

**The London School of Economics  
and Political Science**

*The Rise of the Octobrists:  
Power and Conflict among Former Left Wing Student Activists in  
Contemporary Thai Politics*

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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

Since the early 1990s, the prominent role of ‘Octobrists’ – former left wing student activists from the 1970s – has become increasingly evident in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. Some Octobrists have played leading or supporting roles in key moments of political transition, such as the 1992 urban middle-class movement for democracy, various social movements throughout the mid-1990s, the political reform process of the late 1990s, and the rise of the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai) government under Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001. But over the course of the past ten years, these former student activists have become increasingly divided, amidst the protracted conflict between ‘Yellow shirt’ (anti-Thaksin) and ‘Red Shirt’ (pro-Thaksin) forces in Thai politics. Octobrists have defended opposing political stances and severely attacked one another across the political divide.

This thesis examines why the Octobrists have managed to remain a significant force in Thai politics, despite the collapse of left wing politics in the late 1970s, and why they have experienced deepening internal divisions and a crisis of legitimacy over the course of the past decade. This thesis argues that the Octobrists successfully exploited shifts in the structure of political opportunities over the 1980s and 1990s which allowed them to overcome constraints on their involvement in politics. These former left wing student activists successfully made use of the political skills, social networks, and progressive language which they had developed and refined since the 1970s, in order to gain access to new channels of political influence and power. Above all, they managed to reframe their earlier history as leftist failures and to craft a new political identity as ‘Octobrists’, as heroic fighters for democracy and against authoritarian rule in the 1970s. In examining the rise and deepening of conflicts among the Octobrists, moreover, this thesis traces the shifts in political environment which accompanied the ascendancy and entrenchment of the Thaksin government and the rise of anti-Thaksin mobilisation over the past decade, which undermined the loose unity among Octobrists and created new sources of tension and conflict in their midst. The thesis also shows how the notion of ‘Octobrists’ shifted from an effective rubric for forging a shared identity among former student activists to a rhetorical device for conflict and contestation among former comrades-in-arms.

*'In the spirit of criticism'*

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Nonetheless, by the time I started the fieldwork in 2006, my earlier assumption was demolished. Amidst the rise of the Thais Love Thais (thai rak thai – TRT) government and the battle between the ‘Yellow Shirt’ (anti-Thaksin) and ‘Red Shirt’ (pro-Thaksin) movements, these former left wing student activists split, switched sides and fought fiercely against each other. Some supported the ultra-nationalist, royalist and anti-democracy campaigns of the Yellow Shirts. Other insisted on supporting the TRT and defending Thaksin Shinawatra. At the same time, many turned to the ‘Two-No’ campaign. And above all, they all pointed fingers at each other as betrayers of the left. As one could imagine, at this point, my initial project turned upside-down.

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AOP	Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon)
BP	Bangkok Post
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFD	Confederation for Democracy (samaphan phuea prachathipatai)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNS	Council for National Security
CPD	Campaign for Popular Democracy (khana kamakan ronarong phuea prachathipatai)
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai)
DN	Daily News
EC	Election Commission (khana kamakan kan lueak tang)
EGAT	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (kan fai fa fai phalit haeng prathet thai)
FFT	Farmers' Federation of Thailand (sahaphan chao na chao rai haeng prathet thai)
GDP	Gross domestic product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISOC	Internal Security Operations Command (kong amnuai kan raksa khwam mankhong phai nai <i>or</i> ko oo ro mo no).
KCL	Kom Chad Luek (Sharp Clear Deep)
KH	Khao Hun (Stock News)
KS	Khao Sot (Fresh News)
KT	Krungthep Turakij (Bangkok Biznews)
LWN	Lok Wann (World Today)
MD	Phuchatkan Raiwan (Manager Daily)
MP	Members of Parliament
MR	Matichon Raiwan (Public Opinion Daily)
MS	Matichon Sutsapda (Public Opinion Weekly)
MW	Phuchatkan Raisapda (Manager Weekly)
MWA	Metropolitan Waterworks Authority
NCCC	National Counter-Corruption Commission (khana kamakan pongkan lae prappram kan thucharit haeng chat)
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Broad (sapha phathana sangkhom lae setthakit haeng chat)
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission (khana kamakan sithi manut)
NLA	National Legislative Assembly
NN	Naew Na (Frontline)
NPKC	National Peace Keeping Council
NS	Nation Sutsapda (Nation Weekend)
NSCT	National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai)
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PCT	Prachachat Turakij (Business Nation)

PT	Post Today
SCT	Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nakrian haeng prathet thai)
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SR	Siam Rath (Siam State)
TN	The Nation
TP	Thai Post
TR	Thai Rath (Thai State)
TRT	Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai)
TS	Than Settakij (Economic Foundation)
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship
UN	United Nations

## **Note on Transliteration**

The transliteration of Thai proper names into the Roman alphabet in this thesis may seem inconsistent. There is as yet no universally accepted system of romanisation of Thai words<sup>1</sup>. What I have done in this thesis is firstly follow the Royal Thai General System of Transcription of the Royal Institute of Thailand. Secondly, from time to time, I follow some widely-used and well-known transliterations in order to avoid unnecessary confusion for readers accustomed to these romanised forms. Lastly, I follow the transliterations used by the persons or organisations who own the names. Throughout the thesis, I try to provide readers both the romanisation and the translation. In the case of the names of books and songs, I give the romanisation and then add a translation in brackets. But for political parties and organisations, I instead, put the translation followed by the romanisation.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The current official version of the Thai Royal Institute is constrictive, rigid, and hence highly disputed. Other attempts to find a consensus on this controversial and slippery issue have so far ended in vain. Without a pre-existing satisfactory alternative, one has no choice but to invent one's own system' (Kasian 2001, xiv).

## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Revival of 1970s Thai Octobrists in Contemporary Politics

The Octobrists (khon duean tula) once were, as young activists, a prominent political force in the anti-authoritarian movement on 14th October 1973, which successfully brought about the end of a two-decade-long dictatorship. And between 1973 and 1976, they continued to work closely with left wing labour, farmer and other grassroots movements. However, the escalation of anti-communist suppression measures and the growing ultra-right wing movement ended their efforts with the massacre in Bangkok on 6th October 1973. Subsequently, more than 3,000 student activists eventually joined the revolutionary mission of the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai - CPT). But after the collapse of the CPT in the mid-1980s, most returned home as political failures under a political amnesty granted by the Thai state.

From the end of the 1980s onward, these former student activists reappeared in public, as neither former student activists nor leftist failures, but as ‘Octobrists’. Although the term had been earlier used by these former student activists themselves and the media from time to time, it was officially established and publicly used when Seksan Prasertkul, a former 14th October student leader, coined this term during his talk at the 20th anniversary of 6th October 1976. His initial intention was to use this term as means to lessen the ideological and historical gap and reunify the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October generations (Harnsak n.d., 70–71; *MR* 2003d)<sup>3</sup>. However, as both 14th October 1973 and 6th October 1976 incidents happened in the same month and were interconnected both in terms of people and sequence of events, the term ‘Octobrist’ (khon duean tula) was later popularised and used as a generic term for people acting to support the people’s movements or involved in either incident. It became a term to distinguish and differentiate the 1970s activists from other groups and other generations involved in

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘Octobrist’ is used in the same way that ‘Septembrist’ refers to the mob that took part in the September Massacre of the imprisoned royalists in Paris in September 1792, or that ‘Setembrista’ refers to supporters of the successful revolution in Portugal of September 1836, or that ‘Decembrist’ refers to the 3,000 soldiers who rebelled against Nicholas I’s ascendance to the Russian throne in 1825, or that ‘Octobrist’ (in Russian ‘Oktyabrist’) refers to members of the conservative-liberal Russian political party, the Union of October 17.

politics. And above all, the reintroduction and utilisation of the term ‘Octobrist’ became part of the process of legitimising and democratising this group of people.

More and more Octobrists gradually reappeared as young and outstanding personalities in different careers and professions, and have since revitalised their roles in different political transitions. Several individuals reached top positions in various political parties, governments, cabinets and state agencies as young blood politicians, spin doctors and government officials. The loose network among these Octobrist politicians was one of the few factions in Thai politics which was bound by ideological concerns and occasionally acted behind the scenes to influence certain progressive policies (Ockey 2004, 34-35). Outside state power, many became successful businesspeople and executives in various prestigious private companies. Countless numbers of them worked as outstanding journalists in local and international newspapers and television channels, and as prominent intellectuals in various universities and research institutes (Hirsch 1997; Missingham 2003; Rungrawee 2004; Somchai 2006; Praphat 1998).

Not only managing to establish themselves in their careers, many also participated in different stages of modern Thai political development. By 1992, countless numbers of Octobrist businesspeople, non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers, medical doctors, progressive politicians, etc., both in Bangkok and the provinces, participated and played crucial roles in mobilising the mass uprising against the revival of military influence in electoral politics in May 1992 (Anek 1992; Bamber 1997, 240-242; LoGerfo 2000, 221-252; Mukdawan 1992; Nuannoi 2002; Ockey 2004, 151-171; Thitinan 1997, 216-232).

Throughout the 1990s, Octobrists played vital roles in the rise of social movements (Hewison 2003, 144-145; Missingham 2003, 30; Phumtham 1986, 24-25; Prudhisana and Maneerat 1997, 199-201; Simpkins 2003, 255; Suthy 1995, 121-122; Giles 2003c, 291). Octobrists worked as NGO workers, radical academics and high-ranking staff in the Ministry of Interior who initiated and implemented many community and sustainable development projects (Sangsidh 1998). Many Octobrist progressive businesspeople were involved in environmental mass protests. And those in high-ranking positions in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment also supported movements from within the bureaucracy (Hirsch 1997). Many Octobrist NGO activists, journalists,

senators, academics, businesspeople and Buddhist monks helped in mobilising support for the Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989; Kanokrat 2003; Missingham 2003, 50-1, 91, 105, 131, 135, 148-152, 162-5; Praphat 1998; Rungrawee 2004, 552; Somchai 2006, 60-63). Missingham (2003) argues 'Of the twenty or so NGO activists and academics who work most closely with the AOP, there are a handful, about six or seven, who participated in the flourishing student movement of the mid-70s and joined the CPT insurgency in the forest' (2003, 100-106).

In the political reform of the late 1990s, the role of Octobrists and their networks became even more visible. In the initial stage of the reform, many Octobrist academics and public intellectuals, like Thirayuth Boonmee, became the pioneers in constructing the discourse on 'good governance' and urging cross-class collaboration and interaction among civil society and political institutes for political reform (Connors 2003, chapter 9; Giles 2002). During the reform campaign, Octobrists from various organisations including the Women's Constitution Network (khrueakhai phuying rathathanun), the Campaign for Popular Democracy (khana kamakan ronamong phuea prachathipatai - CPD) and the Confederation for Democracy (samaphan phuea prachathipatai - CFD), the People's Network Against Corruption (khrueakhai prachachon tan khorapchan), the Rural Doctors Society (munlanithi phaet chonnabot), 30 NGOs working on health issues, and business groups also actively participated in support of the movement (Naruemon and Jaran 2002, 492). After the triumph of the campaign, several of them benefitted from the 1997 reformist constitution by accessing state power through new mechanisms created by the reform. Many ran for election as senators. Others obtained positions as members of the National Human Rights Commission (khana kamakan sithi manut - NHRC), and others joined various special governmental advisory committees.

The political power of the Octobrists reached its peak during the 2000s during the rise of the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai - TRT) government. Many Octobrist politicians, spin doctors, campaigners, academics and NGO workers were either directly recruited into the TRT Party or indirectly integrated into political public-policy strategic units or as candidates to become Members of Parliament (MP) (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 93-99; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 66-69, 144-150). There were efforts among the Octobrists to mobilise their political experience and the networks built during the 1970s to formulate successful populist policies and mass support for Thaksin Shinawatra's

government (2001-2006) (Kasian 2004; Giles 2001). And after the landslide victory of the TRT Party in the 2001 election, many obtained prominent positions in the party and in the cabinet.

On the other hand, amidst the conflict between the Yellow Shirt (anti-TRT) and Red Shirt (pro-TRT) movements from 2006 onward, Octobrists became divided. Octobrist politicians and activists who had been inside and in support of the TRT turned themselves into leaders of the National United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (no pho cho - UDD – the Red Shirts). Others who had been dissatisfied with the government opted to promote anti-TRT campaigns. In advocating these movements, they not only fought against the counter movement, but they also severely attacked and mobilised all kinds of means and ideological strategies, even conservative and right wing ones, to delegitimise their former comrades standing on the opposite side. This brought about open conflict among Octobrists and the degradation of the reputation of Octobrists in politics.

Against this backdrop, the survival of the Octobrists and the conflict among them pose a crucial question about the development and transformation of left wing activists in a changing world. While the CPT collapsed and Leftist movements at the global level fell into a sharp decline over the 1980s and 1990s, why did these former left-leaning student activists manage to survive, become revitalised and adapt accordingly? Why are these people still so important and influential after all these years, even when there is no space left for leftist and radical movements in the Thai political context? Nonetheless, after long efforts in building up new power and roles, why did they end up in conflict and a crisis of legitimacy during their participation in the Red-Yellow conflict?

A number of scholars have attempted to answer these questions. In explaining the revival process of the Octobrists, these scholars have focused on three major causal factors: the opening up of new political opportunities; success in mobilising political resources; and their ideological transformation.

The first set of studies argues that successful economic development from the 1960s to the 1980s and political liberalisation in the 1980s provided the conditions for an increase in the roles of Octobrists (Pasuk and Baker 1997, 32-35). By the 1980s, due to

the increase in technical and financial support from international funding, and the government's demand for support from NGOs in development schemes, the NGO sector was expanding rapidly. This opened new space for independent politics, and opportunities to learn new skills while retaining their commitment to social change (Gawin 2004; Shigetomi 2004). Also by the early 2000s, new opportunities offered by TRT power demonstrated the outstanding role of student activists (McCargo and Ukrist 2005; Pasuk and Baker 2004).

A second set of studies attributes their success to the mobilisation of their 1970s political skills, networking and activism, as well as their recently constructed middle class and new political status. The progressive appeal of Octobrist politicians trusted by public was based on their 1970s reputation (Ockey 2004, Chapter 2). The success of Octobrists in current politics is partly due to the accumulation of political experience since 1973 (Nuannoi 2002; Bamber 1997). Octobrists in the NGO sector continued their 1970s activism in pushing forward social change (Prudhisian and Maneerat 1997, 199). Not only their 1970s assets, but the elitist political status obtained from their current careers and professions also explain their success and access to political power and elite networks. The uniqueness of the medical doctor's network has helped some Octobrists to access the royal family network and successfully promote their reformist agendas (Bamber 1997; Nuannoi 2002).

The last and most distinguished group of writers has explained the success of the Octobrists as an adjustment to and adoption of non-radical ideas, strategies and alliances. In acquiring successful political career paths, those within state mechanisms successfully adjusted to bureaucratic systems and norms. Although many of these Octobrists had initially attempted to work with progressive political parties and supported policies benefiting the underprivileged, they were barely able to deliver real change in political and policy processes. Those in party politics collaborated with corrupt politicians and aligned with political cliques and parties. They adjusted to the norms of coalition and money politics. During the Thaksin government, Octobrist politicians and political advisors inside the TRT government strongly insisted on supporting the TRT government and Prime Minister Thaksin in spite of strong evidence of corruption and abusive measures by the government (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 93-95; Giles 2001; Giles 2003b, 211).

In increasing and retaining political roles in and power for the social movement and political reform process, Octobrists shifted toward a liberal reformist direction rather than pushing forward radical change and acting as agents of that change. Successful Octobrist government officials, especially those in the medical sector, shifted to allying themselves with the liberal reformist elites and promoted reformist campaigns both inside their own organisations and in national political reform campaigns. They touched only on apolitical activities, such as community work, which was rather more reformist than ‘politics’ (Bamber 1997). Octobrists in the NGO sector were then dominated by neo-liberalism and liberal democratic politics. Many of them transformed themselves into neo-liberal service providers and some even promoted a neo-liberalist agenda in their development work (Giles 2003c). They shifted toward collaborating with the reformist elite and government, as in the collaboration between NGOs and the National Economic and Social Development Board (sapha phathana sangkhom lae setthakit haeng chat - NESDB). Prominent Octobrist intellectuals like Seksan Prasertkul and Thirayuth Boonmee, former 14<sup>th</sup> October student leaders, cooperated with the Local Development Institute (sathaban phathana thongthin) led by liberal reformist elite and leading figures in the school of localism in promoting a localism agenda in development work at the grassroots level. Moreover, through human rights organisations like the Union for Civil Liberty (samakhom sitthi seriphap khong prachachon), they moved from leftist ideas toward moderate civil society and a humanist left. They collaborated with liberal humanist intellectuals and activists in advocating democracy through the perspective of institutionalised human rights (Connors 2003, 216-241). In responding to the economic crisis in 1997, many in the NGO and academic sectors (Anek 1993b; Seksan 1995; Thirayuth 1998) echoed and advocated the same message with alternative rural localism, communitarian-liberalism, reformism and liberal nationalism in rejecting global capitalism, consumerism and neo-liberal ideas and mechanisms like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Hewison 2002, 147-149; Narong 2000a and 2000b; Giles 1997, Chapter 7; Giles 1998; Giles 2003a; Yuk Sri-Ariya 1998). At the same time, they accepted the logic of the ‘free market’, promoting community businesses as niches in the world market (Giles 2003b).

In promoting the 1990s social movements, Octobrists working in extra-parliamentary politics rejected the grand narrative of socialism and abandoned earlier ideas of

revolutionary and class-based movements including seizing state power, organized political parties, and hierarchical and centralised structures (Pasuk 2002, 33; Praphat 1998, 86; Giles 2003a, 13-17; Giles 2003c). Firstly, they applied a different democratic discourse including direct, participatory and grassroots democracy to legitimise non-state actors in the political process (Naruemon and Jaran 2002, 495). Secondly, they promoted a 'New Social Movement' discourse, non-violent strategies and concepts of civil society, (Baker 2000, 17-18; Missingham 2003, 30; Pasuk 2002, 25; Simkins 2003; Suthy 1995, 121-122; Giles 2003c). They applied cross-class networking strategies and identity/cultural politics, ran single-issue campaigns, and built a loose organisational network, all as parts of the stratagems for their movement (Baker 2000; Missingham 2003; Nalinee, Sulaiporn, Siriporn 2002, 188; Naruemon and Jaran 2002, 468; Pasuk 2002, 25; Praphat 1998; Prudhisana and Maneerat 1997; Rungrawee 2004; Sayamol, Atchara and Kritsada 2002). Thirdly, they developed a new approach toward 'the state'. They argued that it was possible to seize the state without a revolution; they believed that they could change the state from within and developed a strong alliance with reformist technocrats and business sectors (McCargo 2002a, 4-5). Fourthly, Octobrist NGOs were influenced by and worked in mainstream liberal and moderate ideas of neo-liberalism, nationalist localism, communitarianism, moderate civil society and the humanist left, post-modernism, anarchism, autonomism, etc., in NGO development work (Connors 2003, 231-233; Hewison 2002, 144-145).

In the political reform movement and the drafting of 1997 constitution, Octobrists from various sectors joined hands with a liberal reformist elite in pushing forward reform nationalism and an 'elitist perspective-ideal of electoral democracy' (Somchai 2002). They were in support of the constitution which tended to exclude the military, politicians and the uneducated lower classes as sources of corruption and money politics from electoral politics. They advocated several liberal elitist components of the 1997 constitution, including the requirement for MP candidates to have a university degree, a party list electoral system, non-elected independent political and expert functions, etc., (Ockey 2004, 166-170). Even Octobrists who had worked with radical NGOs and social movements, like the Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP), also went along with the reformist movement. They actively facilitated the participation of the AOP in constitution drafting and consultation through the 'School of Politics' (Missingham 2003, 159-162). Despite initially representing radical elements in the

reform process, these Octobrists were able to insert almost no progressive and radical goals into the 1997 constitution. Their support for the process turned them into instrumental agents in the reform (Connors 2002, 38-39, 44-45 and 49-52).

In addition to coalition politics and liberal reformism, many Octobrists even took a non-democratic and liberal royalist direction

. In the anti-TRT campaign, Octobrists marched to de-legitimise the elected corrupt government of the TRT. They condemned electoral politics as a part of Thailand's political problem. They played leading roles in advocating conservative, right wing, 'quasi-monarchist' and royalist ideas to strike against Thaksin and their former comrades in the TRT as anti-monarchist and republican as a tactic to block the power of the TRT government (McCargo 2009, 11 and 19).

Aside from the rise of Octobrists, this literature attempts to explain the conflict and divergent trajectories among the Octobrists. However, it focuses mainly on their ideological transformation and deviation from former radicalism. Furthermore, it treats these shifts as sources of the recent conflict and paths of their regressive ideological moves.

Firstly, the remaining conservative and dogmatic impulses during the 1970s shifted Octobrists toward reformist and conservative ideas. Decisions to join political parties led by capitalist and nationalist businesspeople, particularly the TRT, were stated to be the result of ideas for seizing state power which developed in the 1970s. The pursuit of cross-class alliances with 'progressive capitalists' over and above 'class struggle' was influenced by the Stalinist politics of the CPT, which pushed for a revolution of 'the national democratic state' (Giles 2001). The legacy of 'Leftist Nationalism' from Maoist and Stalinist ideas reappeared among and laid the ideological basis for Octobrist NGO workers in supporting nationalist ideas and allying with a wide 'democratic' coalition dominated by domestic capitalists and small businessmen in an anti-IMF movement in the 1997 economic crisis (Giles 1998; Giles 2003a).

Secondly, the shift toward non-radical ideas was a decision to abandon the leftist ideas dominated by the Maoist-CPT. During the 1970s, student activists did not have sufficient opportunity to explore different shades and schools of leftist ideas owing to

the rigid radicalisation of Maoism, problematic violent revolutionary strategies and the top-down/undemocratic/hierarchical command structure of the CPT (Giles 2003b). Subsequently, amidst the decline of the CPT, these left-leaning activists found themselves in an ideological and leadership crisis without other leftist ideological options. This ideological crisis forced them to abandon earlier leftist ideas and search for alternative ideas and organisations. Some who went into further education after abandoning the CPT learnt new ideas and criticisms of the Maoist and Soviet left (Hewison 2002, 144-145). Some even rebuilt leftist ideas along Stalinist lines (Giles 2003b). Octobrist NGO workers moved to autonomist ways and anarchist ideas of New Social Movement, non-violent strategies, and ideas of post-modernism and civil society rather than a unified structure to avoid militant political strategies with the rigid Maoist authoritarian structure of the CPT and dogmatic left wing organisations of the past (Baker 2000, 17-18; Simpkins 2003; Giles 2003c).

Thirdly, changing political conditions after the collapse of the CPT, when liberal democracy became the only game in town, transformed Octobrists in a non-radical direction (Anderson 1993; Rane 1999). After returning home, they faced conservative coalitions and state-promoted capitalist liberal democracy. They found out that there was no room for the Left (Giles, Suthachai et al. 2001). With the rise of the liberal democratic government in the 1980s, Thai politics moved away from a military-authoritarian regime. The Thai state started a conciliation process with student activists through a political amnesty, promoted local development and opened space for electoral politics (Hewison 2002, 144-145). It seemed unnecessary to struggle against the state with the same confrontational and militant strategy (Connors 2003, Chapter 11). Class analysis as learned from the Maoist CPT was no longer a useful tool for challenging state power (Rane 1999). By the 1990s, the global and domestic context shifted toward liberal reformist, pluralist ideas and neo-liberalism, and the Thai state successfully re-articulated its interests according to these new conditions. Octobrists shifted in these directions accordingly. Initially, they argued that this shift was only for tactical reasons. They assumed that by strengthening civil society, developing a network and gaining acceptance from business and the bureaucracy through the issues of rights, participatory democracy and sustainable development, they could reduce state power from within (Giles 2003c). This group of leaders contended that the transformation of their ideologies and practices was actually the result of their failure in challenging the state

and elite politics. Somsak Jeamteerasakul (2007b) argues that after two decades, the Octobrists in the anti-TRT campaign had already become reconciled with the monarchy and military, rejecting electoral politics, and promoting localism and nationalism. Unfortunately, in doing so, they came to look at the state as neutralised by various independent forces. Giles (2003b) argues that the state is not neutral. Instead, it is dominated by a capitalist class. Thus, instead of radically challenging the state and ruling elite, their only course of action was negotiating and avoiding conflict with state power (McCargo 1998, 5-9; Somchai 2002).

Fourthly, the clash among these Octobrists in the late 2000s was long developed through a path for survival and promotion of their new interests. The Octobrist middle class and businessmen who sprung up in the early 1990s were shaped by consumer capitalism and their concerns were mainly based on their economic interests rather than democracy (Ockey 2004, 151-171; Giles 2003a, 18). Those in party politics affiliated with conventional corrupt and capitalist political parties were in it purely for their personal gain from party political games (Giles 2003b). In the same vein, those Octobrists who collaborated with the Thai state, downplayed political issues, and shifted toward more reformist ideas of participatory democracy and alternative development did so because they relied on international funding, won acceptance from business and the state, avoided conflict with the state, and achieved their desire to be seen as legitimate actors and to be involved in major policy formation (Connors 2002, 49-52; Giles 2003a, 13-17). Also, in sustaining organisations and movements, they turned themselves into cheap neo-liberal service providers and followed the agendas of international funding agencies (Kanokrat 2003; Sanguan and Surapon 2001, 15-21).

Although this earlier literature offers us guidelines and a starting point for examining why and how these Octobrists resumed their importance and eventually clashed in Thai politics, there are two general limitations. Firstly, these writings are not based on any serious empirical research. Most rely on limited sources of information and methods of data collection. Furthermore, the scope of these studies is limited to a particular set of Octobrists rather than taking different groups into account.

Secondly, there is no comprehensive theoretical framework integrating various factors in the analysis of these Octobrists. In analysing the revival of Octobrists, each of these

readings chooses to look at Octobrists through a selective approach. As for the question of conflict among the Octobrists, the explanation was directed by specific political methods rather than systematic research directed at the quest of conflict. The first group comprises the works of liberal and modernist agitators. Although they recognise these people with a student activist background from the 1970s, they treat and explain their rise in contemporary politics through a modernist approach as newly emerging in a liberal democratic context. Their explanation is mainly dominated by newly opening opportunities in democratic politics and the liberal world and specific tangible assets from the 1970s which are relevant to the demands including skills and networks. They mention only broadly leftist ideas, political networks and skills, and then apply them in static terms in explaining how these activists re-emerged and rose to prominence by exploiting these resources (Ockey 2004, 34). Moreover, these liberal advocates are content to explain the de-radicalisation among the Octobrists as a progressive step abandoning earlier violent and extremist leftist views for a more liberal and democratic direction (Gohlert 1991; Hirsch 1997; Seri 1986). The second set of literature was produced by the Octobrists themselves and chooses to consider merely subjective data and factors. These reflect their personal experience in returning to politics and their disappointment with their former comrades who became less radical, at least when compared to themselves. The last set of literature is an effort by leftist scholars and advocates who carry expectations that the Octobrists would continue to be radical actors. They look at deviation from the radical direction of the Octobrists as disillusionment. In illustrating the return and changes among these people, they focus mainly on factors explaining what went wrong with radicalisation during the 1970s, why they rejected the idea of class struggle as an agent for changing the state, and how hegemonic elite ideologies of neo-liberalism and reformism dominated their revival and eventually caused conflict and deviation from earlier aims and goals.

In summary, with a lack of systematic research, excessively personal attitudes and political agendas, earlier writings focus mainly on specific explanatory factors. They could not construct a comprehensive analysis of how the Octobrists managed to continue their political activities and influence, and why they ended up in a crisis of legitimacy. On the one hand, each set of literature misses opportunities to consider and integrate a wider range of explanatory factors. On the other hand, through limited data and analytical views, earlier studies are prone to treat the Octobrists as a homogenous

group. They overlook the diversity among them which brings about a process of contestation in their post-activist lives.

### **1.1 Social Movement Theory framework and the Octobrists**

In filling gaps in the literature mentioned above and constructing a more comprehensive analytical framework, this thesis finds inspiration from social movement theory. The scholarly literature on social movements provides useful analytical tools for understanding the emergence, development and transformation of the Octobrists. For example, writings on ‘cycles’ of mobilisation offer guidance by showing that mobilisation and demobilisation of social movements unfold in a predictable fashion. This is a useful starting point for understanding the Octobrists, not only in terms of their mobilisation but also their demobilisation. In the mobilisation phase, the cycle of contention begins when political opportunities are opened for well-placed ‘early risers,’ when their claims resonate with those of significant others, and when these give rise to objective or explicit coalitions among disparate actors and create or reinforce instability in the elite. In understanding the emergence and evolution of Octobrists and their mobilisation, this literature suggests we should consider heightened conflict, broad sectoral and geographical diffusion, the expansion of the repertoire of contention, the appearance of new organisations and the empowerment of old ones, the creation of new ‘master frames’ linking the actions of disparate groups to one another, and intensified interaction between challengers and the state, lending to particular state responses a key pivoting role in determining which direction the cycle will take. In understanding the decline of the Octobrists, social movement theorist Sidney Tarrow identifies several key factors, including exhaustion and fractionalisation/polarisation, institutionalisation and violence, and repression and facilitation (Tarrow 1998, 144-150).

In explaining the cycle of mobilisation and demobilisation of the Octobrists, this thesis selectively draws concepts from the social movement literature including political opportunity structure, mobilisation structures, and framing. These terms provide systematic frameworks in exploring the origin, emergence and transformation of, and conflict among, Octobrists. Rather than emphasising the grievance-based conceptions of social movements, it takes issues, actors, and constraints as given, and focuses on how

the actors develop strategies and interact with their environment to pursue their interests (Canel 1992, 38-39), and mobilisation processes and the formal organisational manifestations of these processes (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 3-4).

First of all, notion of political opportunity structure helps to identify political opportunities for collective action by the Octobrist movement and the constraints affecting conflict among them. The term 'political opportunity structure' means a set of conditions that shape the prospects for collective action and the forms of movements, foremost among which were the opportunity-threat to challengers and facilitation-repression by authorities. The model focuses on an interaction of movement and institutionalised politics (McAdam, McCarthy and Zale 1996, 2-3; Tilly 1978, Chapter 3, 4, 6). Political opportunity is significant as a key explanatory variable of the timing of collective action and outcomes of movement activity (McAdam 1996a, 24-31). Social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded (McAdam, McCarthy and Zale 1996, 2-3).

Scholars of social movements argue that shifts in political opportunity are crucial for enabling and impelling mobilisation. Proponents of the model (e.g., Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1983; Tilly 1978) say the timing and path of a movement is largely dependent upon the opportunities afforded insurgents by the shifting institutional structure and ideological disposition of those in power. The political opportunity is also created and increased by movements and for themselves (McAdam 1996a, 23 and 34; Tarrow 1994, 82).

At the domestic level, the change in nature of the state power structure and life-course of the Octobrists was crucial. In understanding changes in state attributes, one needs to observe six different classifications of political opportunity structure including the reduction in the degree of repression by the state (Tarrow 1998, 80), the opening of institutional access to new actors, realignment/shifts within elite politics, new potential elite alliances, splits/conflicts/divisions within the elite, and the decline of the state's capacity and facility in policy implementation (Rucht 1996; Tarrow 1994, 761; Tarrow 1996, 53; Tarrow 1998, 71).

A second element of the literature on social movements which helps to illuminate the trajectory of the Octobrists is the notion of ‘mobilising structure.’ Here the focus rests on the collecting, assembling and use of resources (material and/or non-material), and the dissemination of information within a movement, above all for sustaining movement activities and achieving its goals and the explicit purposes of a movement’s interests (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 3; McCarthy 1996, 141; Rucht 1996, 186-187). For movement to start and survive, insurgents must be able to create a more enduring organisational structure to sustain collective action (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 13).

In analysing the process of the re-establishment of the Octobrist movement, this focus on ‘mobilising structures’ helps us to explore the ability of the Octobrists to recruit and sustain mobilisation among former activists. In the case of the Octobrists, this thesis identifies ‘pre-existing social networks’ (McAdam 1988; Snow et al. 1980), especially ‘schoolboy’ networks (Tarrow 1994, 135), as important infrastructures<sup>4</sup>. These personal networks drew on previous experiences of collective action, facilitated communication and exchange, and kept the movement’s identity alive even when public campaigns were not in progress (Diani 1992, 110-111). Furthermore, informal and personal networks contained strong ‘netness’, the denseness of their social relationship foundations linking movement constituencies to movement institutional ties (McCarthy 1996, 142-143; Tilly 1978). Above all, these informal networks were a source of ‘social capital’. Personal networks and commitments counted for much in the maintenance of activism among the Octobrists, much like the 1960s activists who were still active in Western Europe or the United States (US) in the 1980s, who were embedded in networks of former activists, and who kept their faith by keeping in touch. Those who lacked such networks, whether for ideological or organisational reasons, were less likely to remain active in politics in the long term (Tarrow 1998, 168-169).

