me further. 'Where you say you used a hundred-and-one different tricks to send the manuscript out for printing, without being checked, what were these tricks?'

I smiled. 'Sir, it has to be the duty of prison officers to find out for themselves what tricks we used.'

Interrogator:	You're saying the officers are stupid, that you're cleverer than them, right?
I:	No, sir. I'm stupid, too.
Interrogator:	And why are you calling the officers stupid?
I:	Everyone is stupid, to a greater or lesser extent. Only the Buddha has no stupidity in him.

Interrogator: Did the dictionary contain sarcastic references?

I: I think so.

Interrogator: Who were they aimed at?

I: I don't know.

Interrogator: Who does the word 'they' refer to?

I: The people who were the targets of the sarcastic references.

Interrogator: So who was it that was the target of the sarcastic references?

I: I've already told you, I don't know.

Interrogator: If you don't know who the target was, how do you know the references were sarcastic?

I: I've already told you, I don't know for sure. It's only what I thought.

Interrogator: Alright. You're really looking for trouble. So these words that you thought were sarcastic, what were they, then?

I: I can't remember.

Interrogator: Try to remember.

I: I've tried and I still can't.

Interrogator: You haven't made any effort at all, yet.

I: I've been trying since you showed me the letter, and I'm still trying now, but without much success.

Interrogator: If I have a dictionary brought in for you to look at, could you show me where the sarcastic references are?

I: I think it would be a waste of time. The dictionary is very big.

Interrogator: How can a dictionary have sarcastic words in it?

I: Well, exactly, sir!

Interrogator: It seems you're not going to tell the truth.

I remained silent. He smiled His eyes met mine and he shook his head. A police captain, who had been sitting, listening, rose from his desk and came and stood behind my chair. 'You should tell the truth', he said. 'Don't you go thinking we're fools. We may even know where the sarcastic references are, so what have you got to say to that? If you don't tell us …' A police lieutenant came up and added, 'Better to tell the truth, sir. Do you remember me? I know you well. We were at school together. If you tell the truth …'

A corporal, a sergeant, a second-lieutenant and goodness knows who, numbering four or five in all, were enjoying themselves crowding round, and all speaking at the same time, so that I could not make out what they were saying.

'Hey, you lot, you're being a nuisance,' my interrogator said. 'It's none of your business. Back off, the lot of you.'

Everyone withdrew, except the captain. 'You shouldn't act suspiciously. Not being open is acting suspiciously. There's no case against you. It's really weak. But don't think of trying to help other people. It would create needless danger for you.'

I was silent.

'Idiot!' my interrogator said to the captain. 'Stop prattling on. *Mom* Nimit here, is out of your league.'

The captain returned to his seat and sat down.

Interrogator:	(reading a letter) 'Once I get out of prison and am free, there is bound to be some opportunity where I might be of service.' What kind of 'opportunity' do you mean, here?
I:	I don't yet know what opportunity may arise, where I might be of service.
Interrogator:	You meant the opportunity to take revenge on the government, didn't you? Let's talk like men, now.
I:	Forgive me, but the word 'opportunity' means the opportunity to take on work, not the opportunity for rebellion.
Interrogator:	That is, take on work towards a rebellion, of course.
I:	I have never been aware that the Princess desired another rebellion. I don't. Surely no one wants to see the country descend into disorder.
Interrogator:	You've been involved in one rebellion already.
I:	I was found guilty of that. But my true feelings were another matter.
Interrogator:	You must have some sense of grievance, for sure.
I:	Some, while I was still in prison.

Interrogator: That's enough on this letter. But there are other things we have to talk about.

Then he turned to the pile of exercise books which were hidden on his left hand side, and picked one out of the pile.

The Fruits of Merit and Sin and *Today*

He read on the cover of *The Fruits of Merit and Sin* that it was about the life of a political prisoner who had received a royal pardon, and an attempt to seize power by the communists in 1940. 'We're only just in 1939 now. Does this mean that you know the communists will seize power in 1940?'

I: What I wrote is just a story. It's all hypothetical.

Interrogator: And when you say it is about the life of a political prisoner, that's hypothetical, too, is it?

I: Yes, all of it.

Interrogator: But when you write a novel, there has to be some basis of truth, doesn't there?

I: That's right. But it's understood that such truth does not have evidence to confirm it, and readers of a well-written novel cannot tell how much is truth and how much is hypothetical.

Interrogator: That means that you admit there is some truth in this story?

I: Yes, sir.

Interrogator: I haven't, myself, yet read your book. But one of my superiors took it away to read and said that you looked out for yourself very well. You say something and when you're about to say something that constitutes an offence, you stop, and then you go on again. Whenever you're about to say something that constitutes an offence, you always stop, and it's a good read, too.

I: This may be just a point of view. If you read it yourself, or other people read it, it might turn out to be a novel that supports the government.

Interrogator: Have you let anyone read it yet?

I: No.

Interrogator: Really?

I: I don't know who would read it.

My interrogator picked up another exercise book. 'This one is called *Today*. It's also yours. You've been really busy with your writing. I haven't read it yet. It's also a novel, I suppose?'

I: It's a diary.

Interrogator: What's in it?

I: A prison record.

Interrogator: They've brought me the whole lot of them, no matter what kind of crap it is. I don't know whether they think I haven't got enough to do, or what.

He picked up the exercise book and flicked through it as if he could not be bothered. When he reached the third page, his eyes widened, indicating that he had come across something interesting, which he then proceeded to read aloud. 'These people have done nothing wrong other than to have different ideas to those of the government. On the subject of whose ideas are more correct, King Prajadhipok, the nation's leader, judged that it was the government itself that was wrong. The government itself deceived the people and looked to its own interests more than those of the nation. Democracy today is a delusion. The word 'rebel', these days, does not refer to a bad person; rather, it refers to a person who loves honesty and justice.'

He put the book down. 'What's all this about? Has you diary got entries like this all the way through?'

I: Only just there. Other parts are to do with my activities in prison and not about the government.

Interrogator: Why did you criticize the government in this manner?

I: I have already confessed that when I was in prison I held some grudge against the government. The Prime Minister and Luang Chamnan were well aware of this.

Interrogator: Why did you write this diary?

I: To jog my memory.

Interrogator: Has anyone read it?

I: I don't think so. Normally a person who writes a diary is writing only for himself.

Interrogator: There doesn't seem to be much point in criticizing the government, if you're the only person to read what you wrote, or just to please yourself. Does it make you feel that good?

I: It does rather. When we are angry at something, we have to do something, don't we? We might thump the table and then hurt our hand, but we feel a sense of relief.

He laughed with delight at my answer. After questioning me about a few further matters, he called for the record of my statement which the clerk had taken down. He examined it and had me look through it and then I signed it as correct.

Court charges

I returned to my cell feeling not especially cheerful. My earlier hopes that I would be released once my questioning had been completed were now thoroughly dampened. I was certain that not one of the Special Branch officers responsible for questioning me and drawing up charges had any sympathy for me. It would be easy for them to give the opinion that there were grounds in my case. They might try every way of sending me back to Compound Six. Whether the court thought I was really guilty or not, was for the court to decide itself.

I still had some hope, but only that I could rely on the discretion and justice of the court. If my case went before a court of justice, I would have the opportunity to fully contest the case. I would have a lawyer to represent me and that lawyer would prepare everything for my defence, including all kinds of documentary evidence, and

people could come and listen to the hearing in court. The newspapers could publish details of the hearing. All these things would help to make the judge cautious in reaching his verdict. And so far, there had never been a case of a judge in a court of law having to send his verdict to Parut Palace for final approval before.

It was rumoured that the Special Court took orders from Parut Palace. This was alarming for defendants who had expressed hostility towards the government or influential members of the government. Having been punished for rebellion, it was unlikely that I would get any sympathy from the government. But I was only a minor figure. Surely the government would not sacrifice justice just to destroy someone of my standing.

When I considered my case in 1933, at least I could see that there was one judge who thought that charges should be dropped. The fact that I was punished was perhaps because the other judges thought I must be guilty, which may have been due to bias or malice, or a desire for approval, with no concern at all for the legal point of view. About half of the judges in the Special Court were regular army officers, who did not appear to have studied law anywhere other than what was taught in the military academy. Every single one of those officers was influential in the administration, or was a favourite of Luang Phibun, so they were bound to regard it as their duty to eliminate enemies of the government, and not let other powers get in their way This was the same method as in the National Assembly, where half the members are appointed and act as the ‘government party’. If there really was an order from Parut Palace, it did not have to be put in words or writing. A mere nod of the head or a meeting of eyes was sufficient.

If I was going to go to court again, I was going to try to conduct myself with the utmost politeness. I would try to make the court sympathize with me and be kind to me and to awaken some compassion in the state prosecutor. This was my only way out.

