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*Abdication and Regency: The Siamese monarchy 1935–46**

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Abstract

The abdication of Prajadhipok, King of Siam, in 1935 marked the end of the reign of the country's last absolute ruler and brought a young prince, Ananda Mahidol, to the throne in his place. Over the next decade, Ananda would rule *in absentia* as he grew up in Switzerland, leaving the regime considerable latitude to consolidate its authority over the monarchy and royal affairs. This article looks at three aspects of this period: the abdication as triumph of the authority of the Constitution over that of the king; the succession to the throne of a branch of the royal family that would otherwise have been bypassed; and the extended regency, which sanctioned rather than resisted the strengthening of government control over the monarchy.

Introduction

The abdication of Siamese King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, r. 1925–35) in March 1935 marked an important turning point in the political history of modern Thailand. Prajadhipok's departure from the political scene brought an end to the recurrent tensions that had plagued his relationship with the People's Party regime, which had forced him to accept a Constitution in June 1932. The succession to the throne of eight-year-old Prince Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII, r. 1935–46) dramatically changed the balance of power between the government and the monarchy. For most of Ananda's reign, he was overseas and was represented vis-à-vis the government by two or more regents. These men, at least until 1941, were considerably more cooperative than

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Prajadhipok had been, and their generally complacent attitude allowed the government to substantially consolidate its authority over royal affairs.

Over the past few years, the 1932 'Change of Government' (as it is most often called in Thai) has enjoyed a renewal of scholarly interest both inside and outside Thailand. As arguably the most important single event in modern Thai history, it has become part of a complex of what Pierre Nora has called 'sites of memory',[1] including the actual coup, the Democracy Monument in Bangkok that commemorates it, and the first Thai Constitution that it produced. Prajadhipok himself has become a contested 'site', as he has evolved from the target or victim of the coup into a kind of patron saint of Thai democracy who sought unsuccessfully to rescue Siam from the misguided actions of the new regime. More broadly, conflicting perspectives regarding the supporters and opponents of the new regime have become linked to ongoing debates over the trajectory of Thai democracy since 1932.

Most of the recent scholarship has focused on the period between 1932 and 1935, examining the struggle between Prajadhipok and his royalist supporters and the People's Party government. The years following his abdication are generally studied with a focus on Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, the military strongman who rose to power in the mid-1930s and led Thailand into its ill-fated alliance with Japan during the Second World War. The monarchy during this same period gets relatively short shrift, essentially because of the absence of an adult ruler. As this article will show, however, the Eighth Reign represents a crucial chapter in the history of the Thai monarchy.

This article will look at three specific aspects of Prajadhipok's abdication. First, it will examine the 'battle of wills' between the king and the parliament as a reflection of the regime's determination to assert its own authority and that of the Constitution over the monarchy. This series of parliamentary victories demonstrated to Prajadhipok that he really was now 'under the Constitution', as the People's Party had repeatedly proclaimed, and persuaded him that there was no point in remaining on the throne. Second, it will explain how developments after 1932 led to the succession of a branch of the royal family that would otherwise most likely have remained on the sidelines of Siam's

[1] See P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) and Arthur Goldhammer (tr.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1996. Although this English translation of Nora's work translates the French term '*lieux*' as 'realms', 'sites' is a more correct equivalent and is also used by some authors in English.

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political stage. The selection of Ananda Mahidol (r. 1935–46), a young prince living overseas, instead of an adult with his own interests and ambitions, dramatically affected the monarchy's evolution. Finally, the role of the regents will be analysed to show how they facilitated the implementation of a genuine constitutional monarchy whereby the throne was subordinated to the government. This period was arguably the zenith of the Constitution's authority and the nadir of that of the monarchy. Moreover, these developments would also have a longer-term impact on the relationship between the two institutions during the reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (r. 1946–2016).

Background

The events of June 1932 permanently changed the direction of Thai political history. The People's Party, a group of mid-level military officers and civilian officials, staged a coup and forced Prajadhipok to accept a Constitution. Princes were henceforth barred from holding office, and a new government was put in place with the institutions of parliamentary democracy. Although the king agreed to stay on the throne and cooperate with the new regime, he never became reconciled to the shrinking of his powers and role to the parameters of a largely symbolic constitutional monarch. The new regime was a rather unstable mixture of individuals with differing ideals, ideologies, and agendas. Conservatives with varying degrees of loyalty to the king continued to play a role in the government and succeeded in destabilizing it from the inside, even as the newcomers worked to weaken the throne and shift its power to the institutions of constitutional government. The early months of 1933 saw a tightening of control by the conservatives and a counter-coup by military elements within the People's Party, followed in October by a full-fledged uprising mounted by dissident army units under the leadership of the disgruntled Prince Bovaradej.[2]

The degree of Prajadhipok's direct involvement in the rebellion is still not completely clear, although recent scholarship has tended to substantiate accusations of complicity subsequently levelled against him

[2] For an overview of these events, see B. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1984; J. Wright, *The Balancing Act*, Asia Books, Bangkok, 1991; and Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country, and Constitutions: Thailand's Political Development, 1932–2000*, RoutledgeCurzon, Richmond, 2003.

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by the government.[3] Certainly, he was dissatisfied with the new regime and its treatment of the royal family and their loyal supporters; whether he genuinely believed that it could be successfully overthrown in favour of a return to the *ancien régime* is less certain. What is clear is that the Bovaradej rebellion and its suppression convinced the king that his uneasy coexistence with the People's Party could not last, at least not under existing conditions. At the same time, his failure to either fully support the uprising or voice a strong endorsement of the regime further affected his personal prestige. In a meeting with the British Minister to Siam in December 1933, he complained bitterly that 'in England they say the King can do no wrong. In Siam it appears he can do nothing right'.[4] Suffering from a long-term problem with his eyes, Prajadhipok announced his decision to go overseas to seek treatment; he spent the rest of his life in self-imposed exile. He left Siam in January 1934, taking an extended voyage through Asia and several European countries before finally settling down in England.[5]

Although the king had legitimate health reasons for leaving the country, his departure at this point cannot have pleased the government. As long as he remained in the country, his presence gave at least tacit approval to the regime in power, but his departure was a clear signal of his disaffection, all the more so since he did not announce a definite time for his return. It must have appeared to the government that Prajadhipok was attempting to manoeuvre himself into a new bargaining position, and in fact this was probably true, although ultimately he would fail in this attempt. For the time being, however, the king would be absent, and

[3] See F. Ferrara, 'The Legend of King Prajadhipok: Tall Tales and Stubborn Facts on the Seventh Reign in Siam', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 43, issue 1, February 2012, pp. 4–31; Nattapoll Chaiching, 'The Monarchy and the Royalist Movement in Modern Thai Politics, 1932–1957', in *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand*, S. Ivarsson and L. Isager (eds.), NIAS Press, Copenhagen, 2010, pp. 147–78; and Natthaphọn Čhaičhing, *Khọ Fanfai nai Fan an Lúa Chúa: Khwamkhluanwai khọng Khabuankan Patipak Patiwat Sayam Phọ. Sọ. 2475–2500 [Dream the Impossible Dream: The Activities of the Movement Hostile to the Siamese Revolution 1932–1957]*, Fa Diewkan, Nonthaburi, 2013.

[4] 'Notes on Sir R. Holland's Audience with H.M. the King of Siam', 26 December 1933, in British Foreign Office [henceforth FO] 371/18206, F 1194/21/40; reproduced in Nayana Hongthongkham, 'Phrabat Somdet Phrapokklao Čhaoyuhua lae Khana Rat' [King Prajadhipok and the People's Party], Chulalongkorn University master's thesis, 1977, pp. 300–10. Prajadhipok's reference to 'the King can do no wrong' refers to the attribute of sovereign immunity that came to characterize the British monarchy.

[5] Correspondence regarding his travel plans is in Thai National Archives [henceforth TNA], KT [Foreign Ministry], 7.3.3/11.

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the National Assembly unanimously approved the designation of Prince Naris (the king's uncle) as regent. In addition to being the highest-ranking surviving prince, Naris had avoided involvement with political affairs, and there appears to have been no opposition to his assumption of the post.[6]

Disputes, negotiations, and abdication

While Prajadhipok's abdication in 1935 was the culmination of months of disagreements and crises of various kinds, several specific issues contributed significantly to the disintegration of his relations with the regime. First was a draft decree concerning inheritance taxes passed by the National Assembly in July 1934, which Prajadhipok argued failed to adequately distinguish between Crown Property that belonged to the king himself and Crown Property that belonged to the country. He refused to allow Naris to sign it into law, but the Assembly passed it over his veto, as the Constitution allowed.[7] A second disagreement came shortly thereafter, with a dispute over three draft decrees on criminal-law procedures. There were two main issues at hand: whether or not the king's formal approval was necessary for an execution and the process by which a condemned criminal could submit a petition requesting clemency. According to the proposed legislation, the king's signature would no longer be required to carry out executions. Prajadhipok felt, moreover, that the drafts did not stipulate clearly the condemnee's right to petition for pardon. Again he refused to sign the draft, and again the Assembly overrode his veto.[8]

The third key issue related to the non-elected component of the Assembly: the so-called 'Category 2' representatives. The June 1932 Constitution stipulated that the king would *appoint* them without any reference to his being involved in *selecting* them. Prajadhipok does not seem to have had any role in the appointment process beyond rubber-stamping the government's list, and a 1934 report on the subject mentioned that the king was only empowered to make such

[6] *Raingan Kanprachum Sapha Phuthaen Ratsadon* [Proceedings of the National Assembly, henceforth *Raingan*], Second Term, Ordinary Session 4/2476 (8 January 1934), pp. 166–7.

[7] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session 2/2477 (4 August 1934).

[8] The debates over these drafts stretched over several sessions: *Raingan*, Extraordinary Sessions 9/2477 (20 August 1934), 10/2477 (22 August 1934), 19/2477 (19 September 1934), 28/2477 (28 September 1934), and 29/2477 (29 September 1934).