Furthermore, scholarship on ‘mobilising structures’ draws attention to the dynamism of the mobilising structures of the Octobrists in terms of formal and/or informal processes,

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<sup>4</sup> Learning from emergence and organization of American independent movement and France’s revolution, American civil rights movement and American New Left, the informal settings, friendship networks and relationships, and loosely tied networks involved across groups and classes are important, sometime even more important than to the tightly knit ones in explaining the accomplishment of the movements (McAdam et al. 1996, 4; Tarrow 1994, 49; Tilly 1978).

mechanisms or organisational bases. The form of organisation, it has been noted, can be influenced by the history of organisational infrastructures and the relationship between organisational form and type of movement (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 4). For example, loose and informal networks may function well during a period of demobilisation and repressive conditions when one has no legal status (Tarrow 1994, 49). However, the informal can be developed into formal collective structures. Changes in repressive and supportive conditions cause alternation between informal and formal forms of organisation (Tarrow 1994, 49). The formalisation of a movement is a part of organisational development and a by-product of professionalisation, internal differentiation and integration in order to increase their capacity in mobilising political resources to sustain the movement. At the initial phase, organisational networks tend to be informally structured. However, gradually they learn that an informal movement linked by personal networks is rather difficult to organise and vulnerable to external conditions compared to other formal structures and links (Diani 1992, 110-111). In order to strengthen the movement and attract public attention to their cause, they have to create their constituency and elite patronage on their own either by explicit consensus mobilisation or simultaneously (Kriesi 1996, 154).

The specific mobilising structures of the Octobrist movement have functioned to mobilise resources and promote collective action. Firstly, different individuals, groups and organisations within the Octobrist networks have functioned as connecting points in exchanging information and resources in order to support the revival of the Octobrist movement in three major dimensions including inter-organisational exchanges, individual/social movement organisation exchanges, and personal exchanges/networks. Inter-organisational exchanges have consisted of direct exchanges through personal ties of friendship or overlapping membership in developing a common understanding of the problem issues they confront. From time to time, they join forces to lend resources to other groups and access the media.

Secondly, all actors, organisations and networks within the Octobrist movement have collaborated in forming what scholars call a 'movement family'. A 'movement family' is a free-standing protest campaign group which links networks, organisations, and caucuses together in order to coordinate events and efforts (McCarthy 1996, 143-144). Under this concept, we then understand how different actors within the Octobrist

movement created specific lobbying groups which connect and bring together their diverse membership to support the movement.

Finally, the Octobrist movement has functioned by alternately using various types of movement technologies. At the broadest level, the movement has functioned through a strategy package of ‘action technologies’, sets of knowledge about how to carry out a particular action and what its consequences are likely to be. There are two types of action technologies. Production technologies are sets of knowledge about ways of achieving goals, such as lobbying, demonstrations, strikes, or attending public hearings. Mobilisation technologies are sets of knowledge about ways of accumulating the resources (such as time and money) necessary for production technologies. In pushing forward specific goals, different actors within the Octobrist movement have selectively chosen either ‘insider’ tactics (e.g., lobbying, litigating) or ‘outsider’ tactics (e.g., demonstrations, attempts to get media coverage) according to the nature and degree of conflict in the political environment they have faced, internal organisational resources, the character of their membership, principal sources of financial support (Oliver and Marwell 1992, 251-255), and past knowledge and experience of mobilisation technology.

The third notion of the literature on social movement is ‘framing’. It helps to explain how the Octobrists constructed and utilised cognitive and discursive frames to promote their movement as well as how these processes triggered changes and conflicts among them. A ‘frame’ is any set of ideas, beliefs, problem issues, and movement symbols which were raised in the movement (Zald 1996, 262). Frames are the specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behaviour and events in an evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action (Zald 1996, 261–262). A framing process is a process in which frames are constructed in response to the particular purposes and goals of the movement (Tarrow 1994, 123). Here the thesis focuses on two major dimensions of the framing process: framing as a resource mobilising strategy; and framing as a means of collective identity and movement construction.

First of all, ‘strategic framing’ and ‘framing alignment’ offer useful concepts in explaining forms of resource mobilisation. Literally, strategic framing is a process in

making a linkage between culture, ideology and frame. Practically, a frame assigns meaning to and interprets relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystanders' support, and to demobilise antagonists. Strategic framing guides us to understand how a frame is used as an active tactic and strategy in constructing meaning and legitimacy, and defining a pathway for initiating, promoting, and sustaining change for the movement (McAdam 1996b, 338-339).

Framing alignment is a process by which participants in social protests and movements construct any given set of ideas, beliefs, problematic issues and symbols, and put these into function (Snow 1986). It functions both in bringing the movement's 'message' (demands and grievances) to power holders and the public (Snow and Benford 1992, 136), and in providing motivation-generating energy for participation in the movement (Zald 1996, 265). The process can range between interpretations from context and from the flow of pre-existing ideas or beliefs, and the inherited culture and values of the target population, as well as those related to the new frames and values of the movement in responding to the particular purposes and goals of the movement (Baud and Rutten 2004, 1-18 and 197-217; Snow 1986; Tarrow 1994, 123).

To be more specific, there are four framing alignment processes which help us to understand the Octobrist movement. The first is frame bridging, which involves the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. It manages to create the sense of 'we-ness' among people with different orientations through overlap of individual political identities and the collective identity of a movement (Klatch 1999, 6). The second is frame amplification. It refers to the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame on a particular issue, problem or set of event. The third is frame extension. It involves the expansion of the boundaries of a 'movement's primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents'. The fourth is frame transformation. This refers to a redefinition of 'activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework, such that they are now seen by the participants to be quite something else' (Snow et al. 1986, 467-474).

Second of all, the framing process helps in the construction of a collective identity among participants and in the formulation of a movement structure. It builds up a collective identity as an incentive to participate in the movement and interpretive orientations linking individuals and the movement. Collective identities provide congruent and complementary sets of individual interests, values, and beliefs and movement activities, goals, and ideology (Snow 1986; Snow et al. 1986, 464; Friedman and McAdam 1992, 156). This overcomes the argument that individuals join collective action only when they expect the private benefits of participation to exceed the cost. In reality, there is also a collective identity benefit in being part of the movement. The nature of collective identities produced by social movements changes over time. Initially, framing works in attracting new recruits and sustaining supporters. A successful movement usually does not create attractive collective identities from scratch. A new collective identity is planted in the soil of pre-existing collective identities, and to an extent it is embedded within them. The most important decision is to define the boundaries of the group, whether inclusive or exclusive. Eventually, a collective identity becomes a public good and faces the free-rider problem. Once a movement has managed to fashion an identity, it is difficult to control its consumption unless it is a highly exclusive one. In effect, the collective identity becomes a public good that all can consume without contributing to its production (Friedman and McAdam 1992, 156-157 and 161-169).

However, not all framing efforts manage to mobilise resources and constituencies. The term 'frame resonance' helps in analysing how and why the Octobrist movement successfully mobilised on some occasions while at other times the framing efforts fell on deaf ears and may even have been counterproductive (Snow and Benford 1988, 198-210). Frame resonance comprises core framing tasks, infrastructural constraints of belief systems, and phenomenological constraints. 'Core framing' tasks mean robustness, completeness and thoroughness of the framing efforts (Klandermans 1984). The success of a mobilising campaign relies upon its ability to effectively produce 'diagnostic', 'prognostic' and 'motivational' framings. 'Diagnostic framing' involves identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality. 'Prognostic framing' is a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem as well as identification of strategies, tactics, and targets which need to be pursued. 'Motivational framing' is a call to arms and rationale for engaging in ameliorative or collective action and to go beyond the

diagnosis and prognosis. Since the agreement about the causes and solutions to a particular problem does not automatically produce collective action, it follows that consensus mobilisation does not necessarily yield to mobilisation (Snow and Benford 1988, 200–202).

The second component of framing resonance is the infrastructural constraints of belief systems comprising levels of centrality and interrelatedness. With respect to centrality, the effectiveness of the framing process depends upon the larger belief system. If the values or beliefs the movement seeks to promote or defend are of low importance within the larger belief system, the mobilisation potential is weakened considerably. With respect to interrelatedness, if the framing effort links to only one core belief or value, then the movement is vulnerable to being discounted. In order to deal with this dilemma and expand their potential constituency, movements may extend the boundaries of their primary framework by incorporating values that were initially incidental to its central objectives (Snow and Benford 1988, 205-206).

The third feature is phenomenological constraints. The successful frame needs to consider the relevance of the frame to the world and life situation of the participants. There are three interrelated but analytically distinct constraints that bear upon the issue of relevancy including empirical credibility, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity. Empirical credibility refers to the fit between the framing and events in the world. Experiential commensurability relates to whether the frame can compete in a framing dispute. Does it suggest answers and solutions to troublesome events and situations and harmonise with the things which participants have been or are currently experiencing? Or is the framing too abstract and distant from the everyday experiences of potential participants? Narrative fidelity is a framing that resonates with cultural narrations, with the stories, myths, and folk tales that are part and parcel of one's cultural heritage (Snow and Benford 1988, 207–210).

Furthermore, the success of the framing process in promoting the rise to prominence of the Octobrists has relied heavily on how far it is able to open up new political opportunities. One significant purpose of the framing process is to promote changes in the prevailing cultural climate, the history of the country and issues of concern. In short,

inserting new framing should help in promoting a new political climate and expanding cultural opportunities (Gamson and Mayer 1996, 279).

Beside benefits from the framing process, it is necessary to consider another of its consequences toward both the movement and its frame specialists<sup>5</sup>. At the movement level, de-radicalisation and changes of political goals were the consequences of playing roles as popular intellectuals and specialists in the framing process. A social movement is the product of the interaction of different social and political groups. Therefore, acting as popular intellectuals in a social movement, the Octobrists had to attract many groups with different backgrounds. At the same time, they had to compromise with diverse alliances, opponents and media. During this process, they ran the risk of losing their ideological coherence, or being incorporated into hegemonic politics and mainstream society. From time to time, in extending their frame to link with the wider belief system of liberal democracy, they overextended the frame in a liberal direction (Snow and Benford 1988, 205–206).

At an individual level, one has to bear in mind that politics is personal. Personal consequences and disillusioned memories of post-intensive participation in a political and revolutionary movement affected individuals differently. On return from a revolution, individuals faced a ‘rebound effect’ or threw themselves into a public and private life which was different from their time with the movement. Furthermore, they encountered disillusionment, due to the gap between the ambition of their earlier leftist movement and actual outcomes (Tarrow 1994, 164-165).

In addition, the transformation of the Octobrists came as a result of the integration of new ideas they learnt from their political exile, new class status and new political settings. The construction of post-1970s networks often went beyond the activists’ original movement membership. The framing process suggests post-revolutionary life turned activists upside down and brought them to connect with new social ties which immediately took them away from their radical lifestyles and ideas. Their private sphere was expanded. Furthermore, new social institutions established on their return forced

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<sup>5</sup> A framing specialist is person who develops, borrows, adapts, and reworks interpretive frames that promote collective action and that define collective interest and identities, rights and claims (Baud and Rutten 2004, 6).

these people into a new type of political socialisation. This allowed activists to select a good deal from past positions and to be engaged in networks of international debate to internal party politics, and to socialism as theory and praxis (Hite 2000, 129). Furthermore, changes in class affiliation bring about a transformation of political stances among activists. The political behaviour and the diversity of the leftist movement were also in some measure determined by their class character (Mars 1998, 39-40).

Aside from transformation, the framing process also caused conflict among the Octobrists. Although the framing process may help a social movement to forge a collective identity and specific form of solidarity, social movements are diverse and heterogeneous, and they change over time. A social movement is an outcome of constant tension between diverging orientations and different sets of belief and culture (Diani 1992, 111-112). Therefore, a frame is generated by a diverse set of actors in relation to a variety of audiences inside and outside a movement. Often, the framing process is competitive and contested (Diani 1992, 111-112; Gamson and Mayer 1996, 283; Zald 1996, 269). Thereafter, in participating in these frame competitions, the Octobrists were naturally at risk of fighting against each other in promoting their agendas and ideas.

In summary, the scholarly literature on social movements provides an analytical framework for understanding how the Octobrists successfully maintained their political significance. As we shall see, the Octobrists exploited shifts in the structure of political opportunities over the past few decades while drawing on the strengths of the mobilising structures developed in the 1970s. The Octobrists also engaged in a process of constructing and utilising frames in reviving their political roles upon their return from the failed revolutionary mission of the 1970s. The social movement literature also helps to explain how competition and confrontation among Octobrists eventually developed.

## **1.2 Research methods and techniques**

In conducting research on the Thai Octobrists, this thesis pays attention to three major interrelated approaches and methods to gather information for analysis: press reports and other written documentary materials, oral histories, interviews, and discourse analysis.

First of all, this thesis draws on documents written by outsiders from various perspectives including newspapers, related research, printed matter and archives. The thesis draws on interviews, self-written documents (diaries and short stories), organisation materials of different political clubs and movements during the 1970s (pamphlets, meeting minutes, papers and political statements), and other documents related to their recent revival, political transition and commemorative celebrations of the 1970s events. In addition to documentary research, this research has also drawn on ethnographic and participant observation. By attending reunion parties of these Octobrists, commemoration ceremonies of revolutionary bases, exclusive political meetings, and 6<sup>th</sup> October commemorative conferences, the author managed to find additional sources of information and insight beyond written materials otherwise available.

Secondly, the thesis draws upon oral histories. Through in-depth interviews, the author gathered information on a specific period or a single aspect of an individual's political biography and socialisation over his/her life course by which individuals construct a core self that is political (della Porta 1992, 168–172; Klatch 1999, 6). On the one hand, these interviews provide insight into the individuals' own understanding of their political life trajectories, including why they came to think about politics and their political roles as they did. On the other hand, the interviews relate the individual narratives to the broader questions of political identity formation in changing historical and political contexts (Hite 2000, xix). In this research, oral history is a method of studying the construction and transformation of an individual's political identity and activism.

However, in drawing on oral histories, the thesis confronts several problematic issues including the reliability of sources, the representation of the sample, the comparability

of the results of interviews, and the degree of manipulation in the presentation and interpretations of the results. To overcome these difficulties, one should compare different biographies, use an 'inter-disciplinary approach' to evaluate interviewees' interpretations (della Porta 1992, 181) and cross-check data from interviewees with other sources of information that consider key informants from different types of social groups, gender and form of participation. Thereafter, while acknowledging the value of memories, the thesis is based on a critical examination of the correspondence between interviewees' accounts and other sources of information.

Although it was impossible to conduct interviews with all Octobrists in this project, as there are more than 3,000 of them, the author tried to cover a wide range of people who can represent the diversity of the Octobrists. Firstly, representatives from both the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generations were approached and interviewed. The generation who actively participated in the 14<sup>th</sup> October anti-military movement in 1973 represents those who were socialised through a wide range of political ideologies ranging from liberal-royalist, social democratic and New Left. The 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generation comprises those who were radicalised after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and focused mainly on Maoist ideas. Furthermore, in each generation, the author tried to cover people with different functions including both student leaders and rank-and-file members of various political clubs, socialist-oriented parties, and informal leftist groups. Secondly, the author interviewed Octobrists who either joined the armed struggle of the CPT after 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976, or secretly supported clandestine activities of the revolutionary movement in the cities, or even those who kept a low profile. This research has tried to select people who worked in as many different revolutionary bases, functions and positions as possible. The last selection criterion was the political setting and degree of political engagement on return to contemporary politics. Efforts were made to select people from as many different political settings as possible both in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. Also, the author interviewed Octobrists with different degrees of success and effort in recovering political power and status as well as in participating in 4 major democratic developments and transitions: the mass movement and pressure groups in the 1992 May event; the development of the Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) and people's democracy; the constitutional drafting process during the political reform of 1997; and the rise of the Thaksin Shinawatra government. The interviews covered Octobrists ranging from those who became leading

political figures, popular intellectuals, and prominent NGO workers, to rank-and-file participants in different political transitions and activities of the Octobrist movement.

In conducting interviews, this project started with contacts and names of activists found through archival research. Octobrists were then located according to the different criteria mentioned above. The interviews took place from November 2006 to May 2007. Each interview lasted from one to six hours. Some informants were interviewed twice. Further interviews were conducted after the first draft to obtain current information about many activists in the sample. The texts of the intensive interviews form the basis of the conceptualisation of individual political identities and their relationship to the political process. Unreferenced quotations from activists come from the researcher's interviews. Pseudonyms for those who chose to remain anonymous have been used throughout the thesis to maintain continuity.

In conducting the interviews, there are two main difficulties particularly when interviewing leading Octobrist figures. First of all, the research took place during the peak of political conflict among Octobrists where those in the anti-TRT movement were using right wing tactics attacking the leftist background of those in the TRT government. Therefore, many leading Octobrist politicians declined to give interviews on their past and the current political conflict situation. Secondly, many prominent Octobrist popular intellectuals and NGO workers refused to give an interview after reviewing the interview and research questions. They insisted that they had repeatedly answered these questions several times in their writings and in the press, even though many questions challenged their earlier writings and interviews. Those who agreed to talk either repeated what they had already said in their earlier work and avoided responding to critical questions about their past leftist history and background as well as the problematic process of Octobrist construction. On the one hand, one can argue that this problem is a limitation of the research. On the other hand, by saying nothing or saying the same thing, leading Octobrist figures demonstrated their intention to keep the image of Octobrists that they had already constructed and the way they want us to understand their past and present. This is similar to Ross's findings in her studies of the social memory and amnesia of May'68 in France. She decided not to conduct interviews. She argues that those people who benefit from the re-writing of 1968 history did not want to talk about it. In dealing with this limitation, this research follows

suggestions from Ross by relying on the public record (Ross 2002, 17). Especially in case of leading Thai Octobrists and prominent figures, there are countless examples of testimonies, writing, diaries, documentary footage, memoirs, and interviews.

In-depth interviews focused on six sets of issues. The first took up the demographic background of activists including family background and dynamic, parent's political beliefs, and early political and gender socialisation. The second set centred on political involvement as well as networks, skills and ideological development during their time with the 14<sup>th</sup> October anti-military movement, the leftist movement between 1973 and 1976, and the clandestine activities and conflict within the CPT. The third set of questions focused on their political revival after the decline of the CPT from the end of the 1980s onward. The questions asked about the struggle to recover their social and political status in a new setting, and political participation and positions during the 1992 May people's uprising, the rise of social movements, the late 1990s political reform, and the rise of the Thaksin government. The fourth set was their interpretation and standpoint amidst the conflict during the rise of the Thaksin and the anti-Thaksin movement and above all conflict among the Octobrist generation. The fifth looked at their roles and attitudes toward the construction of an Octobrist identity and discourse. The last was their views on their own ideological transformation by recounting their life histories and then discussing their views of democracy, new social movement, and socialism, and their vision and concerns for Thailand's future.

The last method to be employed in the thesis was discourse analysis. This method was used to unpack the political ideologies and world views of Octobrists, and how they have linked these to particular structural problems in their political activities. Donati (1992, 143-147) suggests that the process of discourse analysis can be undertaken through 'frame analysis': topic selection and definition, text and frame.

As mentioned earlier, the role and significance of the Octobrists' political assets in these processes have been underestimated. Thus, this thesis focuses on the influence of left ideologies and their integration within the new political discourse in their participation in the May 1992 incident, the drafting of the People's Constitution of 1997, political reform, and the formulation of Thaksin's populist policies. In this method, the newly emerging political discourses and activities of Octobrists during the 4 political

transitions are analysed, by exploring the new political discourse that Octobrists used in legitimising and empowering their political activism, including terms like ‘democracy’, ‘new social movement’, ‘people politics’, ‘civil society’ and ‘political reform’. The author then collected related political materials including documents written by Octobrists and their organisations, political statements on related discourse, and interviews with the Octobrists who were pioneers in framing these discourses and those who turned this rhetoric into action.

### **1.3 Thesis and chapter outline**

In illustrating how one analytical framework drawn from the literature on social movements explains the survival and dynamic of Octobrists in contemporary Thai politics between 1990s and 2000s, this thesis is divided into eight chapters, partly chronological and partly arranged by topic. This first chapter contains the rationale of the research, and the significance of the thesis topic and its research questions. It explores how earlier literature seized and missed opportunities to develop a comprehensive analysis of the revival of the Octobrists in a changing political context. In addition, it explores and develops the theoretical framework and methodologies in filling earlier gaps.

Chapter Two sets the stage by tracing the origins and development of the Octobrists during the 1970s. It sketches and outlines the international and domestic context which affected and encouraged the participation of Octobrists in the anti-military and socialist-oriented movement between 1973 and 1976 and the clandestine activities of the CPT. It also examines the process of their ideological radicalisation, organisation, networks and skills development. This chapter not only presents the historical background of the Octobrists but also provides a crucial foundation for understanding the political assets and problems that influenced their return and transformation in contemporary politics. On the one hand, firsthand experience and participation in the anti-authoritarian movement, campaigning for socialist-oriented political parties, mobilising people at the grassroots level, and working on confidential missions for the leftist movement in cities enabled the Octobrists to develop cross-sector networks and various political skills. On the other hand, a leftist historical background and problematic radicalisation within the

CPT obstructed the Octobrists' return to Thai liberal democratic politics and halted leftist ideological development after the collapse of the CPT.

After the historical background, chapters Three to Seven explore the revival and development of the Octobrists in different political dimensions and settings during the last two decades through an analytical framework drawn from the social movement literature. Chapter Three stresses the roles of framing in the struggle of the Octobrists in the realm of cultural politics. It explores the processes by which they reclaimed their political space in a changing political context. The chapter argues that after an initial failure to recover and reunify on their return, they succeeded by the early 1990s in rewriting their failed leftist background and democratising 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October history, as well as replacing their earlier image as losing leftists with that of 'the 1970s Octobrist–democratic fighters'.

Chapters Four and Five emphasise Octobrists who became politically active in both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. This involves those Octobrists who successfully turned themselves into politicians, spin doctors, NGO workers, academics, journalists, singers, artists, political activists and business people. These people still actively worked in politics, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary. The chapter examines the integration of their past and present political assets, skills, and networks. In addition, the chapter notes the role of newly opening political opportunities for their career achievements and revitalising their political role in three major political transitions and developments in contemporary politics: the people's uprising in May 1992, the rise of social movements in the mid-1990s, and the political reform process in the late 1990s. At the same time, the chapter analyses the framing process which they used in enhancing their resource and power. The chapter shows how new structural constraints and limitations on terms of political opportunity, mobilising structure and frames influence their transformation into less radical and more liberal and reformist directions.

Before the concluding chapter, chapters Six and Seven provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenal battle among different groups of Octobrists during the rise of the Thaksin government and the anti-Thaksin movements in the 2000s. These two chapters explicitly explain how the Octobrists utilised their unique political activist

assets including skills, networks and newly framed ‘Octobrist’ identity in promoting themselves in new political conflicts. The chapters also chronicle their transformation and conflict. Whilst many Octobrists wholeheartedly used their political skills to support the establishment of the TRT Party and its policies, others joined the anti-Thaksin movement led by the People’s Alliance for Democracy (phanthamit – PAD) to attack the party and their former comrades inside the party on corruption and abuse of power. Eventually, those in the PAD even took a right wing direction by applying royalist and conservative political strategies and undemocratic means in overthrowing the TRT government. This development brought about fragmentation and irreconcilable conflict among different groups within the Octobrists.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Emergence, Evolution and Decline of the Thai Student Movement during the 1970s**

In the 1970s, Thailand witnessed the rise and fall of the student movement. The initial formation started by the late 1960s. Loose networks of student activists gradually developed into a powerful democratic movement, which successfully brought about an end to the two-decade-long dictatorship on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. The movement reached its peak between 1973 and 1976, becoming more radical and unified. However, the retaliation of the ultra-right wing groups which ended with the October 1976 massacre and military coup forced more than 3,000 of these radical student activists to join the armed struggle of the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai - CPT). By the early 1980s, the 1970s student movement had gradually declined in line with the collapse of the CPT. The 1970s thus served as the basis for the rise of the Octobrists.

To understand the Octobrists' post-activist life in the rest of this thesis, this chapter provides a comprehensive historical background of their activist life, as a basis to understanding its legacy. How did they emerge and evolve? How should we understand their complex and varied experiences, activism and ideological development? And how did their activist life and movement end? In answering these questions, this chapter begins with a retrospective account of the future 1970s radicals, as this background history would later affect the evolution of the Octobrists. Then it reveals the emergence, development and decline of these radical young people during the 1970s: their initial formation prior to 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973; the big leap toward a radical and unified student movement between 1973 and 1976; and a revolutionary mission with the CPT and its decline in the years after the student massacre and military coup of October 1976.

## 2.1 Pre-1970s radical movements

Thailand has been viewed by many historians as a country with a lack of radicalism. Thailand never experienced a social revolution that swept the land or an independence movement that liberated it from colonial oppression. This was the result of the absence of a colonial past, and the domination of the Anglophile conservative royalism of the Chakri dynasty, as well as geography, religion, and shrewd leadership (Kasian 2001a, 3 and Chapter 2; Reynolds 1987, 9). Nonetheless, alongside its conservative history, there were the ebbs and flows of many local anti-state movements, communist groups, radical politicians and intelligentsia. Since the Ayutthaya kingdom, several small regional mass uprisings sprang up challenging the Thai state (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 12). And from the mid-1880s or from the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) onward, a few democratic and reformist forces, both in the court and among middle class circles, started countering the traditional polity of absolutist monarchy. A new generation of princes, nobles, journalists and progressive commoners began to express political ideas that challenged the polity's traditional basis of authority and legitimacy, although the King's reform of the executive branch successfully prevented moves toward democratic ideology (Kullada 2004; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 12-13). However, none of these movements was systematically organised in advocating radicalism or succeeded in accessing state power. Only in the late 1920s, alongside the triumph of the anti-monarchical People's Party (Khana Ratsadon) in ending the 150-year absolute monarchy under the Chakri Dynasty on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 and turning Thailand into constitutional monarchy, were there formations of several better-organised leftist and radical forces. These included the left wing leagues within the People's Party, the leftist intelligentsia group and the communist movement (Somsak 1991). And their legacies remained as sources of inspiration for later generations of radical movements especially during the 1970s.

Under the leadership of Pridi Banomyong, the civilian leader of the 1932 coup, the leftist league within the People's Party put much effort into inserting leftist elements into the national agenda. His draft constitution of June 1932 followed the Soviet and Sun Yat-sen models. His 1933 economic plan was something far more radical than anything that the communists of the period would think of. The university that he

founded in early 1934, the University of Moral and Political Science, usually known as Thammasat University, became the most important institutional centre for the advocacy and defence of democratic and egalitarian ideas for Thai society. However, their radical efforts caused great fear among conservative and palace circles. They not only turned down these radical proposals, but also ended Pridi's future with allegations of being 'communist' and 'anti-royalist' (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 16; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 79; Somsak 1991, 85-128).

The second group was a leftist intelligentsia who actively advocated radicalism and socialism from the 1930s to 1950s. In responding to the crises and failures of pre-existing political systems, many new generation journalists and writers including Kulap Saipradit, Supha Sirimanond, Samak Burawat, Sakchai Bamrungphong, Itsara Amatakun, etc., collectively attacked snobbery and class discrimination. Through their writings in various newspapers and novels, they propagated the virtues of democracy, equality, and social justice (Kasian 2001a; Reynolds 1987, 9-42). These both directly and indirectly supported the 1932 revolution (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 15-16; Nakharin 2010, 109-112 and 117). Against the backdrop of post-war political liberalisation in Thailand, this urban-based Thai intelligentsia was inspired by materialist philosophy, social realism and the achievements of post-revolutionary Russia and China. Their works became more radical. They engaged in the Thai transmutation of Marxism, Socialism and Communism through their prominent Socialist Realist novels. The *Aksonsan* (written message), a literate and progressive monthly magazine which had appeared from 1949 to 1952 edited by Supha Sirimanond, became a key journal aggressively advocating Marxist ideas, and was mostly written by communists and their sympathisers outside the CPT (Kasian 2001a; Reynolds 1987, 14-15 and 25-26; Somsak 1991, 11-12). Between 1955 and 1958, Jit Phumisak published a number of path-breaking works on radical Thai history and literature (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 33). His utterly innovative work, the *Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* focusing on an analysis of the social system and political economics in the Marxian sense, appeared in the euphoric atmosphere of 1957. Although small and less powerful, their works laid the foundation of radical literature and later became a source of political inspiration for student activists during the 1970s. Their influence remains strong even to the present day (Reynolds 1987, 11).

The third and final group was the Thai Communist Party (communist thai)<sup>6</sup>. Although in comparison with communist parties and movements in other Southeast Asian countries, the Thai communist movement and party were relatively small, this was the only radical movement which managed to survive and continue to function as an organisation from the 1920s until the early 1980s. According to an official statement of the CPT, the first generation of Thai communist groups began in 1927. From the beginning, they were obstructed by both the anti-leftist sentiment of the Thai state<sup>7</sup> and the Chinese ethnic stereotype of being non-Thai (Bowie 1997, 61-62; Kasian 2001a, Chapter 3; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 77-79; Somsak 1991, Chapter 1; Turton, Fast and Caldwell 1978, 158). Their real heyday came during the political openness during the post-war Pridi Banomyong years (1946-1947). The Thai government was forced by the Soviets to abolish the Anti-communist Act as a prerequisite for Thailand's admission into the United Nations (UN). Subsequently, the party was permitted to operate more freely in the parliamentary system (Bowie 1997, 61-62; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 79; Reynolds 1987, 14-15 and 25). The Thai Communist Party successfully developed a very good relationship with the leftist elements in the People's Party (Somsak 1991, 7-10, 182-183 and 216-219)<sup>8</sup>. Even during the ascendancy of Pridi after the 1947 coup of Phibun Songkhram and the growing power struggle among Phibun Songkhram, Sarit Thanarat and Phao Sriyanond (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 18), the Thai Communist Party still managed to establish itself in the interstices between the power domains of the members of the Coup Group. On top of this, the Thai Communist Party advanced in localising and Thai-ifying its organisation and activities to include ethnic Thais as well as the labour and farmer movements. The Thai Communist Party spent much energy in the Thai cultural market. They established their own printing houses and produced a considerable number of printed materials (Kasian 2001a,

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<sup>6</sup> In 1952, the Thai Communist Party organized its second congress and formally adopted the name of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 80).

<sup>7</sup> This started even prior the twentieth century. King Chulalongkorn expressed his concern about the danger of communism as early as 1881. And as early as 1912, even prior to the Soviet revolution, the Thai government was concerned with the threat of Bolshevism (Bowie 1997, 61-62; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 77-78; Turton and Coldwell 1978, 158).

<sup>8</sup> Many of the leading figures in the Thai Communist Party regularly had political conversations with Pridi Banomyong. Even after the 1949 coup, there were efforts by the party to collaborate with Pridi's group in pushing for a joint coup against Phibun Songkhram-Phin Choonhavan, although its effort failed at an early stage (Somsak 1991, 7-10, 182-183 and 216-219).

Chapter 4; Reynolds 1987, 26; Somsak 1991, 7-10, 17-22, 182-183, 188-208, 218-219 and 126-127).

These three radical forces collaborated in promoting several radical campaigns and movements. Under the pro-Japanese Phibun Songkhram government, many journalists and writers and the communist group joined with the left wing groups in the People's Party to promote the underground resistance to the Japanese and the Phibun government in the name of the Free Thai Party (seri thai or khana thai isara). Also, while leftist intellectuals and journalists played leading roles in promoting the 'Peace Rebellion (kabot santiparp)' of 1950-1952 against the government's decision to support the US in the Korean war, their campaigns and arguments were highly influenced by Marxist-Leninist theories of imperialism, communism and their close sympathisers (Kasian, 2001a, 3 and Chapter 3; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 79; Reynolds 1987, 27; Somsak 1991, 11-12, 38-40, Chapter 3, 129-120 and 134-137).

However, their heyday came to an end after the two coups of October 1957 and October 1958. These coups enabled Sarit Thanarat to resolve the power rivalries and emerge as an unchallenged military dictator (Reynolds 1987, 34-35; Thak 1979, Chapter 2). Amidst the massive suppression campaigns of Sarit, many CPT leaders and personnel were arrested and prosecuted. Thereafter, the entire party permanently went underground and established an emphasis on secret organisation and recruitment in rural areas. Dozens of intellectuals, writers, and progressive politicians were imprisoned, jailed, and driven into exile (and in one or two cases executed). Others eventually joined the armed revolution with the CPT. For instance, in 1965, Jit Phumisak went underground and eventually joined the communist underground after being released from jail. Nonetheless, in spite of these suppression measures throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, their legacy continued and eventually revived during the rise of new radical forces in the 1970s (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 19 and 33; Morrell and Chai-anan 1981, 81; Reynolds 1987, 25).