About twenty days after my questioning, the Special Branch took the Prince of Chainat to a low security prison. He looked dejected at this setback. At that moment I knew for certain that I had no hope of avoiding facing the Special Court once more.

Three days later legal proceedings were filed against me, on the grounds that I had colluded with Phraya Udomphong Phensawat, Phraya Suthep Phakdi, Phra Wuthiphak Phakdi, Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon, Pol. Sgt. Maen Loetnawi, Capt. Luang Prachansitthikan and Nai Chot Khumphan, in urging people to mobilize in preparation for harming important figures in the cabinet, and that I had written articles in support of, and promoting, communism, and articles criticizing the government. These I had done between 1937 and 29 January 1939 (that is, from the time I received a royal pardon until I was arrested). The prosecution was seeking punishment for the defendants under criminal law, sections 101, 102, 104, (revised), 249, 250,60,63,64,68, and in my case alone, they also sought punishment under the Royal Decree on Communism, 1933, Section 4, and in addition, under Section 73 of the Criminal Law, on the grounds that I was unrepentant.

On the day that legal proceedings were filed against me, Special Branch police took me off to join the Prince of Chainat in the low security prison.

Chapter Seven

Low security

I arrived at the low security prison in the evening. When I saw my cell, my heart sank. The cell at the palace police station was small, but this was even smaller.

Compared with Bang Khwang, where the cells in Compound Six had been like the rooms in a house, this really was a prison cell.

But meeting up with old friends helped to lift my spirits. Before long Khun Khliphonphrun called out a greeting from his cell. I had not heard anyone 'call out a greeting' for three months. Even though the place itself was worse than the police station, here we had the freedom to speak, which was really wonderful. I began to feel that I was a human being again from the first moment I got to chat with a fellow prisoner.

About 40 accused had been sent to the low security unit before me, including the Prince of Chainat, Phraya Udomphong Phensawat, Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon and Dr Chot Khumphan. I wanted to meet Phra Sitthi because I had liked and respected him ever since I was an officer cadet under his command. Of those whom I had served under, none was more suitably qualified to be a commander than he. He was tall and well-proportioned, a fine-looking and awesome figure. There was a hard, direct look in his eye, he spoke with a thundering voice, and he was knowledgeable, single-minded and resolute. I used to both hate and respect him, both fear and like him. But now that he, too, was accused of plotting against the government, my hatred and fear disappeared, leaving just a feeling of liking and respect for him. I asked Khun Khli which cell Phra Sitthi was being held in, and, wow! Phra Sitthi called out in reply from the cell right next to mine.

'Sir,' I said, 'they have accused me of conspiring with you, sir. Did you know?'

'Yes. But I haven't seen you for twenty years, so how would I conspire with you?'

We chatted about the prosecution charges which were so vague that we could not prepare documentary evidence to refute them. I understood that the charges filed with the court had to state the date, time and place where the prosecution alleged the defendant had committed the crime. Otherwise it would be unjust to the defendant, because only the prosecution would be able to prepare witnesses and the defendants would not know how to prepare themselves properly. In the case of Phra Sitthi, the prosecution's allegations that the crime had taken place 'during the month of October

1933 and thereafter', meant that the defendant would have to be prepared to confirm the place and time of everything he did during that period, both day and night.

From 1933 until 27 January 1939 was [more than] five years. If the prosecution brought in a witness and asked whether on a certain day or certain night the defendant had sat chatting with the witness in a coffee shop, the defendant would have to recall instantly that on that day or that night he had not been in a coffee shop and had not chatted with the witness, but was asleep at home, as his wife and children knew, and so on.

'They've arrested us and put us in prison and we're absolutely powerless to resist,' Khun Khli concluded. 'I myself admitted it. I confessed on the day they questioned me that I really was plotting against the government, but nobody approved, so I abandoned the idea. They asked me if I hated Luang Phibun. I said I didn't hate him, but I didn't respect him and I belittled him, too, by saying he lacked the appropriate ability for the post, and that I respected only my former teacher (Phraya Songsuradet) and would like him to be the prime minister. Then I asked my interrogator whether my punishment for my statement would be execution. He said no. At the least, my punishment would be reduced by half as a result of my confession. I would just be imprisoned for life or twenty years. I was happy with this. Luang Phibun would not live forever. Whenever he died, I would get out of prison.'

Those listening were silent. It was widely known that there was enmity between Luang Phibun and Phraya Songsuradet. At the time when these two 'tigers' were in the same cave the situation had become ever more tense. The young tiger, whose power was increasing, had replaced the old tiger, and the old tiger had withdrawn from the cave. But the young tiger had followed, attacking and completely destroying the old tiger's followers.

I was wondering who, if Luang Phibun were no longer in power, would govern in his place. A person who governs a country has to be someone who loves justice more than power, or else there has to be a democracy, so that everyone can live contentedly. I believed to some extent that if Luang Phibun were no longer in power and his authority had disappeared, there really would be the opportunity for

establishing a democratic system of government, and Khun Khli would get out of prison as he hoped. But I never imagined that Khun Khli's life would come to an end before Luang Phibun's, and that he would be executed by a firing squad along with Phra Sitthi Ruangdet and others, numbering 18 in all.

Reasons for the arrests and being arrested

Khun Khli was a talkative kind of person. When he knew something about someone, he could not help but start criticizing them, and he had an amusing way of telling stories, which made people only too willing to listen. So I got to hear that Chao Khun Thep had said, 'I don't know what my sons have been up to. They've got me into trouble, too,' while Nai Phutphan and Nai Phaophong, when they were arrested and put in cells at the police station, had said, 'We don't know what our father has done now. He's got us imprisoned for nothing.'

On the first night that we met, we talked light-heartedly until it was dark. In the end Phra Sitthi took the opportunity, while the guard was out of sight, to whisper to Khun Khli, 'This business of Li Bunta[23] shooting Luang Phibun, what's it all about? I'm completely baffled by it.'

'Me, too,' Khun Khli replied. 'No one knows anything about it, except this Li himself, and he refuses to say anything. If anyone asks him, he shakes his head and walks away.'

Khun Khli did not believe that anyone had used, hired, or begged Li Bunta to shoot, because if that really were the case, he would have had some inkling of it. Khun Khli, however, had his own theory, that Nai Li had shot Luan Phibun for personal reasons.

My thoughts focused on the assassination attempt on Luang Phibun at Sanam Luang. On that occasion the person who hired Nai Phum to shoot definitely had a political motive. But who was it? I did not believe that Phraya Thorani Narubet was

[23] Luang Phibun's chauffeur. He was subsequently executed.

responsible, or even involved in hiring the gunman, because, by nature, he was not the kind of coward to favour a sly attack. I had waited for someone to speak out, but no one ever did.

Imprisonment in the low security unit was not as strict as in the police station. Now we had the opportunity to walk around the compound in front of the cell block for fifteen minutes each day. We were able to go and stand beneath the window at the back of the governor's house, where there were often strangers furtively looking at us. Sometimes there were women and people who were understood to be relatives of the governor. This made the young men, Bunmak, Phutphan, Phaophong and No Nen gravitate to that area frequently. Among the women furtively looking at us, was one who would later appear as a witness for the prosecution in the case against No Nen. Her name was *Nang* Sa-ngiam Plukjaisua and she testified that she had received poison from her lover, No Nen, who asked her to sprinkle it on Luang Phibun's food.

I welcomed the morning walks as an opportunity to chat and consult with various individuals about how to fight my case. I was accused of conspiring with Phraya Udom, Phraya Suthep, Phra Wutthipha, Sgt. Maen and Dr. Chot, even though I had never, ever, met any of these people. I needed, therefore, to know what these people looked like, and to find out whether there were any reasons or not for people to think that we had conspired to try to launch a coup.

Such circumstances were not confined to my case alone. Generally speaking, the defendants (with the exception of the specific individual's case) had never met and never even heard of one another. Everyone exchanged accounts of the circumstances which they understood had led to their arrest. Thus, the realization emerged that the arrests and charges of plotting against the government were complete nonsense.

Having listened to everyone telling their stories, and from observations in the Special Court, I remain convinced, right up to this day, that Phra Suwanchit did not hire or ask Nai Li to shoot Luang Phibun, that No Nen had no involvement in, nor knowledge of the plot to poison of Luang Phibun, if there really was one, and that all

the accusations made against the Prince of Chainat were fabrications, with no basis in truth whatsoever.

On a later occasion, after I had struck up a reasonable relationship with Nai Li Bunta, I asked him, ‘So why did you shoot Luang Phibun, then?’ He shook his head and walked away, just as Khun Khli had described.