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appointments 'in the early stage' of the parliamentary regime. Later, it said, the Assembly would handle all such decisions without recourse to royal authority. However, by late 1934, he took the position that he should have at least some power to select these individuals, if only to choose from a list submitted by the government.[9] Prajadhipok was also displeased by the fact that his veto of a law could be overridden by a simple majority; he felt that ideally a two-thirds or three-quarters vote should be necessary for this purpose, as was the case in Western countries, and spoke of the possibility of holding new elections or some kind of plebiscite to decide the issue.[10]

The third and fourth issues just mentioned emerged during a months-long process of negotiations that began with a 14 October telegram from Prajadhipok in England. The king began by commenting that, as far as he could see, neither the government nor the National Assembly desired to reach a compromise on any of the matters he had raised. Moreover, the regime had consistently waited to inform him until after final decisions had been made, so that there was no possibility of his raising objections or suggesting modifications. He felt that, since he was left with no power to help or protect anyone, he should not continue to rule. He would allow the government time to find a successor and prepare a smooth transition, and then abdicate. The king refused to designate an heir, saying he would leave the decision up to the government.[11]

Prajadhipok's telegram must have caused considerable consternation within the government in Bangkok. Although the regime was determined to affirm its own position and authority vis-à-vis the king, it is unlikely that as drastic a solution as abdication was desirable at that time. Admittedly, an obstacle would indeed be removed from the regime's path if Prajadhipok were no longer in power; and, since the most likely successor was still a young boy (as will be discussed below), the government was not likely to encounter serious difficulties in dealing with him. At the same time, however, an abdication could potentially provoke dissatisfaction among the population and open the government

[9] The report (dated 21 January 1934) and other related documents are in TNA, SR [Prime Minister's Office] (2), 0201.35.2, folder 1.

[10] 'Phraratchabanthuk' [His Majesty's report] dated December 1934, in *Thalaengkan rưang Phrabat Somdet Phraparaminthara Mahaprachathipok Phrapokklao Čhaoyuhua song Sala Ratchasombat [Report on the Abdication of His Majesty King Prajadhipok*, henceforth *Thalaengkan]*, Songtham Printers, Bangkok, 1935, pp. 99–113.

[11] Document dated 14 October 1934 in ibid., pp. 1–2.

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to charges of failing to show due consideration and respect to the monarch.

The government responded with protestations of loyalty and vowed that they had no intention of upsetting or angering the king through any of their actions. They asked for a detailed list of his desiderata so that the Cabinet could attempt to meet his demands. Prajadhipok replied with a somewhat lengthy message that reflected his dissatisfaction with the government's position. Even if the government were to accept his conditions now, he argued, by returning to Siam, he would be vulnerable to 'revenge' from those who had been forced to give in, because he knew that none of his demands would be readily accepted by those who wanted him to be just a 'willing slave'.[12]

When it became clear that the negotiations were going to be protracted, the government decided to send a small delegation to England to deal with Prajadhipok directly instead of attempting to resolve the issues through an exchange of telegrams. The negotiations did not exactly begin on a note of trust and good faith: the king apparently requested protection from Scotland Yard in anticipation of the delegation's arrival. His private secretary told the British that, if Prajadhipok were to return to Siam, 'there is no doubt he would be in danger of assassination', while, if he refused to do so, 'efforts to effect reprisals against him may be made here'. (There is no evidence that the king's life was ever in danger.) The delegation, headed by *Čhao Phraya* Sri Dharmadhibes, the speaker of the National Assembly, left Siam in early November and arrived in England the following month. Between mid-December and mid-February, they had a series of five audiences with the king.[13]

The issues raised in the negotiations were debated in the National Assembly in a 'secret' (closed) session on 31 January 1935.[14] Although the legislature was willing to make concessions on a few of the minor points raised by Prajadhipok, in general, they stuck to their guns on the major issues. In early February, Prime Minister *Phraya* Phahol

[12] The government's telegram of 23 October 1934 is in ibid., pp. 5–6. The original English text of the king's response is in *Raingan*, Ordinary Session 16/2477 (31 January 1935), pp. 890–2.

[13] Relevant documents are in *Thalaengkan*, pp. 16–23. On the king's fears, see FO 371/18208, F6349/115/40, 26 October 1934. The terms '*Čhao Phraya*' and '*Phraya*' that appear in this article are ranks within the system of official nobility.

[14] The proceedings of this closed session (Ordinary Session 16/2477) are reproduced in *Thalaengkan*, pp. 88–347.

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Pholphayuhasena telegraphed the king to inform him that the Assembly unanimously supported the government's position. Prajadhipok reiterated his main demands (discussed above) with the request that the regime give him a straightforward 'yes' or 'no'. A reading of the Assembly proceedings apparently convinced him that there was no point in carrying on any further; on February 28, his secretary informed the delegation in London that the abdication would take effect shortly.[15]

Prajadhipok's formal abdication statement, which he transmitted to the government before officially giving up the throne, contained an overview of the past three years of the constitutional regime and a summary of his grievances against it. He said that he himself had favoured having a Constitution and had therefore initially been willing to cooperate with the People's Party because they supposedly shared the same goal and because he thought it best for the country. However, the new government had 'failed to establish real political freedom, nor did they truly listen to the wishes of the people', as demonstrated by their domination of the National Assembly membership. Prajadhipok reiterated his complaint about the selection process for the Category 2 representatives, in which he 'had no voice at all'. In general, he said, the government failed to observe basic principles of freedom and justice; he could not allow its policies to be carried out in his name.[16]

The abdication proclamation and the various statements that preceded it were part of a consistent attempt on Prajadhipok's part to portray himself as an advocate of democracy standing up for his subjects against an autocratic regime. He maintained (somewhat disingenuously) that he had only agreed to cooperate with the People's Party and its constitutional regime in the first place because he wanted English-style democracy and that, if Siam instead ended up with a dictatorship, it would be no better off than it had been under the absolute monarchy. Unless the government addressed his objections and implemented 'true democracy', he would never consent to return.

Over the long run, Prajadhipok's endeavour to portray himself as a frustrated democrat was successful and, beginning in the 1970s, decades after his death, he became an icon for many Thai opponents of

[15] See documents dated 2 February 1935, 17 February 1935, and 1 March 1935 in ibid., pp. 348–9, 354–6, and 359–61, respectively.

[16] The Thai version is in ibid., pp. 380–4; an English translation is in B. Batson, *Siam's Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy*, Cornell Southeast Asia Program Data Paper, Ithaca, 1984, pp. 101–2.

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military dictatorship, as recent scholarship has studied in some detail.[17] In the short term, however, he was largely unsuccessful in making his case to the Siamese legislature, which consistently and firmly countered his protests in the name of 'democracy' with arguments grounded in their own authority and that of the Constitution. More importantly, the National Assembly's debates first over the draft laws rejected by the king and then in the context of his threatened abdication are very revealing of the differing opinions within its membership concerning the ruler's role in the functioning of constitutional government.

At the beginning of the discussion of the royal veto on the inheritance-tax bill, the speaker stated clearly that this was a problem between Parliament and the king, not between parliament and the government. One representative began by asserting that all individuals were equal under the Constitution, including where matters of taxation were concerned. He mentioned that Prajadhipok had consistently proved his own patriotism and his willingness to use his funds for various useful purposes and suggested that the king's entourage was pushing him to take an ill-advised stand against the draft.[18] There was general disagreement within the Assembly as to the best course to take. Some felt that the existing text should be modified according to the king's proposal, if only for the sake of clarity, while others shared the view that to do so would cause the people to lose confidence in the legislature. It was pointed out that, in England, no ruler since Queen Anne in the early eighteenth century had dared to oppose parliament, and the speaker said that they should not permit Prajadhipok to do so, either. According to the Constitution, he noted, the king was to act with the advice and approval of the Assembly, and not the other way around. The point was that, while the king could refuse to sign a decree into law, he was not supposed to attempt to modify it, since that was the task of the legislature.[19]

[17] S. Čhiamthirasakun [Jeamteerasakul], 'Phraratchaahatthalekha Sala Rat Rọ. 7: Chiwaprawat khọng Ekasan Chabap Nưng' [Rama VII's Abdication Letter: The Biography of a Document], in *Prawatsat phoeng Sang: Ruam Botkhwam kiawkap 14 Tula lae 6 Tula [History Just Made: A Collection of Articles about Oct. 14 and Oct. 6]*, S. Čhiamthirasakun (ed.), Samnakphim 6 Tula Ramluk, Bangkok, 2001, pp. 20–30; see also the discussion in N. Mektrainat, *Kọ̄rani Rọ. 7 song Sala Ratchasombat [The Case of Rama VII's Abdication]*, Khop Fai, Bangkok, 2006; and P. Kongkirati, *Lae laew Kankhluanwai kọ̄ Prakot [And then the Movement Appeared]*, Thammasat University Press, Bangkok, 2005.

[18] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session 2/2477 (4 August 1934), pp. 40–50.

[19] Ibid.

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Prajadhipok certainly had his supporters among the MPs, but overall the debate was rather defensive in tone: they were concerned about a possible challenge to their authority and the resulting loss of their prestige as a body. Although, at this stage, no one apparently wished to provoke the king, neither were they willing to make concessions just to satisfy him when they felt that broader questions of principle were involved. This stance would be reiterated and strengthened during the September discussion over the execution/clemency issue.[20]

When the capital-punishment bills were first discussed, the main rationale given was a constitutional one. Prince Varnvidaya, who was an adviser to the government on legal matters, explained that the fundamental issue was the need to separate executive and judicial powers that had been combined under the absolute monarchy. He noted that in England, for example, one did not petition the king for clemency and that courts under constitutional regimes had absolute power. In the case of Siam, to require the submission of a judicial decision such as an execution for royal sanction would be to involve the king's executive power in the judicial process on a regular basis. *Luang* Thamrong Navasavat, a member of the Cabinet, noted that the Constitution required a minister to take formal responsibility for all royal decisions in any case, and so he argued that the king's signature on a death warrant was superfluous. The final conclusion was that the ruler would be informed of every such sentence but that his approval would not be necessary to carry out the execution. Although there were one or two objections that this could deprive the ruler of his prerogative to oppose an execution, the overall consensus was that the preservation of the condemned prisoner's right to appeal for clemency would be sufficient.[21]

The tone of the debate following Prajadhipok's subsequent veto of those bills was considerably sharper. The king pointed out that, traditionally, the ruler had always been able to grant a pardon, even without actually receiving a petition, and to prevent an execution by refusing to sign the order for it. The proposed law would eliminate this avenue for action and, as a result, people would tend to assume that the government was specifically intending to abolish the royal privilege of granting pardon in order to 'be able to execute political prisoners freely without the

[20] Although three separate decrees were under consideration, they can be treated as a single issue.

[21] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session 9/2477 (20 August 1934), pp. 546–612.

