As we have observed in our preceding discussion that student activism became a world wide phenomenon during 1960s and 1970s. Student raised their voice against the misrule of their respective governments in many developing and developed countries. As far Thai students are concerned, they have a long history of political struggle. The plan for the coup of 1932 had originated among Thai students, the conspiracy began in Paris. In 1924-25, by Phibun Songkhrom, Pridi Banomyong, Thawee Tansai and Payoon. Other students also joined the conspiracy in Europe and later in Thailand. In 1932 they overthrew the absolute monarchy with the help of middle level civil and military officials. They invited the King to rule under the constitution which he accepted. But unfortunately democracy did not last long and very soon army general seized power. They ruled the country with absolute power except on few occasions. As a result, Thai politics from 1932 to 1973 was almost dominated by Thai army generals.

The majority of Thais for generation had been living in an isolated environment. But after coup of 1932, the spread of western ideas,

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exposure of communist ideology in rural areas and ferment within the ranks of urban middle class contributed to an increase in political awareness.\(^2\) Many big business houses had an alliance with the ruling classes and they offered key posts in their firms to the top level army officials. Owing to the preponderance of Chinese workers the government put restraint against the formation of labour unions as it was suspected to have lead to dissimination of communist ideas. In such an atmosphere, students increasingly became vocal and active. They participated in various demonstrations and protested against the academic misconduct, poor economic growth and political issues.

The first incident of student activism occurred in November 1940. During colonial period, Thailand had lost some of her eastern territory to France in 1940. When the war broke out in Europe in 1939, Thai government declared Thailand as a neutral state. When France surrendered in June 1940, the Thai government saw it an opportunity to regain the lost territory. Hence, the government staged an extensive anti-French propaganda campaign. In November, 1940, there were many anti French demonstrations by the Thais throughout the country. Chulalongkorn and Thammasat University students joined the

demonstrations which were promoted by various organizations in Bangkok.³

After World War II Pridi Banomyong became the Prime Minister of Thailand for a very brief period. He was considered to be the one of the most powerful and respected civilian leaders of his time. He was one of the 1932 revolutionaries and also the founder and an instructor of Thammasat University. In November 1947, a military coup forced him to leave the country. His followers, most of them civilians who graduated from Thammasat University, were driven out of politics. With the support of a group of his most loyal followers, Pridi attempted a coup in 1947. He received support from some navy men and several civilian leaders, many of whom used to be his students. He sneaked into Thammasat University one night and held a meeting among his followers in one of the campus buildings. Many of the university professors and administrators were also his old students and admirers. After the meeting, Pridi and his followers went on to seize the old Palace nearby. Some of his men took over the government radio station and announced the news of the coup. However, within two days Pridi’s forces were crushed by the army and Pridi had to flee the country again.⁴

⁴ Ibid.
In June 1959, the students got involved in national politics when a group of navy men attempted a coup against the government and occupied the Thammasat University campus to fortify their position. The rebellion was crushed but army remained at Thammasat University campus claiming that the situation made it necessary to use the University campus because it was located in a strategic area. The university was closed and some students were directed to attend classes at Chulalongkorn University while others were told to go and study at the auditorium of the Ministry of Justice. However, on 11th October 1959, around 2000 students went to attend a session of the parliament and asked one of the MPs to request the government to withdraw its troops from Thammasat University campus. At the end of the session students met the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Phibun Songkram and asked him to withdraw the troops from the campus. Prime Minister assured the students that the troops would move out but he also did not give the specific date. In November 1959, around 3000 students went for a trip to Nakonsawan, a northern town about 250 kilometers from Bangkok. They came back to Bangkok on November 5th, 1959 by train and instead of going home they went together in busses to Thammasat University. They marched on the campus but left peacefully. A few days later government withdrew troops from the campus and Thammasat University was re-opened to the students again. It should be
pointed out that there was constant rumour and some evidence that the government had some specific plan for closing the university permanently because Thammasat University campus was considered to be stronghold of Pridi Banomyong and his followers. But pressure from the students finally forced the government to abandon this plan.⁵

After a trip to Europe and USA Phibun allowed the formation of political parties, lifted control on press and free speech and announced elections which was held in February 1957. In this election, Phibun's followers used notorious methods to get candidates of his party elected. For example, in some of the provinces the votes for the government party exceeded the number of eligible votes. This act of government was vigorously criticized by the press, the students and general public. The discontent among general public, press and students caused the government to declare a national emergency. This act of Phibun angered the civilian population of Bangkok. They began to gather regularly at the Paramain Ground and gradually students of Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities also joined them. They publicly criticized the government for fraud practices in the elections. Some of the students of Chulalongkorn University hung the flag on campus at half-mast.

⁵Ibid., p.10.
designating the "death of Democracy" in Thailand.6 Several days later students from various universities joined the general public at the Paramain Ground and then they marched to the office of Prime Minister breaking police barriers along the way. They forcibly entered inside the Prime Minister's office and demanded a meeting with Prime Minister immediately. The Prime Minister eventually came out and spoke to the protesters and promised to remedy the situation. However, the general public was not satisfied with his promise and later on Field Marshal Sarit took advantage and he was able to overthrow Phibun's regime with the help of students and general public.7 A point that should be made here is that the general public of Bangkok including workers, professionals, and politicians all took part in the massive protest against the Phibun government, for their handling of the election and subsequent declaration of "national emergency".

