

1. The King ✓  
2. ✓

(1942/11/57)



British Embassy,  
BANGKOK.

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My dear Oscar,

The King has recently given four audiences in quick succession, to Messrs. Macdonald and Casey, the New Zealand and Australian Ministers for External Affairs on October 30 and November 4 respectively, to Lord Reading on November 11 and to Rob Scott on November 15. I was present at the last two interviews, and I have heard accounts of the first two from my New Zealand and Australian colleagues. They provide an interesting opportunity to gauge the extent to which the King is coming out of his shell and beginning to assume the responsible moderating role in Thai politics which many have thought the throne here could and should exercise.

2. These audiences were unusually long. Ten minutes or quarter of an hour has hitherto been normal, whereas the King gave Lord Reading 40 minutes and Rob Scott half an hour, and Mr. Macdonald's audience is said to have lasted nearly an hour. Mr. Casey, who of course has known the King personally for a good many years, found him little changed; he did not think that he had grown perceptibly in stature and was treated mostly to "baby talk". On the other hand, Mr. Macdonald was impressed by the King's maturity and sense of responsibility, though he found him depressed and daunted by the role thrust on him and the burden of fighting against corruption. My impression is between the two but nearer to Casey's than Macdonald's. His Majesty will have to develop a great deal before there can be any hope of his really influencing Thai politics or exercising an effective brake on the gangsters. Nevertheless, I detect some progress on what I had previously heard about the King's conversations. At the outset of Lord Reading's audience, he seemed tongue-tied and nervous, though he later opened up and spoke fairly freely. Rob Scott broke the ice more quickly by telling the King of the many friends he had outside Thailand who watched events here with interest and sympathy - a remark which seemed to gratify the King - and by pointing to the stabilising influence on British and Commonwealth development exercised over the last 50 years by the British Crown. Conversation then flowed fairly well, with the King now and again taking the lead.

3. On the substance of the audiences, the King was surprisingly outspoken in his criticisms, particularly of Pibul but also of Sarit whom he seems to regard as corrupt and uncouth. Pibul he described as drunk with power, aiming to be "a second King" and indeed to take the King's place in Thailand; it was clearly his view that Pibul had brought the

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last coup on himself with his folie de grandeur. The King agreed with Rob Scott that the present type of military régime was unhealthy, but saw no alternative to it in the foreseeable future.

4. It emerged from all the audiences, however, that the King's main talking point was communism - both the development of international communism and the extent of communist infiltration and subversion in Thailand. Contrary to the usual view, His Majesty was not too worried about the extent of communist influence in Bangkok; leftist newspaper talk was "the fashion" and even in the notorious Thammasat University, the communist cell probably only numbered 30 or so. He was much more worried by the provinces which had, he felt, a sense of grievance particularly of course in the North East. He gave as an example of the ignorance and credulity of the people, a trick which Thep Jotinuchit (Personalities No. 97, Leader of the Economist Party) had been enabled to play by electioneering under the title "Leader of His Majesty's Opposition", by which he persuaded his hearers that he was standing on behalf of the King against the Government. One prescription which the King urged was a more positive approach in the matter of pro-Western publicity; this is obviously a point to which the present Government attaches importance, perhaps at the King's insistence. Another idea of his was for greater efforts at popular contact; he was much impressed by the spontaneous desire of the people to see him during his North Eastern tour, and I subsequently learned from Prince Dhani, President of the Privy Council, that further royal tours to the provinces are contemplated after the elections.

5. At the close of his interview with Lord Reading, the King gave the Marquess an oral message to Her Majesty The Queen. You will doubtless have received this direct from Lord Reading; it was spoken in too low a voice for me to hear a word.

6. In spite of his painful silences and of his frequently wearing dark glasses for audiences, King Puniphol has good looks and a pleasant manner with a certain wistfulness, which rouse goodwill and sympathy, if not pity, in those who are received in audience.

7. I am sending a copy of this letter to Rob Scott and enclose a spare copy in case you may wish to pass it to the Commonwealth Relations Office.

*Yours ever,*  
*R. Whittington*  
 (R. Whittington)

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