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consent of the King'.[22] In a subsequent message, he argued that 'it is against good democratic practice' to make such a serious change as the proposed laws without giving the people an opportunity to voice their opinion through a plebiscite or else a general election.[23]

These arguments carried little weight with the Assembly. There was considerable dissatisfaction with his suggestion of a plebiscite, because it was felt that as elected representatives, the MPs already stood for their constituents' wishes. One MP pointed out that nothing in the Constitution required that they hold an 'election'—as Prajadhipok had suggested—just because he was dissatisfied with a parliamentary decision. Another did emphasize that Prajadhipok had been loyal to the government, which was after all still 'His Majesty's government', and felt that they should at least be willing to reconsider their decision. The general consensus, however, was that, although the king's concern for a proper guarantee of the right to petition for clemency was valid, this right was already sufficiently upheld by the draft as it was originally worded. More importantly, the constitutional process had been duly followed and there was no need to modify its outcome based on Prajadhipok's objections.[24]

To some extent, the final months of the Seventh Reign were characterized by competing discourses of 'democracy' versus 'constitutionalism'. Generally speaking, Prajadhipok was on shakier ground than his political adversaries because, as was pointed out quite explicitly in the correspondence between Bangkok and the negotiators in England, he had been an integral part of the constitutional drafting process in 1932. It was therefore rather disingenuous of him to now claim that various components of that charter were 'undemocratic'.[25] Moreover, it is clear from the remarks of the legislature that, in the MPs' view at least, the Constitution had by now acquired not only legal authority, but moral authority as well. Its stipulations were seen as a kind of litmus test for each of Prajadhipok's proposals, and amending it —though theoretically possible—was neither necessary nor desirable. As one MP—who was actually speaking in favour of helping to rectify the

[22] Telegram dated 7 September 1934 in TNA, SR 0201.41.4/1, folder 1. In fact, the regime had yet to execute any political prisoners, even after the Bovaradej rebellion.

[23] Document dated 24 September 1934 in ibid., folder 2.

[24] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session 28/2477 (28 September 1934), pp. 2190–200.

[25] Comments to this effect are found in *Thalaengkan*, pp. 43, 118; a similar observation from the British Minister Sir Josiah Crosby, who was generally sympathetic to Prajadhipok, is in FO 371/19376, F1935/1442/40, 13 February 1935.

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situation by negotiating a solution between the king and the government —bluntly stated: 'we are the National Assembly; we control (*khuapkhum*) the country; we control the government; we control the king.'[26] In this first real battle of the constitutional monarchy, the Constitution was the clear victor.

It is difficult to gauge with any accuracy the reaction in Siam to Prajadhipok's abdication, since there was a ban on any press discussion of the matter beyond the simple announcement that the king was giving up the throne, which was not made until almost a week after he had informed the regime of his decision. The news must have surprised only those who were shielded from rumours and speculation, as diplomatic reports show that, among the Siamese elite, at least, the abdication had been virtually a foregone conclusion since the king's stance had become known in October.[27] (Moreover, the foreign press, particularly in Britain, had been covering the crisis for several months.) For the government itself, Prajadhipok's departure from power would have been a *dénouement* rather than a climax, since, by early February at the latest, it was fairly clear that the protracted negotiations were not producing any significant concessions. There may have been a sense of relief that the months of tension and doubt were now over and that the government could now move ahead, free from the shadow of Prajadhipok's threats to abdicate.

The transition from the Seventh to the Eighth Reigns was generally smooth. The government broke the press silence on the abdication rumours with rather terse, formal announcements concerning Prajadhipok's renunciation of the throne and the designation of the young Ananda as his successor and of three regents to handle royal affairs during the minority. Although the king's abdication had in fact taken effect on 2 March, the regime chose to delay the announcement until the Assembly debates concluded and Ananda had formally accepted the throne. Presumably, the regime's intention was to remove any doubt that it planned to appoint a successor, and it emphasized its commitment to the constitutional

[26] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session 29/2477 (29 September 1934), reproduced in *Thalaengkan*, p. 235.

[27] See, for example, French Foreign Ministry Archives (MAE), Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales, Série E Asie 1930-1940 (Siam), vol. 56, 20 October 1934; and FO 371/18208, F 7145/115/40, 25 October 1934; official censorship of the topic is mentioned in FO 371/18208, F 6427/115/40, 29 October 1934 and FO 371/19376, F 1697/142/40, 6 March 1935.

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monarchy.[28] More significant, perhaps, was the decision by the National Assembly to publish the proceedings of their closed meetings as well as the documentation of the negotiations with Prajadhipok in order to demonstrate the correctness of their position.[29]

Succession

To fully understand the significance of Ananda's succession, we must go back to the reign of his grandfather, Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868–1910). In 1886, in order to regularize and stabilize royal succession over the long term, Chulalongkorn established a Western-style crown prince title that he bestowed on his eight-year-old son, Vajirunhis, the oldest prince of *Čhao Fa* rank. (*Čhao Fa* are normally princes and princesses born to full queens, and, as a rule, kings would traditionally be chosen from this particular pool.) When Vajirunhis died nine years later, the crown prince title went to his half-brother, Vajiravudh, who held it until he ascended the throne as King Rama VI (r. 1910–25) in 1910. Vajiravudh was the next oldest *Čhao Fa* after Vajirunhis and thus a logical choice for crown prince but, at some unknown point, the decision was made that future successors would come only from his full siblings rather than alternating through half-siblings by Chulalongkorn's different queens based on seniority of age. It is generally understood that Chulalongkorn was persuaded to make this (unwritten) stipulation by Vajiravudh's mother, Queen Saovabha, who was known to be a strong personality. She and Vajirunhis's mother, Queen Savang Vatthana, were full sisters but also rivals, and she was apparently able to ensure that her offspring would receive priority in the succession.[30]

[28] See Sir Josiah Crosby's 'Annual Report for 1935', dated 24 February 1936, in FO 371/20302, F 1909/1909/40, and MAE, Série E Asie 1930–1940 (Siam) vol. 71, 9 February 1935. The texts of the government's announcements are in *Somdet Phrasinakharinthara Borommaratchachonni [Her Royal Highness the Princess Mother]*, Thonthawat, Bangkok, 1984, p. 110.

[29] The decision is in *Raingan*, Ordinary Session 62/2477 (29 March 1935), pp. 4363–6; the *Thalaengkan* was published within a few months.

[30] Discussion of this decision is found in S. Sivaraksa, *Siamese Resurgence*, Asian Cultural Forum on Development, Bangkok, 1985, p. 196; it is alluded to by a contemporary foreign observer in H. Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1901, p. 598. One of Saovabha's grandsons noted that her older brother and sister (Savang Vatthana) consistently deferred to her even in private; Čhulačhakraphong, *Koet Wang Parut Samai Sombunranayasitthirat [Born in Paruskavan Palace during the Absolute*

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Vajiravudh, shortly before the end of his reign, promulgated a formal Palace Law on Succession—the first law in Thai history specifically for this purpose. Under normal circumstances, this law would have effectively fulfilled his mother's wishes, since it specified that, if a king died without a designated heir, succession should proceed through his children or, if there were none, through his younger full brothers and their descendants.[31] Circumstances were not normal, however. Vajiravudh had no sons—his only child, a daughter, was born when he was on his deathbed in 1925. Moreover, when he had ascended the throne in 1910, he had had four full younger brothers; by the time of the law's promulgation in November 1924, however, two of them had died of natural causes, and one more would pass away a few months before he did. This left only Prajadhipok, who was himself childless after seven years of marriage. Thus, against all expectations, the Crown was likely to pass out of the hands of Saovabha's descendants.

The 1924 Law stipulated that a ruler could in fact choose any prince he wished as his heir, and the specific order of succession would only take effect in the event that he did not. For reasons that remain unclear, Prajadhipok never formally appointed an heir, and thus the succession remained uncertain throughout his reign. The most likely candidates were his two half-brothers, Paribatra and Mahidol; the latter was a son of Savang Vatthana and the former the son of Sukhumala, another of Chulalongkorn's four full queens. Paribatra was a military man as well as minister of the interior and generally seen as the most powerful prince in the Seventh Reign. Mahidol, by contrast, had trained as a physician and devoted his life to medicine; he was to die in 1929.

Monarchy], 13th edn, River Books, Bangkok, p. 53. Decades later, veteran British diplomat Crosby referred to the change in succession rights and suggested that the choice of Ananda 'might easily wear the appearance of the tardy righting of a wrong done in the past' (FO 371/18208, F 7145/115/40, 25 October 1934). His point was that Ananda's father, Mahidol, a son of Savang Vatthana, would likely have eventually become heir to the throne if not for the switch to Saovabha's line.

[31] See *Kot Monthianban waduai Kansup Ratchasombat [Palace Law on Succession]*, Section 4 (downloaded from www.krisdika.go.th) [accessed 10 June 2015]. This law is discussed briefly in P. Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 38. Handley notes correctly that the law was meant to establish succession through primogeniture rather than through a ruler's brothers; the peculiar composition of the royal family in the 1920s, however, would make this impossible. The British Legation saw the new law as Vajiravudh's formal attempt to consolidate the power of his own branch of the family against those of his half-brothers; FO 371/10973, F181/181/40, 11 December 1924.

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At this point, the story becomes more complex. When Mahidol died, some newspapers—though not all—referred to him as the 'heir' (*ratchathayat*), which in a formal sense he was, as the Palace Law placed him ahead of Paribatra in the order of succession because the latter's mother held a slightly lower queenly rank than Savang Vatthana.[32] At no point, however, was he formally appointed as heir. More importantly, he was given no official position during Prajadhipok's reign, whereas a future king would unquestionably have been expected to choose government over medical service.[33] Paribatra, on the other hand, held multiple posts in the military and the Cabinet, and served as regent several times during the king's absence from Siam—something Mahidol never did. Thus, it seems almost certain that Prajadhipok expected Paribatra to succeed him.[34]

British and French diplomats regarded Paribatra (or possibly his son, Chumbhos, leaving the father to hold onto his government posts) as the most likely successor even before Mahidol's death.[35] Although Mahidol's children would have had precedence according to the Palace Law, Prajadhipok—as noted above—was not obliged to follow it and was empowered to appoint an heir of his own choosing. The events of 1932, however, dramatically changed the situation. Paribatra, widely perceived as the most powerful royal-family member, was immediately

[32] Newspaper clippings filed in TNA, Seventh Reign, M [Ministry of Interior], 26.5/243. The successive promotions in queenly rank are listed in J. Finestone, *The Royal Family of Thailand: The Descendants of King Chulalongkorn*, Phitsanulok Publishing Co., Bangkok, 1989, pp. 77–9; see also the article 'Phrayot Čhaonai Thai' [Ranks of Thai Female Royal Family Members], from th.wikipedia.org [accessed 10 June 2015].