It seemed to me that the shooting at Sanam Luang and the poisoning attempt (if it really happened) had brought Luang Phibun’s fear of ‘dark forces’ to a point that he could no longer bear, so it was necessary to do something to ensure adequate security. It was the duty of all those loyal to Luang Phibun to help eliminate those who plotted against him; it was the duty of the Special Branch to discover the source of these ‘dark forces’ and destroy it. Suspicions had formed around the movements of Phraya Songsuradet. His idea of establishing a military training school in Chiangmai was thought to be part of a plan to seize power. His friends and followers, such as Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon Luang Chamnan Yutthasin, Luang Ronsitthiphichai, Khun Khli and so on, were all suspected of trying to get their forces together and even assassinate Luang Phibun. But Phraya Songsuradet and his followers needed a source of money. Suspicions began to fall on highest levels of the royal family, such as King Prajadhipok and the Prince of Nakhon Sawan. But as everyone knew, during this period of crisis, Phraya Songsuradet had no opportunity to be granted an audience with high-ranking members of royalty, such as those whose names I have mentioned. But there was another high-ranking member of royalty who traveled widely, both in Siam and abroad, and that was the Prince of Chainat, whom anyone could readily meet. It appeared also, that he had visited Chiangmai, which would have been an opportunity for Phraya Songsuradet to have an audience with him. The Prince of Chainat was therefore suspected of giving support to Phraya Songsuradet’s coup plot.

It was the misfortune of the highest levels of the royal family that they were believed to be extremely wealthy and to want a return of their powers.

Apart from Phraya Songsuradet, there were some high-ranking civil servants with some political influence who had close relations with the royal family and

feelings of antipathy towards Luang Phibun. It is possible that they were suspected of setting up an opposition camp against Luang Phibun.

But suppose that it emerged from the Special Court's deliberations, clear as crystal, that all these suspicions were all entirely unfounded. What would happen then? Would the court really punish innocent people? Would Luang Phibun not be ashamed to authorize the punishment of people who 'might be enemies', when it was known throughout the country that they had done nothing wrong?

'Assassination, like the attempt at Sanam Luang is a dirty way of playing politics,' Chao Khun Thephatsadin told me. 'People like me would not do that under any circumstances.'

'If I were extremely ambitious and craved power, why on earth would I invite Prajadhipok to return to the throne?' the Prince of Chainat told many people who had an audience with him. 'And if I were to plot against the nephew[24] I had brought up, in order to restore Prajadhipok to the throne he had tired of, had been unable to preserve and had had to sacrifice in such a way? That wouldn't look very good, would it?'

And on one occasion he said in despair, 'Why is it that government after government refuses to understand that I have no ambition for power? I want to live on my own like all other ordinary people.

'I'm a doctor,' Nai Thanom Photphanklao said. 'When I finish work I drink with girls and then go to bed. I've never been at all interested in politics, and even now, I don't know why I was arrested.'

Almost everyone had their own story, in which they would plead that they should not have been arrested. Except, that was, for me - for I was by now no longer in doubt about the reason why I had been arrested - and a few others, whom I thought

[24] The 'nephew' is King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII r. 1935-46) who came to the throne following the abdication of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII r. 1925-35) .The Prince of Chainat was

of as politicians, such as Luang Chamnan, who liked to listen to other people's stories, but did not expand upon his own, Khun Khli who did expand on his story, too much, Dr. Chot, who said, 'Ever since I became involved in politics, I always thought that one day I would be put in prison,' and Phra Sitthi, who simply said, 'They've got me in place of Phraya Songsuradet.'

Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon's story

Although it was believed that the court ought to drop all charges, except in the case of Khun Khli, everyone had to prepare themselves to fight their case as best they could. As it happened, there was not a single one amongst us who was a barrister or solicitor. But if you do not have a sword, you have to make do with a knife. Four people – Dr. Chot, Phra Ratchayat Raksa, Phra Wutthiphak and I – therefore pretended to be lawyers. Dr. Chot had studied law in Germany, Phra Wuthiphak and Phra Ratchayat Raksa had been provincial governors, and I myself was familiar with the methods of the Special Court. Through my position as 'make-do lawyer' a close friendship developed between Phra Sitthi and myself. Phra Sitthi promised that he would tell me everything about his conduct which was relevant to the case, without covering anything up.

'So you didn't know that Luang Phibun was going to shoot me on the battlefield at Bangkhen, then? In that case I'll tell you. When the rebellion[25] broke out I was delegated to protect the capital. Later, Phraya Phahon ordered me to go and assist Luang Phibun on the front line, because Luang Phibun needed a senior person to consult with. After I reported to Luang Phibun, I was delegated the authority by Luang Phibun to give any orders without waiting for prior authorization. I examined the plans for the positioning of our forces and saw that there were no units protecting our flanks. This was essential and had to be organized quickly. I therefore ordered troops from one part of the rear to be moved up to cover the flanks. Before the troops could carry out my orders, the rebels sent a locomotive crashing into a wagon mounted with an anti-aircraft gun, which created confusion throughout the battle

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particularly close to the young King's family and acted as his guardian following the death of the King's father, Prince Mahidol, in 1929.

[25] The 1933 Boworadet Rebellion

front. Luang Phibun was busy sending reinforcements up to join the battle front. As soon as the troops who were to cover the flanks arrived, he was in a hurry to push them forward to join the line of battle. In response he was told that I had ordered them to cover the flanks. Luang Phibun was furious with me, accusing me of obstructing his orders. He rushed over to see me and raised his gun to fire, but a soldier grabbed his hand and several people prevented him. Then he left. That evening, he came to see me. He apologized, saying 'It was a misunderstanding which made so angry that it came out that way.'

I did not think that the story that Phra Sitthi had told me was relevant to the case, but Phra Sitthi argued that he later thought Luang Phibun might have been furious to the point of shooting him because Luang Phibun, already suspicious that Phra Sitthi's sympathies lay with the rebels, mistakenly thought that Phra Sitthi had deliberately obstructed his orders in order to damage the government side.

Phra Sitthi said that when he heard news that there would be a coup, he had wanted to remain neutral and tried to heal the divisions because he believed that the nation's soldiers should not get involved in the quarrels and divisions of politicians. But after consulting various other army commanders in a meeting at the home of Phraya Ritthi Akhane, it was apparent that the army commanders were happy to assist the government and claimed that remaining neutral was tantamount to siding with the rebels. Phra Sitthi concurred and changed his decision and joined the government side.

'If they then interpret this as you inviting others to side with the rebels', I said, 'I think it would be difficult for you to entirely clear yourself.'

'How many years do you get for it?'

'Compared with the Petchburi case,[26] your case is much weaker. I think that, at the most, the punishment should not be more than twenty years.'

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[26] During the Boworadet Rebellion the commander of the military base in Petchburi declared his loyalty to the King, announced that no other forces would be permitted to pass through the province and prepared his troops to march on Bangkok to put pressure on the government.. When he learned that Prince Bowaradet had withdrawn to Pak Chong, he took a train to Bangkok and surrendered himself to the government side. The Special Court subsequently sentenced him to 20 years for rebellion, while many others from Petchburi, including the provincial governor, high-ranking civil servants and junior military officers were given life sentences.

Phra Sitthi had nothing else to fear apart from the meeting at the house of Phraya Ritthi. When questioned, Phra Sitthi had made some admissions and some denials; that he had indeed gone to a meeting at the home of Phraya Ritthi, but had not persuaded anyone to be neutral. He had simply consulted with those in the meeting as to whether they should consider letting Phraya Song back into government service. I thought this part admission, part denial would not be very helpful. When I asked about the assassination attempt on Luang Phibun at Sanam Luang, he replied that he knew nothing about it at all. He simply suspected that one of Phraya Song's followers, who had fled to Indo-China, was responsible, and that the man had acted without the knowledge of Phraya Song.

'Can you tell me honestly,' I asked, 'whether Phraya Song was really planning to seize power, as everyone suspected?'

'I don't believe it's true. Khun Khli told me it wasn't true. Phraya Song honestly intended to pass on his military expertise to the army, and he was aware that he knew nothing of politics. The military was the only thing he knew about.'

'Did you ever consider seizing power yourself, sir?'

Phra Sitthi considered the question in silence for some time before confessing that shortly after Phraya Song had resigned, someone came to discuss it with him, expressing concern that the People's Party's aim of changing the system of government to democracy still had no hope of being realized, because the army had an ever-increasing voice in political matters. Instead of being neutral, the army was an influence in bolstering important figures, which caused divisions and factionalism within the army itself. But most of the army still supported Phraya Song; most of those who wanted democratic rights, therefore wanted Phraya Song to return to command the army and deny individuals in the government the opportunity to use the army to bolster them in the future. To do this required seizing power again. At that time Phra Sitthi was an infantry commander. He would readily have been able to seize power. But he wanted approval from Phraya Song. When Phraya Song learned of this, he absolutely forbade Phra Sitthi, and the matter petered out at the discussion stage.