In October 1958, Sarit carried out another bloodless coup and made himself Prime Minister. He abrogated the constitution, proclaimed martial law and appointed a committee to draft a new constitution, Martial law remained in effect until 1968 when the new constitution was completed. During this ten year period Thailand was under Martial law, and there was major demonstration against the world court. The world

court had come to offer its verdict in June, 1962 that Khao Praviharn, an ancient temple along the border of Thailand and Cambodia was rightfully under Cambodian sovereignty. This decision by the world court ignited demonstration throughout Thailand. University students did not initiate the demonstration, but few days of general public demonstration in Bangkok and other cities, students joined one of the largest student organised demonstrations ever to be staged in Thailand up to that time. In June 21, 1962, over 50,000 students marched from the Paramain Ground to the Parliament Building shouting slogans and carrying placards denouncing the world court verdict. The students represented all the major universities of Bangkok including Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, and the medical, fine arts and agriculture universities. In front of Parliament Building hundreds of students of the various universities took turns in making speeches denouncing both the world court verdict and the Cambodian leaders.

The students met with little government opposition due to fact that the government position on this particular issue was similar to their own. In fact, some of the public demonstrations which occurred were not only supported by the government, but also promoted by government backed politicians.

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The martial law which was imposed by Sarit in 1958 continued almost for ten years. The drafting of the new constitution which began in 1959, was completed in 1968. According to the constitutional provisions election had to be held within 240 days of the date the constitution went into effect. The students of Thammasat University together with the public and some politicians began to request the government to lift the martial law to ensure a fair campaign during the election and protecting certain liberties which were denied since the martial law imposed. In support of their demands, students marched from Paramain Ground to Parliament Building to pressurise the government to accept their demands. Though this demonstrations was relatively small and could have been crushed but government wanted not to have any kind of confrontation just before the election. Therefore their demands were accepted and martial law was lifted except in some of the outer provinces.

In February 1969, student staged another demonstration against the increase of Bus fare. Majority of Thai students rely on crowded buses for transportation to and from the university. When government supported and operated bus companies raised the bus fare by 30 percent, many students felt this 30 percent increase in the bus fare was imposed on them for their agitation before the election. Hence, a well
organised protest demonstration forced the government to roll back increased bus fare to its original price.\textsuperscript{9} Immediately after this successful demonstration, the student representatives from Thammasat, Chulalongkorn and Chiangmai Universities and also from some of major educational institutions formed “National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT)” which played very crucial role in the democratisation of Thai Politics.\textsuperscript{10}

On September 8, 1970 students of Chulalongkorn University held a rally in the campus against the corruption charges of three university administrators. Students demanded to see the Deputy Director and the Secretary General of the University, but both administrator refused to appear. Thereafter students marched to the office of the Prime Minister and on the way students from other universities joined them. Ten student representatives met the Prime Minister Thanom and requested him to suspend all three administrators the Deputy Director, the General Secretary and the Dean of Architecture. Prime Minister promised to look into the matter and to meet those administrators and students on the next day in the university auditorium. But the students were not satisfied with this and the very next day they marched towards the office of the Prime Minister under the banner of National Students

\textsuperscript{9} Ross Prizzia and Narang Sinsawasdi, \textit{op.cit.}, n.3, p.13.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, p.14.
Centre of Thailand. The students were of the view that the Prime Minister should take more strong stand against the three administrators than just to have discussion with them. They demanded again a meeting with the Prime Minister but he refused. After this students marched to the parliament building and occupied the seats reserved for the members of parliament and said that they would not leave until they receive a definite answer from the Prime Minister on the dismissal of the three administrators. Finally, the Prime Minister met with the students and told them that he had already discussed the matter with the authorities of the Chulalongkorn University and explained that a special committee would be set up to investigate the allegation of corruption and three persons would be removed from their administrative position but they would remain in the University with their professor status. The students were quite happy with the outcome of this meeting and abandoned the Parliament Building.

Before the formation of the National Student Centre of Thailand, Thai Universities did not have any intra-University Organisation. A very strong student union was present at each university but these student unions were non-political in their nature. It was for the first time in 1969, during the elections, they co-operated with each other. During

\[11\] Ibid., p.15.
this election, the students from various universities informally organised
to assure an honest election and to prevent the irregularities which
occurred during the previous election.12 After the election, representatives from all the Thai Universities met at Cheingmai to attend the "World University Service" and jointly they proposed that Thai Universities should have an intra-University Organisation. This meeting was followed by number of meetings at various universities. The last meeting was held at Prasammitra Teacher College in December, 1969, and a resolution was passed to form an intra-University Organisation which came to be known as "National Student Centre of Thailand".13 A committee to draft the constitution for this organisation was also appointed at this meeting. The constitution drafting committee consisted two members from each of the eleven educational institutions which included Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Kasesart University, Silpakorn University, Mahidol University, Cheing Mai University, Kohklen University, Songkhla University, Prasammitra Teacher College, Bangsean Teacher College and Patumwan Teacher College.

12 Ibid., pp.15-16.
The constitution drafting committee set forth the following goals and objectives for the centre:14

1. To promote a good relationship among the students of all Thai Universities and between Thai students and students of other countries.