[33] Finestone, *Royal Family*, p. 239, says that Mahidol was 'heir presumptive' from Vajiravudh's death until his own; although Finestone is an extremely authoritative writer, this claim does not seem to be confirmed by contemporary sources. Mahidol is referred to as both 'Heir Apparent' and 'Heir Presumptive' in W. Stevenson, *The Revolutionary King: The True-Life Sequel to* The King and I, Constable, London, 2000, pp. 19, 21. However, Stevenson's understanding of Thai history leaves a lot to be desired; in particular, his statement that Mahidol's title of 'Prince of Songkhla' 'was traditionally given to future kings' (p. 41) is completely fanciful. The British-style habit of giving princes titles based on Siamese toponyms was an innovation of Chulalongkorn's reign; Mahidol was the first and last to hold that title.

[34] Biographical information on Paribatra from Finestone, *Royal Family*, p. 430.

[35] A French diplomat reported that Mahidol had no desire to become Rama VIII and would not accept the crown if Prajadhipok died before him; MAE, Asie 1928-1939, Siam, vol. 23, 13 April 1929. The French diplomats were particularly concerned about the prospects of Paribatra's succession because he had studied in imperial Berlin and was viewed as pro-German; their reports are in MAE, Asie 1928-1939, Siam, vol. 28.

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packed off into exile with his family and would presumably be out of the running for the throne as long as the People's Party was in power. Mahidol's young son, Ananda (nine years old in early 1935), was first in the line of succession, even though the late prince had reportedly dictated a statement shortly before his death formally asking Prajadhipok not to designate either of his offspring as heir.[36]

Mahidol was unique among his generation of princes in having both a monogamous marriage and a non-royal consort. Ananda and his younger brother, Bhumibol, were unlikely candidates for the throne, as their birth to a commoner mother gave them a rank considerably lower than *Čhao Fa*. The Palace Law does not explicitly exclude children of non-royal mothers, but the terms it uses to refer to possible successors imply high-ranking princes, and Chakri kings were normally the sons of queens. A son of one of Prajadhipok's older full brothers was passed over precisely because he was born to a non-royal minor wife. Because Mahidol's consort was his only wife, however, the boys were viewed as fully legitimate successors.[37] Moreover, their rank had been raised along with that of several of their cousins during Prajadhipok's reign.[38] With Paribatra in exile, Ananda was next in line.

This decision was not a lightning bolt out of the blue.[39] From the early days of the constitutional regime, Ananda had been mentioned as the likely successor in the event of Prajadhipok's abdication. In an audience with the People's Party leaders just a few days after the coup, Prajadhipok himself suggested Mahidol's son as a possible successor.[40]

[36] F. B. Sayre, *Glad Adventure*, Macmillan, New York, 1957, p. 99; Sayre, who served as a royal adviser in Siam for many years, was the recipient of Mahidol's statement. Prajadhipok honoured the letter, though not the spirit, of this request by indicating his support for Ananda's succession without formally designating him as heir.

[37] His widow held the title of Princess Mother during her sons' reigns. The prince who was bypassed is discussed in FO 371/18208, F 7145/115/40, 25 October 1934, and Somsak Čhiamthirasakun, 'Nailuang Anan Khưn Krọngrat tam Lamdap Khan khọng Kot Monthianban rư phro Pridi Sanapsanun?' [Did King Ananda Take the Throne Based on the Order of Succession in the Palace Law or because of Pridi's Support], non-published article dated 17 June 2006, downloaded from http://somsakj.blogspot.sg [accessed 15 June 2008].

[38] The text of the decree raising the young princes' rank, dated 8 November 1927, is in *Ratchasakun Wong Chabap Kaekhai Phoemtoem [Royal Genealogy, revised and expanded edition]* (cremation volume for M. R. Bunrap Phinitchachonkhadi), Channawanit, Bangkok, 1982, p. 139.

[39] *Pace* Stevenson, *Revolutionary King*, p. 25, who gives the impression that the royal family in Switzerland only found out about it from a newspaper headline.

[40] Excerpts from a report of this 30 June 1932 audience are in *Thalaengkan*, pp. 3–4.

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Once he began to talk seriously of abdicating in late 1934, Ananda was spoken of as the most likely candidate. Although Prajadhipok refused to formally designate a successor during his negotiations, he continually upheld the rights of Mahidol's children, and the documents subsequently published by the government show clearly that Ananda was expected to succeed him.[41]

Although Ananda's succession has generally been overshadowed by the abdication crisis and the negotiations that preceded it, there are two points of interest that deserve consideration: the possibility that some other prince might have been chosen instead and the role of the government in the selection process. In recent years, there has been debate among a few Thai scholars over the possible candidacy of Prince Chula Chakrabongse, a nephew of Prajadhipok who had spent most of his life in England.[42] Prajadhipok mentioned Chula as a possible successor in his correspondence with the government shortly before abdicating, but he clearly did not think highly of the idea. More importantly, Chula was born to a Russian mother (his father had spent a number of years in St. Petersburg) and princes of mixed blood were explicitly barred from the throne by the Palace Law on Succession. Chula himself affirmed in his autobiography that he was definitively bypassed on these grounds and that Prajadhipok had made this crystal clear to him on multiple occasions. He also included a photograph of his mother's Siamese passport, where she is identified in French as his father's 'morganatic spouse'.[43] Although Chula's name occasionally surfaced when there was talk of a possible change of ruler, it is highly unlikely that the government would have attempted to override the stipulations of the Palace Law to put him on the throne.[44]

[41] See, for example, ibid., pp. 62, 148–9; royal-family members confirmed this to Crosby at least as early as October 1934 (FO 371/18208, F 7145/115/40).

[42] See Suphot Dantrakun, 'Kansup Ratchasantatiwong' [Dynastic Succession], *Fa Diewkan [Same Sky]*, vol. 3, number 4, 2006, pp. 95–111; and Somsak, 'Nailuang Anan'.

[43] Čhulačhakraphong, *Koet Wang Parut*, pp. 60, 275; Prajadhipok's comments on Chula are in *Thalaengkan*, pp. 148–9. Somsak, 'Nailuang Anan' provides a thorough discussion of why Chula was considered ineligible. There is no exact equivalent for 'morganatic' in Thai, but Western-educated Siamese in the Foreign Ministry would certainly have understood the implications of the French term.

[44] Chula is mentioned in FO 371/18208, F 7145/115/40; FO 371/19376, F 1440/142/40 (1 March 1935), and F 1935/142/40 (13 March 1935); and MAE, Série E Asie 1930–1940 (Siam), vol. 56, 10 April 1933 and 7 March 1936. Article 11(4) of the Succession Law specifies that any prince who had a 'foreign wife' was excluded from consideration, and thus his sons were as well (see *Kot Monthianban waduai Kansup Ratchasombat*). The law

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The formalization of the succession involved the Palace as well as both the executive and legislative branches of the government. Under the 1932 Constitution (Article 9), succession was to be made *doi nai haeng* ('in the spirit of' or 'along the lines of') the Palace Law, *duai khwamhenchọp* ('with the approval') of the National Assembly. In the parliamentary debate over the draft Constitution, there was some discussion of whether or not a future ruler could be chosen by the Assembly from outside the royal family, but the view of the drafting committee was upheld, namely that the 1924 law remained authoritative in terms of the order of succession. It was affirmed, however, that the Assembly would have veto power over the candidate submitted for their approval.[45]

The choice of Ananda was thus was made within the dual framework of the Palace Law and the Constitution. Thai sources normally simply indicate that the government submitted Ananda's name to the Assembly, which voted in favour of his succession, but the reality is more complicated. A list of 23 princes, in order of eligibility according to Palace Law, was drawn up by the Ministry of the Palace and submitted to the government after Prince Naris had checked it. The list followed the precise order of succession stipulated by the various clauses in the Palace Law. Mahidol, Paribatra, and a third surviving *Čhao Fa* prince headed the list (each one directly followed by the names of his sons before the name of his next brother), followed by Prajadhipok's other half-brothers of lesser rank and their princely offspring.[46]

The only published account of the succession by one of the participants is that of Pridi Bhanomyong, a core member of the People's Party who was minister of interior at the time. Pridi's account suggests that the selection process was handled mainly by the executive branch, but this perspective does not fit with the sources. He states that the Cabinet took five days (2–7 March) to consider the various candidates, but the National Assembly proceedings show that the list was submitted to the prime minister by the Ministry of the Palace on the 4th, vetted by Naris

defines 'foreign' in this context as 'a woman whose original nationality was other than that of a real Thai' (*nang thi mi sanchat doem pen chao prathet ưn nọkčhak chao Thai doi thae*). This somewhat convoluted phrasing would seem to exclude any foreign-born wife while allowing for the fact that the royal family had ancestors who were locally born Chinese. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this query.

[45] *Raingan*, First Term, Ordinary Session 36/2475 (25 November 1932), pp. 396–401.

[46] The list is reproduced in *Raingan*, Second Term, Ordinary Session 33/2477 (6–7 March 1935), pp. 2430–3. Princes like Mahidol who were already deceased were indicated as such on the list.

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the following day, and submitted to the Assembly on the 6th during a marathon session that lasted well into the night.[47] The involvement of a body outside the court such as the National Assembly in the selection of a monarch was, of course, without precedent in Siamese history, and the members were very conscious of the weighty task before them. The majority of the MPs interpreted this as meaning that *they* had the power to choose the most suitable candidate and could go down the list until they found the right one. They were unwilling to rubber-stamp a successor merely on the basis of his eligibility according to the Palace Law because a poor choice would have serious consequences for the country.[48]

Thus, the main responsibility for choosing the new king fell to the legislature, not to the Cabinet, and there were several hours of debate before the decision was finalized.[49] There was no question of opposing Ananda's legitimacy as a candidate, which was fully confirmed by the Palace Law. The main opposition came from MPs who felt that it was unwise to choose a young ruler with the prospect of more than a decade of regency before he would attain adulthood. One representative argued that the new king must at least be of legal age. Not only did he need to be old and mature enough to shoulder the responsibilities of his position, but, if the regime chose a young successor, they would be open to the charge of wanting to manipulate ruler and regents alike for their own purposes.[50]

[47] The session's proceedings are in ibid., pp. 2332–429; the transcript made public in *Thalaengkan* ends before the succession issue is discussed. Pridi's original account is in P. Phanomyong, 'Khwampenpai nai Khana Phusamret Ratchakan Thaen Phra'ong' [Events Inside the Council of Regents], in P. Phungsunthọn and P. Siriphat (eds.), *Bang Rwang kiewkap Phraboṛommawongsanuwong nai rawang Songkhram Lok Khrang Thisọng [Some Stories about the Royal Family during World War Two]*, Nitthiwet, Thonburi, 1972, pp. 38–78; an English translation is in Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (tr. and eds.), *Pridi by Pridi*, Silkwork Books, Chiang Mai, 2000, pp. 210–30. Pridi emphasizes the Cabinet's reliance on his own expertise in interpreting the Palace Law, when in fact the Ministry of the Palace had already done so. He does, however, provide credible and interesting information about the Cabinet discussion (and elimination) of other candidates like Paribatra and Chula.