I asked about the fact that the government had, on numerous occasions, tried to invite Phraya Song to work with them, but he had always refused, which I suspected might be for some political motive. Phra Sitthi pointed out that Phraya Song in all honesty did not want to get involved in politics. Phra Sitthi was a close friend of Phraya Song and knew his feelings well. But it was Phraya Song's misfortune that on Luang Phibun's side, they did not believe that Phraya Song really intended to withdraw from politics, and even among Phraya Song's own supporters, there were constant attempts to get him to accept administrative powers. As a result, Phraya Song was always an object of suspicion, and he became an enigmatic figure in the eyes of ordinary people. This made him feel uncomfortable and want to go and live abroad, but he did not have the money.

Phra Sitthi further admitted that he was one of those who would like Phraya Song to be prime minister, because he believed in Phraya Song's integrity and that he would set up a democratic system of government as had originally been intended. Thus, when Phraya Phahon resigned, Phra Sitthi, who at the time was an appointed member of the National Assembly, tried to persuade other members to put forward the name of Phraya Song as prime minister. There was a secret ballot, and it appeared that Phraya Song received many more votes than Luang Phibun. When Luang Phibun learned the result of the ballot, he pointed out that this was simply a trial-run sounding out the opinions of members of the National Assembly, and invited Phraya Phahon to return as prime minister, even though the National Assembly had cast no votes for him. When Phraya Song learned of Phra Sitthi's efforts in the National Assembly, he was not pleased. When members of the National Assembly, who had formerly supported Phraya Song, saw that he had abandoned them, they changed their support to Luang Phibun. From that moment Phra Sitthi lost all hope of stemming Luang Phibun's power, and planned to remove himself from political circles and resigned from government service. After Phra Sitthi had resigned, Luang Phibun urged him to return, but Phra Sitthi refused, which is understood to have increased Luang Phibun's suspicions about him.

Chapter Eight

Special Court 1939

I realized that the political enmity that existed between Luang Phibun and Phraya Song was such that it was impossible for them to be reconciled. I had long ago seen which side would emerge the final victor. I wanted to know whether Phraya Song had had any thoughts of fighting for power or not. If what Phra Sitthi had said was true, it meant that Phraya Song was not a conspirator who planned to bring chaos to the country. Although there were two or three people like Khun Khli, they had abandoned their attempts already. There was no way that there would be any rebellion. The confusion, which had shocked and alarmed the people, was not the

fault of Phraya Song, but rather that of Luang Phibun, who had created the unrest by borrowing the hand of the law to throttle his enemies.

However, the whole truth would surely come out during the hearing in the Special Court. I had listened to Phra Sitthi's story with only one ear; the other I had saved for listening in court.

Everyone knew that Phra Sitthi was one of Phraya Song's close comrades. Thus it was probable that he would be fiercely attacked by the prosecution. But when several days of examining witnesses had passed without reference to Phra Sitthi, one began to suspect that Phra Sitthi was not one of the 'favourites'.

The favourites were the young men, No Nen, Phra Suwanchit and Luang Chamnan. The prosecution attempted to prove that No Nen was the prime instigator in the poisoning attempt, Phra Suwanchit in the assassination attempt by Nai Li and Luang Chamnan in the assassination attempt by Nai Phum at Sanam Luang. They brought, in each instance, about twenty further witnesses to the cases of these favourites. Each of the witnesses gave chilling testimony. They related how they were connected to, or knew of the plots to assassinate Luang Phibun. If what they said was true, it would have to be concluded that all three of these favourites were evil, immoral, disgusting, not worthy of being called a gentleman, or an officer, or a politician; not worthy, even, of being called a human being. But since they were human beings, it seemed like they ought not to be permitted to continue to live. If the judges believed the words of the prosecution witnesses to be wholly true, they would have to express the opinion that the defendants should be severely punished.

Suspicious aspects of the prosecution witnesses

Because I was not facing charges of prior knowledge of these plots against Luang Phibun and I had [no] close links, either personal or political, with the three defendants, I was still in a position, the same as the judges, to listen to the testimonies of the witnesses with an open mind.

The first thing that shocked me was the bold manner of each of the prosecution witnesses as they entered the court. They looked the defendants over with scorn and contempt, or with ill intentions, or sometimes they gave a sneering smile. I had never met a single one of these witnesses, but whenever our eyes met, I always felt I was being humiliated.

The prosecution began asking questions under headings which they had prepared. Some witnesses who were over-eager answered the prosecution questions in advance, so that the prosecution had to remind them to answer just the question. Some witnesses, before answering a question, silently mouthed the words as if they had memorized what they had prepared to say in advance, but had then forgotten. Most of the witnesses answered the prosecution questions with written expressions, not the expressions of normal speech; for example, they referred to themselves as *kha* (which was used in court documents as an abbreviated form of *khaphachao*).[27] The ease with which the witnesses answered the prosecution questions was also suspicious, as people with only a low level of education responded more fluently than those who were highly educated, to the extent that it appeared that they did not have to think before giving their answers. Yet they gave precise answers, unafraid of their memory being at fault; for example, when questioned about times and places, they responded immediately, without having to stop and think. I was unable to draw any conclusion other than that these questions and answers were all a put-up job, agreed in advance and learned off by heart. I guessed that the event I had seen played out went as expected, and the words had not come from the minds of the speakers, but were the words someone else had taught them and they had memorized them like parrots.

I felt nervous only when the defendants rose to cross examine the witnesses, because the defendants had had no opportunity to prepare their questions in advance. The witnesses, too, did not know what they would be questioned about. But my nervousness soon changed to pity. The defendants had to answer charges of capital offences. A tiny slip could cost them their lives. They did not know in advance how the witnesses might slander them. When they had listened to the statements of the witnesses, they were in a daze, sweating, restless and agitated, their hands shaking

[27] *Khaphachao* is a formal first person pronoun, 'I'.

and lips trembling. They turned to consult one friend and *wai* [28] another, because they did not know how to properly cross-examine the witnesses. They knew nothing about law and nothing about the incidents which the witnesses claimed they had been involved in, either. But their friends were no better informed than them. They had to help themselves as best they could, and their friends, too, tried to help in a chaotic fashion. If watching the suffering of others were fun for the spectators, the defendants' struggle in the Special Court would be a first-rate tragedy, better than you would see on any theatre stage.

The disadvantage of the defendants

Worst of all for the defendants was that they did not get any sympathy from anyone. They knew that it was the duty of the state prosecutors who sat opposite them to prove their guilt. The court, whose role it is to preserve impartiality, whispered to the state prosecutors and smiled and took an interest in their requests or reasons they offered, but was intimidating and aggressive towards the defendants. If the testimony given by a prosecution witness was beneficial to the prosecution, the court was quick to record it. If there were any flaws, which might provide an opportunity for the defendants to clear themselves, the court hesitated and added questions, which gave witnesses the opportunity to correct their testimony. When the time came for the defendants to begin their cross-examination, the court persistently obstructed them with claims that the question was irrelevant, so that they could not carry out their cross-examination properly. The court, moreover, took special care when it came to recording the statements of the witnesses when they responded to the defendants' questions, because their statements now frequently appeared inaccurate when compared with the statements they had initially made.

'I don't recall,' witnesses would say to cut things short when they were questioned closely about incidents in a way which might have been beneficial to the defendants. The court would always prohibit the defendant from asking further questions, claiming that it was unlikely that the witness would be able to remember, because it was a long time ago. Instances such as this, where witnesses could not

[28] A gesture of not only of greeting and respect, but also of begging and pleading.

remember, did not occur at all during the prosecution examination. Even the most trivial matters which had occurred 4-5 years earlier, witnesses were able to recount in detail, and the court never doubted, nor questioned, why they could remember, when it was a long time ago.

The defendants were shocked by the slanderous accusations of the witnesses. They looked at the prosecution and were met with sneers. They appealed to the court, but the court was aggressive, intimidating and obstructive, and looked as if it planned to crush them and then trample on them without mercy, and with no regard to upholding justice. The judges looked upon the defendants with sullen, angry expressions. They saved their smiles for the state prosecutors, and when the day's proceedings were over, they accompanied the prosecutors to the club.