## **2.2 Formation and development of the pre-14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 student movement**

Under the political restrictions between 1932 and 1968, the role of students in politics was rather minimal, manipulated and apolitical (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 137-139). Only in the late 1960s did the country start to witness a new generation of radical movements led by students. The political frustrations and unmet aspirations generated by the volatile economy, the erosion of authoritarian leadership, the termination of political liberalisation, the negative impacts of US military intervention and the wave of successful anti-Vietnam War protests awakened the political consciousness of these newly privileged middle-class students. Gradually, they started forming a loose but powerful movement structure and cross-sector alliance in promoting political campaigns against an illegitimate dictatorship and calling for social and political changes. To do so, they successfully equipped themselves with New Left ideas and a hybrid discourse of liberalism-monarchism-nationalism.

The politically active younger generation of the 1970s was a by-product of the expansion of higher education and a new economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s. Under the 'development' and 'modernisation' process of the Sarit Thanarat-Thanom Kittikachorn-Prapas Jarusathien era and supervision of American advisors and Thai technocrats, there was a massive expansion of education at all levels, especially universities and technical colleges, both in Bangkok and the regions (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 16-17 and 177; Prajak 2005, 43). This policy generated significant social mobility and offered young people from different classes and backgrounds opportunities to access higher education. Once entering the university, this minority educated class in Thai society automatically obtained new status which was seemingly synonymous with membership in the middle class and national elite. New bourgeois strata emerged outside the old feudal-bureaucratic upper class (Anderson 1977, 13 and 16-17; Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 22; Prajak 2005, 43 and 94-99).

The end of the 1960s boom was a pretext for increasing the initial frustration among students. Throughout the 1960s, the war-related economic boom - US financial support for military regimes (and Japanese investment) - and national development created constant economic growth and enormous expectations among these students about their future career prosperity in both the private and public sectors after they graduated

(Anderson 1977, 14-16; Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 20-21; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 75). But by the late 1960s, this long boom had come to an end. In 1971 and 1972, the Americans began to withdraw their troops from Indochina. Their huge financial support to the Thai government dropped sharply, together with war-related business. The earlier expansion of employment in the public sector, which increased by 10 percent each year between 1957 and 1967, started dropping to only 2 percent each year from 1968 onward (Pasuk and Baker 1993, 512 and 625; Prajak 2005, 93). University degrees no longer guaranteed high-status employment. Thai society started witnessing waves of demonstrations in response to rising economic frustrations. In 1968, the very first demonstration since the Sarit Thanarat era protested an increase in bus fares. About 2,000 students and citizens marched to the Prime Minister's residence. Between December 1972 and January 1973, a series of campaigns against luxurious and extravagant consumption and Japanese goods was promoted by student groups from different universities and spread to other provinces. In addition, the campaign noted the close ties between foreign economic domination and segments of the Thai military elite. The Thanom-Prapas regime was targeted as a major part of the economic problem, because of its reputation for blatant corruption and inability to maintain economic prosperity as in the Sarit era (Anderson 1977, 18; Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 36-37; Chanwit 2000, 10; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 75-76, 90 and 143; Saneh 2001, 10-13).

The crisis of legitimacy of authoritarian government at the end of 1960s brought about increasing demands from students for the establishment of democracy. The new educated middle class suffered from political suppression by the rigid authoritarian regimes of Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963) and Thanom-Prapas (1963-1973) (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 50-51). Under Sarit, political participation at the university level and access to political activities and positions at the national level were dominated by a small number of corrupt and inefficient bureaucratic- military political crony families (Prajak 2005, 13-14). Nonetheless, there was no real organised mass student movement against authoritarian governments in over a decade. After the death of Sarit in 1963, the regime was replaced by the Thanom-Prapas-Narong military government (1963-1973) which had less unified power and dictatorial character in comparison with the Sarit regime. The censorship imposed by Thanom and Prapas was weaker than under Sarit (Anderson 1977, 17-18). Students were allowed to organise socially relevant activities

(such as summer work camps in rural areas) for the first time. In 1968, the first university election took place at Thammasat University. In addition, between 1969 and 1970, Thammasat and Chulalongkorn University students who were concerned with problems on their own campuses organised many protests against corruption within their universities (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139 and 142).

At the same time, under pressure from the US and other governments, the military government was forced into political liberalisation<sup>9</sup>. A more democratic constitution was promulgated in 1968 and national elections were allowed in 1969. A few days after the new constitution was promulgated, the first student protest in ten years took place against the arrest of 'Hyde Park' stars giving speeches on the increase in bus fares. About 2,000 students and citizens marched to Government House. The release of the Hyde Park speakers and reduction in bus fares marked the beginning of student political activism. Before and during elections between 1968 and 1969, students organised several seminars and panel discussions on democracy and the electoral process, and also formed the Election Observer Group (klum sangketkan kan lueak tang) with more than 3,000 students from fifteen universities and colleges to observe and monitor local and national elections (Jaran 2003, 3-5; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 141).

However, the dream of democratisation was destroyed by the 1971 auto-coup of Prime Minister Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn in consolidating absolute power. The coup abolished the constitution, parliament, and political parties (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 90). This move not only provoked immediate anxiety among university students and the public (Jaran 2003, 3-5, 106 and 351; Prajak 2005, 459 and 517), it also kindled the proliferation of anti-military sentiments and campaigns among students. One of the biggest campaigns was against the delayed retirement of Thanom from the military and control over politics, as well as the 'Thung Yai' scandal - the crash of an overloaded helicopter which high ranking police and military officers had used for a personal and illegal hunting trip with movie stars in Thung Yai national forest reserve at the beginning of 1973. After the expulsion of nine students from Ramkhamhaeng University for producing a satirical booklet about these scandals, more than fifty

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<sup>9</sup> At the international level, the sudden rapprochement between Peking and Washington (symbolized by Nixon's visit in February 1972) drastically undermined the credibility of one major rationale for military domination ever since 1947 (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 35-36).

thousand students marched to the Democracy Monument. They staged a sit-in protest for three days that successfully forced the government to allow the students to return to school and extended their demand for a new constitution within six months (Jaran 2003, 154-160; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 145-146; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 133-134).

The anti-authoritarian protests and campaigns for democracy proliferated throughout the early 1970s. By early 1973, several turning points brought about a people's uprisings which successfully brought down the two-decades-old authoritarian regime. By mid-1973, the 'Constitution Appeal Group (klum riakrong rathathananon)' was initiated by a group of student leaders like Thirayuth Boonmee, the former Secretary-General of the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai - NSCT). It managed to mobilise a petition for a democratic constitution signed by 100 prominent politicians and intellectuals. On 6<sup>th</sup> October, thirteen members of the Constitution Appeal group were arrested while distributing pamphlets. Promptly, hundreds of thousands of students and their allies both in Bangkok and upcountry started protesting. In parallel with the principal demand for the immediate release of the detainees, the students also demanded completion of the drafting of the new constitution within six months (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 146-147; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 133-134). Without a response from the government the protests expanded. Students at Thammasat University decided to call off their final examinations and started gathering in protest on their campus. On the morning of October 13<sup>th</sup>, approximately 500,000 people gathered in the area around Thammasat University and then marched towards Ratchadamnoen Avenue and the Democracy Monument. Early in the morning of 14<sup>th</sup> October, news of the release of the thirteen and the promise of a constitution finally reached the demonstrators. However, as they were preparing to disperse, violence broke out throughout Bangkok. Over one hundred students and others were killed and several government buildings were burned. Finally, on the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> October news of the resignation and exile of Thanom Kittikachorn, Prapas Jarusathien and Narong Kittikachorn and the appointment of Sanya Dharmasakti, Rector of Thammasat University, as the new Prime Minister calmed the violence by late on 15<sup>th</sup> October (Haberkorn 2007, 35-36; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 145-147) and created a landmark of the success of the pre-1970s student movement.

Alongside their political campaigns and activities leading up to 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, student activists developed a loose but powerful movement structure and cross-sector alliance. By the early 1970s, they formulated themselves as a loose network of unorganised conversation groups and independent political clubs, coffee house councils (sapha kafe)<sup>10</sup>, university societies (Jaran 2003, 8)<sup>11</sup>, and cross-university associations<sup>12</sup>. In spite of the small numbers of each group, they were active and became very well organised and influential (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 141). Students often worked with and belonged to more than one organisation and developed cross-organisation networks. These networks functioned as conjunctions where activists from different faculties and universities discussed ideas critical of mainstream political and cultural norms, and promoted political activities at both university and national levels. Countless activities against the oppressive culture, increases in tuition fees, apolitical and extravagant social activities among university students including football matches, as well as other political protests against Japanese goods and the Vietnam War (Prajak 2005, 90-93), were initiated by these small groups of university students (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 144). The people gathered at Thammasat University before 14<sup>th</sup> October comprised students from various universities and schools through these networks built earlier.

For instance, the Thammasat University Dome Assembly (Sapha Na Dome), located at Thammasat University, was a gathering of the most active student activists from many clubs and universities of the early 1970s. It promoted political activities including

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<sup>10</sup> Coffee House Forum (sapha kafe) were informal groups of students who gathered regularly in a coffee shop to discuss current social and political issues.

<sup>11</sup> Many formal student clubs particularly regional societies, development camps and composition/literature clubs, also became places where students shared and expressed their political and social frustrations (Jaran 2003, 8).

<sup>12</sup> The most important independent clubs included the Thammasat University Dome Assembly group (sapha na dome), the Dharma Economics group (setthatham), Legal Studies (niti sueksa) and the Thammasat Women's Group (klum phu ying thamasat), the New SOTUS (fuenfu SOTUS mai) group at Chulalongkorn University, Coffee House Forum (sapha kafe) and Economics Factory group (rong ngan setthasat) at Kasetsart University, the Signal View Group (walanchathat) group at Chiang Mai University, the New Generation club (khon run mai) and Sons of Ramkhamhaeng club (luk pho khun) at Ramkhamhaeng University. As well as in Thailand, political groups and networks were formed among Thai students in the USA, Germany, etc., including the Coffee House Forum at Cornell University and the We Miss Thailand group (khit thueng muang thai) in the US (Prajak 2005, 46, 89 and 268-273).

producing handmade political books which disseminated radical ideas among university students, organised rural and labour study groups, and supported progressive and radical candidates and political parties at both university and national level (Jaran 2003, 70-80 and 94-97). At Chulalongkorn University, an older and more conservative university, New SOTUS (fuenfu SOTUS mai) emerged, a loose gathering of students who disagreed with and aimed to abolish the conservative seniority and hierarchical traditional code of SOTUS (acronym for Seniority, Order, Tradition, Unity, and Sincerity). They went even further to attack the root cause of the conservative seniority system in the undemocratic and corrupt bureaucratic system in Thailand (Prajak 2005, 88-90). At the same time, the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai), the first formal university network organisation established in late 1969, became active in supporting the student movement (Jaran 2003, 150), even though it had been initially criticised by independent political clubs as an apolitical, regressive and non-radical organisation<sup>13</sup>.

Besides networking among themselves, student activists successfully allied with and mobilised support from various citizen's groups, and liberal-royalist-radical elite networks in late 1973. Sulak Sivarak, a 1960s liberal-monarchist intellectual, was the most important point of access to networks and support from the liberal-royalist intellectual elite. Due to his upper middle-class family connections, education and activities in England, and his prominent reputation upon his return as a social critic and writer, Sulak became a bridge among different groups of people (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 26; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-140). The parithatsan sewana (Dialogue Review) group which he founded became a site where 1970s activists regularly met and exchanged political and social concerns and mobilised political support from progressive intellectuals and the elite<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, many leading students developed connections with senior liberal and socialist politicians, especially those from the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) and Economist Party (Setthakon) during election monitoring and political campaigning in support of progressive parties and

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<sup>13</sup> When it was organized in 1965, the National Student Centre of Thailand's main function was to make contact with foreign university students, primarily in the context of an exchange programme. The group was generally inactive until its revival in 1969 (Jaran 2003, 150; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 141).

<sup>14</sup> During the 1963-1968 period, most of those who became leaders of the October 14, 1973 uprising were conscientised and politically inspired by reading *Sangkomsat Parithat (Social Science Review)*, and joined the Parithatsan Sewana group (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-140).

candidates (Jaran 2003, 27, 42-43 and 93-95). The office of the Thamma Rangsi law firm belonging to Kaiseng Suksai, a progressive former Nakhon Phanom MP, became a gathering place where student activists and progressive politicians discussed and promoted democratic and anti-authoritarian campaigns. At the same time, they obtained strong support from people in different sectors, such as the Lawyers Association of Thailand and several newspapers, in applying pressure on the government (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 145).

In terms of ideological framing, a foundation of New Left ideas and a hybrid discourse of liberal-monarchist-nationalism was laid underneath the proliferation of student activism. The successful experiences and protest technologies of New Left student protests and the global anti-war movement during the 1960s were crucial sources of political inspiration. Radical Thai students learnt that fellow young people in America and France had successfully forced two presidents from power, forced the withdrawal of American troops from Indochina, and toppled De Gaulle's authoritarian Fifth Republic in the heady days of May 1968 (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 29-30). In advocating the New Left, Marxism and communism, they obtained support from both other liberal intellectuals and the CPT<sup>15</sup> (Jaran 2003, 150-151 and 216; Prajak 2005, 109-111 and 120-134; Somsak 2001, 59-64 and 92-93). However, rather than the theoretical or philosophical debates of the European tradition of the likes of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin<sup>16</sup>, their emphases were more on rebellious political culture and the tactics of the young. They advocated the integration of liberalism and the New Left of 'student power' as a force in both the anti-war and anti-authoritarian movements in other countries<sup>17</sup>. They also emphasised a romantic Marxism especially presenting Marxism

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<sup>15</sup> The CPT supplied literature of 1950s Thai radical intellectuals and other non-western revolutionary movements and heroes in China, Vietnam and Latin America including Mao, Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Lu Xun, CPT, etc., to clubs and student organizations and through their own media, the *Asia* weekly newspaper. Moreover, its 'The Voice of the People of Thailand' (VPT) radio station was a source of radical inspiration in guiding students in more radical directions (Jaran 2003, 150-151 and 216; Somsak 2001, 59-64 and 92-93).

<sup>16</sup> A few radical student activists such as those in the Dharma Economics group (sethatham) and Thammasat University Dome Assembly (sapha na dome) clubs tried to use Marxist analysis to study Thai society. Morell and Chai-anan (1981, 142 and 287) argue that several top student leaders were naïve about communism, as only a few of them had had direct contact with the CPT.

<sup>17</sup> As for New Left ideas, countless writings both in *Sangkhomsat Parithat* (*Social Science Review*) and hand-made books of various political clubs popularised the New Left during the rise of the international

through Western<sup>18</sup>, Third World (Jaran 2003, 219; Prajak 2005, 438-442) and the 1950s Thai leftist thinkers (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 32). Above all, they learned to familiarise themselves with a rebellious culture and new protest tactics including sit-ins, sleep-ins, blockades, and so forth.

Furthermore, their political campaign was framed in the hybrid discourse of liberalism-monarchism-nationalism. Firstly, 'liberal democracy and nationalism' were bridged. Student activists in parallel with liberal/royalist elites and the CPT<sup>19</sup> constructed a new liberal-nationalist frame in delegitimising nationalist ideas constructed by military governments with the support of the US government against communism (Prajak 2005, 38 and 210-211; Suthachai 2000). They urged strong anti-American nationalism and anti-Vietnam War campaigns by highlighting the negative impact of the presence of US military bases in the form of serious social problems including rampant prostitution, fatherless mixed-race babies, drug addiction, pollution and sleazy commercialisation, as well as Thailand's involvement in an unjust war (Anderson 1977, 22; Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 17-19 and 30-31; Chanwit 2000, 10; Prajak 2005 140-157, 166-70 and 180-183). They then labelled the US as an oppressive imperialist power sustaining an undemocratic military government in Thailand. They condemned the Thai government for betraying their nation by selling out national autonomy in favour of their own interests and support in sustaining their power. In overcoming these problems the Thai people had to fight against the military regime and call for democracy. This hybrid frame dominated ideas in promoting campaigns against the Vietnam War and Japanese goods, appealing for a democratic constitution and above all campaigns against the Thanom-Prapas government (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 35; Jaran 2003, 34-5;

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anti-war movement and proliferation of vibrant student uprisings throughout the world during the 1960s and early 70s. Songs with anti-war content and rebellious ideas and singers who promoted anti-war and other civil rights movements were mainstreamed and provided political inspiration among activists and university students (Prajak 2005, 170-171, 250-251, 299, 266-267 and 303-305).

<sup>18</sup> The influences of the New Left on Thai student activists were evident in reference to thinkers like Martin Luther King, Herbert Marcuse, Frantz Fanon and Angela Davis. Writings about these people were popularized among non-mainstream magazines and newsletters circulated among university students (Prajak 2005, 170-171, 250-1, 299 and 303-305).

<sup>19</sup> From time to time, the CPT mentioned its efforts to craft a nationalist approach in reappropriating and reclaiming Thainess from the Thai authoritarian regime and in opposition to US imperialism in Thailand, which related to the concerns of these student activists (Prajak 2005, 210-1).

Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-144 and 287; Prajak 2005, 157, 249-255, 264-277, 345-353 and 530-532)<sup>20</sup>.

This liberal-nationalist frame was reproduced by and among students through their alternative media which provided a powerful and influential means for communicating and exchanging information. These included books, newsletters and journals that they made themselves (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-140), public talks at protest sites, anti-military songs, posters, wall books, radio programmes, leaflets, films and plays (CPT 2003, 191). Prior to the peak of the anti-authoritarian movement in October 1973, the *Sangkhomsat Parithat (Social Science Review)* and other books produced by the Thammasat University Dome Assembly (Sapha Na Dome), Signal View (Walanchathat) group (at Chiang Mai University) like *Phai Khao (White Menace)*<sup>21</sup>, *Phai Khiao (Green Menace)*<sup>22</sup>, and so forth, systematically released information and writings about Indo-China and the Vietnam War, as well as the linkage between the Indochina war and the authoritarian regime (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-140; Prajak 2005, 257-277).

This hybrid frame helped to conceal earlier disagreements and conflicts among different groups of students. It offered a common basis for expressing frustration with an oppressive political power and culture under authoritarian military governments for

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<sup>20</sup> Liberal and neo-nationalist ideas had been advocated by the younger generation in their social and political activism since the mid-1960s. Many 1960s young writers and artists used existentialism and surrealism to express and advocate a liberal sense of boredom, alienation and political impotence. Others vividly championed ancient 'Old Siamese' culture and literature against what it regarded as decadent and superficial Westernisation. In addition, at the beginning of the 1970s, naïve reformist zeal, an American spirit of utilitarian idealism, and social volunteerism were promoted among university students by Puey Ungpakorn, a liberal economist, as well as other liberal-oriented groups and student organizations like the Parithatsan Sewana (Dialogue Review) group, the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai), etc. (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 35; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-140).

<sup>21</sup> In their anti-American and anti-war campaigns, Thammasat University Dome Assembly group (Sapha Na Dome) produced *Phai Khao (White Menace)*, the title of an influential book published in 1971 which sharply attacked the United States as an imperialist power in Thailand (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 36-37).

<sup>22</sup> In 1971 a group of students at Chiang Mai University also published a magazine called *phai khiao (Green Menace)*, referring to green military uniforms, which was sharply critical of the military's deep involvement in politics (Haberhorn 2007, 66; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 144).

groups with different ideological orientations. It temporarily concealed the differences between the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai - NSCT) and independent groups regarding the leadership, objectives and strategies of the movement, and encouraged the students to unify in pushing forward the anti-authoritarian movement (Somsak 2001, 63-68; Somsak 2004)<sup>23</sup>.

Secondly, a 'nationalist-democratic-monarchist' discourse was framed and used throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> October uprising (Prajak 2005, 379 and 528-529). While acting as a radical force for change, the students in the early 1970s were sympathetic and close to the institution of the monarchy. In promoting their campaign, they used monarchism as a powerful ideological tool. In the process of recovering its power after a long decline during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the monarchy also managed to reconnect itself with university students. Through friendly behaviour towards and activities with many universities, including the conferring of university degrees, presenting music by himself and his family, and giving annual speeches, the popularity of the monarch among university students increased. The result was a view among students of the monarchy as a supportive and humanised institution when compared with authoritarian governments. The King either perceived the student movement as an ally in balancing the power of authoritarian regimes or was genuinely sympathetic toward the younger generation. The King himself even indirectly encouraged universities to participate in politics. Between 1970 and 1973, he counselled students on current issues and the political situation, such as corruption, democracy, the generation gap, the significance of youth, etc. Even amidst the rise of the student movement in 1972, the King did not discourage

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<sup>23</sup> The mass mobilisation was initially led and unified by independent groups. However, after twelve members of the Constitution Appeal group (klum riakrong rathathanun) were arrested, many former National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai – NSCT) members joined the mass command unit in negotiating with the government over the release of the protestors. Nevertheless, the NSCT confined the objectives of the movement to the release of the protestors and the call for a democratic constitution, while independent groups insisted, in line with the demands of the demonstrators, on fighting for the overthrow of the authoritarian regime and argued that conforming the military government meant accepting its authority. Thus, even after achieving the first two objectives, the independent groups still did not stop the demonstration. Subsequently, the NSCT criticised and condemned the independent groups, particularly Seksan Prasertkul, as extremist and communist. Conflicts and differences among these activists resulted in confusion and miscommunication among the leadership of the movement and was part of the reason for the protest after the decision to disband the demonstration on the morning of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 (Somsak 2001, 63-68; Somsak 2004).

mobilisation by students but instead encouraged them to unite with other parts of society and improve the country (Prajak 2005, 464-477 and 491-492).

Furthermore, liberal royalist intellectuals, especially Sulak Sivarak, played a crucial role in mainstreaming liberal royalist ideas among their young compatriots. His countless articles glorifying the past virtues of Thai monarchs while comparing and attacking the corrupt and ineffective authoritarian government were circulated in many journals and welcomed among student activists. Furthermore, he regularly invited royalist intellectuals and figures to join editorial boards and to contribute writings on their good memories of the monarchy in the past (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 139-140; Prajak 2005, 475-80).

In promoting their anti-authoritarian campaign, student activists linked monarchism with democracy and nationalism by constructing a discourse of a 'democratic king', delegitimising the undemocratic military regime (Prajak 2005, 469, 536-537). The historical image of a weak, ineffective and undemocratic monarchy was revised. In their newly revised account, the Thai monarch had been the initiator and protector of democracy (Prajak 2005, 491 – 99; Somsak 2001, 9–19). For instance, the front page of the newsletter issued by the Constitution Appeal group (klum riakrong rathathanun) posted a quotation from the will of King Rama VII in promoting democracy and disagreeing with autocracy or authoritarian regimes, without mentioning other historical facts<sup>24</sup>. What they saw in this document was content which was 'highly relevant' to their demands and which differed totally from that in the document. Furthermore, on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1973, students called for the power which the authoritarian government had immorally taken from the Monarch. Also, on 13<sup>th</sup> October, the NSCT intentionally used the monarchy as a symbolic tactic in legitimising and protecting the mass demonstration of 500,000 people, especially during their march out of Thammasat University, by holding the national Thai flag and portraits of the King and Queen (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 147; Somsak 2001, 9-19 and 59-64).

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<sup>24</sup> 'I am willing to abdicate the power which earlier belonged to me to all the [Thai] people. However, I will not allow my power to be transferred to any particular person or group of people having absolute authority without listening to the real voice of the people' (*Constitution Appeal Group* 1973).

### **2.3 Radicalisation and unification of the student movement between 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976**

The triumph of the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident boosted popular confidence in student power (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 155-156). The new liberal situation, distrust of parliamentary politics, the rise of Communist movements both at home and abroad, and threats from ultra-right wing movements shifted student activists beyond liberal democratic campaigns into leftist directions. The organisation and activities of their movement became more and more unified and they started associating with the CPT. The polarised situation ended up with the massacre on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 which forced thousands of student activists to flee to the communist movement in the jungle.

In the aftermath of the 14<sup>th</sup> October victory, the appointed liberal government (October 1973-February 1975) of Sanya Dharmasakti, a retired Thammasat University rector, replaced the dictatorship. The government directed their initial efforts toward political liberalisation. It promised democracy, free elections (in January 1975 and April 1976), the right to organise, freedom of the press and so forth (Anderson 1977, 18 and 22; Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 37). At the same time, elite politics after the Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Jarusathien period experienced a power vacuum. General Krit Srivara, the new army commander-in-chief, was reluctant to assume a dominant leadership role. This was not only because of the continuing power of Thanom and Prapas in certain sections of the army, but also his intention to avoid being attacked by the students and the public. His faction was perfectly happy to encourage students and the NSCT to attack the 'three tyrants' and to leave students in the delusion that they had become the prime movers in this political situation. Most of their demands were being met by the civilian Sanya government (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 149-150 and 258-259). These were greeted with great excitement among the student and people's movements, prompting strikes and unrest among labour, farmers, and teachers, calling for their rights which had not been respected for decades<sup>25</sup>. The role of the students

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<sup>25</sup> More than 264 pressure groups appeared and 390 demonstrations took place. In labour unrest alone, there were 399 strikes from October to December 1973 and 350 from January to December 1974. This figure was higher than that for the previous 15 years. Each strike and demonstration gathered tens of thousands of people. Before 1973, labor disputes had never exceeded 34 in any one year. Yet in 1973 there were 577 labor disputes, with over 500 ending in a strike, with nearly 178,000 workers involved.

became more prominent both inside and outside parliament. At the onset of the 14<sup>th</sup> October victory, student activists were rather optimistic about and very close to the appointed liberal royalist government of Professor Sanya Dharmasakti. Some said that student leaders could even make a direct telephone call to the Prime Minister if there was any matter they would like to discuss with him (*Prachachat* 17 October 1974, 19-26). Many student leaders like Thirayuth Boonmee and Pramoj Nakornthap were invited to join the constitutional drafting committee. The government provided funds and opportunities for the universities to play a leading role in the nationwide Democracy Propagation Programme (*khronkhan phoeiphrae prachathipatai*) Subcommittee. The elected governments of Seni Pramoj (February-March 1975 and April-October 1976) and Kukrit Pramoj (March 1975-January 1976) were also initially accepted by students due to their liberal and democratic reputations.

In spite of the initial political popularity, the liberal governments and their socialist-oriented coalition parties were hard pressed to respond to the immense demands of the student and people's movements because of the political instability of weak coalition governments. Their reform programmes were far too modest for the students (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 131-132, 193, and 261-268; Suthachai 2001, 66-67). On some issues, the government ended up compromising with former ruling and business cliques rather than responding to the demands of the majority of the population (Saneh 2001, 3-4). Students became distrustful of the parliamentary and liberal democratic system and started opting for more radical alternatives.

The increase in radicalisation among student activists after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 came of age in the shadow of the Communist victories at both the international and regional levels. While the pre-14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 movement was inspired by the rise of western leftist movements after 1968, after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, student activists became more radicalised amidst the triumphs and expansion of communist governments and Communist-style guerrilla warfare in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. This created a surge of sympathy towards radicalism among students (Kasian 1984a, 46; Giles 2003b; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 152-153). Furthermore, after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, information and knowledge about China entered more freely and circulated openly among Thai

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Seventy-three percent of these strikes occurred after the October 1973 uprising. In 1974, 358 strikes saw over 100,000 workers involved (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 187; Mallet 1978, 80-82).

activists and the public. This was partly because the Thai governments shifted toward a foreign policy more sympathetic toward China in line with the eastward foreign policy of the US<sup>26</sup>. This responded to the desire and curiosity of students for radical political inspiration from nearby communist countries like China (Suthachai 2001, 68-69).

In addition, the escalation of anti-communist suppression measures of ultra-right wing movements taken against the political activities of student activists and social movements left active students with no middle ground but radicalism (Prudhisan 1987; Suthachai 2001, 118). The straitened economic circumstances and political instability created by mass movements turned businessmen and the middle class, who earlier had supported the mass demonstrations of October 1973, toward right wing sentiments to the extent that they even welcomed the return to dictatorship three years later. With little experience in politics and unsophisticated ideas about government, it is easy to blame the economic deterioration on the increase in the number of strikes and worker irresponsibility. The growth of socialist and revolutionary elements within student and social movements particularly on the issues of the anti-Thai feudalism and anti-monarchism also created fear among royalist forces (Anderson 1977, 9, 18 and 23; Somsak 2001, 9-15 and 96-97). Above all, the level of tension increased greatly after the victory of revolutionary communism throughout Indochina in the spring of 1975. The abolition of the Laotian monarchy at the end of 1976 aroused enormous alarm in conservative, military and royalist circles<sup>27</sup>. To protect themselves from the rise of leftist and communist movements, royalist forces, conservative politicians and capitalist groups organised ultra-right wing movements from all social strata and promoted anti-communist measures against radical elements within the growing social movements (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 268-269; *Sarakadee* 2000, 73; Somsak 2001, 9-15, 96-97, and 167-170).

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<sup>26</sup> By the early 1970s the People's Republic of China became a permanent member of UN Security Council and Nixon made a formal visit to China in 1972. In response to this, in 1974 and 1975 the Sanya Dharmasakti government signed a trade agreement with China, and PM Kukrit Pramoj made a formal visit to China. In early 1975 Bangkok began to normalize relations with the new Indochinese states.

<sup>27</sup> The communist and genocidal Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. Not even two weeks later, on 30 April 1975, Saigon fell to the Vietnam People's Army. The Pathet Lao established the Lao People's Democratic Republic on 2 December 1975 (Anderson 1977, 17 and 23-24; Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 39; Haberkorn 2007, 228; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 4 and 163).

A variety of new rightist organisations emerged. Principal among them, 'New Force (nawaphon)', an ultra-right wing propaganda think-tank, aggressively advocated anti-communist ideas in public. It comprised right wing middle-class intellectuals, writers, and priests, members of military wives clubs, government officials, etc. Some, like the monk Kittivudho, overtly claimed that 'killing communists was not a sin' (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 235-252). The 'Village Scouts (luk suea chaoban)' were initially organised by the Border Patrol Police in rural areas to counter the CPT. However, between 1973 and 1976, it integrated more well-to-do groups, the middle-aged, provincial officials, rural notables, middle and high income peasants and the urban nouveaux riches in small towns and later in Bangkok. At its peak, around two million people out of forty million of Thai citizens registered as Village Scouts. These people were bound by 'semi-fascist' ideas, mythical rituals of patriotism, disaffection with the excesses of democracy and fear of the emerging communist threat. Furthermore, under the divide-and-rule strategy, the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) spawned the 'Red Gaurs (Krathing Daeng)', a militant anti-communist student network. It recruited vulnerable young members of the petty bourgeoisie, especially vocational and technical school students who were caught in a time of widespread unemployment, with little hope of obtaining government jobs and scornful of factory work. They were ideologically aroused by extreme anti-communist ideas and financially supported to stir up violence against all activities and demonstrations by university student and social movements (Anderson 1977, 20 and 27-28; Bowie 1997; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 235-252; Somsak 2001, 147-8; Suthachai 2001, 128-134).

One major direction of the anti-communist campaign was against student activists and their activities through both ideological campaigns and violent action. They generalised all reformist, radical and leftist ideas as communism. They convinced the public that students and political activists were traitors to the nation, had adopted foreign communist ideas, and had obtained external support. Stories of connections between student leaders and financial support from the KGB and military training in Hanoi were repeated in all right wing media. Rightwing media persistently depicted socialist-oriented activities as a plot to overthrow the royal institution (Suthachai 2001, 126-128 and 131-133). Leaflets were distributed all over the country accusing student leaders and Socialist Party, Socialist Front, and New Force politicians of being communists who wanted to destroy the 'nation, religion, and monarchy' (Morell and Chai-anan

1981, 4 and 172). Physical attacks, arrests and assassinations in both group and individual cases regularly occurred. Media censorship was widespread, including the closure of publishing houses and newspapers.

Information was revealed in February 1975 about two controversial mass killing cases including the 'Na Sai village' and 'Red Oil Drum (thang daeng)' cases, where 3,000 people were assassinated by being burned alive by either the military, the police or the Internal Security Operations Command. The Red Oil Drum cases occurred in southern Thailand, particularly Phatthalung Province, involving those accused of being communist. In early 1976, Dr. Boonsanong Punyodyana, Secretary-General of the Socialist Party of Thailand (sangkhomniyom haeng prathet thai) and a figure respected among student activists, and a New Force Party MP from Lopburi Province were assassinated. Also during the peak of anti-US base demonstrations in Bangkok in March 1976, the Krathing Daeng threw bombs into the protests causing 4 deaths and more than 70 injuries. Many leaders of anti-dam protests were assassinated in July 1974 (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 38; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 263-264; Suthachai 2001, 101-103 and 125).

This two-year-long polarised conflict between right wing groups and the growing the left wing student movement eventually came to an end with the massacre on the morning of October 6<sup>th</sup> 1976. Amidst efforts by conservative members of elite and royalist groups to bring the Thanom Kittikachorn-Prapas Jarusathien regime back to Thailand, the student movement struck back. The National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai) collaborated with the National Labour Council of Thailand in a prolonged nationwide protest. The final act of the crisis opened on September 25<sup>th</sup> in Nakhon Pathom Province west of Bangkok with the hanging of two activists after they had been stopped by police for distributing anti-Thanom Kittikachorn posters. Students rallying at Thammasat University held a mock hanging to dramatise the deaths of the two workers. Whether by design or unfortunate accident, the makeup applied to one of the young actors left him with a resemblance to Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn. Rightist newspapers, radio stations, political parties and groups demanded the immediate punishment of those responsible for this act of *lèse majesté* (Anderson 1977, 13; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 274).