[48] *Raingan*, 33/2477, pp. 2332–44.

[49] Ibid., pp. 2332–64. The main points of the debate can be found in Suwit Loetkraimethi, 'Ratsapha kap Kanplian Ratchakan chak Rọ. 7 su Rọ. 8 lae Rọ. 8 su Rọ. 9' [Parliament and the Succession of Rama VIII to Rama VII and of Rama VIII to Rama IX], 14 April 2013, downloaded from https://prachatai.com/journal/2013/04/46139 [accessed 10 January 2020].

[50] *Raingan*, 33/2477, pp. 2334–9.

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These points received the backing of several colleagues who agreed that it was not the time for Siam to have a child as king. Others, however, felt that, since Ananda was the most eligible candidate according to the Law of Succession, this was the most important consideration; one man pointed out that to bypass a legitimate heir could cause problems within the royal family later on. Someone commented rather bluntly that, from some points of view, it was not particularly crucial whether or not the king was an adult, since he did not have heavy responsibilities or duties, and the speaker went so far as to say that, under the post-1932 political system, 'the king is not especially important'. A representative from Chiang Mai spoke favourably of Prince Mahidol, whom he had known, and felt that the son of such a 'democratic' prince would be an excellent choice. He added more practically that a king as young as Ananda would not spend much of the government's money and would probably be content with receiving enough for a good education. In any case, he advised, since the real power lay with the government (including the Assembly) and the Constitution, and since 'the King can do no wrong', if a young king actually did commit an error, it would be of little import.[51]

Although the Cabinet did not impose Ananda on the National Assembly, it seems clear that he was in fact their choice, and certainly the negotiations and other meetings in Europe over the past few months had proceeded on the basis of such an assumption. Cabinet Secretary *Luang* Thamrong, who had been part of the delegation sent to negotiate with Prajadhipok, had gone to Lausanne in February to meet with Ananda and his family. Now reporting to the Assembly, he noted that there had not been much to discuss, since the prince was only ten years old, but that Ananda had given several reasons why he did not wish to be king. These reasons were explained off the record and do not appear in the Assembly's proceedings, but they were subsequently published in an account of his childhood. According to his mother, Ananda objected that he was just a child who was lazy and did not know anything. He was concerned that the throne would be too high, so that he would fall off and be scolded by the prime minister. The future king also felt that it would be a nuisance to go around under the royal parasol and surrounded by retainers because he would get no sun and could not run freely.[52]

[51] Ibid., pp. 2359 ('not important') and 2362–3 ('the King can do no wrong').

[52] Letter from the Princess Mother to the Dowager Queen, dated February 1935, in Kalyani Watthana, *Čhaonai Leklek, Yuwakasat [Little Princes, Young Kings]*, Dansuttha, Bangkok, 1988, p. 140. For *Luang* Thamrong's visit, see *Raingan*, 33/2477, pp. 2348–9.

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Ananda's objections notwithstanding, both his mother (the future Princess Mother) and grandmother (Dowager Queen Savang Vatthana) had indicated their acceptance of the succession. Ananda's mother deferred to her mother-in-law, who in turn deferred to Prajadhipok's wishes, which more or less settled the issue. It is almost certain that the family shared the original desire expressed by Mahidol near the end of his lifetime that his sons should never have to take the throne, but the situation had changed dramatically in the six years since his death. While Prince Damrong, a senior royal-family member consulted by the dowager queen, may have been overdramatic in his view that, if the family did not agree to Ananda's succession, it could well mean the end of the dynasty, in the difficult months surrounding Prajadhipok's departure and abdication, the path laid out by the Palace Law and supported by the government may well have seemed the right choice to the beleaguered royal family.[53]

Regents

Ananda's succession to the throne of Siam was approved by a vote of 127 to two.[54] Once the selection of King Rama VIII had been formally approved, the National Assembly turned its attention to the designation of regents, as required by both the Palace Law on Succession and the 1932 Constitution. The two documents did not make the same stipulations. The Palace Law referred only to the minority of a young ruler, calling for the establishment of a 'Council of Regents' composed of a high-ranking prince (who would be the actual regent) and the two

[53] Ibid. and Kalyani, *Čhaonai Leklek*, p. 140. Damrong's comments are reported in Somphop Chanthaprapha, *Somdetphrasisawarinthira Phraborommaratchathewi Phraphanwatsalaiyikachao [Her Majesty Queen Savang Vatthana]*, Phadung Suksa, Bangkok, 1971. p. 312. Prajadhipok had reportedly contacted the dowager queen himself to urge her not to oppose Ananda's candidature (FO 371/19376, F 924/142/40, 4 Janyary 1935). A purported account of these events is Stevenson, *Revolutionary King*, ch. 3, which evokes an atmosphere of government coercion and fear and intimidation on the part of the royal family. Stevenson's book, however, often reads more like a novel than a biography. In this instance, he places excessive emphasis on the role and influence of future Prime Minister Phibun, but Phibun, though a rising star, was a peripheral figure in these events.

[54] *Raingan*, 33/2477, p. 2364. The report does not indicate the identity of the two dissenters.

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highest-ranking Cabinet ministers.[55] (It had previously been the practice to appoint only a single regent when needed to temporarily replace an adult monarch.) The Constitution, on the other hand, stated more broadly that, whenever the king was abroad or unable to perform his duties, one or more regents should be appointed. These appointments would have to be approved by the Assembly and, if the king had not chosen someone himself, then the Assembly would have the authority to do so.[56]

Although at least one MP felt that the Palace Law should be followed strictly, the general conclusion was that, in this instance, its authority was superceded by that of the Constitution. There was, however, a consensus that there should be a council rather than a single regent and that it should be headed by a prince.[57] The most logical candidate would have been Naris, who had been acting as regent since Prajadhipok's departure in early 1934. Naris was elderly, however, and flatly refused to continue in this role.[58] By the time the matter came up for debate in the National Assembly, immediately following the vote confirming Ananda as king, the government had proposed a list of three names to nominate as a Council of Regents: Prince Anuvadhana (frequently referred to as Prince Oscar), Prince Aditya, and *Čhao Phraya* Yomarat. Anuvadhana was a son of Chulalongkorn and Aditya a grandson; *Čhao Phraya* Yomarat was a high-ranking noble—a commoner who held a royally bestowed administrative title. The Assembly ultimately approved the government's choices, but only after a lengthy debate with other names proposed.[59]

The government had clearly given some thought to its choice of regents, and Prime Minister Phahol explained to the Assembly the qualifications it considered important. In addition to being competent men who enjoyed the people's trust, he said, the regents would have to be respected by foreigners and be on good terms with the royal family. Prince Oscar was a 'straight arrow' and completely trustworthy, although he was apparently one of the few high-ranking princes who had never held a ministerial post. Prince Aditya had been educated abroad and had

[55] *Kot Monthianban*, Section 6; Siam had a Cabinet for several decades before acquiring a Constitution.

[56] Dec. 1932 Constitution (downloaded from www.krisdika.go.th) [accessed 12 July 2008].

[57] The discussion of these issues is in *Raingan*, 33/2477, pp. 2465–70.

[58] A conversation with Naris is summarized in *Thalaengkan*, pp. 366–71.

[59] The debate is in *Raingan*, 33/2477, pp. 2364–406.

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proved his capabilities in provincial government posts. He was experienced in administrative matters and was considered a 'clever prince' who was democratically inclined. *Čhao Phraya* Yomarat had held a number of important government positions under the absolute regime.[60]

In an account written a number of years later, Pridi—who was a member of the Cabinet at the time—gave further details on the considerations that prompted the selection of these three regents. Prince Oscar was the only remaining prince living in Siam other than Naris who held the conferred rank of *Krom*, which raised him above other princes of the same birth rank. Like Aditya, he was considered to have democratic tendencies and seems to have had no political blemishes on his record after June 1932, and Pridi praised both men for 'not being haughty because of their rank' in their dealings with other people. Equally interesting, and perhaps more important, was the fact that both princes had some acquaintance with prominent members of the People's Party. Prince Oscar had served with Phahol as an *aide-de-camp* for Prajadhipok, and he had become acquainted with Pridi during visits to France, as had Aditya. *Čhao Phraya* Yomarat was distantly related to Pridi.[61]

Prince Aditya is an interesting figure, both because he played a prominent role as regent well into the Second World War and because he was the highest-ranking prince to throw in his lot with the regime. (As will be explained shortly, Prince Oscar served only a few months as regent and does not seem to have had the same kind of rapport with the government that Aditya did.) Shortly after the June 1932 coup, Aditya made a speech to the inhabitants of the Nakhon Pathom *monthon* ('circle', an administrative region comprising several provinces) of which he was governor. He urged the people to remain calm, help keep order, and not to oppose the People's Party, which he himself supported. This action earned him the personal commendations of the new regime's prime minister, who praised him as a 'patriotic prince' who shared the goals of the People's Party and was a worthy example for other royal-family members.[62] Aditya was apparently able to maintain his official position despite the new Constitution's ban on princes in higher levels of government, perhaps because his post was at

[60] Ibid., pp. 2373–4.

[61] Pridi, 'Khwampenpai', pp. 57–9.

[62] Aditya's speech is published in *Lak Mưang* newspaper, 5 and 6 July 1932; the prime minister's letter is in TNA, SR 0201.8/22.

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the lower *monthon* level; his support for the government in the province of Phuket, where he was stationed at the time of the Bovaradet rebellion, earned him a medal.[63]

The first months of the Eighth Reign were marred by tragedy with the death of Prince Oscar in August 1935. While the initial telegram from the other regents to the king in Lausanne stated that he had had heart failure, it was later announced that he had shot himself. Within a week of his death, a detailed police report appeared that attributed the suicide to the strain of his responsibilities as head regent, particularly with regard to the handling of Prajadhipok's personal funds (which were not completely autonomous from government control) and to the effect of criticisms of his performance from other princes. According to one account, he had been pressured by the government to get back all of Prajadhipok's regalia, and the ex-king was also distressed at the government's decision to terminate the stipend given to his exiled father-in-law, Prince Svasti, who was unpopular with the new regime.[64] According to the government's investigation, Oscar was also the victim of slander and machinations by other senior princes. There is no basis for evaluating these claims that, as British diplomats noted, provided 'useful propaganda' against the princes. The latter made emphatic denials that they had slandered or been abusive toward Oscar.[65] He was replaced by *Čhao Phraya* Bijayendra, a noble who had not been affiliated with the People's Party but was sympathetic to it. As the only remaining prince on the Council, Aditya became head regent.