The defendants gradually began to feel that the court was not impartial, as was becoming quite apparent. When a defendant cited his own witness in order to refute the prosecution evidence, the court knew that the defendant had no chance of making contact with his witness, other than secretly and with difficulty. Moreover, no one wanted to be a witness for the defendants, fearing that they might get 'roasted' too. If there had been just one person willing to be a witness for the defendants, it would have been huge good fortune for that defendant. Yet even then, the court objected and would not allow defendants to call their own witnesses, claiming it was unnecessary. Some of the defendants understood that the court had said it was not necessary, because the court could already see that the prosecution evidence was not sufficiently credible. But when the day that the defendants were to be sentenced arrived, they realized that the court believed the prosecution witnesses on every detail. Thus, preventing the defendants from calling witnesses to refute the charges had been unjust and had deceived them into misunderstanding the situation.

Worst of all, Luang Chamnan and several other defendants had requested that the court call Luang Phibun for questioning, so that he would testify before the court. But the court refused, claiming that it was not appropriate for defendants to cite a witness who was an 'important figure'.

It was true that in cross-examining the witnesses, the defendants asked long-winded and roundabout questions and sometimes did not go about the questioning in the right way. But that was excusable because they were not permitted lawyers. But the court was unwilling to excuse them, and bullied and intimidated them into forgetting what they had prepared, or at least getting muddled over it. The defendants felt alone with no way out. As a result, No Nen raised his hands to *wai* the court nearly every time he was asked a question, and when the state prosecutor got up to question or admonish, No Nen raised his hands to *wai* him, too, as a plea for mercy. On one occasion No Nen said he was like a non-boxer being forced to fight Jack Dempsey. Everyone jeered and regarded him as a clown. They were relishing No Nen's suffering.

Defendants who were fiercely attacked by the prosecution did not get any sympathy from other defendants. You could see that when No Nen asked an ill-conceived question, which might incriminate him, other defendants would jeer along with the prosecution. The general feeling among the defendants was 'every man for himself'. Even though, deep down, they really felt sorry for No Nen, they wanted to show the court and the prosecution that they were not involved with him. The other defendants, who had not had the finger pointed at them by witnesses, thus acted as if they had hung a placard round their necks for the court and state prosecutor to see, with 'Please don't think that I'm the same type as No Nen' written in large letters,

The reason why witnesses gave false testimony

Having heard the prosecution evidence about the plots to harm Luang Phibun in the cases of No Nen, Phra Suwanchit and Luang Chamnan, having observed the course of events, and from what I had gleaned from other sources, I am absolutely convinced that the prosecution witnesses gave entirely false testimony.

The question is, how did the prosecution witnesses come to bring themselves to give false testimony, in contravention of the law. I do not know what the truth actually is, but I have a theory, which other fair-minded people would probably think is not too far-fetched.

I divide the false witnesses into two categories. The first had cause to be angry with the defendants and therefore took the opportunity to slander them in revenge. Another kind, were those who hoped for some benefit or reward. They sold their honour or reputation for money. They were prostitutes in a new guise.

The mystery lay in how the Special Branch, which had investigated or set out the case, had gathered up all these prostitutes, and how they had woven together all the falsehoods into a single story. Was it possible that one of the investigating officers was the person who had thought the whole thing out, in the same way that you write a play, and had then sought out actors to play the parts that he had written? The authorities had written the whole script. These false witnesses were really actors who had been brought to the Special Court to play their parts.

I then had to ask myself why the authorities would sacrifice justice and break the law in fabricating false evidence. Normally we would never believe the authorities would be so corrupt. But please remember that the defendants here were enemies of Luang Phibun, who held enormous power and was the support behind all those base-minded individuals.

It was not that every official was willing to commit evil deeds. But among a flock of sheep there are likely to be some black ones. These black sheep were selected by some powerful individuals as tools to eliminate their political enemies.

Those black sheep must have been stupid enough to believe that the defendants were sufficiently evil as to plan to poison Luang Phibun, yet all so clever and astute that they had concealed the plan and completely destroyed any evidence. Relying on the ways of the judiciary to punish the defendants would not achieve success; it was necessary to fabricate evidence. Fabricating false evidence was legitimate, because since the defendants were indeed bad people, they should be punished. Thus these black sheep had reason to feel proud that they were fabricating false evidence in the cause of upholding morality in the world.

Moreover, the black sheep must have felt that fabricating false evidence to send the defendants to prison was a good thing for the country, because the

defendants were enemies of Luang Phibun, the superman, who would miraculously be able to lead the Thai nation forward to become a *maha prathet* [29] within two or three years. Destroying these defendants was like eliminating a thorny obstacle to the nation's progress.

Since the black sheep believed that it was virtuous to fabricate false evidence, they would feel proud that this important task had fallen to them. And with the trust of important individuals, on whose support they hoped they could depend, as well, they may have looked to some future financial reward, or, at least, to the thanks they would receive once the business of fabricating false evidence was successfully concluded.

Finding witnesses to give false testimony is not at all difficult, if the witness is sure that he will not be doing something illegal and that he will make a satisfactory gain in return. In the 1933 Rebellion case, the prosecution witnesses had every reason to believe that they would bring down the defendants with their false testimony, and the fact that they would bring down the enemies of the government was a meritorious service, worthy of a handsome financial reward.

Fabricating slander against defendants and placing it in the mouths of witnesses is not difficult. All it requires is that the black sheep has a bit of a 'head' for writing. I myself can write a novel, which when people read it, they think is true. Writing novels is a matter of inventing falsehoods and making them look true. I believe that any writer, no matter who, has the ability, to a greater or lesser extent, to invent a story for the court in which Nai Li's assassination attempt on Luang Phibun was not for personal reasons, but was part of a plan, whereby Phraya Song remained behind the scenes and these defendants rushed around in the main roles. Some writers might have created a better story than this black sheep, but there could be few writers stupid enough to believe that writing a story with the aim of having the defendants punished is a meritorious service.

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[29] 'great nation'. According to Phibun in the future every country would have to choose between *maha prathet* status and 'slave' status. *Maha prathet* status meant the ability to protect oneself and sustain oneself economically, militarily and so on.

I must apologize for putting forward these theories. Some of my friends asked me to keep these thoughts to myself, until the truth emerges by itself. But I argued that the truth will not come out by itself if no one is interested in bringing it up again to examine. My wish in writing this, is to implore those who uphold justice to look back at these events. I believe in all honesty that behind the Special Court of 1939 was a filthy school of lies and a plan to kill innocent people in cold blood.

Identifying Phra Sitthi's Handwriting

After listening to the testimony of about 60 prosecution witnesses, I could not be bothered to listen any further, having already seen that these witnesses were acting. They were bad actors, playing their parts unrealistically; they made us aware that they were not saying what they thought, but what they had been taught to say, and they had memorized it until they knew it by heart.

None of the 60 witnesses gave testimony that related to either me or Phra Sitthi, so I did not have to pay attention. I began to chat with Dr. Chot Khumphan who was sitting on my right. We discussed economic problems, politics and theories in general. Occasionally I turned round to look at the cartoon poking fun of the judges which Nai Phutphan was secretly drawing.

The prosecution began to attack Phra Sitthi by bringing in Police Major Et Na Pompet, an expert in handwriting, to identify the handwriting in one document as belonging to Phra Sitthi. The document had been found at the home of Phraya Udom Phensawat and was as follows:

'Chao Khun Songsuradet returned on Friday. It seems he will co-operate this time. At the moment he is at Bangsu etc. Now there are meetings taking place in groups, so people dare not say anything. This being the case, it can be assumed that, increasingly, these groups will co-operate with each other. It is damaging that the tank corps were too hasty in approaching Chao Khun Phahon. There is news that he will resign and Luang Phibun will ask him to take up a diplomatic post overseas.'

Pol. Maj. Et's method of identification was to take a photograph of the letter, enlarge it many times, and then compare it with the hand-writing in another letter which Phra Sitthi confirmed was his own. The similarities in the handwriting in the two letters were sufficient for the average person to believe that they belonged to the same person, as Luang Chewong Songkhram had testified. But there were some letters which were written differently. Phra Sitthi was himself dumbfounded that it seemed that someone could write a letter in handwriting that so closely resembled his own. I take this opportunity to add that Pol. Maj. Et might have acted honestly in expressing his opinion that the handwriting belonged to Phra Sitthi. But for me, as an observer, I was able to choose between a handwriting expert and the person accused of being the owner of the handwriting, as to who to believe. I thought that Phra Sitthi himself ought to know, better than Pol. Maj. Et, whether the handwriting in that letter was his or not. Moreover, since the country had experts in identifying handwriting, it was bound to have experts in faking handwriting, too.

As Phra Sithi's 'make-do lawyer' I advised him to cross-examine Pol. Maj. Et, the result being that Pol. Maj. Et could not confirm that it really was Phra Sitthi's signature. Pol. Maj. Et's opinion was based only on theory which might be wrong.