On the night of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1976, a militant group of Red Gaur (Krathing Daeng) attacked students at Thammasat University all night long. In the early morning of 6<sup>th</sup> October, hundreds of armed police, several heavily armed Border Patrol Police units and thousands of Village Scouts (luk suea chaoban), Red Gaur, and other vigilantes, opened fire and tried to force their way into the Thammasat University campus. Some students were burned alive and lynched from nearby trees. Hundreds were killed and wounded. And around 3,000 students were arrested (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 39; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 274-275; Somsak 2001, 155-160). That evening the military took power once more, and shortly afterwards the extremist right wing regime of Tanin Kraivixien, an ultra-conservative judge specialising in anti-communist policy, was installed. Books published by radical students were burned and banned. Student political activities were prohibited (Chanthana 1987, 230; Connors 2003, 91-92; Thikan 2005, 16-20). In the wake of these events, thousands of left-leaning intellectuals, writers, students, and politicians went underground, many of them seeking refuge eventually with the Communist Party of Thailand in the jungles of the North, Northeast, and South (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 39).

In promoting these political activities throughout this period, the student movement became more unified and radical than before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. Student organisations and activities in high schools, universities and political parties became dominated by radical activists. At the high-school level, huge numbers of schools, particularly in Bangkok, were organised and radicalised by the Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nakrian haeng prathet thai - SCT). These high school students campaigned against the culture of corruption and called for political participation at their schools. By mid-1975, these radical students took control over student councils, clubs and societies at their schools, and then turned them into political mechanisms for the wider radical movement (Cheep and Parakorn, interview by author, 21 March 2007 and 7 February 2007, Bangkok). At the same time, they provided support for university students and farmer and labour movements. The Student Centre of Thailand also arranged to spread their radical high school members to as many universities as possible to advocate radicalism in upcountry and less well-known universities, as well as moderate groups within the prominent universities (Jariya and Ped, interview by author, 24 February 2007 and 25 November 2006, Bangkok; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 162; Somsak 2001).

At the university level, by mid-1975, students who had turned radical succeeded in transforming student councils, societies and clubs into leftist organised units. Right after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, radical and leftist student parties started establishing and attracting more members in nearly all universities. Furthermore, they managed to radicalise moderate parties into a more leftist direction. Another important symbolic victory was success in seizing power in the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai - NSCT) in 1975 (Cheep, Ped and Pha, interview by author, 21 March 2007, 25 November 2006 and 3 March 2007, Bangkok; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 162; Somchai P., interview by author, 29 March 2007, Mahasarakham). After competing with moderate forces, a group of leftist students led by Kriengkamol Laohapairoj, a radical candidate who was supported and influenced by radical rank-and-file supporters and secretly by CPT members managed to win the position of NSCT secretary-general over moderate and liberal candidates. Under his leadership, the NSCT became a radical umbrella organisation helping to consolidate the radical student movement in a unified direction (Somsak 2001, 94-95; Suthachai 2001, 114).

In promoting radical activism, students associated themselves with the liberal government and socialist-oriented parties. Several radical members of the NSCT became the driving force behind campaigns for social and political reforms (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 37). In the constitutional drafting process, many leading students actively participated in its research and public participation subcommittees (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 109-111). Furthermore, many of them played crucial roles helping socialist politicians in setting up and running as MPs for the Socialist Party of Thailand (sangkhomniyom haeng prathetthai) in late 1974<sup>28</sup>.

Aside from working in alliance with liberal elites and political parties, student activists were strongly engaged with the rise of the farmer and labour movements. Starting from the nationwide Democracy Propagation Programme (khrongkan phoeiphræ

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<sup>28</sup> The Socialist party of Thailand (sangkhomniyom heng prathetthai) was an amalgamation of the 1969-1971 Social Democrat party (sangkhom niyom prachathipatai) then led by former MP Col. Somkhit Sisangkhom, and the People for Democracy group (prachachon phuea prachathipatai) headed by Thirayuth Boonmee, a former secretary-general of the National Student Centre of Thailand. Somkit was elected the new party's leader. Former radical MP Kaiseng Suksai became deputy leader, and Dr. Boonsanong Punyodyana, secretary-general (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 111).

prachathipatai), the NSCT collaborated with the State University Bureau in promoting democracy and rural development. Later on, the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (sahaphap naksueksa seri) under the leadership of Seksan Prasertkul, initiated a rural visit programme. Hundreds and later thousands of university students were sent for in-depth visits to the most remote and poverty-stricken rural parts of the country. However, instead of advocating democracy, many students turned to organising farmer movements and promoting social revolution. They started lecturing puzzled farmers about the evils of capitalism, the threat of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the need for class struggle. Using the grievances accumulated from years of neglect, they were able to convince many farmers to organise themselves in order to place effective pressure on the government to act on their behalf and to fight oppression by local landlords or government officials. In empowering the farmers, students inspired them with the success of the 14<sup>th</sup> October uprising. They described how an organised group of students - without arms - had succeeded in bringing down a seemingly omnipotent military regime (Haberkorn 2007, Chapter 4: 175-176, 180-181, and 191-198; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 151-154 and 213-215; Suthachai 2001, 112; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 150). From early 1974 onwards, the student organisations became crucial supporters of a large-scale network for the farmer movement. In March 1974, with support from the NSCT, farmers staged their first large-scale protest, gaining nationwide attention for their demands for higher rice prices. By the end of 1974, with support from student activists, the National Assembly passed the Land Rent Control Act and the Farmers' Federation of Thailand (FFT) was set up to monitor implementation of the law and mobilise farmers throughout the country (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 37; Haberkorn 2007, 211; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 223-224; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 150).

Even other student groups with less radical elements shifted into a more radical direction. Many formerly liberal-oriented students like Seksan Prasertkul and Thirayuth Boonmee eventually broke away from liberal student groups like the NSCT and formed their own radical organisations. Seksan formed the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand to work directly with labour and farmers' movements. Thirayuth set up People for Democracy group (prachachon phuea prachathipatai) to promote activities which were more leftist than what he had carried out before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 (Kasian 1996, 78-80; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 149-150 and 218-219; Yuangrat and Wedel

1987, 150-151). Jiranan Pitpreecha, a female Chulalongkorn University student leader during 14<sup>th</sup> October, became involved in the radical movement. After 1973 she became a kind of unofficial spokeswoman for the radical movement on women's issues and used communist and revolutionary language in her writings (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 154, 159-161, 189-190 and 196; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 142-143).

Student activists formed alliances and worked hand in hand with labour and urban poor groups. The Federation of Independent Students of Thailand concentrated its work on slum dwellers in the capital and cooperated with emerging trade union leaders to campaign for higher wages and better working conditions. The NSCT worked hard in supporting the first major strikes of textile industry workers in June 1974 which included thousands of workers from about 600 factories. Most importantly, they played a significant role in the first explicit formation of the *samprasan*, a tripartite alliance of students, farmers, and workers. Students went to the villages and mobilised many Central Plain farmers to lend support to the demonstrations of labourers. This political coalition, unprecedented in Thailand, caused much alarm among counterinsurgency agencies (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 154, 159-161, 189-190 and 196).

In addition to collaboration with farmers and labourers, student activists in environment and natural resource conservation clubs mobilised a radical environmental movement. They successfully linked environmental problems with class and state exploitation and US imperialism. They argued about collaboration between the Thai state and capitalist class against the people in their campaigns against deforestation, petro-chemical industry pollution, pollution of the Mekong River caused by a factory, a reservoir in Chonburi Province storing water for Pattaya tourist town but putting more than 2,000 households under water. Furthermore, the environment conservation clubs from 37 institutes, the NSCT, the Law Study Club Thammasat University, and other groups mobilised more than 10,000 protesters to promote campaigns against the impact of the illegal concession to the Temco mine in Southern Thailand and the planned construction of a US military radar station in northern Thailand. They highlighted US imperialism as a major threat to the Thai environment and fought for the autonomy of the Thai environment (Suthachai 2001, 122-126).

The student movement became closer to the CPT both in organisation and ideology.

Through a wide range of media channels including printing houses, newspapers, weekly magazines, underground booklets and a radio station (Voice of the People of Thailand – withayu siang prachachon heng prathetthai), Maoist ideas and CPT political strategies became the only leftist ideas which were comprehensively and fully translated into Thai (Suthachai 2001, 117). Newspapers like *Asia* and *Pituphum (The Fatherland)*, which were secretly supported by the CPT branch in Bangkok, became the main source of information about China, the CPT, and above all Marxist-Maoist ideology and revolutionary strategies (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 287-288; Somsak 2001, 59-64). When the government recognised the People’s Republic of China in early 1975 and began to normalise relations with the new Indochinese states after April of that year, publications of militant leftist literature expanded even further. Some handbooks used by the CPT to train its cadres were openly on sale in Bangkok’s bookstands and university bookstores. Party pamphlets such as *Chiwathat Yaowachon (Youth’s View of Life)*, written by a member of the CPT politburo, were distributed freely on university campuses (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 163).

Their messages were spread and reproduced by and among students. Hundreds of pamphlets and books on Marxism and Maoism were published in Thailand and widely read by secondary and college students. By late 1975, most active students - leaders of the NSCT, the Student Centre of Thailand and various student unions in major universities - had become committed to the pursuit of a revolutionary path. The statements of student leaders came to resemble the CPT’s policy guidelines. Both groups stressed the struggle for independence and attacked US imperialism, foreign capitalists and investors, feudal elements, the military, bureaucratic capitalists, and the liberal democratic form of government. Student publications emphasised their interest in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and used leftist terminology, such as ‘US imperialists’, ‘capitalists’, ‘feudalists’, ‘warlords’, ‘exploitation’, ‘armed struggle’, ‘cultural revolution’, and so forth. Even a magazine published by the Buddhist Thai cultural group of a Bangkok high school declared that Thai youth had to be united and coordinate their struggle with the masses in order to destroy ‘the rotten and reactionary social system’ and establish ‘a new social order with real independence and freedom.’ A writer with the pen name ‘Revolutionary Youth’ in another student magazine, *Yuwathat (Youth View)*, appealed to students to take up arms against ‘capitalists, feudalists and the bourgeoisie.’ By mid-1975, *Athipat (Sovereign)*, the NSCT newspaper, supported the

CPT's stand and published articles and editorial columns arguing that the only way to improve society was through revolutionary means, not through democracy or an evolutionary course. In one issue *Athipat* went so far as to publish a column explaining exactly how to use the Russian-made AK-47 machine gun, the CPT's basic weapon. Thirayuth Boonmee had become well versed in Marxism and Maoism and had translated into Thai a book, *The Chinese Path to Socialism* (bon sen thang su sangkhom niyom chin), written in English. New revolutionary cultural objects mushroomed and echoed the revolutionary messages. University 'songs for life' bands started composing and performing revolutionary songs and those which had been composed by leading Thai revolutionaries affiliated with the CPT. Several of the CPT's own songs were played on the party's clandestine radio station to which many of the students listened, and were whistled and sung openly on university campuses (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 162-163, 172, 288-290). These helped in simplifying complicated Maoist texts and enhancing sentiments for the revolutionary mission (Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Bangkok).

Several scholars argue that by early 1973, student activists and their organisations became counterfeit Maoist organising units and part of the CPT force (Kasian 1984a, 44-45; Somsak 2001, 59-64). Students turned to promoting political activities in line with CPT ideas. Activists in nearly all universities collaborated with the Farmers' Federation of Thailand which appeared to be a front organisation of the CPT. Political study groups organised among students clearly functioned as a means of teaching and spreading Maoist ideas and promoting the revolutionary mission rather than as intellectual debates and exercises as before 14<sup>th</sup> October (Cheep and Ped, interview by author, 21 March 2007 and 25 November 2006, Bangkok; Kasian 1984a, 44-45). By early October 1976, nearly 1,000 students and half or more of their leadership had already been in contact with CPT members (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 289-290).

Underneath the unified picture of a radical student movement and its shift toward a radical direction with the Maoist-Communist discourse of former liberal students, the organisational relationship and ideological integration between students and the CPT was complicated and contested. At the same time, activism and the ideological framing process were not strictly confined. The contest and competition among different shades of student activists continued.

The organisational domination and ideological guidance of the CPT over students was loose, decentralised and distant through a unit cell structure rather than by direct line of command. Before the 14<sup>th</sup> October uprising, the CPT had little interest in the student movement due to its rural policy focus and awareness of anti-communist suppression measures and its illegal status (Kanok 1981, 305-306; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 286-287). There were few CPT members in urban areas who developed secret connections with a few student leaders. Many CPT members helped to push forward the Group Appealing for a Constitution and urged their children and people in labour unions to join the demonstration. They also worked behind several people in newspapers and publishing houses to collaborate in support of the student movement (Somsak 2001, 59-64). However, in doing so, the CPT had to maintain security. Direct communications or a direct relationship between students and the party was limited (Jaran 2003, 218-221). After the success of the student movement on 14<sup>th</sup> October, the central committee of the CPT began to take an active interest in the student movement (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 286-287; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 152-153). But their focus was still on a rural militant revolutionary strategy. For the CPT, the revolution in the city by students was an inspiration for the revolutionary movement but not the correct political strategy (Somsak 2001, 59-64). Right before 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976, there were still only small numbers of students recruited into the formal CPT organisation (Somsak 2004).

The activities of radical students did not focus only on rural and militant strategies. In parallel with mobilising rural farmers, their work also emphasised alliances with the progressive bourgeoisie, support for the labour movement, promotion of electoral democracy and environmental issues (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 159-161).

Many student leaders who had matured politically before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 still perceived themselves as a successful student force independent from the CPT and were radicalised through various political ideas including liberal royalism, New Leftism, and social democracy. (Kasian 1984a, 43; Kasian 1996, 78-80; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 152-153). Many of them insisted on supporting the approaches of parliamentary politics, civil disobedience and non-violence. From time to time, liberal-socialist students and their approach were condemned by more radical students, particularly those who were radicalised through Maoist ideas after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. They were

labelled by their younger fellows as ‘liberal reactionaries’, ‘petite bourgeoisie’ and ‘self-proclaimed liberal heroes’. The debates among different groups of students normally ended up as ideological dialogues in alienating and disempowering liberal ideas in the movement and opening a space for CPT ideology to lead the student and people’s movement (Kasian 1996, 80).

In terms of ideology, the success of the CPT in achieving a dominant role was not merely in promoting Maoism and Communism. But the framing process also integrated a ‘nationalist’ ideology and highlighted the 1950s Thai left heroes. The CPT emphasised a strong sense of anti-Westernism and antagonism against the Thai state which had developed among students before 14<sup>th</sup> October (Thongchai 1994, 10). At the same time, the party added to this earlier broad nationalism a neo-nationalism which mainly focused on anti-US imperialist ideas and promoted international socialism, particularly alliances with eastern states like China (Suthachai 2001, 94-101).

The glorification of the 1950s Thai left helped in linking the younger student activists with the CPT. In entering the post-1973 new radical period, students searched for a history of their own. While a Thammasat literary group stumbled onto Jit Phumisak’s work and started excavating his works (Reynolds 1987, 39), the CPT intentionally distributed information about Thai left intellectuals (Somsak 1991, 22-37). The party handed in manuscripts to student activists and published Jit’s works and biography through the party publishing houses (Prajak 2005, 312-314; Somsak 2004). Between 1973 and 1976, Jit’s poems, music, reviews, essays, and scholarly studies as well as those of other progressive writers of the 1950s were popularised among students (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 33 and 38; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 300; Reynolds 1987, 14-16; Somsak 1991, 22-37). This discovery and the reprinting of his works made possible linkages between the 1950s and 1973-1976 which helped to define and fortify the emergent post-1973 consciousness, while the CPT was something far away. The 1950s intelligentsia were closer in educational background and in age. And Jit’s life brought them closer to armed struggle and the CPT. Even though Jit Phumisak and Pridi Banomyong had neither been party members in their lifetimes nor had a smooth relationship with the party, the CPT made Jit a party member only after his death to produce a biography of him after October 1973 to capitalise on his growing popularity (Reynolds 1987, 14-17). Nonetheless, the CPT succeeded in romanticising and

portraying a linkage and interwoven history between the CPT and 1950s Thai radical intellectuals. The party portrayed persons like Jit and Pridi as Thai radical intellectuals who eventually agreed with the CPT's militant strategy, and who chose to join and dedicate their lives to the armed struggle of the CPT (Prajak 2005, 312-314; Somsak 1991). They released more and more information about the residency of Assanee Polachantra (Nai Pee - Mr. Ghost) in the jungle with the CPT, the death of Jit Phumisak at Phu Phan, a CPT revolutionary stronghold. Subsequently, students took a more and more romanticised view of a revolutionary with the CPT in the jungle and became convinced that militant revolution was the only option. By the late 1970s, these older home-grown Marxists had largely replaced the international New Left as the central influence. Jit Phumisak became the model of how to be a 'revolutionary intellectual' for left wing students of the 1973-1976 period. Revolutionaries like Assanee Polachantra who turned himself into a militant fighter in the jungle became legends (Somsak 2004).

#### **2.4 Life with the armed struggle and the decline**

The political polarisation between the student movement and ultra-right wing groups between 1973 and 1976 ended with the massacre of students at Thammasat University on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. The massacre and the military coup that followed in its wake marks the beginning of student participation in the armed struggle of the CPT. The continuing threat of the ultra-right wing movement and the welcoming policy of the CPT encouraged most radical students to flee to the jungle and join the revolutionary struggle. However, life in the revolutionary bases was different from their expectations. They were assigned to propaganda work and other mundane activities, rather than ideological and intellectual exercises. They experienced ideological conflicts with the CPT and among themselves during the Indochina conflict. The collapse of the CPT and the shift of the Thai government in a more moderate direction by 1980 eventually drove all students home.

The direct experience of the massacre at Thammasat University, the series of arrests and threats and the later domination of an ultra-conservative government and forces, made

both liberals and radicals understand that there was no space left for them in Bangkok<sup>29</sup> (Anderson 1977, 24; Haberkorn 2007; Kasian 1984a, 43; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 277-278). In the meantime, the CPT, which had reached its peak both in terms of support from Communists in Indochina<sup>30</sup> as well as expansion of its military activities and areas throughout the country (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 159, 195 and 295), immediately condemned the *sakdina* (aristocracy), royalists, business elites and US imperialists as the forces behind the killings on 6<sup>th</sup> October (Thikan 2005, 21-25). It affirmed that joining the armed struggle and revolutionary movement of the CPT was the only way to survive and win against the conservative regime and right wing movements. This sympathetic move impressed and convinced the vast majority of radical students. An estimated 3,000 students, farmer leaders, labour leaders, leftist politicians, nurses and intellectuals, gave up their university places, civil service jobs, union posts, and teaching positions and fled to the hills into the arms of the insurgent movement (Jiranan 2006, 214-216; Kasian 1984a, 43; Kasian 1996, 80-82; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 285-293 and 299-300; Thikan 2005, 1, 21-25 and 44)<sup>31</sup>.

The processes and routes by which student activists reached the revolutionary bases varied. Some fled directly to the jungle through earlier connections with CPT members, while others had to roam around different places searching for contacts. Through

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<sup>29</sup> More than 3,094 students were arrested on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. 2,000, 200, 700 and 100 were detained in Bangkok, Chonburi, and Nakhon Pathom prisons and police stations, respectively. Although most were released on bail, 19 leading activists and labor unionists were tried on communism charges in military courts. These students and unionists were detained for 710 days before being released without charge.

<sup>30</sup> With full support from communist neighbours in Indochina between 1975 and 1978, the CPT dramatically expanded its military activities, not only in military supplies, but also in the availability of secure rear bases in which to train party cadres, soldiers, and hospitalise the wounded (Kanok 1981, 384-385). By 1975, estimates of the armed threat showed some 8,000 to 10,000 full-time armed insurgents, supported by some 6,000 to 7,000 unarmed civilian activists in the CPT infrastructure (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 195 and 295).

<sup>31</sup> Many left-wing student activists were temporarily imprisoned or fled abroad. While official statistics from ISOC stated around 1,000 students went into the jungle, other independent and radical media gave estimates ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 and more who joined the armed struggle of the CPT. Because those who were in the Southern revolutionary base alone were more than 1,000, and more than around 500-1,000 postponed enrollment at Thammasat University the following year (Jiranan 2006, 214-216; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 285-286, 291-293 and 299-300; Thikan 2005, 1 and 44). And recently, Kasian (1996, 80-82) mentioned on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 6<sup>th</sup> October that at least 3,000 students joined the armed struggle of the CPT after 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976.

different routes, some near and some far, students were spread out at various revolutionary bases throughout the country (Thikan 2005, 47-48). Upon arrival, the students were impressed by the warmth and courtesy of the CPT in sharing their anger and bitterness (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 152-153). This was the most enjoyable period of their revolutionary experience. It was the first time they had met real communists and the revolutionary base communes of the CPT which they had only dreamt of or read about. They were excited by the unfamiliar culture of the CPT, and they were soon calling each other 'comrade (sahai)' and coining pseudonyms. They were moved by the support of local people for the CPT. In the south in particular, most local villagers sent their children to join and provided the required resources for the CPT (Thikan 2005, 72). Above all, they gained courage with the influx of more student friends (Vi, interview by author, 8 December 2006, Chiang Mai) and official declarations and news of student leaders joining the revolutionary struggle led by the CPT (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 296-297; Thikan 2005, 70 and 87-88).

Upon arrival at revolutionary bases, students had to join Military and Political Training Schools which had been specially organised for them. The theoretical classes and reading groups at these schools were mainly dominated by the strict ideas and history of the Maoist CPT<sup>32</sup>. These mostly functioned to confirm the understanding and loyalty of students to the CPT ideological direction rather than promoting leftist ideological dialogues (Kanok 1981, 305-309). Students had already seen and heard most of the literature read in group discussion before joining the CPT (Rue-dee 1996, 173; Thikan 2005, 28-30, 65-67 and 171-177). The main focus at the schools was basic practical and military skills training for their survival and military combat. Students were trained for propaganda work. They learned how to work independently in mobilising the process of listening to problems - building up friendship - establishing and living with/in the community - persuading - organising people to stand up to fight against the Thai state. Students with special training, particularly those with medical and musical backgrounds, were also sent to Vietnam and China for further specialised training. They

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<sup>32</sup> Readings were limited to Maoist literature, CPT declarations and agreements, and other CPT thinkers' writings which focused on and covered mainly CPT's analysis of Thai society as semi-colonial and semi-feudal, the revolutionary strategies of the CPT in promoting a revolutionary people's war in rural areas and democratic war in urban areas, etc. Moreover, the learning process in theoretical classes in the jungle was more instructive than interactive (Thikan 2005, 25-40 and 49; Ungpakorn 2003b, 204).

were expected to return and provide long-term support for the revolutionary war (Kanok 1981, 314–317; Thikan 2005, 124–128).

After a brief introduction at the schools, rank-and-file students were placed in small groups of five to ten to work in different functions in some of the 250 liberated villages where the CPT was in full control (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 296-297; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 161-162). In the liberated zones, students worked actively as ‘supplementary’ teams for the party in various capacities. They were mostly assigned according to the skills and professions which they had developed and established prior to entering the jungle (Thikan 2005, 48-51). Their work ranged from activities in the cultural and music division, military action, alliance development, medical services, advocacy and mass mobilisation, and producing radio programmes for Voice of the People of Thailand (withayu siang prachachon heng prathetthai) and newsletters for revolutionary bases, research and theoretical studies etc (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 296-297). Furthermore, they used their professional skills to work for the community and production sections in support of the CPT and local people in the liberated zones. While some organised schools and provided medical services, others provided technical support for these remote communities including electricity, water systems, etc. (Jiranan 2006, 156; Working Committee of Phoo Payak Monument 2005, 60-90 and 129-133).

Later, some who proved tough enough to join frontline units would be assigned to join the ‘armed propaganda units’ with the armed forces - the People’s Liberation Army of Thailand. Their mission was to expand the external relations of the CPT among rural farmers and ethnic minorities in new areas (Thikan 2005, 124-128). Students had to perform four major duties, namely, propaganda, medical services (bare-foot doctors), entertainment and self-defence. When visiting a village, unit members responsible for propaganda presented the CPT’s ideology and policies and criticised the government, the medical activists provided medical services to villagers, the entertainers staged a play and performed revolutionary music for villagers, while the self-defence corps protected the unit from government forces (Kanok 1981, 387-404).

Student leaders, particularly those who had produced intellectual work and were involved in print media, were recruited to work closely with senior CPT members in producing printed media for the revolutionary bases and radio programmes for the

Voice of the People of Thailand clandestine radio station (Thikan 2005, 54-62 and 66-67). With the support of students, more than 20 newsletters were regularly distributed in various revolutionary bases (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 296-297; Thikan 2005, 57-59)<sup>33</sup>. The productions of the Voice of the People of Thailand radio station were more effective. Student singers, musicians and artists started working in the art and culture division. They organised revolutionary bands and worked for cultural units in producing revolutionary songs, plays and other cultural activities both for entertaining rural people and asserting communist and revolutionary ideas in the context of their work. Apparently, their news stories, songs, poems, articles and interviews became one of the major sources of content for the Voice of the People of Thailand clandestine radio station (Thikan 2005, 48-53 and 63-64).

The participation of these students expanded the revolutionary bases of the CPT five-fold (Thikan 2005, 50, 54 and 193). However, the experience of revolutionary struggle did not advance their leftist ideology or theory. Instead, students obtained practical and political mobilisation skills working with marginalised and poor people as well as in-depth knowledge and understanding about problems and characteristics of rural Thailand which not even the Thai state managed to access (Thikan 2005, 124-125). Through sharing work and life in war zones and revolutionary bases, students also developed strong friendships, social connections and networks with their student fellows, farmers, local politicians, senior CPT comrades, and ethnic minorities.

The honeymoon period between students and the CPT did not last long. The students' initially favourable impression of the CPT was diminished by intractable working conditions, a centralised command structure and increasing conflicts. Many students became dissatisfied with difficult working conditions and conflicts at the operational level. Not only were they incapable of adjusting to working with limited resources, in physically demanding and dangerous work, but many young student recruits also found the psychological pressures and demands to follow revolutionary morality and discipline unbearable. Many could neither tolerate expectations to be tougher, more

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<sup>33</sup> At their peak, Fire Lam Tung, one of the most popular newsletters in Southern Thailand, was printed in more than 5,000 copies. At No. 61 base various groups of leading student activists produced *Athipat* (*Sovereign*) newsletters and ran NSST in a revolutionary situation (Thikan 2005, 57-59). Thirayuth Boonmee was editing *Samakhi Surop* (*United to Fight*), a magazine circulated among students and intellectuals both in Thailand and abroad (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 296-297).

disciplined, and more obedient than the average peasant recruits, nor the discipline of everyday life as revolutionaries. They suffered in that they had to atone for their sins of bourgeois materialism, middle-class consciousness and liberal individualism (Kanok 1981, 306-307; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 161-162).

Many leading student activists later claimed that they suffered from unequal treatment and exploitation by a nepotistic, hierarchical structure (Kasian 1996, 80-82) and centralism within the CPT. Nepotism and authoritarianism in the Party made the radicals feel that the system was unfair, not only for them, but also for other cadres who had been working hard in the revolutionary movement. They felt that only those who were generally more Chinese or had been sent to study in China gained faster promotion within the party political hierarchy. But for those without revolutionary seniority or family connections with the top, complaints were useless. Praise and promotion seemed channelled along family lines. Many of those who were close to the CPT leadership were protected (Jiranan 2006, 272). Very few students were allowed to become full CPT members. The party organisation, and consultation and decision-making procedures were undemocratic and non-deliberative. Subsequently, a number of students felt that the party would never be able to bring democracy to the country even if it were successful in seizing power (Kanok 1981, 309-311; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 162-163 and 183-188). Many student leaders, former socialist politicians, and leaders of student organisations who had joined the CPT as independent allies in the expectation of equal partnership with the CPT in fighting against the Thai state and in protecting sovereignty, democracy and social justice disagreed with the CPT on its centralised command over the revolutionary movement, its hierarchical structure and the privileged status of CPT members (Kasian 1984a, 43; Kasian 1996, 80-82; Thikan 2005, 74-80, 87-88 and 248). The proposal of former left student politicians to establish a shadow government comprising several socialist parties and the CPT was rejected by the CPT (Thikan 2005, 75 and 272).

Other conflicts at the operational level and tactical issues with local and CPT members also discouraged student activists from completing their revolutionary mission with the CPT. Students complained that they spent most of their time on subsistence cultivation rather than the revolution (Caravan 2000, 32-33). Moreover, disputes over tactics and strategy in improving working conditions, administering the revolutionary bases and

expanding rural mass support disappointed huge numbers of radical students who decided to abandon the CPT. Within less than a year, most of the students who were dissatisfied with the CPT and their assignment either left the CPT or moved to their own bases.

These problems at the operational level eventually turned into uncompromising ideological conflict with and distrust of the leadership of the CPT after the outbreak of the war among communist states in Indochina and the change in Chinese foreign policy leading to more friendly relations with the Thai government (Kanok 1981, 340-341). Amidst the concurrent ideological disputes between the Chinese and the Soviet Union, between 1978 and 1979, there was the extraordinary first open war between communist states in world history (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 40). While Vietnam and the Lao PDR were closely allied with the Soviet Union, the Khmer Rouge sided with the People's Republic of China. Vietnam's decision to invade Cambodia in December 1978, its dominance within Laos and the overthrow of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge government shortly thereafter was embroiled in fierce Sino-Soviet competition, leading to the strike by China against North Vietnam. Even though the earlier survival and expansion of the CPT between 1975 and 1978 relied heavily on military and financial supplies from Vietnam and Lao (Kanok 1981, 384-385; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-168), the CPT was closer to China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) both in term of its history and ideology (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 304-305). After initial efforts to be neutral in this conflict, the CPT was eventually pressured to publicly announce its support for China and its 'Three World' theory in going against the USSR, Laos and Vietnam. With the CPT's pro-Chinese orientation and its decision to stay on an anti-Vietnamese course, by the end of 1979, the Vietnamese and Lao communist parties formally pledged not to support the insurgency in Thailand and demanded that all CPT bases be withdrawn from Lao territory (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-168). All large CPT supporting facilities in Laos and Vietnam including major political schools, military training camps and hospitals were closed and moved to less secure 'liberated' areas within Thailand. The CPT also lost many ethnic Lao and Vietnamese cadres, fighters and sympathisers. All routes of supply from China through Vietnam and Laos for the CPT were terminated (Kanok 1981, 384-385; Thikan 2005, 90-95, 160; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-168).

Many students and lower ranking members were uncomfortable with shortages of supplies as well as having to fight against Lao and Vietnamese comrades who had earlier closely collaborated with them and had provided valuable support (Thikan 2005, 90-95, 160). At the same time, the Indochina conflict was also a psychological loss for the students. Many had grown up with and were encouraged to join the insurgency by the Communist victory in the Vietnam War against the United States and above all the idea of international left wing solidarity. Without support both from China, the Lao PDR and Vietnam, they were discouraged and their morale deteriorated (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 4-41; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-168).

Worse than the suspension of supplies from Laos and Vietnam, the new Chinese leadership under Deng Xiaoping switched policies from revolution toward more open market-oriented policies after the death of Mao. In carrying out its 'Four Modernisations', China opened its door to the Thai government (Thikan 2005, 90-95, 160). China sold oil to the General Kriangsak Chomanan government (1977–1980) during a serious fuel shortage, for instance. In foreign policy, the CCP worried more about the practicalities of containing Soviet influence along China's southern borders (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-168). Protecting Cambodia from Vietnam and Laos was their crucial mission. In doing so, they used Thai territory to transport troops, weapons and other ammunition to Cambodia in the fight against the Lao and Vietnam communist movements. In exchange for this access, the CCP agreed to reduce its collaboration with and support for the CPT (Kanok 1981, 385-387). Aside from a reduction in support for the CPT, Chinese officials advised the CPT to ease its criticism of the Thai government and reverse their anti-capitalism (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-168 and 170-175). This put the CPT in an impossible position. These abrupt twists in Chinese ideology and foreign policy and the CPT's rigid adherence to the Chinese position immediately caused tremendous fissures among the CPT leadership and lower ranking soldiers. Above all, this infuriated many students. The leading CPT members split. For instance, some challenged the CCP's order to not use the Voice of the People of Thailand radio station as a means of attacking the Thai government and decided to move the radio station to another location. Others insisted on toning down the message. However, after a brief fight, the Voice of the People of Thailand radio station which had been used by the CPT for over quarter of a century to attack the Thai government was eventually forced to discontinue its broadcasts.