2. To serve and promote the welfare of the students.

3. To promote the students freedom and to protect student benefits.

4. To further the educational standards and academic cooperation.

5. To promote a good understanding between students and the common people.

6. To preserve and promote Thai culture.

7. To render services for the welfare of the society.

The constitution drafting committee began its work in 1970 and finally it was disclosed to the public in 1973. The National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) had mainly three executive organs: the executive committee, the secretariat committee and the financial committee.

The Executive Committee consisted the Chairman of the student union of each university. The main duties of the executive committee were (1) to formulate policy for NSCT, and (2) to select the leaders of all units working under the secretariat committee.

14 Ross Prizzia and Narang Sinsawasdi, op.cit., n.3, pp.16-17.
The Secretariat Committee consisted one Secretary General and three deputies, all of them were directly responsible to the executive committee. The Secretariat Committee acted as spokesman of all the universities leaders. There were many functionally oriented sub-committees under the secretariat committee which included: public relations, foreign affairs, academics, volunteers and public welfare, office arrangement, sports, fund raising and security.

The financial committee took care of the financial affairs of the centre and consisted one representative from each university. This committee was directly responsible to the executive committee.

In the organisational hierarchy of NSCT, the General Secretary was the most powerful person and was ultimately responsible for all NSCT activities. The first General Secretary was chosen from Thammasat University for the academic year 1970-71. During this period NSCT was not much interested in the political matters, rather it concentrated more on social services such as fund raising for flood victims, organising of T.V. programmes, blessing the King, and providing various counselling services to graduating high school students.¹⁵

Thirayuth Boonmee was elected Secretary General of NSCT for the academic years 1971-72 and 1972-73. He was an engineering student of

Chulalongkorn University with best academic record since his school days. It was he who gave new directions to the Thai student movement. Under his leadership the activities of NSCT turned from social issues to political one.¹⁶

Under the leadership of Thirayuth, National Student Centre of Thailand attracted the attention of Thai people when students launched a ten days "Boycott Japanese Goods" campaign.¹⁷ The Thai-Japanese trade balance was very much in favour of Japan since last ten years. The deficit was increasing at the alarming rate for the fiscal years of 1970, 1971 and 1972. By the end of 1972, the trade deficit with Japan was placed at approximately 215 million dollars.¹⁸ In November 1972, the students started a campaign against the purchase of Japanese goods and the period between November 20th to 30th they declared as "anti Japanese Goods Week".¹⁹

During this period students from various academic institutions joined together under the banner of NSCT and requested the public not to buy Japanese goods. Students visited various business districts for the campaign, they distributed handbills and pasted stickers on public

¹⁶ Ibid.


¹⁸ Bangkok Post, November 17, 1972.


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Dear Thai Citizen,

We the students, who are also your children are cooperating with one another to refrain from buying Japanese products during "anti-Japanese Goods Week". The reason for this is that Japan is taking advantage of us by using various business ploys to cheat us and also because the trade dominance by the Japanese in Thailand has increased alarmingly during the past 10 years, putting Thailand gradually into a position as Japan's economic slave.

What we are stating here is not far from reality and if you study carefully the action of Japan or look around and see Japanese dominance in trade and cultural sphere, you will see that what we say is true.

We would not have been in trouble at all if the Japanese role was to help to develop our country's economy as they often claim.

If you look at the numerous Japanese goods which have gutted Thai market and became a part of everyday life of the Thais, and influence by advertising (made by Japanese firms), you will realize that large number of there products are not essential at all. Furthermore, they will cause more damage to the national economy.

We do not want violence because we realize the need for international relations. But if robbers come to our house we have to seriously fight them until they flee or change their behaviour.

This movement may be only an insignificant starting point, but it needs cooperation from every sector of the population as it is a fight for righteousness and national progress.

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The National Student Center of Thailand, therefore, has asked you to sacrifice your happiness and conveniences, and to save the money you may spend on buying and using Japanese goods and services during anti-Japanese goods week, November 20-30th, to show that the Thai bloods runs thick and cannot be looked down on by anyone.

National Student Center
November 16, 1972

The students proposed a ten point plan for economic revival and presented it to the government on November 20, 1972. Some of the major points included the following proposals:

- The government should urgently enforce law preventing aliens from taking jobs from local residents.
- The foreign owned department stores are not necessary to the country and the National Executive Council should prohibit the expansion of the existing ones and the establishment of any new ones.
- The government should consider controlling or prohibiting the importation of unnecessary goods and investments.