Phra Sitthi told me that the handwriting in the letter was similar to his, but the turn of phrase was not his at all. He had never written a letter to Phraya Udom, and he did not understand the contents of the letter, which seemed ambiguous, muddled and nonsense, like the expressions of a schoolboy. Apart from that, Phra Sitthi had never called Phraya Songsuradet 'Chao Khun', either to his face, or behind his back.

The prosecution did not call any witnesses. This made me think that the prosecution evidence was insufficient to persuade the court that it was really Phra Sitthi's handwriting. And even if the prosecution brought in more evidence so that people believed it really was the defendant's handwriting, this was still not a crime, because the contents of the letter did not show clearly that it was referring to a coup attempt.

What Phra Sitthi and I both feared most, and which there was no way round, was that he had attended the meeting at the home of Phraya Ritthi Akhane. But, for

whatever reason, the prosecution did not call any witnesses on this matter. I understood that in trying a criminal case, even if the statement of the defendant at the investigation stage was self-incriminating, by way of confession or part-confession, it could not be used against the defendant unless the prosecution had produced witnesses to arrive at the same conclusion.

Consequently, when the prosecution announced that they would call no more witnesses, I and other defendants shook Phra Sitthi's hand and congratulated him, our hopes high that he would not receive any punishment. 'I thought you would really get it, like me,' Phra Suwanchit said, 'but you got off really lightly.'

Police perjury

Of the 52 defendants, I was the one who had been the least slandered, and against whom the prosecution evidence was the weakest. This was the opinion of all the other defendants and even the prosecution itself in my case. I learned later that some thought I should not have been prosecuted and my file had been put on one side for the withdrawal of legal proceeedings. But for reasons still unclear, the prosecution, in the end, and against their better judgement, had to pursue the action against me.

None of the documentation in my case afforded the court any opening for meting out punishment to me. If the prosecution were to prove that I was a rebel, they had to produce evidence that, in some way or another, I had conspired against the government.

The prosecution witness whose testimony implicated me was Nai Cha-em Chaisut, who testified that he had seen me go to Phraya Ritthi Akhane to ask for work, and that Phraya Ritthi had arranged for me to work in the Irrigation Department. When I stood up and asked Nai Cha-em where he had met me and when, he hesitated, and then stated that in actual fact, he had never seen me at all. He had only heard of me. I asked the court to record his response, but the court refused. So it appeared in the court record that Nai Cha-em had seen me at Phraya Ritthi's house.

This meant that the court helped Nai Cha-em to give false testimony, even though the witness himself had tried to correct his statement to what was true.

Then came the crucial scene in my trial, when a police constable came and testified that he had seen me at Phra Udom's house. The constable strode confidently into the court. I did not realize that he would tell lies and slander me, so I did not pay attention. But when he had cast his eye over all the defendants, his gaze came to rest upon me for two or three minutes, which dismayed me somewhat.

He testified that one evening he had served as a night watchman at the front of Phraya Udom Phensawat's house to keep an eye on who went into the house. He had seen many of the defendants enter the house, including me, disappear inside for about five minutes and then reappear. He did not know why I had gone in and he had not greeted me. He knew me well because he used to have a house near me in Wat Intharawihan District. The court asked him to point me out. He did so correctly.

I sat dumbfounded.

His testimony was not damning. If I really had gone into Phraya Udom's house, it did not seem to be any great crime. I was not shocked by his testimony. I was stunned and numbed because I felt it was astonishing beyond belief that the prosecution witness committing perjury was a policeman. I was dismayed at these actions of someone who was a protector of the people.

There were only two prosecution witnesses to prove that I was a rebel, involved in a conspiracy with Phraya Song and Phraya Udom. One testified that I had disappeared inside the house of Phraya Ritthi Akhane to ask for a job; the other said that I had disappeared inside the house of Phraya Udom for five minutes, but did not know what I did. The truth was I did not know either of the two witnesses and had never known either Phraya Ritthi or Phraya Udom. I had never spoken a single word with either of them and I did not even know where their houses were. I thought that it was not necessary to call witnesses to refute the false testimony of the prosecution witnesses, because it was not apparent, from what they said, what crime I had committed.

When the prosecution announced that it would not question the witnesses further, I felt pleased that I had committed no crime and was not involved with any one of the defendants. I had never known Phraya Ritthi or Phra Udom, I had never asked for work from them, I had never met them, I had never spoken with them, and I had never been to their houses. The prosecution then asked me whether or not I had written the book, *The Fruits of Merit and Sin*, with the intention of publishing it. I denied that that had been my intention. 'If you weren't going to publish it, why did you write it, then?' the state prosecutor asked. I replied that I had written it while in prison to ease my loneliness.

All my companions came and congratulated me, believing that the court would certainly withdraw the case against me. I thought so, too. It was beyond all expectations that the court would judge my visits to the house of Phraya Udom and Phraya Ritthi as rebellion.

The hero in the rebellion case

Other defendants sympathized with me and said that action should not have been taken against me on such flimsy grounds. As for Phra Sitthi, an incident occurred later which led to him being praised as the hero of the rebellion case.

When the prosecution had called all their witnesses, the defendants prepared to call their own witnesses for questioning. But the next day the prosecution announced to the court that the police investigators had sent further witnesses and was therefore requesting permission to question the prosecution witnesses further, which the court willingly granted as it had previous requests.

The additional witnesses were army lieutenants. I have to say here, too, that I was extremely saddened that they damaged the honour of army officers in the Special Court by perjuring themselves so shamelessly.

According to their testimony, Phra Sitthi had used them on two occasions to take money to Nang Hiang Songsai who was staying at the home of Police Constable

Kham. On the first occasion it was 40 Baht and on the second, 60 Baht. Before handing the money over to Nang Hiang, they had asked, ‘Is Khun S. well?’ which was a signal pre-arranged by Phra Sitthi. Phra Sitthi insisted that the money be handed over without anyone seeing, and that it be kept secret because Nang Hiang was a relative of Nai Phum, who had tried to shoot Luang Phibun at Sanam Luang.

When the two lieutenants had testified, I passed Phra Sitthi a question I had jotted down on a small piece of paper. He questioned the witnesses, as I had advised, without enthusiasm. ‘I don’t think it’s important,’ Phra Sitthi told me during the lunch break, ‘because these witnesses only accused me of giving Nang Hiang money, what for, I do not know.’

‘But Nang Hieng is a relative of Nai Phum, who tried to shoot Luang Phibun,’ I countered immediately. ‘Next, they’re sure to call Nang Hiang to question her about your involvement in the shooting of Luang Phibun.’

‘But the prosecution case against me made no reference to the shooting of Luang Phibun. Not like the cases of Phra Suwanchit and Luang Chamnan.’

‘That’s true, sir. But the charges in your case are sufficiently broad and there would be no need to file a further charge. The reason the prosecution have called further witnesses is because the prosecution evidence is not yet sufficient for it to be possible to mete out punishment. This is critical, now.’

Although Phra Sitthi had always listened to my ideas, in this instance he did not seem convinced. He said no more and turned to chat and joke with Phra Suwanchit in a light-hearted manner.

But I was proved right. As soon as the court reconvened in the afternoon, the prosecution called Nang Hiang for questioning. Nang Hiang testified that she was the niece of Nai Phum. The money which Phra Sitthi had given to Second Lieutenant Amphai to pass on to her was for buying things for Nai Phum in prison, as Nai Phum and Phra Sitthi had agreed in advance.

After Nang Hiang, the prosecution called Nang Thomya Thapsaithong to give further evidence, the gist of which was that Nang Thomya knew that Nang Hiang had received money from Phra Sitthi and that Nang Hiang had used the money to buy things for Nai Phum in prison.

From the moment the prosecution produced these three prime witnesses, Phra Sitthi's peace of mind evaporated. It was easy for the prosecution witnesses to tell stories of what they knew and what they had seen, but it was really difficult for a defendant to prove that he had not done those things.

I began to work seriously on Phra Sitthi's case. I questioned him thoroughly on anything and everything which might have been of some benefit to his case, and when I was uncertain on a point of law, I consulted Phra Ratchayat and Phra Wutthiphakdi. Eventually I found a way to prove that the testimony of the lieutenants, and Nang Hiang and Nang Thomya were entirely false.

Phra Sitthi would mount his fightback over his whereabouts, using his passport to show incontrovertible evidence that, on the days and times when the lieutenants claimed that he had used them to pass money on to Nang Hiang, he was in Burma. Moreover, Phra Sitthi cited Nang Prachon Patchanuk (Phra Prachon Patchanuk was actually the judge in Phra Sitthi's case), who testified that on the day and time that Nang Hiang said that Nai Phum had taken her to see Phra Sitthi at his house in Thanon Ratchawat District, Phra Sitthi's house had not yet been built. Furthermore, Nang Hiang had said that she and Nai Phum had taken a *samlor*[30] to visit Phra Sitthi, yet it was apparent that at that time, in Bangkok, there were not yet samlors for hire.