During the 14 years of constitutional monarchy between the June 1932 coup and Ananda's death in June 1946, an adult monarch was physically present in Siam for slightly over two years: Prajadhipok until January 1934 and Ananda during the final months of his life. Consequently, the role of the regents was a long-term one. They functioned in several different capacities but had relatively little real power. They held the authority to sign (or refuse to sign) decrees and royal pronouncements in the king's name; but, under the Constitution, of course, the legislature could pass a law over a royal veto, as had been done toward the end of the

[63] TNA, SR 0201.1.1.3.13.

[64] Somphop, *Somdet Phrasisawarinthira*, p. 314. Official documents relating to the case are in TNA, SR 0201.8.1/14 and 16; the police report of 19 August 1935 is in the latter file. On Svasti's pension, see letter dated 15 March 1935 and telegram of 27 July 1935, reproduced in *Raingan*, Ordinary Session 4/2478 (20 August 1935), pp. 311–26.

[65] FO 371/19377, F 5566/296/40 (21 August 1935); 'Annual Report for 1935', FO 371/20302, F 1909/1909/40. For a discussion of the charges, see *Raingan*, 4/2478, pp. 320–2.

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Seventh Reign. They acted as liaison between the government and the royal family, particularly senior members such as the king's immediate family in Lausanne and the dowager queen in Bangkok. The regents also played an advisory role, being consulted by the government on matters relating to the Palace or to the royal family. Finally, they performed a ceremonial function, standing in for the king on occasions when his presence would normally have been expected.

The channels of communication between the regents and the government were rather complex and apparently varied according to the matter at hand. At times, they communicated directly with the prime minister, especially where important or sensitive topics were concerned. More frequently, however, the correspondence passed between the Cabinet Secretariat (*Samnak Lekhathikan Khana Ratthamontri*) and the Privy Secretariat (*Samnakngan Ratchalekhanukan nai Phra'ong*). When a particular ministry had a question or problem relating to royal affairs—such as royal funds, for example—it was possible to go through either of these two offices. The regents' administrative arm was the Office of Palace Affairs (*Samnak Phraratchawang*), which was the successor of the old Ministry of the Palace. (The ministry was originally downgraded in status a few days after the 1932 coup, but it was restored in the course of a government reorganization in December 1933. It was abolished a second time shortly after Prajadhipok's abdication and replaced by the Office of Palace Affairs.)[66]

The prime minister or someone on his behalf had to sign all documents issued by the Office of Palace Affairs. Since he was the titular head of both this office and the Privy Secretariat, the Cabinet Secretariat could—and did, at times—bypass the latter bodies completely and communicate with him on their behalf.[67] It was thus theoretically possible for the government to make decisions concerning royal affairs without consulting the regents at all, although this was presumably unnecessary as long as the latter were cooperative. In general, however, there appear to have been regular contacts between the two sides, including special meetings that were sometimes initiated by the regents. Prince

[66] 'Nai Honhuai' (Sinlapachai Čhanchaloem), *Čhao Fa Prachathipok [Prince Prajadhipok]*, the author, Bangkok, 1987, p. 651; on the 1933 change of status (which aimed at bringing all Palace offices and military units under direct Cabinet control), see Thipphawan Čhiamthirasakun, *Pathommathat Thang Kanmưang khọng Pridi Phanomyong [The Original Political Views of Pridi Banomyong]*, Sathaban Santiprachatham, Bangkok, 1988, pp. 239–41.

[67] See, for example, correspondence from 1937 in TNA, SR (2) 0201.14/2, folder 1.

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Varnvidaya, the regime's legal adviser, was an active participant in these meetings, and it was apparently he who followed up on the problems raised and then reported back to the regents.[68]

It must be acknowledged that the regents' powers as such were largely the rubber-stamping of government decisions. This was true, for example, of their approval of the appointed members of the National Assembly, whose number was expanded in late 1937 to match the increased number of elected representatives. Just as had been the case during Prajadhipok's reign, a list of names was drawn up by the government and then submitted to the regents for their signature.[69] The dynamics of the relationship changed, however, after Pridi joined the Council of Regents in December 1941, shortly before the death of *Čhao Phraya* Bijayendra. Ideological differences and personal rivalries had made him and Phibun (now prime minister) into bitter adversaries, and Phibun may have felt that a regent's position would be a 'safe' place that would prevent Pridi from causing trouble, since Aditya remained head regent and was loyal to Phibun. In fact, this decision was to place Pridi and Phibun in an adversarial relationship, in view of the former's opposition to the latter's decision to ally Thailand with the Japanese.

Phibun is implicated in one of the few controversies involving the regents and their powers. In January 1942, the prime minister chose to declare war on Great Britain and the United States of America—a decision that had to be approved by the king. Pridi was away from Bangkok at the time; according to the account of the then-Cabinet Secretary, Thawi Bunyaket, Aditya ordered that Pridi's name be affixed to the declaration of war despite his absence, the rationale being that he could sign later. Thawi later accused Phibun of having usurped the regents' power on this and other occasions by having decrees signed in their names before actually sending them the documents for approval. After the Japanese defeat, this incident was cited as grounds for declaring the state of war between Thailand and the Allies to be null and void. Phibun's biographer (and son), on the other hand, argued that it was legitimate for the declaration of war to be signed by two out of three regents (Aditya and Bijayendra) and noted that, although only the latter two were mentioned when the

[68] Minutes for several such meetings from 1937 and 1938 are in TNA, SR 0201.41.2/2.
[69] FO 377/21054, F 10778/1494/40, 29 November 1937.

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decree was read over the radio, Pridi's name appeared in the version reproduced in the *Government Gazette*.[70]

The assertion that the declaration of war was valid with the signatures of only two regents would in fact seem to be correct, for such was the consensus of the National Assembly during its deliberations at the time of Prajadhipok's abdication and the appointment of the first Council of Regents. Recognizing that the potential existed for divisions within the Council but wishing to prevent any one regent from having veto power, the Assembly decided that only two of three names would be necessary to constitute formal approval on the king's behalf.[71] In fact, the incident is perhaps less revealing about Phibun's actions than it is about the tensions within the Council of Regents, especially between Pridi and Aditya. The chief regent was generally believed to go along with whatever Phibun wished, whether or not he himself agreed with the decision.[72] As a close supporter of Phibun, Aditya was drawn into the latter's rivalry with Pridi.

The regents, particularly before Pridi's tenure, generally acquiesced in the regime's efforts to consolidate its authority over various aspects of royal affairs. A document in the archives gives a list of 'royal customs' or 'traditions' (*ratchaprapheni*) that probably represents the narrowest definition of what this area included. The list mentions five specific kinds of affairs: matters relating to the royal family, such as changes in rank, marriages, ordinations, and cremations; royal gifts of favour to individuals; rituals and ceremonies; patronage for Buddhism and other religions; and royal charity.[73] While the government did not intend to eliminate all royal privileges, it did succeed to a considerable degree in gaining influence and control over a wide variety of matters, including those affecting royalty's personal lives. At the same time, the king's absence and the pliant attitude of the regents enabled the regime to

[70] Anan Phibunsongkhram, *Čhomphon Phọ. Phibunsongkhram [Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram]*, Montri, Bangkok, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 346–50. See Vichitvong na Pombhejara, *Pridi Banomyong and the Making of Thailand's Modern History*, s.n., s.l., 1982, pp. 181–2; and Thawi's account in Samakhom Nakkhao haeng Prathet Thai (ed.), *Bưangraek Prachathipatai [Beginnings of Democracy]*, Thai Rat, Bangkok, 1973, pp. 315–16.

[71] *Raingan*, 33/2477, pp. 2407–16.

[72] *Khamhaikan tọ̀ San Atchayakọn Songkhram khọng Phrawọ̀rawongthoe Phra'ongčhao Athitthip'apha [His Royal Highness Prince Aditya's Deposition to the War Crimes Court]*, Chirawannusọn, Bangkok, 1983, p. ii.

[73] The undated document is in TNA, SR (2) 0201.14/2, folder 1; it seems to have been written in 1937 in the context of preparations for the establishment of the Royal Court Committee, to be discussed below.

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manipulate for its own purposes what should logically have been royal prerogative.

In regard to individual royal-family members, the government tended to tread carefully, at least in the early years of Ananda's reign. In late 1937, Naris, as head of the family, wrote to inquire about his options for punishing a lower-ranking princess who had violated the Palace Law by moving out of Bangkok without his permission; the government responded that she had the constitutional right to live where she pleased, and she seems to have been left in peace.[74] This case presents an interesting contrast with efforts by some MPs in 1932 and 1935 to override a Palace Law requirement that a princess who married a commoner must give up her royal rank; both attempts were voted down.[75] It seems likely that it was easier to 'protect' from the Palace Law a single princess whose actions were presented as more or less a *fait accompli* than to contemplate the nullification across the board of an important principle in that law.

With other aspects of Palace affairs, however, the government felt itself to be on firmer ground. Through its authority over various administrative bodies old and new, it gradually succeeded in drawing into its sphere of influence virtually every aspect of the monarchy, from royal property to royal ritual. The Royal Court Committee (*Khana Kammakan Phraratchasamnak*), created in early 1938, coordinated all of the various Palace offices handling administrative, financial, ritual, and legal affairs for the throne. While the precise lines of governmental control over the Committee are not clear from the documents, the prime minister's position as head of its two most important components—the Privy Secretariat and the Office of Palace Affairs—leaves little doubt as to where the authority lay. Moreover, the prime minister chose the members of the Committee and submitted the names to the regents for approval.[76]

[74] See correspondence from December 1937 through May 1938 in TNA, SR 0201.41.6/7.

[75] The first involved a draft Revised Palace Law on Royal Marriage submitted in August 1932; a few MPs argued unsuccessfully that the law should stipulate that such marriages were legally valid even though penalized by Palace Law (see *Raingan*, First Term, Ordinary Session 12/2475 (1 August 1932), pp. 76–8). In 1935, an MP attempted to introduce a new version of the law that would eliminate this penalty on the grounds that it was a violation of the constitutional guarantee of equality for all under the law. His draft was not accepted for debate, however, as most other MPs refused to tamper with Palace Law; *Raingan*, 31/2477 (5 March 1935), pp. 2173–82.

[76] Documents relating to the Committee's development are in TNA, SR (2) 0201.14/1-2.