Though martial law was in existence the Prime Minister did not attempt to stop this sudden movement. However, he warned the students that "there must be no violence, not even demonstrations

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outside Japanese embassy".\textsuperscript{22} Prime Minister Thanom and Deputy Prime Minister Prapas unofficially expressed admiration for this peaceful student movement against the unpopular Japanese by remarking at one point that the demonstration was a "masterpiece".\textsuperscript{23}

During the "anti-Japanese goods week", campaign, the students got support from a large number of Thai public and media also highlighted the genuineness of students worries. King Bhumibol also extended his full support because he was also in favour of decreasing the purchase of Japanese luxury goods. He said "careful consideration must be given to what demands are made or the goal of the movement might be defeated".\textsuperscript{24}

The sale of the Japanese goods decreased considerably during this campaign. On the last day of the anti-Japanese Goods Week, students organised a protest march from Paramain Ground to the headquarters of the National Executive Council to put pressure on the government. Prime Minister's representative met with six student representatives and ensured the students that the Prime Minister is supporting their demands and an attempt would be made to enforce the

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.20.  
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p.20.  
\textsuperscript{24} Bangkok Post, December 1, 1972, p.1.
feasible sections of their ten point demands. In response to "anti-Japanese goods week" campaign, Japanese Foreign Ministry reviewed the loan agreement which was signed between two countries in April 1972. This was followed by the visit of Japanese Minister of International trade and industry Mr. Yasuhiro Nakasone. He came to Thailand to explore the prospects of greater Japanese export of Thai agricultural products. Japanese reacted immediately because they were very much afraid of spreading such movement to other neighbouring countries where they were economically active and exploiting their markets.

On December 12, 1972 the National Executive Council issued Decree 299 which in effect gave the power to control the judges to the Minister of Justice, whereas according to the justice act of 1952, the Chief justice of supreme court held the highest post and presided over all judges in Thailand. He also served as Chairman of the official judiciary committee. Decree 299 was designed to transfer the chairmanship of this committee to Minister of Justice who was directly responsible to the Prime Minister. The very next day of the announcement of the Decree 299, the law students of Thammasat University began their protest

27 Ibid.
movement and later on they were joined by the students of other universities. Students got huge support from the members of legal profession and press because Decree 299 had political implications which was not good for the students career and future of the Thai judicial system as a whole. On 17th December 1972, the representatives from all universities except Songkhla University presented a letter to the Prime Minister and requested him to continue the Judicial Act of 1952. Prime Minister realized the unpopularity of the Decree 299 and called the meeting of National Executive Council and in the legislative the Decree 299 was voted out.28

The students, press and public raised their voice against the government when "Thung Yai" scandal was exposed.29 This involved high officials whose helicopter crashed on Burma-Thai border on April 29, 1973. Investigation by a team of students and newspaper reporters revealed that the helicopter was filled with carcasses of protected animals, was returning from an illegal hunting expedition in the Thung Yai game preserve. But Marshal Thanom immediately announced that the helicopter was returning from a "secret mission". This whole episode was highly criticized by the students, press and the public, Mr.

M.R. Kukrit wrote in a Thai language daily, "Army government which lacks moral standard, cannot continue to govern".30

In June 1973, another student demonstration broke out when nine students of Ramkamhaeng University were expelled by the Rector Dr. Sakadi Phasooknirand. The students were accused of issuing an illegal magazine. The editorials and cartoons of the magazine criticized the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and depicting them as "beasts".31 Actually it was an expression of students' anger against the handling of "Thuag Yai Affairs" by the government. The students from Ramkamhaeng University started mobilizing support through distributing leaflets. They were able to organize a huge protest rally at the Paramain Ground with the help of the students of other universities. Student leaders from various universities criticized the government in their speeches and thereafter they marched towards the Democracy Monument. At the Democracy monument, students staged a protest rally and the speeches of the student leaders were not confined only to the release of nine students of Ramkamhaeng University students, rather they demanded for a new constitution, an end of corruption and measures to deal with the increasing price of rice and the sagging Thai economy. In this task students were supported by a group of university

31 Ross Prizzia, Thailand in Transition; The Role of Opposition Forces (Hawaii, 1985), p.54.
lecturers from various Bangkok universities. In an open letter which was signed by eighty two young professors, they protested against the dismissal of the nine students of Ramkamhaeng University. As a result government reacted and ordered to close all major universities in Bangkok and deployed police force to form a human barricade blocking all routes leading to Democracy monument. But this move of the government proved to be a great mistake because many students who would have gone to classes, marched towards Democracy monument. After some minor clashes and pushing at the barricade line, the police finally let the students go to the Democracy monument and join other protesters.32

After arrival of students in large number at the Democracy monument, number of protesters reached around 50,000 in number. The students got favourable support from the civilian population too, who donated money, food and drink to them throughout their campaign. One report of the incident noted:

"During the long hours of protest, a large amount of food, drink and money was donated from sympathetic citizen from all walks of life, ranging from street vendor to well known personalities.... The amount of money collected was more that 40,000 baht".33

32 Ibid., p.55.
33 Quoted by Ross Prizza, op.cit., n.31, p.56.
Throughout the protest students sang King's song, emphasizing that they were hostile to the government but still respected the King. In the meantime, the government attempted to deal with the expanding dimensions of the protest. Prime Minister called an urgent meeting of his cabinet members and invited student representatives, including the nine expelled students, to see the Prime Minister. As a result of the meeting government agreed to the following points:

1. The case of nine students who were expelled from Ramkamhaeng University would be reconsidered by the Council of Universities.
2. The students' demand for removal of the Rector of Ramkamhaeng University would be reviewed and taken consideration by the government.
3. The persons who assaulted the students distributing leaflets on the first day of the campaign would be tried and the matter would be taken up to the police department.
4. The government would declare the reopening of all closed universities, and all restrictions pertaining to shut down would be retracted.