These changing conditions not only brought disappointment, but also led to severe ideological disagreements and disillusionment among students toward the CPT. Students started being disillusioned with the party's dependence on Chinese support, the CPT's unquestioned allegiance to Maoism and ignorance of other interpretations of Marxism (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-169), its foreign policy and its analysis of Thai society and revolutionary ideas and direction (Thongchai 1994, 12; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 172). First of all, the student activists were concerned about the dominance of Mao's thought on the differentiation of the Three Worlds theory (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 164-175). They argued with the decision of the CPT to pursue the Three Worlds theory, to support China against the USSR, Laos and Vietnam as a new threat to the revolutionary mission pushed the CPT into too close a reliance on China (Thikan 2005, 100-102).

Second, the student activists argued that the total ideological dependence on the Chinese-Maoist pattern had caused the CPT to misinterpret Thai society and to pursue the wrong revolutionary strategy (Jiranan 2006, 214-215; Kanok 1981, 349-350; Thikan 2005, 248). Influenced by Maoist guidelines, the CPT viewed Thai society as semi-feudal and semi-colonial, which was favourable to an armed revolution in rural areas, like in China in the 1930s. The CPT perceived Thai society before 1855 as a feudal society with a natural or self-sufficient economy and political power controlled by the King. However, from 1855 onwards, Thailand was gradually transformed into a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society by imperialist powers, particularly Great Britain and France. As feudalism declined, a capitalist economy gradually emerged. However, capitalist development was limited to urban areas, while rural areas remain under feudal domination, especially with respect to the relations of production. The system of government and consciousness of the people was still feudal in character. In other words, capitalism had not yet fully developed and feudalism had not yet been completely destroyed in Thailand. According to this analysis, the CPT held that the peasants – the majority of the Thai people - were subjected to the exploitation of imperialists, feudalists, and bureaucratic-capitalists (Kanok 1981, 216-227 and 373-378). In launching the revolution against these powers, the CPT adopted a Maoist strategy, namely, the 'countryside encircles the town' strategy, through armed struggle

among rural peasants (the main force of its revolution) (Kanok 1981, ii-iii; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 175-176).

The analysis of Thai society as semi-colonial and semi-feudal was unconvincing for the students (Jiranan 2006, 214-215; Thikan 2005, 248). For them, Thailand had more of a capitalist nature. The capitalist mode of production had developed widely in urban areas during the previous ten years and the feudal character of Thai society had been mostly destroyed (Thirayuth 1981, 26). Capitalist exploitation in the cities made the middle class, the intellectuals, and labourers, ripe for class struggle (Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 181-182). The idea of the country encircling the cities was obsolete because of the modern weaponry of the Thai state. In addition, Thailand is much smaller than China, so the ruling class can manoeuvre its repressive might in all regions, making it difficult to expand the revolutionary war. Therefore, the revolution should start in the cities with the middle class as a crucial revolutionary force (Kanok 1981, 376-379; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 175-176). Alongside ideological clashes, there was also a generation gap between the liberals of 14<sup>th</sup> October and 1950's CPT revolutionaries (Jiranan 2006, 206-208). Overall, because of their diverse liberal and socialist ideological socialisation before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, many students of 14<sup>th</sup> October could hardly stand being forced to follow the CPT's strictly Maoist ideas and interpretation (Giles 2003b, 205 and 208).

In arguing against the CPT, many student leaders initially drew up and proposed constructive ideological and strategic suggestions through the party's internal deliberative process (Thikan 2005, 160, 177-218, 206 and 239). For the most part, the response of the CPT toward these proposals and criticisms was rejection and harsh and alienating retaliation. The acceleration of these conflicts caused many of these student activists eventually to abandon the CPT in disgust. Those who either tried to propose alternative ideas through newsletters like *Sueksa (Educate)* and *Phu Buk Boek (Pioneer)* or overtly criticised the party and its leadership, faced social sanctions such as censorship of their works, condemnation as soviet reactionaries and revisionists, isolation, or even threats from militant CPT members. Because of these suppressive and distressing reactions from the CPT toward their criticisms, many students felt that there was no room for compromise as the party put pressure on them to conform. Many became disillusioned with the Party and started to defect from the party from the early

1980s with extreme anguish (Thikan 2005, 160 and 177-218; Jiranan, 2003, 272-273; Yuangrat and Wedel 1987, 189-191).

After leaving the CPT, many students lined up to insult the party in public (Thikan 2005, 222). Several major figures like Yuk Sri-Ariya (Tienchai Wongchaisuwan), Boonsong Chareatorn and Thirayuth Boonmee gave interviews and wrote a series of articles for various major magazines attacking the CPT (Kanok 1981, 329-341; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 304-305; Thikan 2005, 124-128). It was the first time the CPT had been criticised and challenged publicly (Kanok 1981, 329-341). Discrediting the CPT through a nationalist approach successfully discredited and alienated the CPT among the Thai public. They attacked the party for not being the legitimate leaders of the Thai revolutionary movement because it was dominated by the Chinese and used by China to control Third World countries. For them, the party was dominated by a 'Jin Jaa' (strongly pro-Chinese) ambience and Chinese-oriented staff who were of Chinese ancestry, educated in China and hardly spoke Thai. Furthermore, several students went even further by joining the CPT's opponents, such as the Communists in Laos and Vietnam, to form a new Thai communist party, condemned by the CPT as pro-Soviet reactionaries (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 304-305; Thikan 2005, 91, 97-98, 100-102, 128 and 134-141, 242-247).

Amidst these changes and conflicts, the CPT began to review and improve the party as well as reducing tensions. However, its efforts were too little, too late. Many studies, discussions and seminars within the CPT were conducted at various levels to collect the opinions and ideas of its cadres concerning the revolution (Kanok 1981, 329-341). The 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of leading members of the CPT was organised. But, instead of solving the problems, more disagreements, unpromising hopes for improvement and undemocratic processes during preparation for the meeting only worsened the situation. Many leading and lower-ranking party members resigned from the CPT (Thikan 2005, 1 and 7).

The internal conflicts and decline of the CPT not only caused confrontation between radical students and CPT members but it also brought about tremendous fragmentation and polarisation among students (Jiranan 2006, 123-125; Thikan 2005, 156). Not all of them went against the CPT. Many still stood on the side of the CPT and continued

working to support the revolutionary missions led by the CPT amidst the conflicts. The first groups of students were mainly concentrated among the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 generation who were organised through Maoist ideology even before entering the armed struggle. They thus neither had problems with nor questioned the strict Maoist ideas and self-discipline processes indoctrinated into them by the CPT. Secondly, there were those who were satisfied with their supportive working conditions. Living in bases with small communities, with sufficient support from local people, successful experiences in expanding rural mass, respectable and dedicated CPT leaders, and assigned missions suitable for their interests and professional background, and with no Chinese or CPT leadership intervention in their work, they believed in and built and strengthened supportive relationships with the CPT. Thirdly, those who lived in remote, isolated and small military bases were not informed and had no access to information about the conflict.

At the initial stage of the conflict, students who were still loyal to the CPT perceived these disputes as minor, short-term problems. The decision of the CPT to support the CCP in the Indochina war and the closure of the Voice of the People of Thailand were just short-term policies and would not cause long-term problems (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok). Furthermore, they did not look at the confrontation between students and CPT members in the revolutionary bases as a structural problem but instead as a set of personal and marginal issues. Allegations against the party were exaggerated (Somsak 2001, 49-51). Even if some started questioning the ideas and strategies of the CPT, they treated their hesitation as a minor issue and told themselves that every revolution faces obstacles. Subsequently, they soldiered on working for the CPT. They condemned their fellow students who had problems with the CPT as liberal individualists who could not manage to adjust to the party's discipline. Meanwhile, critics disparaged their fellow student activists as naïve and dogmatic CPT loyalist children (Jiranan 2006, 141-143; Thikan 2005, 57-60).

Eventually, the collapse of the CPT and the shift of Thai security policy into a moderate direction encouraged students to return home, whether they were supportive of or antagonistic to the CPT. By the early 1980s, with the withdrawal of support from China, Laos and Vietnam, internal conflict and the failure of revolutionary ideas and strategy, the CPT gradually deteriorated. By the mid 1980s, most CPT strongholds and

revolutionary bases had been destroyed by the Thai military. Leading CPT members moved out of the revolutionary bases and eventually many were arrested (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok; Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai). There were still many students who insisted on remaining in the liberated areas and fighting to protect their military bases and the local people to whom they felt obliged until very last moment. Nonetheless, when other nearby bases were destroyed and no leading CPT members remained, they were eventually all forced to leave and return home (Porn-narong, interview by author, 7 March 2007, Bangkok). Unlike those who disagreed with the CPT, these groups of radical students left the CPT and said farewell with respect, sympathy and understanding of their limitations. These people returned home humiliated, as they had to admit that the CPT was no longer a potential revolutionary organisation; they gave up on the revolution, and returned home.

At the same time, the political ambience back home had become politically more liberal and the government's anti-communist policy had been moderated. By the end of 1977, under the leadership of General Kriangsak Chomanan, a young pragmatic military and elite ousted the ultra-right wing government of Tanin Kraivixien. This coup gave the signal that the 'Dark Age' of modern Thai politics had ended. The curfew was ended. More open expression of views in the press and on university campuses were allowed, although by no means representing freedom of speech. In 1978, a more liberal constitution was passed and in 1979 an election was allowed. The government relaxed its earlier extremist anti-communist policies and pursued a more neutral foreign policy toward conflicts in Indochina. For instance, General Kriangsak reopened communications and eventually secured the collaboration of China and Vietnam in blocking the CPT, as mentioned above. Under the subsequent government of General Prem Tinsulanonda, these moderate policies continued (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 277-279). Most importantly, from 1978 onward, the Kriangsak government started offering an amnesty to students, intellectuals and others involved in the October 6, 1976 events who had gone to the hills. And amidst the degeneration and deterioration of the CPT, to persuade students and local CPT military units to abandon the CPT, the Prem government issued order 66/23, a Communist amnesty measure which returned student status to all students who decided to return home (Jiranan 2006, 270; Thikan 2005, 20-21). This policy offered the choice of returning home to all students. By 1981, whether

apathetic or sympathetic to the CPT, the majority of students who had fled in 1976 were back to where they came from (Anderson and Mendiones 1985, 40; Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 303).

Without preparations by the CPT or student activists, the student movement was dispersed and left unorganised in Bangkok and elsewhere. Upon return, many student activists still hoped to revise their revolutionary strategy and organise a new political movement in urban areas (Thikan 2005, 97-98 and 128). They perceived the destruction of revolutionary bases and arrests of CPT members as short-term, low tide conditions for revolution. Their plan was to wait until the situation improved to revive their revolutionary struggle at an opportune moment (Cheep, Jariya and Pha, interview by author, 21 March 2007, 24 February 2007 and 3 March 2007, Bangkok; Somchai P., interview by author, 29 March 2007, Mahasarakham; Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai). However, without a focus on, or serious groundwork in, urban areas, the CPT was unable to revive its work in the cities or to reconnect with those who had fled after the revolutionary bases had been destroyed (Thikan 2009). By mid-1985, when the CPT structure had vanished and most leading figures were arrested, all students had to admit that the CPT as well as their expected revival of their revolutionary struggle had definitely collapsed and could not be revised for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, continued fragmentation and distrust obstructed attempts by student activists to reorganise themselves. Those who were supportive of the CPT carried on blaming their student activist opponents for the decline of the CPT. Eventually, by the mid 1980s, all student activists were left disappointed and had to abandon their revolutionary dreams and continue their lives like other ordinary people (Jaran, Lert and Pha, interview by author, 15 February 2007, 7 February 2007, 3 March 2007, Bangkok; Khaen Sarika 1987, 55-56 and 65-66).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The 1970s was the decade that marked the birth of the Thai Octobrists. Their activist lives during that period were full of controversy. They went through periods of both success and failure. Their movement started as a loose network. It became a strong and unified student movement, and eventually dissolved after the dispiriting collapse of the

revolutionary leadership of the CPT. In promoting their movement and activism, they forged different alliances, ranging from the liberal-royalist elite, farmers and labour groups, to the Communist movement. Their radicalisation and their framing process were based on a variety of problematic ideologies and discourses ranging from liberal democracy, the New Left, national-royalism, and Maoism-Communism. Above all, their dream of promoting social and political change ended with ideological disillusion and open conflict among themselves.

The 1970s students were a by-product of the baby boom. Their first political move was a result of their frustration with corrupt and ineffective authoritarian regimes that could hardly handle the end of the long war-related economic boom of the late 1960s. Their movement was influenced by the global New Left and anti-war movements, liberal politicians as well as their supposedly democratic King. Their initial efforts in small politically active student groups gradually developed into strong networks allied with various liberal reformist elites. Their success was marked by their leading roles in the anti-military movement which forced the authoritarian government out of the country on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973.

There was a big leap after the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident. Amidst political liberalisation, student activists' political activities proliferated and their significance increased. They collaborated to promote farmer, labour and anti-imperialist movements. These student activists turned more radical under the shadow of an increase in power of the Communist movement both outside and inside the country and increasing suppression from the growing ultra-right wing movement. Their organisation was strong and under the full control of radical forces. They used Marxist-Maoist-Communist ideas and discourse under the long distance guidelines of the CPT.

Their radical activities in urban areas ended in the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 massacre. Most radical students fled to join the armed struggle with the CPT with the hope of continuing their movement. Under the strict control of the CPT, they were assigned to work in support of Maoist-CPT ideas and missions. The students who had been socialised through different ideologies and had organised independently were dissatisfied and in conflict with their own fellow students in their opinion of the party. Many became disillusioned with the party and its revolutionary mission after the CPT

followed the Chinese Communists in becoming sympathetic toward the Thai government in exchange for support to attack their Communist neighbours. With an amnesty granted by a new more moderate Thai government, many groups abandoned the party. Those who had been supportive of the CPT were also forced to leave their revolutionary bases because of the collapse of the party by the mid 1980s. With no CPT groundwork in the urban areas and continuing conflict among the Octobrists, they were left disorganised. This marked the dissolution of the student movement of the 1970s, but not the end of the Octobrists as a force in Thai politics.

### Chapter 3

#### **The revival and construction of Octobrists from ‘1970s failed leftist student activists’ to ‘1970s Octobrists-democratic fighters’**

This morning, I went to pay respect to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October heroes, as I usually do every one or two weeks. I always buy two wreaths to pay respect at the monuments commemorating the people’s uprising against dictatorship on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and the student massacre on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 in front of the main auditorium of Thammasat University.

I place one wreath in the hand of the statue representing the 14<sup>th</sup> October heroes and press my hands together and bow in memory of ‘rights and liberty’.

I put the other wreath on top of the granite memorial to the 6<sup>th</sup> October heroes and press my hands together and bow in memory of ‘social justice’.

Indeed, 30 years ago, ‘social justice’ was interpreted as meaning the same as ‘socialism’ before the political crisis of the Thai revolutionary movement led by the CPT and the ideological crisis of international socialism during the last two decades made this interpretation fade away.

But the dream of ‘social justice’ remains.

(Kasian 2006, 6)

After their return from the failure of the armed struggle led by the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai – CPT), the Octobrists gave up their revolutionary struggle and continued their lives like other ordinary people. Several initial efforts to revive the leftist movement failed. Their ongoing gatherings during the 1980s were rather divisive and apolitical and functioned merely as a means of maintaining their old boy networks. Only from the early 1990s did the Octobrists gradually succeed in reunifying their earlier political networks, recovering pride in their 1970s political history and securing public acceptance of their generation. Instead of leftist failures, they then became known as the Octobrist-democratic heroes of the 1970s. More and more people from this generation came out to reveal themselves in public and to claim to be Octobrists. The public and media also followed suit. By the

end of the 1990s, commemorations of their 1970s leftist history were treated almost as national celebrations of democracy.

In unpacking the causes behind these developments and trends, this chapter attempts to answer two major questions. Firstly, why did the initial attempts to recover the leftist movement among Octobrists fail during the 1980s? Secondly, how and why did they then succeed in reunifying and regaining public support under the new political identity of ‘Octobrists: democratic fighters’? Regarding the initial failure, this chapter argues that there were three major causes: the hostile political conditions against leftist movements amidst the collapse of the CPT; the loose and divisive organisational structure of the leftist movement which hindered their revival in the post-CPT era; and the uncompromising conflicts among them since the mid 1970s and during the decline of the CPT regarding the past failure and future direction of the movement. With respect to the second question, three major interrelated conditions brought about the success of the 1970s student activists in reinventing themselves under the new identity of Octobrists and heroes of democracy. The first condition was the emergence of new political conditions. The end of the Cold War and the decline of the CPT made the Thai government stop perceiving these student activists as a political threat. Domestic political liberalisation by the late 1980s, including the rise of the democratic mass movement against the return of the military into parliamentary politics in 1992, the rise of the social movement throughout the 1990s, and the political reform in the late 1990s, provided a supportive and fluid political environment for the Octobrists to revive their political activities. The second condition was the successful political and social positions of these Octobrists which enhanced their means and status in stating their message to the public as well as promoting their new identity among the elite and middle class. The last and most important was the comprehensive process of democratising their leftist history and elements of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October incidents, normalising their leftist reputations and cultural legacy, and institutionalising ‘Octobristism’ with their reconstructed democratic historical background.

### **3.1 Initial failure in revitalising the leftist movement among 1970s student activists**

At the onset of the return from armed struggle in the mid 1980s, some Octobrists tried to keep their leftist background hidden and refused any further participation in activities in the name of leftist movements. Others who still wished to work for leftist movements failed either to reconnect with the CPT, or to convince their former comrades to continue the revolutionary movement, or to reconcile conflicts among themselves.

At the global level, the Cold War continued. In spite of a 'rollback' of direct intervention by US troops in the Vietnam War in 1973 due to their military failure, a weakened US economy, and rising domestic anti-war movements, the US revived its newly vindicated role and pushed the world and the region into a 'Second Cold War' (1979-1985). While the focus of the First Cold War (1946-1979) on ideological conflict ended by 1979, the Second Cold War shifted toward a new level of confrontation and a conventional struggle for power centred in the Third World between the US and the USSR. US military outlays for the period 1981-1986 expanded. While the Soviet Union continued to support the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia in 1978, the US continued to back an insurgency on the Thai-Cambodian border. In parallel, the US developed a closer relationship with the Chinese government. In pursuing a balanced diplomacy, the Thai government recovered and maintained good relations with China (Buszynski 1982; Halliday 1984). In this new stage of the Cold War, the break between the CPT and the CCP became permanent. Thailand remained very much of a "front-line state" in the Cold War. Under such conditions, the state still kept an eye on Octobrists upon their return, and this created an ambience which obstructed the revival of radical politics (Ciorciari 2010, 64-66 and 86).

At the domestic level, in spite of more relaxed political conditions than in the late 1970s, the dominant role during the semi-democratic polity during the 1980s of the military and several conservative elements mobilised in the 1970s restricted the former activists from reviving their role. By 1977, the ultra-right wing government of Prime Minister Tanin Kraivixien (1976-1977) was forced to step down in a coup and was replaced with more moderate soldiers in General Kriangsak Chomanan (1977-1980) and later General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988). Under pressure from their supporters, the Young Turks (a group of middle-ranking military officers) in the case of Kriangsak

and the Democratic Soldiers in the case of Prem, both governments pushed more moderate policies, including Order 66/2523 which granted an amnesty for insurgents who surrendered, and a new combination of military and political methods in counter-insurgency. Nonetheless, conservative forces both within military and royalist circles still maintained a dominant position. Prem turned to the more senior and conservative military and embraced direct political consent from the palace. By the early 1980s, the more moderate forces, especially the Young Turks, were marginalised, especially after their attempted coup against the interference of older ultra-right wing figures in the Prem government in 1981. And shortly after his moderate move, the Prem regime prepared new laws to retain a dominant role for the army in Parliament, the possibility of a non-elected Prime Minister, a nominated Senate, and electoral rules favouring the military (Chai-anan 1982, 22-65; Charoemkiet 1992, 75-99; Pasuk and Baker 2002, 330-349; Surachai 1982).

Aside from parliamentary politics, freedom of the press and political activities were still constrained in the 1980s. In the post-1976 era, the government empowered the Ministry of the Interior to use Decree 42 to closely monitor the press and implement various repressive measurements against critical journalists. Between 1979 and 1984, forty-seven journalists were assassinated and in some cases the police were directly implicated. In the public sphere, even though political activities were allowed, arrests of leading CPT members continued even in the late 1980s in order to give warning signals to former communists (Chai-anan 1982, 136-137; Pasuk and Baker 2002, 331 and 388-389).

Against this backdrop, most Octobrists considered the grim political atmosphere as the ebb in the revolutionary struggle. Thus, they suspended their political activities, first temporarily and later permanently, and kept a low profile. Many who had just begun their lives in the private sector and started families preferred to keep a distance from their leftist backgrounds and other leftist political activities. They worried that a leftist profile would negatively affect their future career and family life. For example, Vipa Daomane, a former activist from the Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University, later became a successful marketing and advertising executive in various companies and had to conceal her leftist identity by presenting a false CV when first applying for jobs in private companies to cover up the years she spent in the jungle. During social

gatherings of her Chulalongkorn University activist circle, called 'Friends of Chula', many of her friends faced difficulties in explaining the background of this leftist network to their husbands or wives. Some even had to lie to their families about participating in these gatherings (Vipa, interview by author, 28 January 2007, Bangkok).

In addition to the changes in political environment, the initial failures of the student and revolutionary movements were also affected by their loose structural organisation and lack of a prepared strategy for work in the cities. Before the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident, the organisational structure among student activists was kept loose and secret, even among individual members. Their networks were loosely defined by their political clubs, schools and working functions. Even during their time in the revolutionary bases of the CPT, only a few students were recruited as CPT members. They were divided by working function and revolutionary base. These were really remote from each other. Amidst the decline of the CPT, they did not prepare any formal structure or process for reviving their work in the cities. These loose informal structures became one of the major obstacles to the reunification and revival of political activities among these Octobrists (further details in Chapter 2).

Countless Octobrists would still have liked to carry on their revolutionary activities even after leaving the CPT and their revolutionary bases. However, upon their return, they were disconnected from one another and from the CPT. For example, Somchai Phatharathananunth, an activist from Ramkhamhaeng University and recently Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Mahasarakham University, left his revolutionary base in the very last minutes of the CPT in 1985 with sympathy toward many CPT members, in spite of several disagreements over political strategies and ideas. However, upon his return, no CPT member contacted him while he struggled to survive by himself in Bangkok. He said that he did not give up on the CPT, but the party gave up on him (Somchai P., interview by author, 29 March 2007, Mahasarakham). Similarly, Lert Edison (leftist pseudonym) was a student at Chiang Mai University and worked as a prominent technician for the CPT in Northern Thailand. He was sent back to the city when his revolutionary base was destroyed. Nonetheless, he still had vivid hopes for his revolutionary mission. Upon his return the CPT ordered him to wait to be contacted about being sent to a new location. After a year's wait in Chiang Mai, no one contacted

him. He thus returned home to Ratchaburi Province and lost touch with the CPT (Lert, interview by author, 7 February 2007, Bangkok). Porn-narong Pattanaboonpaiboon, a medical doctor from Mahidol University, and Suthisak Pavarathisan, a medical technology student from Chiang Mai University, spent most of their time during the revolution training in various medical schools in China. They and other friends who were sent to China experienced great difficulty in reconnecting with other leftist friends and eventually lost contact with the CPT upon their return because they were all sent back at different times and to different hometowns (Porn-narong, interview by author, 7 March 2007, Bangkok; Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

Furthermore, others who were still able to connect with their student friends and tried to revive the revolutionary movement faced difficulties both in persuading their friends to resume the revolutionary struggle and mediating conflicts among different factions among the students themselves. Watchari Paoluangthong and Jariya Suanpan, who joined the CPT as students from Thammasat University and high school, experienced similar problems in their efforts to organise retreats among people from the same revolutionary base and chain of command. Watchari's revolutionary base was in a very remote area which kept her isolated from - and in ignorance of - the conflicts and decline of the CPT. Combating the situation at her revolutionary base and working with Hmong people were rather promising. However, she had to leave her revolutionary base because her husband needed to be hospitalised in town. Consequently, she came home eager to continue working with the leftist movement. However, she was disappointed because her senior commanders gave up and went back to continue their lives in the city rather than support her efforts to continue her activities. In the same way, Jariya found many meetings among people from her revolutionary base ended up with no conclusion about future solutions. Finally, most people drifted away from the circle and continued with their normal lives (Jariya and Watchari, interview by author, 24 February 2007 and 18 January 2007, Bangkok).

The third obstacle was uncompromising ideological conflict as well as the controversial impact of their leftist experience on their lives after their return. Protracted conflicts and disagreements among the Octobrists which lasted from the mid 1970s until their return became major constraints preventing them from reunifying and continuing their revolutionary mission.

The unreconciled ideological conflicts between the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists and the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists before all were propelled to join the CPT, and between the students and CPT members during the armed struggle, left huge gaps and a lack of trust among the Octobrists. The 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generation were activists radicalised through various ideas from conservative liberalist, New Leftist and social democratic ideologies in the early 1970s, and played leading roles in the triumph of the anti-authoritarian movement on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 (Kasian 1996, 70-74; Pirun, interview by author, 2 February 2007, Bangkok; *Thanon Nangsue* 1985a, 38-42) and became the predominant political force after the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident (Cheep and Jariya, interview by author, 21 March 2007 and 24 February 2007, Bangkok)., while the 6<sup>th</sup> October generation was radicalised through extreme Maoism. The later condemned 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists as ‘petit bourgeois’ and reactionary. The 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists criticised the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists as Red Guards and extreme Maoists. Conflicts which had started after 14<sup>th</sup> October continued even when both sides joined the armed struggle with the CPT (further details in Chapter 2).

On top of this, more serious conflicts over problems with the CPT and life during the revolutionary struggle made relationships among Octobrists rather divisive and difficult to reconcile after they returned. Friction over difficult working conditions, biased sentiment toward the commanding and organisational structure of the CPT, its policy towards the CCP against their Indochinese communist neighbours, and the interpretation of revolutionary ideas and strategy for Thai society, mentioned in chapter 2, did not stop when the students left the Party. These activists carried these controversies back home with them. With these confrontations and the unfriendly environment among former leftists, Octobrists encountered many disagreements among themselves on whether the revolutionary struggle should be discontinued or further improved. Many like Tanet Charoenmuang, a leading 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrist figure from the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, found it difficult to talk to friends who complained bitterly about the CPT and attacked those who still wished to support the CPT and hoped for a revival of the revolutionary movement (Tanet, interview by author, 14 December 2006, Chiang Mai). Pirun Chatwanitchakul and Phra (monk) Suthep Chinwaro<sup>34</sup>, long-term Communist mentors even before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 from Chulalongkorn University and Kasetsart University, realised the mistakes of

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<sup>34</sup> Suthep Lakkhanawichian ordained as Buddhist monk in 1988. He was then known as Phra Suthep Chinwaro.

the CPT but still argued that these could be rectified. However, after their release from jail and return home, they did not want to argue with their friends who left the CPT with sympathetic feelings (Phra Suthep, interview by author, 16 December 2006, Chiang Mai; Pirun, interview by author, 2 February 2007, Bangkok). Somchai Phatharathananunth faced division and disagreement among friends from his revolutionary base. One group gave up. Another would like to carry on the revolution but stick with the old Maoist ideas while others shifted toward new ideas including electoral politics, localism, or even support for military coups (Somchai P., interview by author, 29 March 2007, Mahasarakham).

Students with contrasting experiences in the jungle returned with discordant views of the CPT and the future direction of their movement. Some with fortunate lives in the jungle returned home sympathetic toward the CPT and initially looked forward to reviving and improving the revolutionary movement (Cheep, Jariya and Lert, interview by author, 21 March 2007, 24 February 2007 and 7 February 2007, Bangkok). Others who had a difficult time with CPT members left the CPT with a bad impression. They wanted neither to look back at their past experience with the CPT nor reconcile with those with whom they had fought (Parakorn, interview by author, 7 February 2007, Bangkok). As a result, Octobrists were apparently divided and some did not even trust each other. Their relationships became more and more complicated and fragile. Interactions among different groups mostly ended up in confrontation, and gatherings were unable to come up with any common agreement on past problems and future prospects.

For example, at one extreme, we have someone like Kasian Tejapira, a radical activist during the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident from the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat University, who had many difficulties with and painful memories of CPT members and criticised the lack of internal democracy and the Maoist and Leninist domination of the CPT. In his analytical writing on the decline of the CPT in 1994, he even called the CPT 'out-of-date Communists' as they dehumanised and de-intellectualised student activists during their time in the jungle (Kasian 1984b, 83-84; Kasian 1994b, 70). At the other end, there were people who still believed in the CPT and argued strongly against those who criticised the party as reactionary and accused them of precipitating the decline of the party. Suthisak Pavarathisan, who was socialised through Maoism since high school,

did not find Chinese domination over the CPT a problem. He instead criticised the members of the 14<sup>th</sup> October generation like Seksan Prasertkul, and Thirayuth Boonmee, as problems for the party (Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

Aside from conflicts during the armed struggle, the impact of their activist lives and patterns of struggle gave rise to contradictory perspectives among Octobrists after their return. Those who did not suffer much after they returned tended to be politically more active with other Octobrists. Suthisak Pavarathisan, with little conflict in his unit during his time in the CPT, returned with a rather sympathetic attitude toward the CPT. Furthermore, with his relatively wealthy family background and the advantage of a medical education obtained during his time with the CPT in China, he did not have to struggle like others. He thus found himself with courage to support the CPT in urban areas and organised several meetings among former activists until the CPT's dissolution (Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

Nevertheless, there were many people who did not have family support or lost the benefit of their education as a result of their participation in the revolutionary struggle. These people found themselves struggling in their post-revolutionary lives without any support from the CPT. Consequently, some who were still sympathetic to revolutionary ideas were forced to spend their time making a living rather than being involved in political missions to regroup. At the same time, others who viewed their experience with the leftist movement as negative turned their backs against their student fellows who wanted to revive the revolutionary movement. Some had the view that they wasted years in the jungle on a pointless mission; other students of the same generation had already achieved middle-ranking positions in many organisations. Others found that a leftist identity caused many problems in starting life as ordinary people. Many took a long time to adjust to life in the cities after many years of living in primitive conditions. As a result, many of them did not want to waste their time on further fruitless political activities. Phra Suthep Chinwaro, a leading Octobrist figure who did not officially report to the Thai government upon his return, encountered many problems in pursuing life as an ordinary person. In addition, because of his radical reputation, he did not want to contact other friends, as he did not want to cause them trouble and difficulties (Phra Suthep, interview by author, 16 December 2006, Chiang Mai). For Porn-narong

Pattanaboonpaiboon, his years in medical school in China did not count in the Thai university system. He thus had to start again from scratch. He found that his former leftist networks were not supportive in his career. He had to work as a street vendor to support his studies (Porn-narong, interview by author, 7 March 2007).

Against this backdrop, the gatherings and remaining connections among Octobrists during the 1980s were rather divisive, apolitical and inactive. Gatherings were concentrated among people who had a common political attitude in the same political clubs, revolutionary bases, political functions, universities and schools. Furthermore, to conceal ongoing conflicts and maintain friendly relationships, most gatherings were not politically oriented but similar in nature to other alumni gatherings. The meetings functioned only as ‘group therapy’ for the psychological wounds caused by the decline of the leftist movement. Occasional parties on special occasions like weddings and funerals were common meeting points. Organising activities which would support future careers were promoted from time to time. For example, student musicians who had had opportunities to study at music schools in China with CPT support organised a Saturday Music School to instruct friends who did not have an opportunity to go (Sukhum 2010).

By the late 1980s, in spite of bigger attendances, more formal structures and the accumulation of wider groups of friends, these gatherings of Octobrists remained divisive and non-political. For instance, several key 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists started putting efforts into reconnecting the whole 1970s generation through an annual gathering in the name of ‘Friendship, Sisterhood and Brotherhood (pheuan phong nong phi)’. Despite this inclusive and politically neutral rubric for concealing differences and conflicts as well as hiding their leftist identity, the group was merely a social gathering among the 14<sup>th</sup> October generation. Without a common political agenda, these were merely annual alumni meetings in big hotels and functioned mainly to maintain networks among participants who were then moving into different political and social settings. As Jaran Dhitthapichai, one of the most radical 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrist figures, said, the Friendship, Sisterhood and Brotherhood annual meetings kept him in touch with his Octobrist friends (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok). In addition, these meetings offered an opportunity for these activists to help each other and to connect with new non-Octobrist networks they had recently developed.

Besides the meetings in Bangkok and other cities, many reunions at various revolutionary bases became common meeting places among former student activists and local comrades. Nonetheless, there was no movement toward any common political initiatives through these gatherings. From the early 1990s onwards, annual reunions at revolutionary base sites were formalised in many areas. Most activities concentrated on cultural and charitable purposes. Memorial rituals, construction of monuments for the dead, and fundraising for former farmers and ethnic comrades who were left in poverty were common practices at nearly all revolutionary sites. Efforts to remobilise ethnic minorities and peasants as a political force in former revolutionary base areas were mainly for non-radical purposes, particularly electoral politics (Chatri, interview by author, 5 May 2007, Bangkok; Prida, interview by author, 11 December 2006, Nan).