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One important area of the Committee's responsibility was the handling of the various rituals and ceremonies associated with the monarchy. Particularly significant was the *kathin*—an annual ceremony whereby Thais of all ranks and classes make merit through the formal presentation of robes and other items to monks. Traditionally, the king himself would participate in such ceremonies at selected temples enjoying royal patronage. After the June 1932 coup, the Palace informed the government that the annual expenditures involved in the 'royal *kathin*' (*kathin phraratchathan*)—robes for some 2,200 monks—were considerable and that Prajadhipok felt such costs could no longer adequately be handled with the court's reduced budget. After some discussion, it was decided that the Ministry of Education, which also oversaw religious affairs, would oversee the royal *kathin* for most of the 100-odd designated temples, while some 16 others would receive robes directly from high-ranking royal-family members. As the question remained of where the money would come from, the prime minister attempted to get permission to use funds from one of the ministry's departments dealing with temple affairs. The Buddhist Supreme Patriarch objected violently, however, arguing that the plan would drain funds already allocated to the *Sangha* for other purposes, thus stripping the *kathin* of its significance. In the end, the government decided to use funds from the Ministry of Finance instead, which settled the matter.[77]

As time went on, the government's involvement in the royal *kathin* became more institutionalized under the management of the Royal Court Committee, and the criteria for participation became increasingly broad, extending well beyond the royal family and commoners possessing royal decorations of the highest ranks. In 1934, there was an abrupt change in the regulations to stipulate that all of the designated temples would be supported by government offices rather than individuals.[78] In 1935, the government went a step further by allowing various associations to participate in royal *kathin*. Participation was restricted to associations of government employees, and a limited number of temples—16 out of a total of 122—would receive robes directly from the Palace. The final loosening of restrictions came in 1940, when it was decided that, in provinces with more than one 'royal temple', common people could take part in royal *kathin*.[79]

[77] TNA, SR (2) 0201.97.6/1, folder 1.
[78] Documents from September 1934 in ibid., folders 2 and 3.
[79] TNA, ibid., folder 4, and 0201.97.6/5, folder 1 respectively.

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The government's involvement in such matters is interesting in several ways. First, it is significant that such intervention in this case did not take on serious proportions until after Prajadhipok had left the country, particularly after his abdication. Second, although the government's handling of the royal *kathin* could not deprive the royal family of the opportunity to make merit, it could subtly shift the focus away from the king. While the appropriate term for the king's involvement in giving the robes (*phraratchathan*, to bestow) was still used, the participants themselves tended increasingly to be government officials who had no direct ties to the Palace and who were only representing the ruler in a very general way. In short, the 'royal' *kathin* had become much less so.

Another royal prerogative that the constitutional government came to share was the awarding of royal decorations such as the Order of the White Elephant. Such decorations were seldom, if ever, awarded during the 1932–35 period, presumably because the king would not have been disposed to grant them to individuals who were in the government's good graces, any more than the People's Party would have honoured diehard royalists. Furthermore, the government itself was probably reluctant to use a sign of honour so closely associated with the old regime. Instead, a category of award was created entitled 'Medals for Defending the Constitution' (*Rian Phitak Ratthathammanun*), which were, for example, given out quite freely to those who helped suppress the Bovaradej rebellion. These awards were bestowed by the king (*phraratchathan*) but at the regime's initiative.[80]

In August 1935, a Cabinet meeting was held to regularize the procedures for granting royal decorations. Documentary evidence suggests that, during the first years after these guidelines were laid down, the government bypassed the regents and Privy Secretariat in this process. By the time Phibun was in power, however, the regents routinely received lists of candidates' names, though there is no indication of whether they actually had much say in the selection. For example, in 1939, a group of men were nominated for decorations for helping with the recent Special Court trials against Phibun's enemies; the most prominent defendant had been the king's uncle, Prince Rangsit.[81] It is doubtful that the Palace could have felt much enthusiasm for bestowing medals on those involved with prosecuting

[80] TNA, SR 0201.1.3/25-28.

[81] The Cabinet meeting minutes and other documents from the *Phraya* Phahol regime are in TNA, SR (2) 0201.46.3/1; the 1939 example is in TNA, SR (2) 0201.46.3/31, folder 1.

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royalists. Thus, the government had succeeded in transforming royal decorations from a mark of favour from the throne to an honour reserved for those who loyally served the constitutional regime, even in opposition to royalty.

The handling of royal funds

The most sensitive area of royal affairs, and the one that appears to have produced the most tension between the government and the Palace, was financial matters. After the change of government in 1932, the budget for the royal family and for Palace expenditures was reduced and brought under the regime's control, as was the Privy Purse, the office that handled such matters.[82] Prajadhipok had already cut the Privy Purse budget by 45 per cent by 1931; after the coup, it shrank further to approximately one-tenth of its former amount. As a percentage of the total national budget, it declined from 5.42 per cent in 1932 to 0.91 per cent by 1937.[83] This process was a long and difficult one, and there is ample evidence that the matter was not handled to the satisfaction of all concerned. Moreover, the tightening of the government's control over royal finances meant not only that it could classify and regulate these funds to its own advantage, but also that it was in a better position to use them as it wished.

Prajadhipok's abdication and Ananda's accession provided an opportunity for the regime to reassess and restructure the use of royal funds. Several important questions arose during the deliberations on the 1935–36 national budget, which included an allotment of approximately 600,000 ticals for the king's civil list (*ngoenngop nai Phra'ong*), to be used at his personal discretion. This sum was divided into four broad categories: funds 'for His Majesty's use while he is young', allotments for other royal-family members, royal charities, and funds reserved for the regents. There was widespread concern among the legislators as to

[82] See *Thalaengkan*, p. 187, and Phophan Uiyanon [Porphant Ouyyanont], 'Samnakngan Sapsin Suan Phramahakasat kap Botbat Kanlongthun thang Thurakit' [The Crown Property Bureau and its Role in Business Investment], unpublished paper, 2006, pp. 14–15.

[83] Thaemsuk Numanon, *Lakhọn Kanmưang 24 Mithunayon 2475 [Political Theatre of 24 June 1932]*, Samakhom Prawatsat, Bangkok, 1992, p. 55 fn.; and Nakharin Mektrairat, *Kanpatiwat Sayam Phọ. Sọ. 2475 [The Siamese Revolution of 1932]*, Social Sciences & Humanities Fund, Bangkok, 1992, p. 44.

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the exact parameters of each of these categories and the basis for their use, particularly during the period when Ananda clearly could not be responsible for his own finances. Prince Varnvidaya, who was a member of the Budget Committee, explained that, because of the king's youth, his personal allotment had been reduced and that it had been renamed so that no one would think that the reduction was permanent. The regents would handle funds for royal charities, since the king could not make decisions in this area, either. The general Palace budget was also separate, as were funds allocated for royal ceremonies.[84] Another crucial issue involved stipends for royal-family members, which for many of them represented the main source of income. The portion of the civil list designated for these stipends was reduced by nearly one-quarter after the coup.[85]

After the integration of funds for royal use into the national budget, the next important step was to clarify the management of Crown Property by the government. In early 1937, the decision was made to transfer authority over such assets to the Ministry of Finance, thus effectively removing them from the control of the Palace. The minister explained to the Assembly that the government and regents alike wanted to ensure that the various buildings and properties under royal ownership were properly taxed, as had been the case during the Sixth and Seventh Reigns.[86] This decision was the result of a new decree on royal funds, first drafted in 1935 and passed into law the following year. The Office of Palace Affairs was given direct authority over 'personal property', 'state property', and 'Crown Property', which were considered as 'goods'. Other kinds of 'Crown Property' would be under the control of the Ministry of Finance; net income from such assets would be given to the king to spend 'in his capacity as Head of State'. The new law stipulated that they could only be transferred or used with royal permission and for the public interest or for the profit of the Privy Purse.[87]

The decision to give the Ministry of Finance authority over a substantial portion of royal funds was of course a very significant one and was only made after some debate; while the regents' precise views on the matter are not clear, they were later to express frustration at the way in which

[84] *Raingan*, Ordinary Session 64/2477 (30 March 1935), pp. 4456–66.

[85] Nakharin, *Kanpatiwat*, pp. 29–34, 44–5, has a helpful discussion of royal finances before and after the coup; see also Thaemsuk, *Lakhǫn*, pp. 51–2.

[86] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session 21/2479 (29 March 1937), pp. 1011–28.

[87] 'Nai Hon Huay', *Čhao Fa*, pp. 653–5. The present-day Crown Property Bureau was created a few years later; see Phǫphan, 'Samnakngan', pp. 15–16.

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the transfer was handled. During a meeting with *Phraya* Phahol shortly before his resignation in 1938, they complained that the ministry had never explicitly told them just how much money was to be allotted, so that the Office of Palace Affairs was continually having to borrow money from other parts of the government. They also felt that the ministry tended to spend the money more or less as it pleased and that they had no say in the decisions, even though it had been agreed that they would. The regents objected to what they saw as a general failure to listen to their desiderata and to respond to their concerns.[88]

The potential consequences of this financial restructuring were demonstrated by what proved to be the most important political scandal of the constitutional regime's early years. While the Assembly passed the draft law concerning Crown Property in March 1937, it was not actually promulgated until July—an abnormally long delay. One of the stipulations of the new law was that transactions involving such assets would require specific legal authorization, which had not previously been the case. The delay in promulgating the legislation suddenly appeared suspicious when it was revealed that a number of pieces of royal land had changed hands under questionable circumstances, exactly the sort of transaction henceforth covered by the new law. A member of the Assembly related to the former government official who had made the discovery began his own investigation and found that the Privy Purse had sold a number of plots to prominent individuals at very low prices and purchased others at unusually high rates. Prince Aditya had been involved in several such purchases and was said to have facilitated the reduced sale of certain plots. *Phraya* Phahol had supposedly helped delay the legislation until the transactions were completed, and his wife had reportedly bought three pieces of land. Phibun had also purchased land but subsequently sold it back to the Privy Purse.[89]

The Crown Property scandal proved to be the most important crisis faced by the government during the years after Prajadhipok's abdication. On July 27, a question was raised in the Assembly by Liang Chayakan, who had initiated the investigation and compiled a detailed

[88] Minutes of 13 September 1938 meeting and 19 September 1938 report by Prince Varnvidaya, in TNA, SR 0201.41.2/2.

[89] This account is based on diplomatic reports: FO 371/21053, F 4920/1494/40 (31 July 1937); FO 371/21054, F 5040/1494/40 (4 August 1937); and MAE, Série E, Asie 1930-1940, vol. 72, 31 July 1937. A summary of the affair is in J. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand: A Story of Intrigue*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1991, pp. 95–7.