After the meeting, the student leaders reported back to the waiting protesters that government did agreed most of their demands and advised them to disperse and go home. However, outcome of this
protest movement gave momentum to another protest in favour of Dr. Sakdi, the government suddenly held a high level meeting and announced that the nine students would be readmitted without any conditions. Moreover, some cabinet members encouraged the Prime Minister to remove Dr. Sakdi for the way he handled the entire matter. A few days later, Dr. Sakdi submitted his resignation which was promptly accepted by the government. 34

The organisational efforts of the leaders of the student centre of Thailand was admired and praised by the government during “Anti-Japanese Goods Week”. The cooperation among various universities in support of nine fellow students, and overwhelming public support gave an entirely new dimension to the strength and significance of the National Student Centre of Thailand and its leadership in the politics of Thailand. During the NSCT campaign to reinstate the 'Ramkamhaeng nine' government leaders realised the potential threat and fear from the organised student group which was emerging as a pressure group in domestic politics. Students established themselves as a voice of the people, representing the best interest of a democratic form of government in the face of a government determined to rule by martial law. This characterization of contemporary student activism in Thailand

34 Ross Prizzia and Narang Sinsawasdi, op.cit., n.3, p.27.
was explained in a special paper distributed by the National Student Centre of Thailand and written by its elected leader Thirayuth Boonmee. In this paper which was entitled "The Students Begin to Find their Target", Thirayuth explained the relationship between the students and people.

"... nobody can hurt the students without hurting the people. This is because first students are the children of people and, second, people have great faith in students. Students have proved that they are grateful for the taxes collected from the people for the educational purposes. The students also try hard with all their ability to solve the many social problems. As long as students stay at people's side, the peoples faith in them will remain. This will mean an increased bargain power with the government...." \(^{35}\)

Thirayuth wrote about the students perception of their own power:

"... students activism can change the society as witnessed in Indonesia, Turkey, France, Japan, the United States, and other countries. We study and understand what has happened in other countries.... but I hope that the students would not overestimate their power. Power has

\(^{35}\) Quoted by Ross Prizzia, op.cit., n.31, p.59.
to be controlled and used in a purposeful manner. Otherwise the power can cause destruction and chaos. And this we do not want to see". 36

While talking about future students movement, Thirayuth predicts with confidence:

"We came through the past and we will not destroy our movement in future". 37

This young leader of National Student Centre of Thailand gave momentum to future student movements in Thailand. His confidence in the future of the student movement as a social and political force capable of changing the Thai political system soon became a reality when less than five months after the major demonstration regarding the 'Ramkamhaeng nine', Bangkok witnessed a violent student Revolt which brought down the Thanom government and stopped military rule by martial law.

The 'Student Revolt' of 1973 was unprecedented in the history of Thailand because of lack of democratic traditions. In such an atmosphere, where there was no tradition of democratic politics and the organized political parties were weak, the students became focal point of all opposition. The youth was frustrated due to threat of

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
unemployment and angered by the army's attempt to curb their freedom. The student became the champion of freedom and free expression and raised the banner of revolt.\textsuperscript{38} Student activism was widespread in 1973 and people were becoming increasingly disenchanted with governments delaying tactics with regard to the promulgation of permanent constitution. At the same time, Boonchi Rojanasthein, executive Vice President of Thailand's largest Bank, talked of increasing gap between the rich and the poor. He wrote "those who are responsible for the administration of nation's business are lacking in personal rectitude. It is cause of considerable concern".\textsuperscript{39}

After a long period of price stability, inflation hit in mid 1972 at a unprecedented rate in Thailand since World War II period. Prices began increasing almost at the rate of one percent a month. Economist blamed basically three factors for the domestic inflation, first the world wide inflation raised prices of imported goods; second, a balance of payment surplus and deficit financing from Central Bank credit increased the money supply at an annual rate of more than 10 per cent; and third, a 12 per cent drop in rice production reduced supplies of the staple crop,

\textsuperscript{38} Frank C. Darling, "Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand", \textit{Pacific Affairs} (Vancouver), Vol.47, Spring 1979, p.7.

\textsuperscript{39} Jeffery Race, \textit{op.cit.}, n.29, p.192.
leading an increase in hardship of common life.\(^{40}\) The government responded by establishing price control which led the disappearance of rice from the market, as a result series of strikes broke out in Bangkok because, as Jeffery Race writes: "Politics has never been of much concern to Thai wage earners, the price of rice always has been".\(^{41}\)

Thus period of economic hardship saw the capitalist ruling class, especially the military rulers, draw most of the benefit from the integration of Thailand into the world capitalist economy, while the peasants and workers suffered great dislocation and deprivation from the adverse effect. Eventually, a general call for more open and democratic politics became the need of the time.