In summary, during the first decade after their return from the armed struggle with the CPT, the Octobrist networks were divided and apolitical. As a result of the oppressive political conditions against leftist movements, and uncompromising ideas and conflicts among Octobrists themselves about the future of the leftist movement, the initial efforts to revitalise the Octobrists as a political force in again promoting the leftist movement after the decline of the CPT did not succeed.

### **3.2 Later success: transformation of ‘extreme student activists’ to ‘Octobrist: democratic fighters’**

After these initial failures, by the early 1990s the former activists had successfully revitalised their networks and regained public acceptance. This was a result of the new political structures and new social status of the Octobrists. Most importantly, these former activists successfully transformed their political identity from leftist-leaning students to ‘Octobrists: 1970s democratic fighters’.

In contrast to the 1980s, by the early 1990s, the five-decade-long Cold War had come to an end. The Communist-led revolutionary threat had gone, both nationally and internationally. This set the pretext for rendering the 1970s radical activists less threatening as a historical memory. The conflicts between the US and the USSR were

reconciled. The Communist bloc collapsed and shifted toward political and economic liberalisation. By 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev announced the reformist political and economic policies of glasnost and perestroika. In 1989, there was a dramatic mass movement against the Communist Chinese government which ended in a massacre. In 1990, East and West Germany reunified. Eventually in 1991, the USSR was dissolved. At the regional level, the Communist Party of Vietnam started implementation of the 'Doi Moi' free-market reform process and eventually agreed to withdraw its troops fully from Cambodia after the demise of the Soviet Union and its growing need for Western investment, trade and assistance. In Thailand, most leading figures of the CPT were arrested and their revolutionary bases were destroyed. By 1991, there were almost no reports of political activities by the CPT (Battersby 1998; Chai-Anan 1997; Ciorciari 2010, 83-88).

Furthermore, the initial stage of domestic political liberalisation by the late 1980s provided a supportive political context for former activists to revive their political activism. The Prem Tinsulanonda regime gave way to an elected coalition government led by Chatchai Choonhavan and the role of parliament and political parties subsequently expanded (Hewison 1997). In the public sphere, the printed media again reasserted its independence and role as a public watchdog. For example, in 1991, the press successfully campaigned for the revocation of Decree 42 which allowed officials to arbitrarily close any newspaper without legal recourse. This campaign created considerable enthusiasm (Pasuk and Baker 2002, 389-390; Thitinan 1997, 221-224).

A liberal political environment was created, with an increasing role for new provincial politicians in party politics, for the business sector in the policy-making process, and for the local/urban poor and civil society groups in campaigns for their political agenda (Pasuk and Baker 1997). The success of the middle class mass movement in opposing the return to power of the military in 1992, the proliferation of radical social movements of marginal people throughout the 1990s in response to the negative impact of economic development, and the vibrant political reform process of the 1990s, all signalled the emergence of a new political environment within which the Octobrists could participate in politics and revive their political identity.

One further point to be considered in understanding the revival of the Octobrists in the 1990s was their new social and political status. By the early 1990s, many of them had become successful academics, politicians, writers, singers, businesspeople, etc (further details in Chapter 4 and 5). Inevitably, this new status provided them new academic and authoritative power in constructing a new political identity. In doing so, they successfully rewrote the history of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October, romanticised life in the jungle with the CPT, and instituted their new identity as ‘Octobrists’.

### *Recasting the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October histories*

The process of reconstructing the histories of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October in a democratic and moral perspective had been long advocated through the annual commemorations since the late 1970s. Only by the 1990s was the repositioning of their histories from leftist failures to democratic heroes realised. They successfully rewrote their 1970s history from the mixed picture of liberal conservatives and extreme Maoist activists to unified innocent progressive students fighting for justice and democracy against authoritarian regimes but forced by the violence and injustice of the Thai state to join the armed struggle of the CPT.

### Democratising 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973

The process of democratising the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 incident started right after the incident itself. In spite of the initial lack of success due to the restrictive political conditions of the late 1970s and early 1980s, these ongoing efforts left a fruitful legacy for later success during the 1990s. The celebration of the first anniversary on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1974 was named the ‘1<sup>st</sup> year after the revolution by the people’ and emphasised mass democracy and people power overthrowing an authoritarian regime (*Prachachat* 1974). However, between 1973 and 1976, the events were quickly replaced by a leftist image and conflict among students in vibrant political activities. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1975, there were questions about the legitimacy of the students (*Prachachat* 1975). Even until the early 1980s, the annual memorial ceremonies were still relatively marginalised. Only a small group of friends, relatives and the younger generation of student activists participated in commemorating the deaths of fellow students as the loss of loved ones (*Parithatsan* 1981). Despite the quiet

celebrations, messages highlighting democratic elements and concealing leftist elements and their conflicts during the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident were constantly presented to the public. For example, in 1981, the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October, *Ssu Anakhot (Toward the Future)*, a political magazine run by several former student activists, argued in an editorial for ‘the democratic soul of 14<sup>th</sup> October’, and emphasised the meaning of 14<sup>th</sup> October as:

‘...this incident [14<sup>th</sup> October] brought us the term ‘14<sup>th</sup> October Spirit’ whose essence was directly the desire for democracy and using the efforts of all to get it. All hoped that democracy would be the best way to set national policy through the wisdom of the majority’.

(*Su Anakhot* 1981a)

At the same time, there was the message arguing that 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 was not an accident; it was political problems which forced the people to stand up. The positive consequences of 14<sup>th</sup> October weakened authoritarian and bureaucratic politics (*Su Anakhot* 1981a).

The democratisation of 14<sup>th</sup> October was realised in the early 1990s. The celebrations shifted from small annual events among relatives, friends and small groups of younger activists, toward better organised series and packages of events in promoting democratic and other moral issues. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October in 1993 was a crucial turning point. The pre-celebration meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1993, at the luxurious Imperial Hotel on Wireless Road in the heart of Bangkok, was a major symbol of the return and revival of the 14<sup>th</sup> October generation to the public stage, because it managed to gather more than 500 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists who were then successful academics, politicians, writers, singers, businesspersons, etc., as well as other non-left allies of the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists (*MS* 1993f). A picture of Seksan Prasertkul and Thirayuth Boonmee, who were then dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University and political and social commentator at the Faculty of Sociology, Thammasat University, respectively, at the 20<sup>th</sup> October 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration dominated the front cover of several newspapers and political magazines, such as, *Matichon Sutsapda (Public Opinion Weekly)*, one of the most prominent Thai political weeklies (*MS* 1993c, front cover). Subsequently, countless seminars, celebrations and

political campaigns were promoted. All were deliberately arranged to serve one common goal, which was to depict the 14<sup>th</sup> October people's uprising as a historic victory in Thai democratisation. In achieving this goal, three major strategies and processes were pursued in parallel.

Firstly, they restated the democratic element and importance of students in pushing forward the democratic transition in the 14<sup>th</sup> October people's uprising. To do so, the democratic version of the history of 14<sup>th</sup> October was systematically redrafted and popularised. There was a seminar series on revising the history of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 like the round table seminar on the 'historical position of the events of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973' at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October. Not only 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists themselves, but also the famous liberal historian, Chanwit Kasetsiri played a key role in revising democratic history of 14<sup>th</sup> October (*MS* 1993f). Countless books and articles from individual experience repeated the same message of the victory of the 14<sup>th</sup> October democratic movement to the public (Jaran 2003; Jaran 2004, 40; Prasarn 1993, 31–32; Wittayakorn 2003). Moreover, there were campaigns to incorporate the history of 14<sup>th</sup> October in the school curriculum (*KT* 2002a; *MR* 1999; *MS* 1993e; Prajak 2005, 10–12), to establish 14<sup>th</sup> October as the official 'Day of Democracy', and to construct the 14<sup>th</sup> October monument. These efforts were nothing new as many 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists had long struggled to institutionalise the dead from the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident as martyrs and had been calling for a 'Martyrs' Monument' since the 1970s (*Matuphoom Raiwan* 1983b; *MR* 1983; *MR* 1989; *MR* 1993a; *NS* 1997a; *NS* 1997b; *Su Anakhot* 1981b). Only during the early 1990s did these efforts succeed, particularly since many Octobrists held influential positions in the cabinet, academia and business. For example, Adisorn Piengket, a former student activist from Ramkhamhaeng University who was Deputy Education Minister during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October played a crucial role in persuading the government and cabinet to support construction of the 14<sup>th</sup> October monument (*NS* 1997a; *NS* 1997b).

Secondly, they interpreted 14<sup>th</sup> October as part of the process of contemporary democratisation in Thai politics together with the landmark Black May 1992 incident. While 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 marked the success of the student movement in mobilising a mass movement to end the 15-year-long series of authoritarian governments including those of Sarit Thanarat (1958–1963) and Thanom Kittikachorn-Prapas Jarusathien-

Narong Kittikachorn (1963-1973), May 1992 saw the triumph of a popular protest led by the middle class in stopping the revival of military intervention in parliamentary politics. The mass demonstrations both in Bangkok and other major cities successfully forced the non-elected Prime Minister General Suchinda Kraprayoon to step down and secured the return of electoral democracy. The similarities of both events as mass movements against military-oriented governments opened space for 14<sup>th</sup> October in the newly constructed process of Thai democratisation. In response to the reshaping of the history of Thai democracy after the May 1992 incident, many prominent 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists wrote about the significance of 14<sup>th</sup> October in the process of Thai democratisation (Suwit 2007, 331). Some argued even further that the success of the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident established the necessary conditions and strong political will for the triumph of the people's movement in May 1992 (Tanet 1992). By this time, it became known that the history of Thai democratisation comprised three major stages: the transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1932 was the triumph of collaboration between civil and military groups; the successful overthrow of an authoritarian regime and establishment of electoral democracy on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 was the success of 'people power' led by student activists; and the middle class mass uprising fought to protect democracy from the return of a military regime in May 1992.

Furthermore, they emphasised the connection between the democratic element of the 1970s and May 1992. In doing so, they succeeded in democratising their 1970s leftist history. Many 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists argued that the middle class in the 1992 May incident largely came from a background and experience shared with the 1970s activists, even though there was no proof that many of the Octobrist middle class participated in or contributed to the success of the May 1992 mobilisation. These former students successfully made use of this interpretation in democratising their histories. Both Thirayuth Boonmee and Anek Laothamatas, two prominent Octobrist academics at Thammasat University, presented similar messages. Thirayuth (1994) argued that the 1990s Thai middle class was consistently pro-democracy because of its Octobrist background.

'Those of my generation are people who have experienced the most political crises, starting with the October 14<sup>th</sup> uprising, through the October 6<sup>th</sup> bloodshed, to the May 1992 event. We are contemporaries of the rebellious

young men and women around the world who turn against the ruling 'system' and power...'

(Thirayuth 1994, 14)

In the same vein, Anek (1993a) explained 'we should keep our eyes on the business executives aged between 30-39 years old, as they were people who participated in and were witnesses to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October incidents' (Anek 1993a, 185).

Lastly, the celebrations of 14<sup>th</sup> October in the early 1990s successfully incorporated other liberal ideas which gave them the appearance of a peaceful movement for 'rights and liberty'. This helped to engage liberal academics and members of the elites in legitimising their rituals. A number of non-14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists participated in the preparation meetings for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary to show their sympathy and solidarity (MS 1993d). Anand Panyarachun (1991-1992), a liberal Prime Minister, mentioned his sympathy with the history of 14<sup>th</sup> October as it helped in reducing the power of the bureaucratic polity and expanding the space for economic liberalisation (MS 1993c).

However not everyone agreed with the reduction of the meanings and facts of 14<sup>th</sup> October into merely a democratic movement fighting for 'rights and liberty'. Many Octobrists put effort into revealing the differences and conflicts during the 1970s. However, they were little heeded and marginalised. The article series 'Lost Memory of a Youngster' by Bandit Jansrikham, known by his pseudonym of 'Khaen Sarika', a former activist from Ramkhamhaeng University who was then administrative editor of the *Nation Sutsapda (Nation Weekend)*, detailed the different ideological streams of ideas, including leftist ideas, among Octobrists before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist from Thammasat University who later became a prominent radical historian, revealed various conflicting ideological streams among students before 14<sup>th</sup> October and argued that they came to be united only on 14<sup>th</sup> October. Right after 14<sup>th</sup> October, differences and conflicts reappeared (Somsak 2001). One of the most outstanding examples was the effort by Kasian Tejapira, a prominent 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist political scientist, in debates with the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generation and other liberal historians about how to define and name 14<sup>th</sup> October. While other 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists like Thirayuth Boonmee and liberal academics like Chanwit Kasetsiri insisted on naming 14<sup>th</sup> October as 'Rights and Liberty Day' or 'Democracy Day',

Kasian Tejapira found it unacceptable to define 14<sup>th</sup> October merely in terms of political rights and liberty, because it would limit the meaning of 14<sup>th</sup> October to anti-authoritarianism, and above all conceal the ideas of anti-feudalism and anti-capitalism and the struggle for social justice and equality which had been the real causes for people to stand up against the regime. He even further argued that 14<sup>th</sup> October was a 'movement of radicalism from below' (in Thai he translated it as 'left from below'). He even further challenged liberal interpretations by sarcastically proposing 14<sup>th</sup> October as 'Bourgeois Revolution Day'. Nevertheless in the meeting, his ideas caused anxiety for Thirayuth and Chanwit. Thirayuth disagreed and argued that the anti-capitalist ideas and movement emerged six months after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and he would like to count the 14<sup>th</sup> October only until midnight of that day. Chanwit even closed the meeting by insisting that 14<sup>th</sup> October should be the day for 'yellow bird-innocent democratic student' and he would not allow it to be hijacked by any 'red bird-leftist student activists' (*KT* 1998b). Nonetheless, questioning voices like these were marginalised and went unheard. The process of democratising and liberalising 14<sup>th</sup> October was established and became the dominant discourse.

From the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary onward, the reinterpretation and framing of October 14<sup>th</sup> in term of 'democratisation' has become rooted and successfully mobilised wider support from new elite groups of politicians, businessmen, etc (Thamrongsak 2010). In the special lecture of Seksan Prasertkul for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2003, he strongly and firmly urged the continuing advocacy of what he called the '14<sup>th</sup> October Spirit (chetanarom sip si tulakhom)', the political will to stand up to fight against dictatorship and appeal for electoral democracy, as well as social justice, peace and harmony for society (*NS* 2003b).

The idea was warmly welcomed by all, even among non-Octoberist intellectuals. In preparation for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremony, prominent 14<sup>th</sup> Octoberist academics and politicians like Thirayuth Boonmee, Pinit Jarusombat, Chamni Sakdiset, Chaturon Chaisang, Sutham Saengprathum, Adisorn Piengket, Kriengkamol Laohapairoj, Phumtham Wechayachai and others, acted as a coordinating committee (*MS* 1998). Through their networks, more and more people from various sectors, who in fact were neither students nor directly involved in 14<sup>th</sup> October, agreed to support the celebration. Chuan Leekpai (former Prime Minister and leader of the Democrat Party), Anand

Panyarachun (former Prime Minister), Uthai Pimjaichon (prominent politician) agreed to be co-chairs. Also, Thanphuying Phoonsuk Banomyong (wife of Pridi Banomyong), Puey Ungpakorn (liberal and prominent academic), Sem Pringpuangkeaw, Saneh Jamarik (Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission), Prawes Wasi, Sulak Sivarak, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Bhichai Rattakul and Dhanin Chearavanont (owner of CP company) agreed to be honorary committee members. With support from powerful political and public figures, many projects, including the monument construction and inclusion of 14<sup>th</sup> October in the school history curriculum made significant progress (*MR* 1999; *MS* 1993e; *MS* 1998; *NS* 1997c). At the peak of the Octobrists' influence, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October in 2003, when many Octobrists were in parliament and the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai - TRT) cabinet<sup>35</sup>, they obtained a budget of more than US\$1.5 million from the government to organise the commemoration (Chaiwat 2003; *MR* 2003b).

Above all, they partly succeeded in making the 14<sup>th</sup> October history official. Their initial proposal was to push parliament to commemorate 14<sup>th</sup> October as national 'Day of Democracy' or 'Rights and Liberty Day'. While other non-Octobrist elements within the Thaksin government counter-argued that the name would undervalue other days like 24<sup>th</sup> June 1932 (the date of the transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy). After a long negotiation, the result was a compromise of '14<sup>th</sup> October: Democracy Day' (*MR* 2003c; Prajak 2005, 6; *TN* 2003).

### Moralising the leftist history of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976

While the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists had their own stories of victory and democracy, the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists found themselves left with a rather painful history of failure and a reputation as extreme leftists, which many of them preferred to forget (Penchan 2003).

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<sup>35</sup> In 2003, PM Thaksin Shinawatra appointed many Octobrists, including Chaturon Chaisang, as members of a committee to consider 14<sup>th</sup> October as National Democracy Day. He was also supported by many other Octobrists in the TRT party including Prommin Lertsuridej (Minister of Energy), Surapong Suebwonglee (Minister of Technology), Pinit Jarusombat (Minister of Science), Praphat Panyachatrak (Minister of Natural Resources), Somsak Pisana-anantakul (Deputy House Speaker), Adisorn Piengket (Deputy Government Whip), Surachat Banrungsook, Kothom Nawarat and Pitsanu Warunyu (*MR* 20 August 2003). Also, there were other Octobrists in the Senate including Karun Saingarm (*TN*, 20 August 2003, 3A)

Nonetheless, after a long effort, they gradually succeeded in repositioning the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October by erasing their extreme leftist background, distancing themselves from the CPT and Maoist history, and dropping the story of conflict with the liberalist 14<sup>th</sup> October generation. Moreover, they represented themselves in terms of democracy and morality by portraying themselves as innocent and heroic student activists who fought for underprivileged people and social justice and protected the democracy that had been established after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973.

Their long march in repositioning 6<sup>th</sup> October, which started right after the incident, was disorganised and hardly succeeded in gaining public acceptance. In the celebration of ultra-right wing success after 6<sup>th</sup> October, there was no political space left for them. For instance, Red Gaurs (Krathing Daeng) and New Force (Nawaphon), militant right wing groups, dominated the scene in Bangkok and forcefully demonstrated against the first anniversary of 6<sup>th</sup> October in 1977. The first anniversary served as an occasion for a call for the release of students from jail and condemnations of the violence of the 6<sup>th</sup> October massacre (Anti-authoritarian Alliance 1977; *Athit* 1977).

The situation was better in 1978, when the leading 18 student leaders were released from jail and there was a public announcement of their innocence of the allegation of being communist. From then on campaigns began against the state's violence, highlighting the deaths of innocent student activists on 6<sup>th</sup> October without referring to or mentioning their leftist ideas and backgrounds. The 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary at Thammasat University focused on '6<sup>th</sup> October: Bright Thai youngsters forever lost', 'The brave: worship the 6<sup>th</sup> October martyrs', etc. (*Athit* 1978b). The 18 former student prisoners marched out revealing their experience of the violence that day (Sutham 1979a; Sutham 1979b; Sutham 1979c; Sutham 1979d). By the early 1980s, after their return from the jungle and at the beginning of political liberalisation, many Octobrists and especially the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists repeatedly condemned the violence at the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident. For instance, *Su Anakhhot (Toward the Future)*, a weekly political journal run by many Octobrists, every year mentioned the massacre and called for both the ultra-right and extreme left wings who were involved in violence on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 to take responsibility (*Su Anakhhot* 1981a). At the same time, the reinterpretation of 6<sup>th</sup> October as a step in the democratisation of Thai politics after 14<sup>th</sup> October was highlighted. On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October, the post-14<sup>th</sup> October period was interpreted as the

most vibrant democratic period in Thai history. But this democracy was ended by violence perpetrated by a right wing government against students and other working class people who played leading roles in defending democracy on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1973 (*Matuphoom Raiwan* 1983a; *Matuphoom Raiwan* 1983c). Despite these efforts to reposition 6<sup>th</sup> October, during the 1980s, most 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists were still not able to unify and recover from their leftist public reputation.

The process of institutionalising democratic and moral elements of 6<sup>th</sup> October was genuinely rooted from the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1996 onward. The turning point was a campaign initiated by Thongchai Winichakul, a leading figure during the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident, calling for a revision of the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October and claiming back public space for the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists. Open letters to his 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist friends and countless public talks and writings before the 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary inspired and brought many 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists back together. Thongchai argued that the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 was a tragedy which both the Thai authorities who were involved in the violence (*MR* 1995) and the victims tried to forget. For him, there were three major reasons for the silence among both perpetrators and victims of the massacre. Firstly, many members of the political elite who had been involved in the conspiracy leading to the killings remained very powerful at least until the late 1990s. Secondly, perpetrators or victims were ambivalent due to self-doubt and a sense of moral dilemma. While those involved in the violence tried to distance themselves from this painful memory as they were later questioned and blamed by society as perpetrators of mass killings, the victims were blamed as communists, the cause of chaos, and a danger to the 'Nation, Religion and Monarchy'. Also many of those who later joined the CPT returned home with no pride in their past radicalism, but instead suffering, guilt and grief. Lastly, there was no pre-existing discourse of 'state violence' in the Thai historical perspective. It was hard to place the 6<sup>th</sup> October massacre in a Thai historical context. Under the idea of a unified nation under a benevolent monarch, a massacre by the state was an alien concept (Thongchai 2001, 3-5). Thongchai called for a 'war of memory' for the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident both at the structural and individual levels in overcoming these problems and re-establishing the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October. At the structural level, the annual celebration and commemoration of 6<sup>th</sup> October must be carried on to institutionalise the memory in the long term. At the individual level, Thongchai encouraged victims to stand up and reveal their painful memories (*NS* 2001). At the 25<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in 2001,

Thongchai appealed for a revision of the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October and for the October generation to pay attention to the stories of ‘little’ people, the victims and their relatives. Many other Octobrists called for publication of the pictures of mutilated corpses on 6<sup>th</sup> October (Makdawan 2001; KS 2001e).

Nonetheless, not every 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist agreed with this inclusive idea and process in moralising 6<sup>th</sup> October as proposed by Thongchai Winichakul. In Kasian Tejapira (1996, 70-74), there are three major contesting streams of ideas in redefining and constructing this history. Firstly, the broad and inclusive 6<sup>th</sup> October history proposed by Thongchai tried to energise the new meaning of 6<sup>th</sup> October hero and ‘idealist’ without mentioning ideology (Kasian 1996, 68). Kasian argued that in doing so, Thongchai diminished and blurred the leftist elements, ideologies and identity of the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists in order to create a common broad value. The objectives of this process were to extend the alliances of the 6<sup>th</sup> October commemoration in the wider public. In doing so, Thongchai was well aware of two major problems he wanted to overcome. The first was the political constraint of the limited space for leftist ideology and heroes. The second concerned the changes in both ideas and social status of former 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists, or what Kasian called ‘mindfulness of the turbulent and diverse politico-ideological aftermath of the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident’. However, for Kasian, this is, on the one hand, a strategy for urgently mobilising the power of those who would help to remember the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident. On the other hand, it is rather subversive because it attempted to disguise the political conflict between left and right (Kasian 1996, 70-74).

Secondly, there was an exclusive meaning of 6<sup>th</sup> October imposed by Somsak Jeamteerasakul, in arguing against the first stream of Thongchai. For Somsak, commemorating 6<sup>th</sup> October was to celebrate and remember student activists who fought for the socialist movement, and in his opinion, the ‘6<sup>th</sup> October hero’ was equal to the brave who are prepared to die for socialist principles.

‘The 6<sup>th</sup> October incident was the most outstanding symbol in Thai society because it was the incident that genuinely demonstrates the beliefs and ideology of the student activists and people and the struggle to advocate socialist principles. This was different from 14<sup>th</sup> October [1973] and May 1992’.

Somsak's strategy was not to expand alliances but to remember 6<sup>th</sup> October correctly. For him, it was better not to remember than remember incorrectly.

Thirdly, there was an idea of a debatable radical history of 6<sup>th</sup> October proposed by Kasian Tejapira himself. He agreed neither with Thongchai Winichakul in ignoring the socialist elements in 6<sup>th</sup> October nor with Somsak Jeamteerasakul on what Kasian argued was a rigid and unsophisticated perspective toward socialist elements inside the 6<sup>th</sup> October movement. He instead firstly argued that the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist movement was neither consolidated under the guidance of 'the CPT' nor under the broader definition of the western 'socialist' movement. For him, the 6<sup>th</sup> October movement was defined as a 'Thai socialist' movement which was formulated through three main contesting ideological streams including the anti-government movement, Maoism and the 1960s Thai left. However, conflicts among these three different streams burst out when all gathered under the CPT. Kasian further argued that amidst this process they even formulated not only 'October socialism' but also 'October nationalism' (Kasian 1996, 68-69 and 80-82). Subsequently, the 6<sup>th</sup> October is a history of contesting ideological movements.

During the debates among these three approaches, the first broad and inclusive approach of Thongchai Winichakul became dominant and was influential in the process of repositioning the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October. At the structural level, most leftist elements subsided. Liberal and moderate progressive ideas were integrated into the process. Its official legacy and declarations were reconstructed through a rhetoric of peace, freedom, democracy, ethics, social responsibility, social justice, etc (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary 6th of October preparation committee 1996; Boonlert 1996). The whole celebration was overwhelmed by statements, seminars, exhibitions, etc., which portrayed the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident as a history of the student movement fighting for social justice and democracy by peaceful means but suppressed by violence from the Thai state. For example, an installation of more than a hundred pieces of art was arranged under the theme 'Spirit of 6<sup>th</sup> October' with a statement by National Artist Alliance of Thailand (MR 1996; Penchan 2003). Moreover, it emphasised how the progressive lesson of 6<sup>th</sup> October contributed to Thai politics. A series of seminars integrated all kinds of topics including

state violence, political hatred in Thai society, mob and state, green politics, Buddhism and political crises, and political violence in Thai society, which were either relevant or irrelevant to 6<sup>th</sup> October and socialism.

At the individual level, the example of Thongchai's angry testimony of his firsthand experience of violence on the football field at Thammasat University and the loss of many lives in front of his own eyes was powerful and inspiring (*MR* 2000a; *NS* 2001; Thongchai 1996a; Thongchai 1996b). Subsequently, many other 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists lined up to write memoirs of their untold stories as victims of state violence in the form of books, newspaper articles and personal online memoirs (Pichit 2009; *Sarakadee* 1996, 161-163; Sucheera 2003). For instance, the students involved in the play which was claimed to be an act of *lèse majesté* and was a trigger for 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976, marched out to relate their own story to the public (Sukhum 1996a).

There were four major consequences of this success. Firstly, in the historical context, the leftist image of the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists was diminished. Its historical status was treated as other 'idealist' people's movements. By the 1990s, more and more intellectuals started referring to 6<sup>th</sup> October as equivalent to the 1932 transition to constitutional monarchy and the 14<sup>th</sup> October movement (*Prachatai* 2008). Above all, the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists became known and remembered by younger generations to the same degree as the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists. In a survey conducted by Thamrongsak Petchlert-anan and his team among 136 students and people in three universities, Thammasat, Silapakorn and Rangsit, on their perception of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976, and May 1992 (Thamrongsak 2010), it was clear that the democratic historical version of 14<sup>th</sup> October was rooted among the public. Nearly 80 percent were aware of its history and nearly 100 percent viewed it either as a democratic movement or an anti-authoritarian movement. At the same time, the process of repositioning and giving prominence to the democratic version of 6<sup>th</sup> October had made some progress. Even though less than half of participants knew about the historical background of 6<sup>th</sup> October, nearly 95 percent of those who were confident to talk about its history described it as a continuation of 14<sup>th</sup> October, calling for democracy from an authoritarian regime and opposing violence against innocent students who were accused by an authoritarian government of communism. Only 7 persons referred to communist elements among these students.

Table 3.1: Survey on awareness of the histories of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October

Incidents	Aware of the histories (out of 136)		Identifying the incident as a democratic movement (among those aware)	
	Number	%	Number	%
14 <sup>th</sup> October 1973	108	79.5 %	107	99 %
6 <sup>th</sup> October 1976	57	41.5 %	50	87.7%

Source: Modified from survey results of Thamrongsak Petchlert-anan on ‘Future of 6<sup>th</sup> October’ 2008

Secondly, the transformation of the image of 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists from the painful experience of extreme leftists to being viewed as defenders of democracy was welcomed more and more by 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists themselves, especially those who had earlier refused to join any commemoration (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary 6th of October preparation committee 1996; Boonlert 1996; *MR* 1996). Many felt that they no longer needed to hide their own backgrounds as part of the history of 6<sup>th</sup> October. In Thongchai Winichakul’s speech for the celebration of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 6<sup>th</sup> October, he argued that the success of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary helped to eliminate the uncomfortable context that haunted his generation for years and years. All preparations and activities before and during the celebrations allowed space for Octobrists to tell their own stories (*NS* 2001).

Thirdly, this success also welcomed new non-6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists into the celebrations and the historical repositioning process. For example, the chair of the Coordinating Committee of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 6<sup>th</sup> October was Gothom Ariya, a non-6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist liberal and human rights advocate. The fund-raising dinner talks for the 6<sup>th</sup> October celebrations were organised on the broad topic of ‘collective action for new politics’. The key speakers were Anand Panyarachun, Prawes Wasi and Thirayuth Boonmee. And the event was broadcast through various national and cable TV channels including Channel 9, Thai Sky TV, and ITV. In the same vein, at the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebrations, more and more non-6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist public figures were invited including Saneh Jamarik, Apirak Kosayothin (Bangkok Governor from the Democrat Party), and other luminaries.

Lastly, many tangibly successful landmark projects were also conceived. With the support and collaboration of all parties, the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists successfully convinced Thammasat University to construct a 6<sup>th</sup> October monument at its auditorium, as well as the ‘Martyrs’ Monument’ at Chulalongkorn University (NS 2000; Vipa n.d.). A commission to reinvestigate the victims of the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident was set up and launched an independent report to contest the official history. The ‘6<sup>th</sup> October Martyr Fund’ was also set up as well as campaigns appealing for compensation from the government for the families of those who had lost their lives (Penchan 2003; LWN 2003a).

### *Normalising the 1970s extreme leftist ideas and identity*

Besides reframing the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October histories in ‘democratic’ and ‘moralistic’ terms, the former activists also successfully normalised their leftist histories and leftist ideological legacy, cultural objects and icons. In doing so they made a legend of their lives as communists in the jungle and realigned their 1970s leftist ideas with other liberal ideas and figures.

### Normalising leftist backgrounds and life with the CPT

From the 1990s onward, countless interviews, books, films, plays and articles about the stories and experiences of the Octobrists both before and during their time with the CPT in the jungle were made public. Nevertheless, instead of revising and focusing on their leftist socialisation and ideological debates, nearly all historical records contained four major messages which all apparently supported the process of normalising their leftist ideas and identity from their 1970s and 1980s histories.

First of all, the story about cell units for leftist socialisation and CPT domination among radical students between 1973 and 1976 was replaced by a claim to be self-organised and independent from the CPT, with their radicalism influenced by the vibrant political situation before and after the 14<sup>th</sup> October victory of democracy. The explanation for the causes and processes of joining the CPT was overwhelmed by stories of bright students who were forced by state violence and injustice to join the armed struggle with the CPT after 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. However, these messages concealed the reality of many

connections they had had with the CPT long before 6<sup>th</sup> October as well as stories of students who had yearned to join the CPT for some time (*Warasan Phleng Lae Dontri* 2002; Prasarn 2003, 60).

Secondly, their history as militant communists and guerrilla fighters as perceived by the public during the 1980s was romanticised and portrayed as the lives of innocent and dedicated students working for underprivileged people and democracy. Countless interviews, books, articles, documentaries, films, websites and plays about their romantic life and daily struggles were produced and re-produced. For example, Bandit Jansrikham actively promoted many new columns written by former comrades in the *Nation Sutsapda* (*Nation Weekend*) about their lives in the jungle. He himself also wrote many articles about the history of that period. Furthermore, the mushrooming annual celebrations in the revolutionary bases, the skeleton-collecting activities, and the construction of monuments commemorating the dead, mainly focused on cultural activities and made heroes of those who died in the jungle during the armed struggle. In attracting more former comrades in the cities to join these commemoration events, the trips and events were full of nostalgic activities including the retelling of romantic memories, celebrations and the construction of monuments to the dead, charitable activities for poor comrades, revolutionary song concerts, and adventure trips back to remote revolutionary bases.

Thirdly, stories of disappointment with and antipathy toward the CPT were highlighted. The CPT was depicted as Chinese-dominated, authoritarian and orthodox Maoists (Caravan 2000, 32–33). Students were portrayed as innocent patriots who fought for social justice and democracy, but were forced to join the CPT for lack of another choice and were disappointed with the corrupt and undemocratic culture of the CPT. Kasian Tejapira's writings showed his great frustration with Chinese domination over the party which alienated him from the core structure of the CPT in spite of his respect toward many of its members (Kasian 2001b). Surachai Jantimatorn, a prominent 14<sup>th</sup> student activist singer, showed his respect for tribal comrades in their long rebellious history against the Thai even before joining the CPT but argued against the CPT's claim of success in radicalising these people (1985a, 19). The success in retelling these stories concealed the dedication of many CPT members, the sympathy that other former student activists had for the CPT even after leaving the jungle, and above all the

problems created by students for the CPT which later partly caused the decline of the CPT.