Phra Sitthi was none too swift when it came to legal matters, and he knew almost nothing at all about law and the trial of criminal cases. But he was a first-rate 'doer'. Once he had the question topics, which had been written down for him, he used the questions to interrogate the witnesses with admirable skill. Throughout the time that he cross-examined the witnesses, everyone listened quietly. The other

[30] Three-wheel bicycle rickshaw

defendants, who were used to chatting among themselves when it was not their turn, now listened with excitement and encouragement. Even the judges were astonished and amazed that the prosecution witnesses' lying was exposed so clearly. The state prosecutors were aghast, and some remained open-mouthed in disbelief.

I firmly believe that any neutral person, who had heard the testimony of both the prosecution witnesses and the defendants, would see that Phra Sitthi was not involved in the shooting of Luang Phibun, as the prosecution witnesses had maliciously alleged.

But the Special Court sentenced Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon to death. Part of the verdict was as follows.

'Although the prosecution testimony was at variance with the evidence, the events took place a long time ago. Who would be able to remember these things precisely, whatever the situation? Even though we have listened to evidence from Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon refuting some parts of the prosecution evidence, it does not refute other parts of the prosecution evidence, because the prosecution testimony uncovered the fact that Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon had committed crimes on a number of occasions at various times. *(Remember, if you will, that in Phra Sitthi's case there were only three eye-witnesses.)* But the evidence produced by Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon cannot refute every part of the prosecution evidence. The defendant Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon is therefore guilty.'

Situation in the court

I believe that all 51 defendants (not counting Khun Khliphonphrun) thought that the court would drop charges and they would be freed. Consequently, on the appointed day when the court was to deliver its verdict, everyone was smiling and cheerful, and had gathered together their things, ready to return home.

Security on the day the court read out its judgement was particularly strict. Our names were called out from a list. Once someone's name was called, two policemen came and handcuffed him and escorted him, one on either side, into a van.

On the way to the Special Court, one policeman rode ahead on a motorcycle equipped with a machine gun for our security. Eventually the two policemen acting as our bodyguards took us to our seats in the court and remained seated on either side of us throughout. In addition, there were also soldiers with fixed bayonets standing guard at every door.

We arrived at the court at 8 o'clock in the morning and had to wait about two hours before the judges took their seat. I glanced at the judges. I could not see any smile or expression of mercy towards the defendants on their faces. They all looked as if they were aware that they were performing the duty of executioner.

The judgement was long and drawn out. The court intended to read it so that the defendants could hear it clearly, so they emphasized words, without any rhythm, oblivious to the fact that the defendants had to sit in a confined place, squashed between policemen for 4-5 hours, and that it was extremely hot and stuffy.

Up until then, before the court reconvened, the defendants were permitted to remain in a waiting room, where there was a chamber pot for their use; and even when the court was in session, defendants were permitted to go and relieve themselves. But on the day of the verdicts the police did not permit defendants to leave their seats.

Before coming to court we had been given tea as a farewell, it being understood that this was the day when our paths would part. I was rather greedy, and drank two cups, one after the other. Now the tea was having an unremitting bad effect. The others had drunk only one cup, so they suffered, but only half of what I had to endure.

The court had not yet finished reading the verdict in the case of Sergeant Maen Loetwari. I was less concerned by Sergeant Maen's case than the unbearable agony caused by a desperate need to urinate. If I waited until the court had finished reading its verdict. I would not be able to hold on. So I stood up, which prompted the policeman to raise his gun, thinking I was about to go berserk, and the judges to stare at me in surprise.

‘Excuse me, sir,’ I said, ‘I beg permission to go to the lavatory.’

Luang Phromyothi, who was presiding over the reading of the verdicts, glared at me in silence, as if he had turned himself into a *rishi* [31]and, with eyes blazing, burned me to smithereens. ‘The court is reading its judgement,’ he thundered. ‘Sit down.’

So I sat down. But immediately, Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon stood up. ‘I beg permission to urinate,’ he said.

‘The defendants will please wait a little,’ Luang Phrom replied. ‘The court has not yet finished reading its judgement.’

Luang Phrom cannot have understood that there are limits as to how long a person can hold on for. The human body has to expel what it does not need to use, and these body organs do not obey the authority of the Special Court. It may be able to cut out freedom of movement, even preventing someone from speaking, but it cannot take away the freedom to expel waste products.

I had tried my utmost not to soil the clothes I was wearing, but without success, and I was now about to soil the floor of the court, too. There was no way round it, apart from my shoes. So I quickly removed my shoes and coyly positioned them to take the unclean matter which my body was expelling, using a hat as a shield in order to preserve as much propriety and respect for the proceedings as I could. Both shoes filled to the brim, but I felt happy, my agony over.

Luang Phrom watched my activity dumbfounded. The policemen beside me were also dumbfounded. They might have thought I was trying to make a fool of the Court. Did they not realize that, although on some occasions I dared make a fool of the Court, under no circumstances, whatsoever, would I dare make a fool of myself?

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[31] A hermit or holy man, often believed to have supernatural powers.

‘Permission requested to urinate,’ another defendant stood up and addressed Luang Phrom. ‘I can’t hold on,’ said another. ‘Nor me,’ said a third. In the end all the defendants stood up and requested permission to alleviate their suffering. Only I did not get up, because I was already content.

Luang Phrom ordered a halt in the reading of the judgements. Many of the defendants raced to the small room which had been set aside. I walked after them carrying my shoes.

I am a rebel

Once the suffering had been alleviated, the court continued reading its judgement. I listened to case after case where verdict ended with the words, ‘the defendant is therefore guilty.’ I had not thought that the court would reach its verdicts by believing only the side of the prosecution witnesses. But I still maintained some hope that in Phra Sitthi’s case, where the defendant had thoroughly refuted the claims of the prosecution witnesses, that the court would be sufficiently ashamed that it would decide not to punish the defendant. But when they came to the end of reading the verdict in his case, they concluded with the words, ‘the defendant Phra Sitthi is therefore guilty.’ I slumped in my seat, utterly dejected. I dared not turn and look at Phra Sitthi.

‘But when it comes to my case,’ I thought, ‘the court will drop charges.’

Before long the court would read the verdict in my case. Part of it went like this: ‘The court has thoroughly considered all the witness evidence of the prosecution and that of Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol. It is the case that Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol had committed an act of rebellion in 1933. On that occasion the Special Court passed prison sentences on Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol and those who accused the government of being communist. Later he underwent re-education provided by the government and received a royal pardon. Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol had not relinquished his thoughts of overthrowing the government at this point. He still maintained, as before, that the government was communist, so he

made contact with and conspired with Phraya Ritthi Akhane and Phraya Udom Phongphensawat, whom the court has already found guilty of conspiring to overthrow the government. In order to change the government this time, Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol made contact with the daughter of the Prince of Nakhon Sawan and secretly communicated with Nai So Sethaputra, who was imprisoned for his part in the rebellion, and is still serving his sentence in the serious offenders' prison. The content of the document, *jo* 47 (*the letter I wrote to Princess Sirirat*), cannot be interpreted as being personal, because it is sarcastic about the government and distinguishes between 'them' and 'us', which means the government is on one side and Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol and his associates on another. The contents of this letter clearly refer to politics. There is no need for further explanation. In addition, Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol wrote articles accusing the government of being communist, saying that he and his associates had done nothing wrong, and merely had different ideas to the government, and as for whose ideas were more correct, King Prajadhipok had judged that it was the government itself that was wrong, and the government itself that had deceived the people and looked to its own interests more than those of the nation and that democracy today was a delusion. In another piece of writing Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol speaks of political prisoners in the wake of the 1933 Rebellion. One of them, who has received a royal pardon, hates the government and talks about a coup that would take place in 1939. Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol wrote this book in 1938, or earlier. Officers discovered it in February 1939. When the facts of this case are recalled, that in this rebellion, the majority of the rebels would have used force to overthrow the government in 1939, the same year as in the novel that Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol had earlier written, the suspicion falls on Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol that he knew of this coup plan for a long time in advance. When all these circumstances are put together, the case is sufficiently well-founded to conclude that Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol was someone who conspired with many other defendants, mentioned earlier, to overthrow the government in order to change the system of government by the use of force.

Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol's only defence is to claim that he was a witness. He is not able to refute the prosecution evidence. The defendant Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol is guilty.'

And at the end of the verdict came the following:

'The court has heard that all the defendants in this case, apart from conspiring to commit violent acts in order to destroy the government, are guilty of rebellion under section 101 of the criminal law, which stipulates two penalties, namely death or life imprisonment, which are severe punishments. It is not necessary to pass judgement of guilt on other charges where the prosecution has requested that Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol be further punished on the grounds that he has remained unrepentant. The stipulated punishments are already severe; they cannot be made more so.