Long before students Revolt of October 1973, the student had frequent discussions and symposiums on drafting a new constitution. The student collaboration with university professors and intellectuals aimed at promoting democratic constitution in the country. In this task they were supported by the general public and the press. An additional factor in their favour was the cracks that were prevailing in army ranks as it was later on apparent from the refusal of General Kris Sevara to massacre the unarmed students during the revolt. At the same time

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p.194.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
capitalist ruling class also wanted to get rid of the dictatorship which became too corrupt and ineffective.\textsuperscript{42}

The revolution actually began when the National Student Centre of Thailand announced it would begin drafting a national constitution themselves.\textsuperscript{43} Thirayuth Boonmee and ten other political activist were arrested by police while distributing leaflets urging support for the early drafting of the constitution. The leaflets specifically referred to December 10, 1973, Thailand's constitution day, the date by which the constitution should be promulgated. Thirayuth and the other activists were accused of violating a National Executive Council decree 17, which forbade more than five people gather for political purposes. Those arrested with Therayuth included. Propansak Kamolpetch, a one time Bangkok parliamentary candidate; Boonsong Chalethorn, Deputy Secretary General of the National Student Council of Thailand; Bandhit Henghilrat, a liberal Art student at Thammasat University; Visa Kanthap, a humanities student at Ramkamhaeng University; Thanya Chunkathatharn, a writer for the weekly Maharaj Magazine; Thawee Muenthikorn, a Thammasat Economics instructor; Mantri Jaengsirinarak, a writer for the weekly Social Science Review; Nopporn Sawanpanich, a


former Chulalongkorn arts instructor; Preedi Boonsue, a Thammasat political science student; and Chiwat Suravichai, former Vice-President of the Chulalongkorn Student Union. Next day police arrested Kongkuat Kongka, a member of another activist group, who was demanding an early promulgation of the permanent constitution. After these arrest police claimed that they have discovered some documents which shows these people were planning to overthrow the government with the help of Communists.\textsuperscript{44} Meanwhile leaders of National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) threatened retaliation for the government action as a result there was total ten days unrest in Bangkok. Following major happenings took place during those ten days.\textsuperscript{45}

1. On Saturday, 6 October, 1973, the first day of the uprising, Thurayuth and ten other activist were arrested by the police while distributing leaflets urging support for the early drafting of the constitution. In ordering the arrest of the students in lieu of freedom of assembly, and the search of their homes in lieu of freedom from unwarranted search and seizure, the Thanom - Prapas government clique only added fuel to the flame of discontent and provided visible

\textsuperscript{44} Ross Pirzza and Narang Sinsawasdi, \textit{op.cit.}, n.3, pp.30-31.

proof to the Thai public that students claim of government repression were correct.

2. On Sunday, 7 October, 1973, on second day of the uprising Deputy Director of Police, Lt. General Prachuab Suntharang-koon ordered the arrest of a member of another activist group, Ramkamhaeng student Kongkiat Korigka; He was accused of being an outspoken who demanded an early promulgation of the permanent constitution. The NSCT Secretary General Sombath Thamrongtenthawang said his organisation would “take action to restore democracy”.

3. On Monday, 8th October, 1973, Prapas ruled out the possibility of an early bail of twelve arrested activists and publicly announced that police has uncovered a scheme which indicates that these twelve arrested students were involved in a plot to oust the Thanom government and to instigate a major uprising with the help of communists. He further claimed that police had found documents which shows that these activist are being promoted by Thai and Chinese Communists. An order was issued for the arrest of Khaisaeng Sooksai, a former parliamentarian from Nakhon Phanom province.

4. On Tuesday, 9th October, 1973, Khaisaeng surrendered to the police at 10.30 am, and was charged with treason. Prime Minister emerged from a cabinet meeting and announced that government has
decided to apply its absolute power under article 17 in dealing with
dozen activist and Khaisaeng. By afternoon, Special Branch Commander,
Chai Suwansorn told the media persons that police could prove
Khaisaeng masterminded the plot to overthrow the government.
Through the streets, colleges and the campuses of the capital, word
spread that the detainees were to be tried on charges such as treason
and communist activities. Thammasat students symbolically registered
their disgust with the government by lowering the national flag and
putting up black flag as a sign of mourning. Around 180 members
Thammasat University teachers signed an open letter to Thanom
Kittikachorn: "We .... agree that all twelve members of constitutionist
movement were acting in good faith to promote the democracy of the
country... their action did not violate peace or morale of the people, we
request the release of twelve detainees in order to avoid the worsening
situation which would worry the public". Students refused to attend
classes as a result of which first semester examination were called off for
an indefinite period. During afternoon, the Thammasat Student
Legislative Body voted approval of four point proposal to be carried out
by the Thammasat Student Council. These points were:

(i) Non-violent protests will be made first, and the students will
remain at Photi compound until the release of twelve detainees.
(ii) Ten representatives will be appointed to negotiate with the government for a speedy release of twelve detainees.

(iii) Letters will be sent to all universities and institutes, calling for a show of strength and unity to support the negotiations.

(iv) If government still refuses to release the twelve after these non-violent protests have been made, the students will resort to violence in the form of demonstrations and bloodshed.

5. On Wednesday 10th October, 1973, the student protest began to swell rapidly. Throughout the morning, youngsters streamed towards Thommasat. Student from Ramkamhaeng University, Parasanmit College of Education, National Institute of Administration and Chulalongkorn University pushed a number of demonstrators to more than 10,000 by early afternoon. As the crowds at the rallies continue to grow, the government announced that Deputy Prime Minister Prapas had been appointed head of a Special Independent Organisation "restore peace and order". At the same time, commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai army, General Kris Sivara, was named as Prapas's Deputy in the new suppression force.