Lastly, many celebrations embraced the non-leftist status of Octobrists and non-leftist figures in order to tone down and legitimise their leftist and militant histories. Many former Octobrist politicians were invited to act as chairpersons in many ceremonies at the revolutionary base sites. Adisorn Piengket, Deputy Minister of Science and Technology, was the chairperson at a merit-making ritual for those who lost their lives during battles at Phusang revolutionary base in 1997 (NS 1997a). In 2006 and 2007, General Surayud Chulanont, a member of the Privy Council and later Prime Minister (2006-2008), whose father, Comrade Khamtan, was a 1950s communist soldier, was invited to chair the opening ceremony of the 'People's History' building, 'Mong-Lauo' tribal museum, and Solidarity Monument at the former revolutionary base at Phu Payak, Nan Province. The speech given by Surayud about his father, a great Thai soldier, who was forced to join the CPT because of his disagreement with the authoritarian Phibun Songkhram regime, helped to legitimise the militant background of these students (NS 2006a).

#### Deradicalising the 1970s radical reputation and cultural objects

Besides romanticising their communist history, the Octobrists also successfully normalised their leftist image and cultural legacy. In doing so, they selectively dropped leftist elements and then linked their former leftist reputations with other non-leftist ideas and figures. Subsequently, they favourably turned them into merely progressive and radical liberal ones.

Firstly, in term of ideas, in retelling their leftist socialisation, most prominent former student activists claimed that the initial ideological source of their activism was not socialist and they were only later forced to convert to leftist approaches. They also argued that they had already abandoned leftist ideas and turned to liberal and other moderate approaches. For example, Pirun Chatwanitchakul, a leading leftist mentor among radical students who joined the CPT at a very early stage, retold his story, saying that his political activism had been leavened by liberal and democratic ideas. However, he was berated for being a communist (Pirun, interview by author, 2 February 2007,

Bangkok). Similarly, Thirayuth Boonmee argued that three ideological streams influenced his initial political activities including western progressive ideas, social volunteerism and self-searching during his time at the university. Although he admitted that he was committed to Marxism and other leftist ideas before 6<sup>th</sup> October and during his time with the CPT, he claimed that he abandoned the extreme views and turned back to his original roots of rational Buddhism which he learnt when he was young (*Siam Post* 1993).

Secondly, the Octobrists succeeded in converting their earlier leftist cultural objects including leftist and revolutionary songs and literature, into ‘songs and literature for life’. They publicly organised countless revolutionary music concerts. However, these events were treated as cultural and historical commemorations rather than potential cultural tools for revitalising radicalism. The concerts and music performances were frozen in a historical time capsule. For instance, patterns of performance were apparently kept in the original, singers marched out in red star military uniforms and everything was decorated with red flags and yellow stars.

In diminishing the leftist image of their earlier literature in the public eye, they either mixed it with other non-left material or reproduced it in the name of the 14<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists. Moreover, they successfully re-identified leftist literature during the 1960s and 1970s as a part of the development of the progressive Thai literature movement which had begun in the 1950s including the ‘peace revolution’, and the progressive journalists’ campaign against the authoritarianism of Phibun Songkhram (Editorial team 1998). Furthermore, in legitimising their history, several publishing houses run by Octobrists, including the Khosit (Proclaim) and Saithan (Stream) publishing houses, reproduced countless pieces of radical literature, especially those on the list of the 100 books banned during the 1970s. In doing so, they further argued that banning leftist literature during the 1970s was damaging to Thai wisdom and the intellectual environment (Monsikul 1997). The 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generation established the ‘14<sup>th</sup> October Academic Institute’ to revive the literature which influenced their generation, a set of the 30 most influential works. By the mid 1990s, they were relatively successful in mainstreaming these readings into Thai society. The major landmark is that many influential 1970s books were included in an official and popular list of the 100 ‘must read’ books for Thais. This was the result of many prominent Octobrist academics and

writers being members of the selection committee. Moreover, their new status helped to erase their leftist reputation. The image of Seksan Prasertkul, Thirayuth Boonmee, etc., as leftist writers gradually faded away after they were named as National Artists in Literature (*MS* 1993a).

Thirdly, in diluting their leftist elements, they infused and integrated their leftist icons with liberal thinkers and ideas. On the one hand, they highlighted liberal royalist and liberalist thinkers as their influential icons during the 1970s. Sulak Sivarak and Puey Ungpakorn were prominent examples. As a result of their support for radical students at the peak of right wing government, when they were eventually alleged to be communist and forced to leave the country for political exile right after the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident, students started embracing these figures in their 1970s history and celebrations of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October as major influential and supportive figures for student activists. At the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October, Thirayuth Boonmee argued he was inspired by western progressive ideas through Sulak and social volunteerism ideas through Puey (*Siam Post* 1993).

On the other hand, the Thai leftist thinkers of the 1950s replaced the earlier dominant picture of the CPT. However, the process was far from straightforward. Many leftists of the 1950s intelligentsia were dropped and transformed into merely progressive intellectuals. Even though the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists were influenced by many other radical ideas, such as western liberals and leftists, and Maoists, the significance of Marxism and Maoism among Octobrists was toned down and the role of Thai leftists was promoted. From the early 1980s onward, the biography, songs and literature of Jit Phumisak were again reproduced. But this time, Jit was distanced from the CPT. His participation and connection with the CPT was defused. The focus was more on his rebellious behaviour during his life as a student at Chulalongkorn University and his intellectual contribution as a Thai thinker and political hero in Thai politics and literature for life (*Athit* 1978a). Countless events celebrating the life of Jit Phumisak were organised and supported by both former activists and other non-left and liberal intellectuals. Chanwit Kasetsiri played a vital role in establishing the Jit Phumisak Trust as a means to popularise Jit literature and songs with little mention of his relationship with the CPT (*MS* 2009). Similarly, the political contribution of Pridi Banomyong toward Thai democratisation and radicalism was emphasised. In 2000, Sulak Sivarak

and many Octobrists acted as main sponsors of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pridi Banomyong. Rather than promoting socialist elements in his political work and the connections between Pridi and the CPT and CCP, his biography highlighted mainly his role in the 1932 democratic transition, the Free Thai movement (seri thai or khana thai isara) during World War II, and the establishment of Thammasat University. Sawanee Liminon mentioned Pridi Banomyong as the leader of the Free Thai movement rather than for his leftist thought (*MR* 2000b), in a book published by the 14<sup>th</sup> October foundation for the 11<sup>th</sup> Children's Art Exhibition of 'democracy is the heart of peace' (The 14<sup>th</sup> October Foundation 2003).

*Institutionalising 'Octobrist: democratic warrior'*

In spite of efforts to 'democratise' and 'normalise' the 1970s leftist history of the Octobrists, genuine success in reviving and regaining their new political status was the result of institutionalising themselves with the new identity of 'Octobrist'. There were three parallel processes in institutionalising this term.

Firstly, it was used in embracing both the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October generations into the '1970s generation'. The earlier differences and conflicting ideologies were reduced and blurred both among themselves and in the public eye. Both the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists started calling themselves and being called merely 'Octobrists' rather than being treated differently and separately. Many activities, institutes, websites, monuments etc., were constituted in the name of the 'Octobrists' rather than specifying which October was concerned. The outdoor art installation which had been originally intended as a monument for the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident was instead named the 'October wall'. Much 1970s leftist literature and music for life was reproduced and renamed as 'October literature and songs' rather than their specific relevance.

Secondly, Octobrists used the term 'Octobrist' in distinguishing themselves from other generations. On the one hand, in publicising the existence of their generation, they involved other politically active generations including those in the 'Free Thai', in May 1992, etc., in their celebrations. On the other hand, in distinguishing and emphasising the unique and outstanding attributes of the 1970s student activists, they persistently blamed younger students for being politically inactive and ignorant in comparison with

the ‘Octobrists’. However, they hardly mentioned that they actually were a minority among their own generation and the political conditions which stimulated their political radicalism changed (KT 1999b). Among them, Thirayuth Boonmee and Seksan Prasertkul were the two most prominent figures who persistently mentioned their disappointment with the younger generation with little political interest and social concern and their addiction to consumerism (Prida and Thongtem 2003, 66; Kamol et al. 2003 p. 31; Seksan 1994).

Lastly and most importantly, the term of ‘Octobrist’ successfully enhanced and supported the process of democratising their leftist background and history. The concept of ‘Octobrist’ helped to enhance the harmonious picture of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October incidents as a continuing effort of the people to protect democracy from the return of authoritarian regimes. In brief, the broad term ‘Octobrist’ helped to integrate 6<sup>th</sup> October into the successful democratic history of 14<sup>th</sup> October. Countless stories related the 14<sup>th</sup> October movement as a successful movement against authoritarianism and the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident as a landmark in the continuing fight against ongoing inequality and a corrupt political structure (Testimony of many Octobrists in *Sarakadee* 1996, 133-174; Seksan 2009). Seksan Prasertkul called their generation ‘October warriors’ in the battle for democracy who kindled hope for the entire nation, as well as rescuing national pride and dignity in his public talk on the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorating 14<sup>th</sup> October in 2001 (Seksan 2001)

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion, throughout the 1990s, the Octobrists successfully recovered their political identity and regained acceptance from the public as well as reunifying through three parallel processes. Firstly, their efforts in democratising and moralising the history of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October were successful. Secondly, they succeeded in normalising their leftist background both before and during their time with the CPT. Lastly, the construction and institutionalisation of the term of ‘Octobrist: democratic fighter’ prevailed as their new identity.

Under the grim conditions of the ‘Second Cold War’ and continuing military influence in 1980s Thai politics, most student activists discontinued their political activities with

leftist movements after their return from the armed struggle with the CPT. At the same time, because of the legacy of loose structural networks which caused obstacles to reuniting after the collapse of the CPT; and the internal ideological conflicts among student activist themselves which led them to an uncompromising situation, those who still wished to carry on their unfinished radical missions could not persuade others or reconcile the ideological disagreements among themselves. Most remaining connections and activities were rather divisive and apolitical. The gatherings mainly functioned as alumni reunions rather than as political meetings with a concrete political agenda.

From the early 1990s, when the Cold War came to an end and political liberalisation began, these Octobrists eventually succeeded in reunifying their Octobrist networks and regained their prize of the history of the 1970s. However, this time, they revived themselves neither as radical activists nor revolutionary warriors, but instead with the new identity of 'Octobrist: 1970s democratic fighter'. In doing so, they democratised the history of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October in parallel with normalising their 1970s leftist historical background, ideological legacy, cultural objects and hero idols. They highlighted democratic and other liberal elements in their 1970s history, and diffused the leftist component with these non-leftist ideological elements. Concurrently, their efforts to integrate different and conflicting groups of Octobrists into a loose unity under the term 'Octobrist', and institutionalising the new identity of 'Octobrist' or 1970s fighters for democracy for their whole generation triumphed. By the mid 1990s, these processes were concretised. The 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists utilised the political asset of the success of 14<sup>th</sup> October people's movement in blurring their leftist elements, while the 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrists recovered from being a lost generation by turning into democratic fighters working side by side with the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generation. The public no longer viewed the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October histories as leftist but rather as the path to democracy of contemporary Thai history. More and more non-leftists joined the celebrations and utilised this history in promoting democracy and liberal ideas.

## Chapter 4

### **The Revival of the Octobrists in Parliamentary Politics in the 1990s**

In the mid-1980s, it was hard to imagine that in less than a decade after the decline of the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai – CPT) and the leftist student movements, many of these former radical students, who had been perceived and indeed perceived themselves as failures, would manage to re-emerge as powerful politicians and spin doctors. While some quickly gained prominent political positions in various governments, others became key political consultants and campaign organisers for political parties. Furthermore, by the late 1990s, many of them also appeared as elected senators and were appointed as members of the National Human Rights Commission.

In explaining these developments, this chapter focuses on the question of how these Octobrists managed to achieve and maintain roles as successful politicians, political lobbyists and political consultants. What this chapter examines firstly is the supportive political environment. Political liberalisation, which started in the late 1980s and developed even further after the 1992 May people's uprising against the revival of the military in parliamentary politics, offered many Octobrists hope and the possibility of beginning to assume roles in party politics. The functions and expansion of coalition and machine politics increased the demand for more diverse personalities to serve in electoral politics. Furthermore, the political reforms of the late 1990s opened up new windows of opportunity for Octobrists to access parliamentary politics. Secondly, political resources, including the political skills and networks these Octobrists had obtained since the 1970s, were crucial for enabling these people to enter political parties and cliques in the first place. However, their new found ability to adjust and compete under new political rules of coalition politics was also a crucial factor for Octobrists in surviving and maintaining their power in the long run. Thirdly, the newly developed reputation of youthful and professional Octobrist politicians was a significant trademark for Octobrist politicians in differentiating themselves from conventional politicians.

Lastly, and most importantly, the ability to adjust to and compete in the new political context of coalition politics was also a crucial factor for Octobrists to survive and maintain power in electoral politics

#### **4.1 Octobrists in the political liberalisation of the late 1980s**

Throughout most of the 1980s, Thai politics was dominated by a semi-democratic or quasi-democratic system. It was a period when Thai parliamentary politics was still mainly dominated by the military and top level bureaucrats in spite of constitutionally legitimated political institutions. Although general elections were in place and there was an increasing number of pressure groups, including business organisations, that tried to influence policy making, under Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988), the constitution allowed non-elected prime ministers, who could come from within government service. The prime minister was elected by a coalition of parties, and major ministries were given to retired military figures, famous politicians, or high-level bureaucrats. The appointed upper house of the Parliament was overwhelmingly military, and several of the major political parties were military dominated (Connors 2003, 95; Neher 1988). On the other hand, it was the consequence of the crisis of open democracy in 1973-1976 which left the elite with no agreement on the form of leadership or regime, and on the continuing contested space between liberal and statist forces (Connors 2003, 91). By the late 1980s, this competition brought about political liberalisation. All political forces moved in one common direction toward electoral politics. Elected politicians and the newly emerging business community put much effort into widening their political power within parliamentary politics against military-led democracy. They tried to change parts of the constitution which contained preferential conditions for non-elected military officers and businesspeople to maintain their position in the parliamentary system. At the same time, earlier dominant forces like the military, conservative capitalists and newly-emerging business groups also shifted and adjusted to electoral politics in tandem with retaining their power (Connors 2003, 95-96). Many leading military officers resigned to establish themselves in party politics. Conservative businessmen, who tried to maintain their connections and exchanges with the military in acquiring power in parliamentary politics through the Senate, cabinet and governmental advisory committees, gradually expanded their political activities to support political parties and to participate directly in electoral and

party politics as electoral candidates (Likhit 1992, 211; Piyaporn 1994, (2)). The newly emerging businessmen at the local and national levels shifted their political strategy from acting as pressure groups to influence state policies toward direct participation in electoral politics (Sombat 2000). Collaborating with and taking control of political parties through financial support, as well as running for election as MPs became common practices among newly successful businessmen (Anek 1988: 452; Anek 1992; Piyaporn 1994, 5-6). As a result, after the end of the Prem Tinsulanonda administration, the Chatichai Choonhavan government (1988-1991), led by the first elected Prime Minister since the 1980s, saw the new face of Thai political liberalisation. New politicians and political parties proliferated. The electoral political environment and new politics became the sole battlefield for all political forces. This created a new set of political opportunities for Octobrists who would like to enter electoral politics.

Under political liberalisation, machine and coalition politics which originated in the mid 1970s became the predominant political rule. This opened up new opportunities for the Octobrists to access electoral politics and state power. Before the late 1970s, there had been neither genuine nor continuing political competition among political parties in Thai politics owing to the domination of military-backed parties and the use of state mechanisms to support their candidates and to suppress opposition parties. The changes started between 1969 and 1975, when more competitive elections were allowed. Political machines consisting of the *hua khanaen* (canvasser) system and vote-buying were created as tools for new individuals and groups to overcome stronger and older patron-client networks. In the 1980s during the latter stages of the Prem Tinsulanonda regime when electoral politics was fully functioning, new politicians, particularly those who transferred from the business, bureaucratic and military sectors, required more and more numbers, types and levels of intermediaries to bridge the gap between Bangkok and the banks of votes scattered around up-country villages and towns in the rest of the country (Ockey 2004, 24-25; Surin and McCargo 1997). By the mid-1990s, moreover, when the public became more interested in differences of party policy, all parties were forced to generate some type of eye-catching policy statement (Surin and McCargo 1997, 142-143). Subsequently, they began to take an interest in recruiting new personnel in the form of spin doctors, strategic campaigners, and so forth. This new arrangement offered new reasons and new roles for Octobrists to yearn for party and electoral politics.

Moreover, coalition governance opened up possibilities for Octobrists to challenge stronger parties and candidates to ascend to ministerial positions. From the 1970s onwards, Thai political parties were built up from factions and based on personalities rather than policy platforms. After the disappearance of authoritarian government in 1973, no party was able to monopolise resources within the government in electoral politics. Individual bureaucrats could be recruited into the *hua khanaen* structure of various candidates. Different parties used more complex campaign methods (Ockey 2004; Surin and McCargo 1997). These helped newer parties to win more seats than ever before. Above all, no party won a majority on its own. Subsequently, coalition governance became the norm for Thai politics. Since 1975, the Seni Pramoj and Kukrit Pramoj governments comprised sixteen and twelve parties respectively, with fewer than ten seats for each party. Under these conditions the ‘cabinet quota’ system was institutionalised. Cabinet positions were allocated based on the number of MPs a minister or his group could control, regardless of background, ideology, seniority or experience. In negotiating for cabinet positions, many MPs were willing to change factions and even split parties and realign with opposition parties (Ockey 2004, 25-26 and 38-40). Even though this made Thai governments short-lived and unstable, it allowed Octobrist politicians affiliated even to small parties and cliques to obtain leading positions in the parties and cabinets.

#### *1970s political skills and networks*

Although these Octobrists returned home as political failures, they were not without resources. Since the 1970s they had possessed skills in political campaigning and networking that suited them well for the needs of new MP candidates and for supporting functions in the more sophisticated political campaign system for politicians and newly emerging political parties. They acquired a profound practical knowledge of electoral politics, grassroots movements and elite political culture, and the ability to liaise among varying classes and interest groups. These assets laid a solid basis for their careers in parliamentary politics.

First, involvement in electoral politics both at the university and national level since the 1970s provided the Octobrists with the skills and instincts to analyse the political

situation, plan electoral campaigns and strategies, and so forth. From the early 1970s when elections at the university level were allowed, the Octobrists played leading roles in inaugurating and campaigning for many radical parties at their universities. After the triumph of the student movement against the military regime in 1973, they developed more successful political campaigns through which socialist-oriented parties dominated the student councils in nearly all major universities (Kanungnit 1987; Padungsak 2006, 196; Sila 2003). For example, Chaturon Chaisang, one of the most successful Octobrist politicians, has mentioned that skills in ‘analysing political situations’ during political crises, learnt from his radical colleague, Kriwut Sirinupong, have been useful for his political work until today (Chaturon 2006, 61). Many of them also progressed into national elections by joining socialist-oriented parties after graduating between 1973 and 1976. Many prominent Octobrists who graduated after 1976 like Chamni Sakdiset and Jaran Dhitthapichai, worked with the Socialist Party of Thailand (sangkhomniyom haeng prathet thai) (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok; Thikan 2005, 84; *Su Anakhot* 1979, 12). In going through these experiences, they developed political skills in respect to their functions within political parties. As MP candidates they developed their skills in leadership and public speaking. As support staff they acquired expertise in organising political campaigns.

Second, their experience working with both grassroots movements and the elite gave them the qualifications to link extra-parliamentary and parliamentary politics. On the one hand, involvement in farmer, labour and ethnic minority movements during the 1970s equipped these Octobrists with profound knowledge, networks and skills in working with extra-parliamentary forces. On the other hand, as university political activists negotiating with governments and promoting problem issues of grassroots people at the national level during the 1970s, the Octobrists had opportunities to connect with many elite and middle class networks. Through these they acquired the ability to promote grassroots problems in the language of the elite and the middle class (further details in Chapter 2).

Beside political skills, the political networks also developed during the 1970s were also crucial political assets which the Octobrists mobilised to move into contemporary parliamentary politics. During their work with leftist student movements, the CPT, the anti-dictatorship campaign and socialist-oriented political parties, these Octobrists

developed profound connections with both leftist and non-leftist groups, including non-left progressive politicians, military officers, elite classmates, and socialist-oriented politicians<sup>36</sup>. Upon their return, three major linkages and relationships provided significant access to parliamentary politics.

The first was the relationship with progressive and liberal politicians during the anti-military government campaign. This relationship became the first point of contact for many Octobrists who wanted to join electoral politics after their return from the armed struggle with the CPT. Under the authoritarian regime in the early 1970s, the Octobrists and non-left liberal politicians, particularly those from the Democrat Party (Prachathipat), including Chuan Leekpai, Uthai Pimjaichon and Veera Musikapong, worked together in putting pressure on the military government to promote electoral politics. Many informal and formal gatherings between these young liberal politicians and leading student activists became a crucial force behind the success of the 1973 people's uprising. Many student activists, who later joined the leftist movement and the CPT had even been initially inspired by these liberal politicians. They were impressed by their anti-military rhetoric. Jaran Dhitthapichai and Sutham Saengprathum have mentioned how they appreciated and were inspired by the public speeches of Surin Pitsuwan, Chuan Leekpai and Damrong Lattapitpath from the Democrat Party (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok; Sutham 2001, 72-74).

The second was the connection with progressive elements in the military during the ideological clashes between the Octobrists and leading members of the CPT, and the decline of the CPT. Because of the progressive image of the 'Democratic Soldiers' in pushing forward Prime Ministerial Order 66/23, the anti-communist insurgency policy which granted an amnesty for students who had fled to join the armed struggle with the CPT, and their close relationship with former military officers who used to work with and then left the CPT, many students who disagreed with the militant political strategies of the CPT gradually developed relationships and worked with these military officers.

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<sup>36</sup> The network with 1970s socialist politicians is less important than others, because upon their return from the CPT the former socialist politicians themselves were less successful in recovering in the 1980s electoral politics (Wat 2000, 213-352). Only at the beginning did a small number of them play a role in encouraging several Octobrists to join political parties. As they found it hard to regain prominent roles in any party, their role quickly faded away and they became marginalised.

There were several meetings and consultations among the Democratic Soldiers, political parties and some former leftist student activists who earlier joined the CPT, including Sompong Sakravee, Yuk Sri-Ariya (Tienchai Wongchaisuwan), and Therdpoom Chaidee. Through connections with and support from the Democratic Soldiers, Sompong Sakravee worked on the progressive military magazine called '*Tawan Mai (New Sun)*' (Chai-anan 1982). Another outstanding case was the relationship between General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, one of the leading members of the Democratic Soldiers, and the Octobrists. As the leading figure in promoting 66/23 and in charge of North-eastern Thailand during the peak of the CPT, Chavalit was one of the key persons negotiating and working with CPT members in settling problems in conflict areas. Thanks to Chavalit's profound understanding of the problems, many Octobrists had good impressions of his work with the local people.

The third was the network among Octobrists themselves. While the communist insurgency ambience was still present, Octobrists selected specific networks among former comrades which would be helpful in the return to electoral politics. There was no evidence of a systematic effort to mobilise mass-base support from their former rural CPT comrades in their electoral campaigns. On the one hand, such an effort would not be good for new Octobrist MP candidates who wanted to leave their leftist reputation and background behind. On the other hand, moving around different revolutionary bases, their former rural CPT networks were scattered throughout the country and sometimes irrelevant to the location of their main constituencies. Subsequently, networks among former radical student activists who they were close to in various leftist political clubs, study groups, support functions, and military bases were more crucial (further details in Chapter 2). As we shall see below, when some Octobrist politicians started building up their support teams and recruiting potential new political candidates, they approached their former comrades. At the same time, many Octobrists who wished to pursue a career in electoral politics also exploited connections with their Octobrist friends who had become successful politicians at an early stage. The success of Octobrist politicians also came from the moral support of Octobrists in other sectors especially those in the media.

In summary, 1970s political activism provided a solid political foundation for the Octobrists in electoral politics. Their first-hand experience with party politics and

mobilising works with grassroots and the elite turned these people into potential politicians and campaigners. The networks developed with liberal politicians, the military and among themselves offered them a first point of entry into electoral politics amidst the political liberalisation of the late 1980s.

*The first wave of Octobrists in electoral politics*

By the 1988 general election, there was the phenomenon of the first wave of Octobrists quietly joining several parties as candidates as well as spin doctors. Chamni Sakdiset, Pinit Jarusombat, Chaturon Chaisang and Adisorn Piengket were outstanding and successful examples. And what these successful Octobrists had in common was direct connections with prominent politicians and elite inner circles of electoral politics. These people were able to connect with these networks both through their political activities with liberal MPs since the 1970s as well as through the family support of those who came from families with a background in the political elite.

Chamni Sakdiset's parents were teachers from Nakhon Si Thammarat Province in Southern Thailand. He was a student at the Faculty of Law, Ramkhamhaeng University, where he started his political activities. At Ramkhamhaeng University, he was active in establishing the Eternal Truth Party (Satjatham). He was a student leader and was one of the nine Ramkhamhaeng University students who were expelled because of their campaign against the military government. This incident later led to the mass student mobilisation which later developed into the people's movement on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. After the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident, he became chairperson of the Democracy Propagation Programme (khongkan phoeiphrae prachathipatai) in the Southern Region. After graduation in 1975, he joined the Socialist Party of Thailand (sangkhomniyom haeng prathet thai) led by former General Somkhit Srisongkhom, as MP candidate in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, his hometown. He became the secretary of the party in 1976 (Thikan 2005, 84). In 1977, he joined the armed struggle with the CPT in the name of the Socialist Party of Thailand. However, he left the CPT due to three major disagreements: undemocratic rule within the CPT; the CPT's reliance on the CCP; and the domination of the CPT over the Socialist Party of Thailand. In 1985, he returned to electoral politics at the invitation of Uthai Pimjaichon, the Progressive Party (Kao Na) leader, a progressive politician who Chamni had known since the 1970s. In 1986, he

won in the general election and became MP for his hometown of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. He also played a role in recruiting new Southern MP candidates for the party (MS 1986a).

Pinit Jarusombat was another student leader from Ramkhamhaeng University. He was the secretary of the Eternal Truth Party (Satjatham) and eventually became a chairman of the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Council. Like Chamni Sakdiset, he was one of the nine students from Ramkhamhaeng University who was expelled before the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident. In 1975, he became a Deputy General Secretary of the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai - NSCT) and played an active role in promoting protests against state policy and violence. After 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976, he joined the CPT in the armed struggle. With a background in the local family business as the major alcohol and cigarette distributor and owner of several rice mills in Chachoengsao Province, Pinit quickly started his own business and later became one of the biggest shrimp export brokers. His wealth became a major asset for him in entering electoral politics. During the economic boom of 1990–1991, he expanded his business into real estate and became one of the most successful and wealthiest businessmen in the province. Through his connections with Uthai Pimjaichon and Arthit Urairat, liberal politicians who split from the Democrat Party (prachathipat) and started their own party, the Progressive Party (kao na), he started his political career as an MP candidate in 1986 but failed. In parallel with his successful business career, he finally won election in 1992.

Chaturon Chaisang, a medical student, was the leader of the Dharma Party (Pracha Tham), the leftist student party in Chiang Mai University. After the party won the university election in 1976, he became president of the Chiang Mai University student council. He joined the CPT after the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident. During his time in the jungle, he was editor of *'Athipat (Sovereign)'*, the major student magazine in the battle zone (Padungsak 2008). Upon his return, he fled to the US with the support of his father, Anan Chaisang, a prominent liberal politician who fought against authoritarian regimes and promoted elections during the 1970s. In 1985, he received an urgent call from his father to come back to run as a candidate in the 1986 election again with the support of his father's connections with political and military networks. At that time, he did not present himself as former leftist student activist. Instead he successfully reshaped his

new identity as a US-educated, new generation politician and the son of a former politician, Anan Chaisang (*MS* 1986b). He not only had his father's connections, but he was also welcomed by his Octobrist friends in journalism. For example, when he started his political career, Kriwut Sirinupong, who was a veteran Octobrist in a newspaper at that time, helped to introduce Chaturon to many of his journalist friends and to develop sympathetic relations with various media outlets (Chaturon 2006, 61).

Adisorn Piengket was the elder son of Thongpak Piengket, a socialist politician in the United Socialist Front of Thailand Party (*naew ruam sangkhomniyom haeng prathet thai*). He graduated from the Law Faculty, Thammasat University. After graduation in 1973, Adisorn briefly worked as a lawyer in Khon Kaen, his hometown, and later started his political career in the United Socialist Front of Thailand Party. After the 6<sup>th</sup> October massacre, the whole Piengket family joined and became important allies of the CPT in the armed struggle. His family was located at the A30 military base in Lao where the CPT put socialist politicians and student leaders. Nevertheless, they later had conflicts with the CPT and left the CPT due to its domination over their allies. After the decline of the CPT, he returned and continued to work as a lawyer. As the Piengket family quickly recovered its political position in electoral politics, Adisorn also became a successful politician ahead of his former comrades. He ran as a candidate in the Mass Party (Muan Chon) through his father's connections in 1983 and 1986 but failed both times.

Beside these Octobrist MPs, other Octobrists also entered politics as political brokers and spin doctors providing support for politicians and political parties. Kriengkamol Laohapairoj is one of the most important Octobrist leading figures in the 1970s. Despite the fact that he was born in a nationalist Chinese family, he was later provoked by the anti-seniority and anti-military movements in his early years at the Law Faculty, Chulalongkorn University. He was one of the founding members of the leftist student party, Chula Dharma People Party (*Chula Pracha Dharma*). In 1975, he was elected as the General Secretary of the NSCT. After the massacre in 1976, he ran to the CPT in the armed struggle. As a prominent student leader, he was treated as a privileged ally of the CPT. He was sent to Laos and China. On these journeys, he started questioning and ended up disappointed with the CPT. Upon his return he faced many economic difficulties. Nevertheless, he carried on his political activities with many Octobrists and

other progressive politicians with whom he used to work in the 1970s. Around 1986, Kriengkamol and other leading 1970s Octobrist friends, Tanya Chunchanatarn and Phumtham Wechayachai, started helping Veera Musikapong, Chuan Leekpai and Banyat Banthattan, former liberal politicians in the Democrat Party (prachathipat), in their political campaigns from time to time (Kriengkamol, interview by author, 13 March 2007, Bangkok).

Anun Hanpanichpan was another interesting case. He was a student activist at the Faculty of Law, Thammasat University. Unlike others, Anun mainly focused his student activities on the arts and literature during the 1970s. He contributed many writings to progressive and leftist magazines to support the leftist student party at Thammasat University. Also he was one of the key persons in the revolutionary Thai musical band at Thammasat University. Through these activities, he developed a wide network of radical artists and activists and planned to join the armed struggle even before 1976. During his time with the CPT in the jungle, he started realising the problems and weaknesses of the CPT. He moved to several military bases in the hope that the situation would be better. He left the CPT at the last stage of its crisis around 1983. Upon his return, Anun quickly completed his university studies and carried on working in journalism. Through his academic and journalistic skills and political network, he was connected to Arthit Urairat by Chatcharin Chaiwat, a radical journalist who was once jailed on a charge of communism. Realising that he did not want to go into the private sector, he decided to work as a junior academic staff providing academic and political support for Arthit when Arthit was the secretary of the National Democratic Party (Chat Prachathipatai), the non-progressive party supporting General Kriangsak Chomanan to be Prime Minister. Gradually, he became a political and policy advisor to Arthit (Anun, interview by author, 17 May 2007, Bangkok).

### *The second wave of Octobrists in electoral politics*

The second wave of the struggle to enter parliamentary and electoral politics mostly focused on connections with and support from former Octobrist friends who had already successfully established themselves in party politics. Either due to lack of opportunities, interests or direct connections with leading politicians in political parties, these Octobrists had not pursued political careers immediately after their return from the

armed struggle. However, from approximately the early 1990s, many new faces from among the Octobrists entered parliamentary politics via the support and networks of the first wave of Octobrist politicians who had earlier based themselves in varying political parties. Moreover, the increase in demand for new human resources in the expansion of political parties at the peak of political liberalisation and democratic transition during the Chatichai Choonhavan government and the 1992 movement against the military government expanded opportunities in party politics. The loose informal networks among Octobrists were important links between ordinary Octobrists and Octobrist politicians. Informal annual gatherings of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October student activists, such as Friendship, Sisterhood and Brotherhood group (pheuan phong nong phi), became connecting points between Octobrists who needed political support or access to political parties and Octobrist politicians. Likewise, these were effective channels for Octobrist politicians to mobilise political support from their ex-comrades.