Based on the above reasons the court passes sentence of death etc. But the defendants Lt. Gen. Phraya Thephatsadin, the Prince of Chainat and Col. Luang Chamnan Yutthasin have performed good deeds in the past and when the overall circumstances are taken in to account, they should be granted mercy. Their sentences are therefore reduced by one third, according to section 59 and section 37 (1). The three defendants are therefore sentenced to life imprisonment; and Mom Ratchawong Nimitmongkol is sentenced to life imprisonment.

A laughable situation

As soon as the court had read its verdict, I laughed. I am not someone who laughs very often; only infrequently do I feel sufficiently cheerful or amused to laugh. The verdict of the Special Court was something to laugh at. In it, the judges deliberately slandered the defendants. Even where the charges were faulty, in that the prosecution evidence was too weak, the court assisted by inserting additional wording which had not appeared in the original case. And the court assisted in interpreting the intentions of the defendants in a way that was beneficial to the prosecution, over and beyond the evidence produced by the prosecution. In short, instead of upholding justice, the court colluded with the prosecution in writing the judgment, selecting only that which would make the people believe that the defendants really were rebels.

I was not just pretending to laugh. I really did feel amused. I saw that the Special Courts were establishments for covering up deceit and evil, in a way so far-fetched, that it could not possibly be true. That was why I thought it was laughable.

If a clown walks on his hands, we laugh, or if in a cartoon we see Mickey Mouse jump onto the roof of a building in a single leap, we laugh, too. This means that something that is unusual, to the point that it defies credibility, is likely to amuse us, so that we laugh.

But I did not laugh for long. Within just one second my sense of amusement had disappeared. I came to my senses and realized that in fact I was not watching a play or clowns, and the Special Court was not a stage. I had been sentenced to life imprisonment by the court and I really would have to go back to prison. There was no way I that I could hope to use any influence to get justice, and from now on in my life I would have to endure awful suffering in prison with no end in sight. I would have to say farewell to all joy and laughter. I would have to face hardship and suffering. There would be no more days of happiness in his life.

There was a buzzing sound in my ears. I felt as if I was in a daze. I half believed, half disbelieved, that the court had found me guilty. I half believed, half disbelieved, that all the other defendants had been found guilty, and that some had even been sentenced to death.

Where was Phra Sitthi? What would he feel? As the death sentence was passed I turned to Phra Sitthi and looked at him with blurred eyes as if I had just woken up.

‘What was my verdict?’ Phra Sitthi asked.

I turned back at once. I did not reply. Who could be so cruel as to say, ‘You’re going to be executed’? One thing I was sure of was that Phra Sitthi must have had buzzing ears and blurred vision like me, and there were two or three other defendants who appealed that they had not heard the court’s verdict.

I was separated from Phra Sitthi. I returned to my cell in the low security prison, but Phra Sitthi was sent to Bang Khwang. One night it was getting cold when

the guard brought news that Phra Sitthi had been shot. I began to feel colder until my jaw was shaking. That night I dreamt of Phra Sitthi, and after that I often dreamt of him. His soul must have been lingering, in order to implore me to continue trying to have his case examined for the sake of justice.

Even now, I still have to laugh when I think of the unbelievable wickedness that has been hidden away in the background. I laughed in a similar vein for the second time when I was sent to Ko Tao with Dr. Chot Khumphan, after it was found that I had written *The Dreams of an Idealist*, which was seen as a grave danger to peace and stability within the country. At that time anything I thought of doing was always regarded as highly suspect. It was so unbelievable that such a state of affairs really existed, that it made you want to laugh. But when I thought of Phra Sitthi Ruangdetphon and the others, 18 in all, who had died, some with not even a tiny stain on their reputation, I cannot feel anything but sorrow, almost to the point of tears.

Appendix 1

Thai ranks and titles

The names of many of the figures who appear in this memoir are preceded by official titles, some hereditary, some conferred.

The Thai civil service had a system of five conferred ranks of nobility, which in ascending order, are: *Khun*, *Luang*, *Phra*, *Phraya* (often written as *Phya* in English sources) and *Chao Phraya*. *Chao Khun* is a 2nd or 3rd person pronoun, used for addressing or referring to someone with the rank of *Phraya*.

Mom Ratchawong and *Mom Luang* are hereditary titles. The former, usually abbreviated to *M.R.*, is a title used by the great grandchild of King. The latter is a title used by children of a *Mom Ratchawong* and usually abbreviated to *M.L.*

The names of commoners are sometimes preceded by *Nai* (Mr.) or *Nang* (Mrs.).

Appendix 2

Key figures

Prince Boworadet (1877-1947) Grandson of King Mongkut (Rama IV); attended public school and military academy in England; Minister of War during the reign of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) until his resignation in 1931; leader of an abortive rebellion in October 1933; subsequently fled to exile in Indo-China.

Prince of Chainat (= Prince Rangsit) (d. 1951) A son of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), educated in Germany; guardian to King Ananda (Rama VIII) following the death of his father, Prince Mahidol; arrested in January 1939 and condemned to death by the Special Court; subsequently commuted to life imprisonment; released from prison Sep. 1944 and royal ranks restored; Regent, 1946-51.

***Khun* Khliphonphreun** (d.1939) a captain serving under the command of Phaya Songsuradet on the staff of the Military College in Chiangmai; condemned to death by the Special Court and executed in 1939.

No Nen (d. 1939) A young opposition member of the Assembly, condemned by the Special Court in 1939 and executed.

***Phraya* Phahon Phayuhasena** (1887-1947) Attended military college in Germany; leader of promoters of the 1932 Revolution; Prime Minister, June 1933-Dec. 1938; on retirement given the honorary title of 'Elder Statesman'; refused premiership 1944 after the fall of the Phibun government.

***Luang* Phibun Songkhram** (1897-1964) Attended military academy in France and became a leading figure in the junior military faction involved in the 1932 Revolution; played an important role in the suppression of the abortive Boworadet Rebellion in 1933; his influence grew during the mid-1930s; on becoming prime minister in 1938 he immediately arrested potential critics and opponents, who were tried in the Special Court; 18 prisoners were subsequently executed; he later claimed in a newspaper interview that he was pressured into signing the death warrants by *Luang* Adul Detcharat, Director General of the Police Department; allied Thailand with Japan during World War II, but was ousted from office in 1944; became prime minister again in 1948 and enjoyed US support for his strong anti-communist stance; ousted in a coup in 1957, he spent the rest of his life in exile in Japan.

***Phraya* Ritthi Akhane** (1896-1967) a leading member of the senior army faction in the 1932 Revolution; Minister of Agriculture, 1936-8; reputation tarnished in Crown Lands scandal; exiled to Malaya 1938-46.

***Phraya* Sisitthi Songkhram** (d.1933) Although a former classmate of Phahon at the Military Academy, he was initially unwilling to join the promoters of the 1932 Revolution; held the post of Director of Military Operations in 1933 but was dismissed within two days; joined the anti-government Boworadet rebellion in 1933 and killed in the fighting at Hin Lap.

***Phra* Sitthi Ruangdetphon** (d. 1939) Staunch supporter of Phraya Songsuradet; Commander of the Infantry Unit, but promoted to an inactive supervisory post in the Ministry of Defence during Phraya Phahon's premiership; Phibun held a grudge against him for organizing vote on who should succeed Phahon, and for his outspoken manner; condemned to death by Special Court and executed, 1939.

So Sethaputra (1903-70) Received a King's Scholarship to study in England, graduating in 1925 with a BSc. in Geology from Manchester University; arrested in the wake of the abortive 1933 Boworadet Rebellion and imprisoned, first in Bangkok – where he compiled the monumental *New Model English-Thai Dictionary* - and later on the penal colonies at Ko Tarutao and Ko Tao; released after the fall of Phibun in 1944, he became a journalist and briefly entered politics in the immediate post-war years.

***Phraya* Songsuradet** (1891-1944) Studied military science in Germany; a member of the senior army promoter's faction, and regarded as the strategic brains behind the

toppling of the absolute monarchy in the bloodless 1932 Revolution; Deputy Army Commander, 1932-3 and Head of the military school in Chiangmai, 1936-9; seen by Phibun as a major obstacle to Phibun's own advancement; exiled to Indo-China in January 1939, where he subsequently died penniless.

Phraya **Thephatsadin** (d. 1951) Commander of Thai military force in France during World War I; elected to the Assembly in 1933; arrested and tried for plotting against the government in 1934; sentenced to 2 years in prison but acquitted on appeal; arrested in 1939 and, together with his sons, Phutphan and Phaophong, sentenced to death by the Special Court; his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment but his sons were executed.