6. On Thursday, 11th October, 1973, a delegation of NSCT members met Field Marshal Prapas, and demanded the release of the thirteen detainees unconditionally. Prapas refused to comply with the demands
but told the delegation that a new constitution would be ready in twenty months. Student delegation was unimpressed, they returned to the rally, which had now moved to the Thammasat University football ground to accommodate the growing crowd of more than fifty thousand. In the meantime thirteen political activists being held at the Metropolitan Police Training School in Bang Khen staged a hunger strike to protest the delay in police investigation and to give moral support to the mass rally of students. In course of time, Prime Minister Thanom and Deputy Prime Minister Prapas consulted with the King in a special audience at Chitralada Palace. The discussion between them which lasted about two hours, the King reportedly expressed grave concern over the present student uprising.

7. On Friday 12th October, 1973, in a move to which was apparently designed to avoid confrontation with the students the government made an announcement that five student activist might be released if the investigation finds that they were not aware of a plot of overthrowing the government and legal action against other eight would be taken. This offer from the government was too little and too late. Thousands of students already started coming towards the Thammasat University from other universities, technical colleges, teachers training colleges, vocational colleges and secondary schools. Many of these students
arrived on foot, often accompanied by sympathetic teachers and lecturers while several passersby donated money to the marchers. The number of students pouring into Thammasat ground swelled to tens of thousands by midday as it was announced that all schools in Bangkok had been closed indefinitely. Chulalongkorn and Ramkahaeng Universities also announced the indefinite postponement of all examinations. Meanwhile, the students stepped up the pressure on the government by announcing a demand for the unconditional release of the thirteen detainees. The NSCT gave a 24 hour deadline starting from midday and warned of "decisive action" if the demand were not met. In the evening, about five hour after the ultimatum was received by the government, it was announced to the waiting students that the thirteen political activists would be released on bail. However students decided to reject the bail offer and demanded an unconditional release of all thirteen detainees.

8. On 13th October 1973, a strong crowd consisting more that 400,000 protesters marched from Thammasat University to Democracy Monument to pressurise the government to accept their demand. Meantime there was a news that the government had agreed to the NSCT demand calling for an unconditional release of the thirteen activists. The students had gained an important victory involving the
unconditional release of the activists. Though the activist had already been released on bail and allowed to leave the detention centre. The government also promised that a permanent constitution would be promulgated by October 1974. Having achieved what they call a victory, the student leaders called off the demonstration at the Democracy Monument and returned to Thammasat University to celebrate.

However, more that 200,000 remained at the streets and thousands of them refused to disband. This group which included "hard-core" vocational and engineering students, was under the direction of Seksan Prasertkul, a student of political science at Thammasat University. These students were dissatisfied with the outcome and wanted a guarantee that the government will keep its promises to the students. Seksan tried to control the restless crowd, urging them to avoid any violence measure and attempting meanwhile to reach the other leaders of the NSCT, but his efforts were in vain. At about 12 O'clock, midnight, Seksan decided to lead the crowd to the Royal Palace to request the King's advice.

On Sunday 14th October, 1973, when early morning students reached to the palace. King's representative Col. Varit came to see them about 5.30 A.M. and read the king's advise to the students, which was to disband peacefully since the thirteen activists had been unconditionally
released and the constitution had been promised before October 1974. After reading the message, Colonel Vasit Dejkunchorn told the students that their majesties had been unable to sleep for four nights running during the protest. Now the King liked all of you to go home. As demonstrators started to disband, an unfortunate incident triggered a violent riot which lasted for the next two days. When demonstrators attempted to leave the street in front of the Palace, Lt. Gen. Monchai Phankongchuen, assistant director of the police department, ordered his men to form a barricade so that students should leave the area in only one direction to ensure an orderly dispersal. The mass of students, however, proved too large, and when students requested that another exit should be allowed was refused, a wave of resentment ran through the mass demonstrators. A reporter claimed that a bag of ice was thrown from the crowd hit a policeman on the head and knocked him down, after which police began using tear gas and threatened the students with their weapons. Many demonstrators were injured as some attempted to fight back with wooden clubs. Most of the students, however, attempted to run from the area. Some jumped into the moat nearby while others ran to take refuge inside the palace grounds. The girl students were said to have been beaten to death by the police. Many of the demonstrators ran back to the Parliament Building while some returned to the Democracy Monument and others to Thammasat
University. They quickly spread the news of police brutality in the palace clash. The story about the girls being beaten to death was told and retold. The demonstrators were now without leaders as all NSCT officials had already disappeared from the crowd. Seksan was said to have collapsed from exhaustion due to his intense and continued activities in the last four to five days.

Meanwhile, at Thammasat Campus, the students started regrouping, anxious to take revenge from the police for their brutality. A group of demonstrators set fire to a police booth beside Thammasat University and the violence continued for two days and one night. The government brought several tanks and some five hundred soldiers to help the Bangkok police force in combating the demonstrators. The demonstrators refused to disband and fought back with wooden clubs while a few had pistols. The army fired M-16 rifles and tank machine guns into the crowds of demonstrators. These weapons, along with the government's helicopter gunships, were responsible for most of the causalities. Several hundred students were shot and wounded; more than one hundred were killed. A small number of soldiers were also killed or injured. Through the violent confrontation, the government used the media to broadcast news reports claiming that the demonstrators were not students but communist agents and that the student leaders
had been forced to join a plot to overthrow the government. Demonstrators were unable to cope with tanks and machine guns, they turned their frustration on other symbol of government authority. Many of the government buildings along Rajdamnern Avenue were set fire. Finally, at about 5.30 P.M. on 14th October, the government gave up the battle and the soldiers were ordered to withdraw from Rajdamnern Avenue.