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list of the transactions and the sums of money involved. Phahol was obliged to respond to his question and was very much on the defensive in the debate that followed; he would eventually step down as prime minister because of the scandal. It was pointed out that, although these sales had ostensibly taken place 'by the King's grace' (*phramahakaruna*), Ananda was clearly too young to give such permission. Phahol was held responsible as the ultimate head of the Office of Palace Affairs and thus of the Privy Purse before its transfer to the Ministry of Finance under the newly promulgated decree. While the regents were not explicitly accused of wrongdoing, they were obviously involved and received indirect criticism for their role in the affair. Several representatives called the scandal harmful to the king's interests and honour.[90]

The regents actually submitted a collective letter of resignation on 28 July, though they subsequently withdrew it, apparently under pressure from the military.[91] There are several plausible explanations for the army's intervention. First, it is possible that certain officers may have profited from the Crown Property transactions. (As many of the latter involved middlemen, the list of buyers and sellers read out during the Assembly deliberations is not informative in this respect.) By ensuring that the same Council of Regents remained in power, the military would have hoped to minimize the extent of the investigation. Second, the MP who initiated the affair was a follower of Pridi, and diplomatic sources referred to a concerted effort on the latter's part to discredit Phibun, whose military faction had close ties to the regents, especially Aditya.[92] Finally, it is likely that, from the perspective of the regime in general and the military in particular, the cosy relationship between the government and the regents represented a highly desirable status quo in political and financial matters alike.

There were regular procedures to request sums of money for specific projects, usually under the category of 'royal charity'. Even here, however, it seems clear that the government had little difficulty in obtaining the regents' approval for what it wished. During the Eighth Reign, at least until Ananda was old enough to make responsible decisions on requests for money, the regents apparently had full power

[90] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session, 12/2480 (27 July 1937), pp. 301–47.

[91] *Raingan*, Extraordinary Session, 15/2480 (31 July 1937), pp. 405–6; the regents' 30 July letter of retraction is reproduced on pp. 366–7. For diplomatic reports on the military's actions see MAE, Série E, Asie 1930-1940, vol. 72, 7 August 1937; and FO 371/21054, F 5040/1494/40 (4 August 1937).

[92] See the two reports cited in the previous footnote.

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to authorize the allocation of funds. Although no evidence was found in the archives that they ever refused a government request, it seems clear that they were concerned that such matters be handled through proper channels and with the appropriate signatures.[93]

It was generally the case that a ministry in need of funds for a particular project would consult the Cabinet Secretariat, which would in turn inform the regents via the Privy Secretariat if the prime minister felt the request was worthwhile. On some occasions, the Ministry of Finance would advance the money once the use of royal funds had been authorized, although there were often delays before the transaction was completed. Normally, the funds would not be spent until a formal letter of authorization was received from the regents in the king's name. In 1943, however, an advisory committee on Crown Property (created several years after the scandal) made a decision that had a potentially significant effect on the allocation process. It ruled that, once the regents had 'commanded' (*bancha*, a rather general term) the use of Crown funds for a particular purpose, the money could be spent before a formal letter of royal approval had actually been sent. There were three proposals pending at the time that met these criteria, and it was decided that they could be initiated even though formal written approval had not yet been given.[94]

There are indications that the royal funds allocated for charity projects were heavily drawn on and perhaps overdrawn, to the extent that there was even talk of tapping into the king's personal allotment. In 1939, for example, the Ministry of Defense requested a large sum of royal money to build and equip a naval hospital. The ministry was informed that, because of heavy demands on the Privy Purse, only about half of the requested sum could be given; it made repeated attempts to obtain the remaining amount over the next few years, but without success. In 1944, the Cabinet Secretariat said quite firmly that the only way to come up with the money would be to use funds from the king's personal budget, which the prime minister would consider. Fortunately

[93] See, for example, the correspondence from 1936 regarding the Ministry of Education's plan to build a series of rural schools with royal funds, in TNA, SR 0201.11/4.

[94] Document dated 30 November 1943 in TNA, SR (2) 0201.43/1. For an example of funds advanced by the Ministry of Finance, see the minutes of Cabinet meeting 13/2481 (15 July 1938) in the same file. The advisory committee's formation is documented in TNA, SR (2) 0201.43/2. The government had created the Crown Property Bureau around the time of the scandal; Phǫphan, 'Samnakngan', p. 15.

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for Ananda, however, the proposal—which would have consumed 18 per cent of his yearly allotment—was not approved.[95]

Available documents show few instances in which the Palace actually initiated one of these so-called 'royal-charity' projects. In virtually every case, the regents were asked to authorize an allocation of royal funds that had already received the prime minister's approval. While the money could presumably not have been spent if the regents had refused, once again, their approval seems to have been essentially a rubber stamp. In many cases, there was probably no reason to object, since hospitals, schools, and temples had long been typical recipients of royal funds.

It seems evident that the Palace had little or no real say in the use of Privy Purse funds. In essence, the government was allocating funds for the various royal budgets and then taking the money back for its own use, almost as if the funds were an extension of its regular budget. While the money was sometimes allocated for projects that the Palace would routinely have supported, this was not always the case. For example, in order to build Phibun's project of a strategic new capital in Petchabun—a plan that ultimately contributed to his political downfall in 1944—the military was reportedly allowed to expropriate royal funds.[96] And the hints that not even Ananda's personal budget was out of bounds are indicative of the control that the regime exercised over the Privy Purse, as over virtually every other aspect of royal affairs—a degree of control that had been considerably strengthened by Prajadhipok's renunciation of the throne in favour of a minor.

Conclusions

Prajadhipok's abdication is most often analysed as an end, to both his uneasy cohabitation with the People's Party regime and, more broadly, the absolute monarchy of which he was the last representative. As can be seen from this study, however, his abdication also marked an important point of transition, from an adult ruler who challenged and then effectively rebelled against the government to a young boy who, for the next decade, would be physically absent—with the exception of one brief return visit in 1938–39—and thus largely a symbolic presence in Siam. Through this period, royal authority would be exercised primarily through the hands of the Council of Regents. This unprecedentedly long regency—longer even than that endured by Chulalongkorn in his youth—would have significant consequences for the monarchy.

[95] TNA, SR 0201.11/21.

[96] Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, p. 280.

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The regents as a group have received little scholarly attention, with the exception of Pridi, and even he is more significant for his activities during and after the war, whereas the Council's most important and formative period was during the 1930s. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, in her detailed study of the Thai constitutional monarchy, is one of the very few scholars to give the regents serious consideration, and her verdict is quite harsh. She views them as having more or less toadied to the People's Party, caved in on every demand made of them, and in general presided over the decline of the monarchy.[97] Kobkua has relied mainly on diplomatic reports rather than Thai archival sources but, as this article as shown, the latter tend to confirm that the regents generally cooperated with the government and do not appear to have seen their role as 'standing up for' the royal family.

The change from a single regent chosen by the king to a council chosen by the regime signified more than just a change of structure or personnel. Along with the succession of Ananda himself, which represented a complex interaction between the Constitution and the pre-1932 Palace Law (itself part of a much older legal corpus), the Council of Regents functioned within fairly narrow parameters and was clearly subordinated to the executive and legislative branches of government. In this respect, the Eighth Reign can be seen as a 'true' constitutional monarchy to a much greater degree than the period 1932–35 in that the throne was clearly now under the full authority of the regime and had little real autonomy of action. (The main exception was the timing of Ananda's return visit, which was postponed several times at the royal family's behest, usually because of his poor health.)[98]

It is clear from the parliamentary debates over Prajadhipok's abdication and Ananda's succession that there was no serious thought of turning Siam into a republic: a monarchy it was meant to be and a monarchy it would remain. What is equally clear, though, is that parliament and certainly the Cabinet as well held a determination that the monarchy should henceforth 'know its place' and function as an institution clearly subordinated to the Constitution. While the phrase 'king under the Constitution' (*phramahakasat yutai ratthathammanun*) had been bandied about in various forms since 1932, until Prajadhipok's abdication, the constitutional monarchy as a system remained very much a somewhat tenuous work in progress, largely because of the resistance of the king and his supporters. The Eighth Reign, with a ruler who was both

[97] Kobkua, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, ch. 4.
[98] Documentation on plans for the visit is in TNA, SR, 0201.41.3/1 and 41.3/3.

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young and absent, provided the regime with the opportunity to firm up the relationship between the core components of this system. It was generally successful in doing so, such that the authority of the Constitution and the regime that had promulgated it remained largely invulnerable to challenges from royalists and other opponents.

That stability, however, would barely survive Ananda's untimely death in 1946. After the army's return to power in 1947 and both before and after King Bhumibol's permanent return to Thailand in 1951, Constitutions became battlegrounds for the contest for power between royalists and their political opponents.[99] The gradual resurgence of royalist elements (with the growing support of the military after a coup in 1947 and particularly after the rise to power of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1957) meant that virtually every development studied in this article was reversed.[100] Regents were chosen from among royal-family members and began standing up for the throne rather than merely standing in for it. Successive Constitutions gradually shifted key powers back to the king—a process that was paralleled by the reassertion of the Palace's control over the Crown Property Bureau and royal finances in general. More broadly, the principle of 'the King under the Constitution' was gradually supplanted by the ideologies of 'Thai-style democracy' and 'democracy with the King as head of state', which implicitly ended the throne's subordination to the Constitution. In effect, the administrative changes of the Eight Reign provided a kind of 'laundry list' of policies that the throne and its supporters worked successfully to nullify. The consequences of this reversal of the state of affairs that had existed between 1935 and 1946 continue to reverberate through the Thai political system today.[101]

[99] See Kobkua, *Kings, Country, Constitutions*; Handley, *King Never Smiles*; and Natthaphọn, *Khọ Fanfai*.

[100] This process of reversal is summarized in J. Ockey, 'Monarch, Monarchy, Succession and Stability in Thailand', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, vol. 46, issue 2, August 2005, pp. 119–22; Handley, *King Never Smiles* provides a detailed narrative.

[101] The most recent development related to the matters discussed in this article is the decision of the ruling King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun to change the constitutional stipulations regarding the appointment of a regent when the monarch is incapacitated or overseas. The king, who frequently travels abroad for extended periods of time, required that the nomination of a regent or regents be optional rather than mandatory and that, if this nomination is made by the Privy Council rather than by the ruler himself, the National Assembly's approval be no longer required. See 'Before and After: Read the 5 Articles Rewritten after Thai Constitution Was Approved', http://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2017/04/06/read-5-articles-rewritten-since-thai-constitution-approved/ [accessed 31 March 2018].

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