At the same time, it was announced over radio Thailand that the government had tendered its resignation to the King. At about 7.15 P.M. the King addressed the nation on television and all radio stations, officially announcing that Thanom government resigned and Professor Sanya Dhammasakdi, the Rector of Thammasat University, had been appointed as the new Prime Minister. Late night Professor Sanya addressed the nation on television and radio, promising a constitution and election within six months. However, many student were still angry over the slaughter of hundreds of young and unarmed people. They argued that it was not enough that the government had resigned because Field Marshal Thanom still remained the supreme commander of the armed forces and Prapas was still Director General of police department. Many demonstrators wanted to continue the movement until they were sure that Thanom and Prapas were powerless; others
claimed that they wanted to see both men dead. The hard core "Yellow tiger" commando unit of the students attacked on metropolitan police headquarters which was symbolic to the police force. Hundreds of demonstrators were gunned down as they tried to close the police headquarters. It was reported that a doctor, a medical assistant and five nurses were also gunned down as they were trying to help some of the injured demonstrators. Finally, the police abandoned the building as the students set it afire. Around 9.00 P.M. it was announced via radio and television that Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn, Field Marshal Prapas Charusathira, and colonel Narong Kittikachorn had left the country. This announcement brought an unexpected calm to the rioters. As the gathering desolved, bus companies joined army buses in giving students free rides to their homes while other students remained to direct the traffic and put out the fires. It was clearly a victory for the students and other demonstrating civilians. Not a single policeman was on sight on the streets of Bangkok. One student summed up the significance of these historic ten days in October when he remarked\(^\text{46}\) "we have made a new Thailand but it cost us a lot".\(^\text{47}\)


\(^{47}\) Ross Prizzia, op.cit., n.31, 71.
The student uprising of 1973 had presented Thailand an opportunity to evolve a stable democratic government. The appointment of Dr. Sanya Dhammasakdi as a Prime Minister by the King was a valuable step towards democratization of Thai politics. The new Prime Minister, Dhammasakdi, promised a new constitution within three months instead of originally announced six months. On 16th October he announced the formation of new civilian dominated cabinet in which only two senior army men were allowed.\textsuperscript{48} The new government announced its intention of upholding monarchy, continuing a friendly relationship with members of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the economic field, it promised policies beneficial to the farmers and agriculture workers, acceleration of industrial production and a stable home currency. Prime Minister also urged the students to educate the people in democratic processes and stated his intention of promoting academic freedom in the universities and smoother relationship between the government and the students.\textsuperscript{49} After the revolt normal life was disrupted in Thailand for several weeks due to strikes in industrial plants, factories and even Railways and Commercial Banks. Long years


\textsuperscript{49} Chai Anan Sanaudavanija and Suchit Bunbongkran, "Thailand” in Hazi Ahmad and Harold Crouch (ed.), \textit{Military-Civilian Relation in Southeast Asia} (New York, 1985), p.89.
of dictatorship had kept the Thais subservient, but the students revolt seemed to have awakened the people to an awareness of their rights.

During the October uprising, the Thai Royal Navy and "Young Turks" supported the students' cause. The army maintained low profile after the students uprising and General Kris Sivara retained his anti-coup stand. Air Marshal Chulasaphy announced that the military and police personnel could be required to resign from the government services, if they wanted to indulge into politics. The monarchy received an increase in their prestige. During the revolt, students carried the photographs of the King and Queen, and King negotiated between student leaders and individual Army Commanders. The King was an unifying force in Thailand when the country was experiencing its first civilian government after several decades. The King served to "legitimize a turning point in Thailand".\(^50\)

The Student Revolt of 1973 was not an end of student activities, after the revolt NSCT and other student organizations attempted to consolidate their position and there was steady increase in student activism and protest demonstrations against many corrupt high ranking officials in the bureaucracy and got them removed from the important positions.\(^51\)

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\(^51\) Ross Prizzia, \textit{op.cit.,} n.31, p.72.
After the "Revolt of 1973" various independent organisations emerged and the influential student organisation, National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), got split and a radical organisation, the Federation of Independent Student of Thailand (FIST), was formed. This new organisation was led by Seksan Prasertkul who resigned from the leadership of NSCT due to the allegation of corruption charges against him. Seksan played very significant role in the demonstration leading to overthrow of the military regime. Infact, it was Seksan who initiated demonstrators towards Chitralada palace, and it is reported that his rhetoric persuaded the students to go beyond the demand of release of thirteen detainees.52

The Seksan's activities widened the gap between NSCT and vocational students. The difference between various student organisations further widened when inter-university and inter-disciplinary classes started in various Bangkok universities. The situation became worse in October 1976, when a bloody battle started between leftist students and right wing group and police.53

53 Ross Prizzia, op.cit., n.31., p.79.
However, the political system in Thailand had changed after the students revolt of 1973 which laid down the foundation for the democratic process leading to a gradual democratisation of Thai politics, a shift from personalised clientlist politics to institutionalised politics and the beginning of the process of weakening of military's role in the politics of Thailand and in its government affairs.