Chamni Sakdiset started inviting more of his former comrades, including Sutham Saengprathum and Wittaya Kaew-Paradise, into the Progressive Party (Kao Na). These three Octobrist politicians set up a stronghold of the Progressive Party in southern Thailand. Sutham Saengprathum was a student at Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University and was elected as the General Secretary of the National Student Council of Thailand in 1976. He was born in Nakhon Si Thammarat, the same province as Chamni. With a middle class background in a family of teachers, he had been socialised through liberal reading and had had a political ambition to play a role in electoral politics before joining the leftist movement at university. His political transformation began through his frustration with the military regimes in the early 1970s. After the coup and cancellation of the election in 1971, during his high school education, he started his political activism at the provincial level. In the 1973 student movement, as an ordinary participant, he was arrested by the police and briefly jailed, causing enormous frustration and provoking his political activism. After 1973, he became an active participant in all kinds of political activities including the Democracy Propagation Programme and public hearings for constitutional drafting. He was arrested during the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident and jailed for nearly 3 years. During his time as a political prisoner, he joined a new political network including military officers who tried to stage a coup, including Major General Sanan Kajornprasat who later became a prominent politician in the Democrat Party (Prachathipat).. After defeating a court accusation of being a

communist, he spent 3 years in the US. In 1987, after returning from the US, he started discussing with many politicians his intention to step into electoral politics. Eventually, he was contacted by Chamni and encouraged by his activist wife to run for parliament.

Wittaya Kaew-Paradise was another activist student at Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University. He did not join the armed struggle because he was shot in both legs on 6<sup>th</sup> October. However, he was still in contact with many of his Octobrist friends in the CPT. After recovering from his injuries, he worked as a lawyer helping people who were charged with communism in southern Thailand. He started his political career at the invitation of Chamni Sakdiset who was in the Progressive Party (Kao Na) in the early 1990s.

Certainly, the initial entry of Octobrists into parliamentary politics relied upon their skills and connections acquired since the 1970s. However, surviving and maintaining a prominent role in the long term in coalition and machine politics required more than such skills and linkages. The ability to mobilise voters effectively, to maintain strong political networks and negotiating power in the cabinet quota system were essential requirements of political success in the fragmented parliamentary politics of the 1990s. Candidates could not hope to win without an effective *hua khanaen* (*canvasser*) structure. And MPs could not attain prominent positions in party and cabinet without a faction and strong financial support (Ockey 2004, 24-25; Surin and McCargo 1997). Thereafter, Octobrists who were successful in their political careers were those who successfully adjusted and competed in conventional coalition politics, and also maintained their 1970s progressive reputation. Some may have been able to avoid direct involvement in money politics. However, they still had to be able to extract political resources from the mechanisms of machine politics. At the same time, they were aware of what was off limits to them in promoting a progressive agenda and being involved in networks that were too radical. Those who wished to maintain complete independence from these systems which they assumed to be corrupt and non-idealistic or who failed to compete within the systems could neither survive nor achieve prosperous political careers.

*Some failed, while others succeeded*

Initially, most Octobrists started their political careers with networks they had had since the 1970s as well as parties with progressive images. The Democrat Party (Prachathipat) with a lot of 1970s liberal politicians, and the Solidarity Party (Ekkaparp) and the Progressive Party (Kao Na) which belonged to Uthai Pimjaichon and Arthit Urairat, former liberal politicians who split from the Democrat Party, were the most popular parties among Octobrists. Moreover, other parties with the image of angels in the public eye due to their anti-military role during the 1992 May incident founded by progressive military officers including the Moral Force Party (Palang Dharma) of Chamlong Srimuang and the New Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai) of Chavalit Yongchaiyudh were also attractive to many Octobrists. However, in the context of political competition, and to strengthen the possibility of joining a government, these seemingly progressive parties had to recruit many non-progressive politicians and cliques and align themselves and work with corrupt parties. At the same time, they had to rely on financial support from business politicians in exchange for policies which favoured their businesses.

After acknowledging these realities, different Octobrists chose to pursue different directions. Some started to inaugurate an independent radical political party. In mid 1991, under the vibrant political milieu of the Chatichai Choonhavan government, many new political parties sprang up. Kriengkamol Laohapairoj organised a meeting aimed at establishing a new political party with the name of '14 October' or 'Kita Party (Prachatham)' (*MR* 1992; *MS* 1991). In responding to the 1991 coup, the party took public political action in denouncing the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) during the movement against the coup government. However, there was a lack of mutual agreement among Octobrists themselves regarding the political direction of the party. The ideological crisis from back in the 1970s left scars and disagreements among Octobrists, who were able to unite among themselves. Furthermore, with an insufficient political base, financial support and public understanding, establishing a new political party was nearly impossible. Owing to these failures, potential MP candidates on the party list declined to be involved. Instead they moved to support other parties. For example, Sombat Thamrongthanyawong and Sompong Sakravee joined the New

Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai). The party did not field any candidates in the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1992 general election (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok).

Aside from the failure to form their own political party, many other Octobrists also faced failure in electoral politics with other parties. Many Octobrists tried to distance themselves from money politics and strategic electoral support from corrupt political networks. Despite limited financial resources, they tried to avoid vote-buying strategies and they did not approach corrupt political networks for financial support. Nevertheless, in fierce political competitions which were dominated by corrupt politicians, they could hardly succeed (Wat 2000, 353-357). Eventually, many who were unable to mobilise political and financial support gave up electoral politics.

For instance, Jaran Dhitthapichai was one of the most prominent Octobrist figures during the 1970s. His reputation as a leftist was established even before the CPT started working with student movements in urban areas. He was one of the founders of the Thammasat University Dome Assembly (Sapha Na Dome), an influential independent political club in Thammasat University. It later became a major hub for leftist student activists. After graduation, he carried on working as a mentor for Octobrists in many universities. After 1976, he fled to join the CPT in the Northern military bases and obtained a high rank in the CPT. When the CPT declined, he escaped Thailand and continued his studies in France and continued participating with the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste) in France. Owing to his extreme leftist reputation, Jaran faced several difficulties in getting a satisfactory job after returning from France before being accepted on the academic staff at Rangsit University through a network of former comrades who worked with Arthit Urairat, the university's owner and a liberal politician who was familiar with these Octobrists. During his time at Rangsit University, he resumed his political activities. Initially, he started expressing his political views and comments through articles in newspapers and political magazines. Frustrated with corrupt party politics, he gradually moved toward direct participation in electoral politics. He joined other Octobrists in the preparations for the establishment of the Pprachatham-Octobrist Party. The party failed, although he had connections with nearly all parties, especially the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) and the Moral Force Party (Palang Dharma). Due to limited openings for candidates in the South which was his stronghold, he could hardly get into those parties. He then decided to join the

Solidarity Party (Ekkaparp) as MP candidate in a network with Uthai Pimjaichon, former liberal Democrat Party MP during the 1970s. However, he was not elected and eventually returned to work at Rangsit University. Consequently, he concluded that, given the realities of money politics, an idealist politician like him could barely succeed (Jaran, interview by author, 15 February 2007, Bangkok).

Those who were unwilling to adjust to the norms of money and coalition politics, or who had been unable to work out how to play the conventional game, failed to survive in electoral politics and eventually were forced to leave in search of new channels to continue their political activities. With fewer resources and less capability to fight in conventional coalition and machine politics, these Octobrist politicians moved out of parliamentary politics and sought new venues in the 1997 constitution for continuing their political career.

Maleerat Kaewka and Sompong Sakravee are good examples. Maleerat was a leading student activist from Khon Kaen University and member of the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai) committee before joining the CPT in their armed struggle. She started her political career in the National Development Party (Chart Pattana) in 1995. She was promoted to a middle ranking position, assistant to the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare. Frustrated within the party and failing to get elected in 1996, she switched to run as a Senate candidate.

Unlike Maleerat Kaewka, Sompong Sakravee never succeeded at a general election despite several attempts and wide political networks. Sompong was president of the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Council and a leading member of the New Generation (khon run mai) Club at Ramkhamhaeng University. He was one of the nine students dismissed by the University for publishing a book against the authoritarian government and worked actively with the group appealing for a democratic constitution prior to the 14 October incident. He joined the CPT in the armed struggle after the 1976 massacre. Upon his return, he pursued a business career in printing. Sompong ran in his first election with the Progressive Party (Kao Na), and then shifted to the Moral Force Party (Palang Dharma), the New Aspiration Party (Khwan Wang Mai) and the Liberal

Integrity Party (Seritham), and again returned to the New Aspiration Party in 1996, but never won once.

The Octobrist politicians who were able to maintain their political power were those who were keen to deploy sophisticated political calculation in coalition politics as well as their reputations as progressive and professional politicians in ascending to top cabinet positions. On the one hand, in comparison with the failed Octobrists, these Octobrist politicians dared and managed to ally with non-progressive forces and mobilise all sorts of support from conventional corrupt politicians. On the other hand, they successfully differentiated themselves from conventional politicians. Even though in reality, they were close to and benefitted from support from and connections with these politicians and their machine-based political strategies, successful Octobrist politicians managed to develop and maintain their positive reputation as young-blood professional politicians as a selling point in negotiating for positions in parties and cabinet. Or at least they were able convince the public that they were less directly involved in money politics or presumably more honest than their counterparts (Table 4.1: Movements of Octobrist politicians in party politics).

For example, Chaturon Chaisang in 1985 joined and ran for parliament under the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) through connections with Harn Leelanon, the Democratic Soldier who was close to his father. In 1983, Chaturon's father and Harn worked with a group of politicians and former Democratic Soldiers in establishing the Reformist Party, but failed. During his first term, Chaturon quickly obtained the position of assistant secretary to the Deputy Minister of Finance during 1986-1989. With Harn, he left the Democrat Party to establish the People's Party (Prachachon). But by late 1989, after the Progressive Party (Kao Na) merged with three other parties and turned into the Solidarity Party (Ekkaparp), he shifted to the Thai Nation Party (Chart Thai) through his connection with Kraisak Choonhavan, a former leftist student activist and the son of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. Under the Chatichai government, Chaturon was appointed as secretary to the Minister of Commerce. In 1992, Chaturon shifted from the Thai Nation Party (chart thai) to the New Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai) with a better offer from and close relationship with General Chavalit.

After moving around several parties, he successfully established himself in the New Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai). In the New Aspiration Party, Chaturon Chaisang was a rising star. With his well-educated background and youthful reputation, Chavalit hoped to use him to improve the party's image. He was quickly promoted. Even after his failure in the general election, he was appointed party spokesperson. In 1996, when the New Aspiration Party was the leading party in government, he became the Deputy Minister of Finance. In 1997, during the decline of the New Aspiration Party, he was chosen to be the party's Secretary-General, replacing Sanoh Tienthong, a corrupt politician with an image as a political dinosaur. Chaturon became a star MP in the House of Representatives during many parliamentary debates. However, as he was not a financial power-holder within the party, his role was only as image maker. When he came into conflict with other powerful politicians in the parties, he was suppressed. Due to his conflict with Chalerm Yoobamrung, a corrupt former police politician, Chaturon resigned as Secretary-General and moved down to take care of the economic policy team.

Because of these conflicts within the New Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai), Chaturon Chaisang eventually decided to leave and intended to establish a new political party. Nevertheless, he learnt that under the 1997 Constitution there was limited space and little possibility for a small party to survive. He then decided to join the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai – TRT) at the last minute before the 2001 election. In the TRT, he was promoted to deputy leader and was 15<sup>th</sup> on the party list, which was considered to be a high ranking position in the party (further details in Chapter 6).

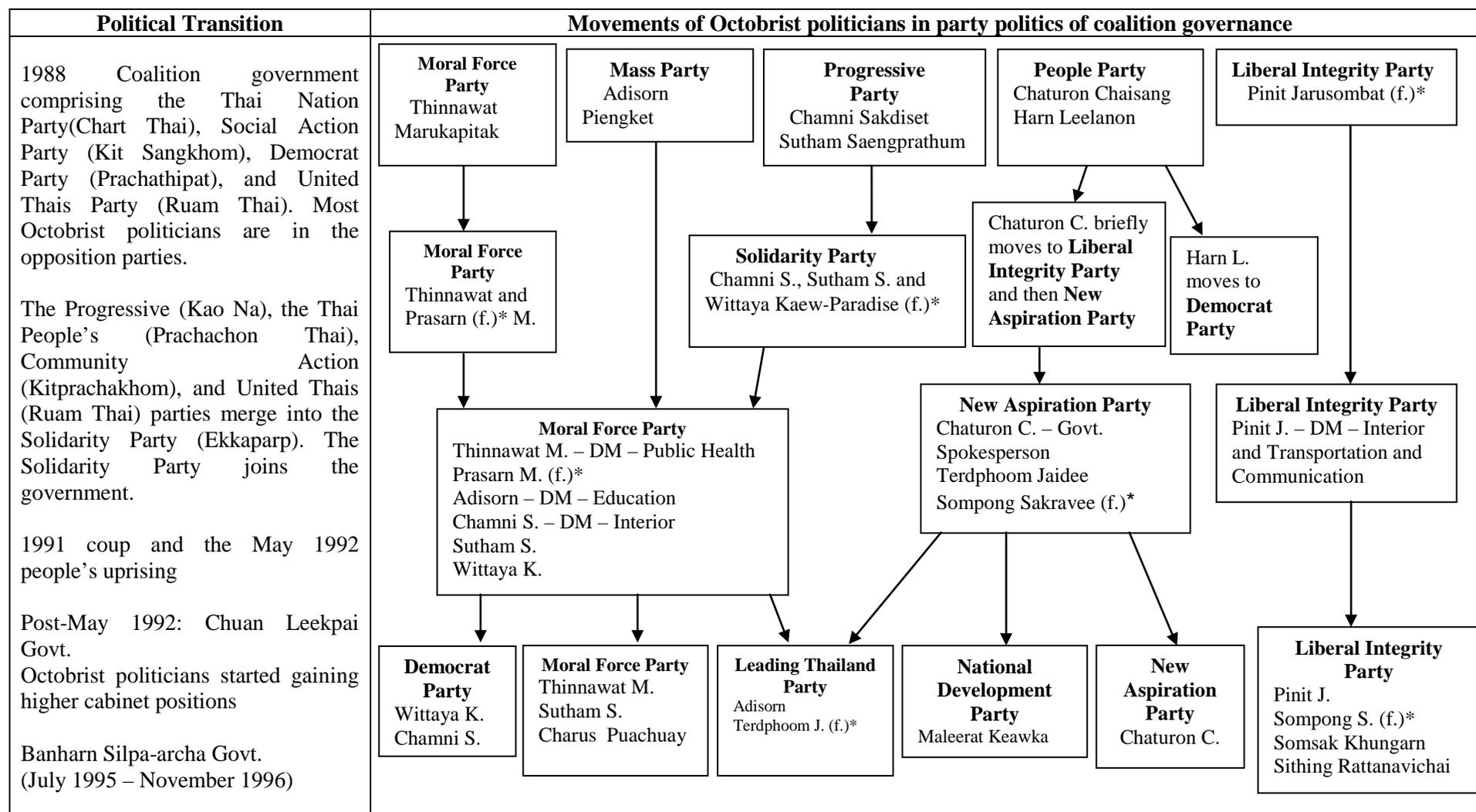
Unlike Chaturon Chaisang, Pinit Jarusombat entered electoral politics as an Octobrist with a successful business background. Pinit started his political career through connections he had forged with Arthit Urairat and Uthai Pimjaichon, former progressive and liberal politicians from the Democrat Party (prachathipat). Unlike his comrades who moved to bigger parties, as a politician he stuck with small parties and successfully used them to negotiate with major political parties to gain government positions. In doing so, he became a major financial backer for these parties, including the Thai People's Party (Prachachon Thai), the Progressive Party (Kao Na) and the Liberal Integrity Party (Seritham). Through coalition-building in parliament, his small parties were able to join nearly every government and gain a cabinet quota in exchange for supporting the

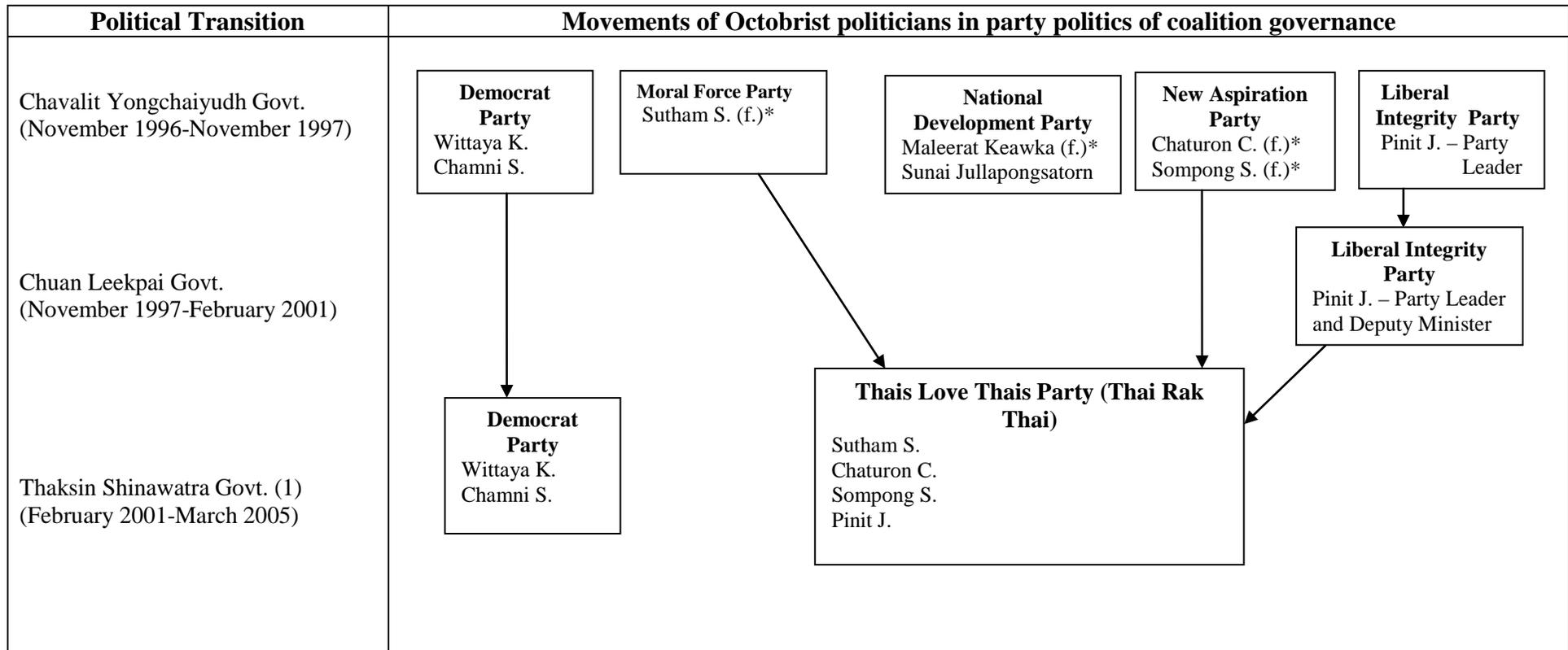
government coalition. He was one of the leading party figures who attained key positions in the cabinet. In 1993, under the Chuan Leekpai government, he gained the position of Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Minister of Transport and Communication, which was considered a grade 'A' ministry (in terms of opportunities for corruption as these ministries deliver a huge budget). In 1996, he became Liberal Integrity Party leader and was able to lead the party into government and earned the position of Deputy Minister of Interior for himself. Under the political changes in the context of the 1997 Constitution, which increased the power of big political parties, his small party started to face negotiating problems with the increasing power of the big parties. He started thinking about either shifting to the New Aspiration Party (Khwan Wang Mai) or merging with other smaller parties. However, he eventually joined the TRT Party, one of the promising major parties (further details in Chapter 6).

Adisorn Piengket, another Octobrist, shifted around and managed to gain prominent positions in nearly every government. His failures with the Social Democratic Party in 1983 and 1986 taught Adisorn a lesson in how to adjust to coalition politics. In his third attempt to become an MP, he moved to the Mass Party (Muanchon Party). Nevertheless, amidst the decline of the pro-military image of the Mass Party, he lost the election of 1992. He swiftly shifted to the Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma) which helped him to gain victory in the election later that year. With his stronghold in North-eastern Thailand, he became a significant MP and constituency controller for the Moral Force Party. He thus obtained a cabinet quota as the Deputy Minister of Education from 1992 to 1995. The conflict within the Moral Force Party between the 'temple' and 'politician' factions forced Adisorn to move to the newly established Leading Thailand Party (Nam Thai) in 1995 and act as its Deputy Secretary General. However, the Leading Thailand Party was immediately disbanded after its failure in the general election. Adisorn then chose to go to the New Aspiration Party (Khwan Wang Mai) as the party rose to power. After the 1995 election, the New Aspiration Party gained enough MPs (125 seats out of 393) to form the government. During this term, Adisorn successfully gained several leading positions in both the cabinet and the party. He was Deputy Minister of Science and Deputy Party Leader. In 2001, amidst the decline of the New Aspiration Party, he moved out with Chaturon Chaisang to form a new party but did not succeed. Eventually he moved to the TRT just as it was being formed.

Chamni Sakdiset, Sutham Saengprathum and Wittaya Kaew-Paradise, three southern Octobrist politicians, struggled to build their southern stronghold with small parties with which they had connections. To overcome the inadequate support of small parties, they all moved to bigger and more promising parties like the Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma). After all had built up their constituencies and reputations, they searched for their own routes to furthering their political space and promotion. Initially, Chamni, Sutham and Wittaya tried to stick with parties with a progressive image which had links to them since the 1970s. Chamni joined the Progressive Party (Kao Na) through a direct connection with Uthai Pimjaichon, the party leader. Later he invited both Sutham and Wittaya to join him in the hopes of building up a stronghold in the southern constituencies. By the end of 1988, under the Chatichai Choonhavan government, the four parties, including the People's (Prachachon), Progressive (Kao Na), United Thais (Ruam Thai) and Community Action (Kitprachakhom) parties merged into the Solidarity Party (Ekkaparp). In doing so, the Solidarity Party finally joined the government and that helped Chamni to gain a position as deputy government spokesperson. Nevertheless, remaining with the Solidarity Party because of their profound link with Uthai taught Sutham and Wittaya an important political lesson. They both failed in the March 1992 election, before deciding to move to a bigger and more popular party like the Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma).

Table 4.1: Movements of Octobrist politicians in party politics





Because of the rise of the Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma) after the 1992 May incident, the ‘three musketeers’ moved to the Moral Force Party at the invitation of Boonchoo Rotjanasatien, previously the major financial supporter of the Progressive Party (Kao Na) and the Solidarity Party (Ekkaparp). Owing to the weakness of the Moral Force Party in southern constituencies, the three were really welcome and became leading figures in promoting the political campaign for the party. Chamni Sakdiset was promoted as Director of the Southern Election Centre of the Moral Force Party, and attained the position of the Deputy Minister of Interior, while Sutham Saengprathum became the party’s spokesperson.

The three moved further politically and separated when they had already established themselves in electoral politics. Because of conflicts within the party, Chamni, Sutham and Wittaya lost their positions as Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma) committee members during a committee meeting. With their established reputations and constituencies, Chamni and Wittaya managed to move to a bigger party in the form of the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) through their connections with Major General Sanan Kajornprasat, a former military officer with close links with several Octobrists since his time in jail in the early 1980s and a powerful Secretary-General and fundraiser for the Democrat Party. With close connections with the leading figures in the Democrat Party and the rooted political support in their constituencies, they were quickly promoted in the Democrat Party. In the 1997 Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and 1998 Chuan Leekpai governments, Chamni twice gained the position of Deputy Minister of Interior. Sutham decided to remain with the Moral Force Party as he did not want to remain under the shadow of Chamni. Nevertheless, staying with a declining party like the Moral Force Party led to failure for Sutham in the November 1996 election. He therefore moved to the TRT as he once worked closely with Thaksin Shinawatra when Thaksin was in the Moral Force Party. With his long experience and strong constituency in Southern Thailand, he was promoted as chair of the strategic political campaign for the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai – TRT) in the South. He was also appointed Minister of University Affairs, deputy party leader, and chief government whip.

In addition to these Octobrists who became MPs, Kriengkamol Laohapairoj and Anun Hanpanichpan managed to carry on their political activities as political consultants and campaigners. Kriengkamol once did campaigning support work for the Democrat Party

and the Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma). At the same time, he provided political support for Chaturon Chaisang, with whom he was close during their time in the CPT armed struggle. He admired Chaturon as a smart, wise and idealist politician. During the rise of the TRT Party, he was one of the first Octobrists whom Thaksin contacted to support the party. Kriengkamol always worked behind the scenes.

Anun started by working with Arthit Urairat in the National Democratic Party (Chart Prachatipatai). He was assigned to conduct policy research, as well as to take care of political campaigns. At the same time, he carried on his journalistic work. He still wrote political articles and poems for several radical political magazines including *Matuphum* (*Motherland*) and *Athit* (*Sun*). After the party was disbanded, Arthit became the chairman of the Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA) board of directors. Anun continued working for Arthit in drafting policy and dealing with the MWA labour union. At the same time, he helped Arthit to establish Rangsit University and took care of student affairs. Through his connection with Arthit, he helped many Octobrists to get work as lecturers at Rangsit University.

Furthermore, in promoting a progressive agenda and enhancing their former radical networks, these successful Octobrist politicians did not push their efforts due to the limitations of electoral and coalition conditions. Although these Octobrists pursued the rules of coalition politics in surviving and maintaining their political positions, they put effort into promoting a progressive agenda and enhanced their former radical networks in five major areas: their role in promoting the 1992 anti-military movement as progressive politicians; participating in reform; providing support for their former comrades in rural areas; pushing forward a progressive agenda favouring the rise of social movements; and suspending the anti-communist law. Nevertheless, due to the limitations of electoral and party politics, many of their initiatives failed or did not last long.

In May 1992, nearly all of the Octobrist politicians and political campaigners came out to support the movement against the revival of the military in parliamentary politics. Chaturon Chaisang played a crucial role in building alliances among politicians in campaigning against the revival of military dictatorship and fighting for democracy and political reform. At the same time, Chamni Sakdiset moved in support of the

organisation of the Democratic Federation (klum samaphan prachathipatai) in changing the constitution earlier drafted by military, as well as developing alliances among 1970s politicians and an anti-military party coalition among the Democrat Party (Prachathipat), Solidarity Party (Ekkaparp) and New Aspiration Party (Khwan Wang Mai). Nevertheless, their role in the anti-military movement was questioned for using the people's movement and claiming their 1970s history as democratic fighters merely to support their own political legitimacy. Since the revival of the military was a threat to elected politicians, fighting against the military was partly to protect their political realm from non-elected elite and military taking over parliamentary power.

Chaturon and Chamni started to promote political reform immediately after May 1992. Although Chaturon failed to win in the 1992 election, he took the role of New Aspiration Party representative on the special committee for constitutional reform. In addition, he organised the 'club of politicians outside parliament' to work on the political reform process. In parallel, Chamni advocated political decentralisation. In this, he started working with Octobrist academics like Anek Laothamatas and Tanet Charoenmuang from the Political Science Faculties at Thammasat University and Chiang Mai University. However, these initial efforts met with the disapproval of several senior members in the party, and politicians with local business interests, like Sanoh Tienthong.

Furthermore, many Octobrist politicians still maintained their connections with and support for their former comrades upcountry. Chaturon Chaisang annually visited the people with whom he used to live during his political mission with the CPT in Nan Province. He allocated budget and promoted development policies for the villages, including new roads and mini-hydroelectric generating plants. Nonetheless, all of these schemes were minor compared to the real socio-economic difficulties that these ex-comrades were facing. His activities were interpreted by the public and his political rivals as a process of making use of these people in promoting his political career.

More importantly, these Octobrist politicians and spin doctors worked to shift the direction of the government in dealing with the rise of social movements. Due to their skills and interests, most of them were assigned by their parties and governments to take care of negotiations with the social movements in different areas. During the successful

period for many Octobrist politicians in the Chavalit Yongchaiyudh government, many of them gained cabinet positions and through these channels, they pushed forward many new policy initiatives and strategies in dealing with the problems of people's movements. However, nearly all of these either failed or were ignored by other powerful politicians.

As Deputy Minister of Science and Technology, Adisorn Piengket pushed forward environmental research projects, compensation for people who were affected by the Rasi Salai dam, proposals for changing the environment laws in favour of the people, and progressive strategies in dealing with demonstrations. However, in doing so, he was attacked and asked to leave the party by Sanoh Tienthong, the Secretary-General of his own party. In addition, he was later accused by the incoming Chuan Leekpai government of corruption in the compensation allocation process. At the same time, Chaturon Chaisang was assigned to take care of the compensation fund for the people who were affected by the Pak Mun dam project. Pinit Jarusombat promised groups opposing the Bor Nok and Hin Krud power plants that the projects would be suspended. Nonetheless, his proposal was obstructed by several MPs in parliament. Because of these failures, he was publicly condemned by the movements. In 1998, as Deputy Minister of Interior, Chamni Sakdiset had to deal with several pressure groups, such as a group opposing a garbage dump in Chiang Mai and a protest by golf caddies. Furthermore, in 1999, Anun Hanpanichpan was assigned to deal with the anti-Rasi Salai dam protest when Arthit Urairat became the Minister of Science and Technology. Despite a profound understanding of the problem, he did not have the power to convince conservative technocrats in the Ministry of Science and Technology. The Octobrist politicians all repeated the same lesson, good will and intentions at the outset, but under the internal constraints of corrupt coalition party politics, most of their efforts were suspended. Most eventually ended up following the government's direction. At the same time, they ended up being condemned as traitors by the people's movements.

Not all of their efforts failed. Chamni Sakdiset and Pinit Jarusombat succeeded in suspending the anti-communist law. In 1997, while they were both Deputy Ministers of Interior, with the support of Sanan Kajornprasat, the Minister of Interior who was from the military and who did understand the problem with the law, they successfully pushed

forward a new security law to replace the 1952 Anti-Communist Act. They argued that an up-to-date law was required to deal with new emerging threats to national security.

#### **4.2 Octobrists in the late 1990s political reform**

Alongside the opportunities created by the rise of parliamentary politics with its coalitions and money politics, there were subsequent opportunities arising from the 1990s political reform process as well as the new networks and reputation they had recently developed. The campaign to reform Thai politics and the constitution started right after the events of May 1992. The process was supported by a tactical alliance among liberal, progressive and conservative forces. The purpose of the reform was to check the power of corrupt elected politicians who were perceived as the cause of the ineffectiveness of Thailand's representative structures, electoral and structural corruption, the plague of factionalism, and political instability (McCargo 2002; Surin and McCargo 1997). In addition, it was designed to limit the power of the mass of rural voters who elected vote-buying and corrupt politicians (Connors 2002; Somchai 2002; Streckfuss and Templeton 2002). Although the drafting process for the 1997 reform constitution was heralded as producing a 'people's constitution' due to the presence of provincial representatives who had been chosen by a complicated nomination process and the public consultation and debates, including a series of 'public hearings' across the country, the drafting process was an elite-led affair, and politicians had the final say concerning the selection of the committee. Overall, popular participation was very limited (Connors 2002; McCargo 2002). The reform process concentrated on three broad areas: reform of the electoral system; establishment of new bodies charged with providing checks and balance against abuse of the political process; and promoting and protecting popular rights (McCargo 2002, 9-12).

The 1997 constitution not only brought about institutional changes for Thai politics; it also had two immediate outcomes which created new roles and opportunities for Octobrists. The replacement of an appointed Senate with an elected Senate and the establishment of new bodies to monitor and reform the political order (the expansion of opportunity from the part-list system will be discussed in Chapter 6) opened new spaces for Octobrist politicians to compete to enter parliamentary politics, both for those who

had failed to win seats in earlier MP elections and for those who had been active in extra-parliamentary politics.

Prior to 1997, the Thai parliament had a long history as a bicameral system. While the lower house or House of Representatives was directly elected by local constituencies, the upper house or Senate had only once been elected, by the House of Representatives at its inauguration, and had long been viewed as ‘the house of bureaucrats’ because its members had been appointed by panels including judges and ultimately all appointments were countersigned by the King. The Senators consisted almost exclusively of royalists, the military and conservative businesspeople (Naruemon 2002, 197). To counter the corrupt politicians and coalition politics in the lower house, the constitution was designed to enable the Senate to be ‘non-partisan’ and free of day-to-day politics. Its power was also increased to balance the lower house. The 1997 reform and its constitution prohibited Senate candidates from being members of or representing political parties and from conducting election campaigns and provided the Senate with more power than appointed Senates under previous constitutions, in order to check and balance the House of Representatives (McCargo 2002, 9–12; Sombat 2002, 204, 207–208). The new 200 elected Senate seats from 76 provinces increased the political opportunities and space for Octobrists who wished to pursue careers in electoral politics and gain direct access to state power. The requirements for Senate candidates to be independent from political parties and not to conduct election campaigns enabled many Octobrists who had already built their public popularity either as politicians or social activists.

Aside from positions as elected senators, new windows of opportunity came along with many non-elected independent bodies established by the 1997 constitution to monitor the government. It was hoped that these new bodies, including the Election Commission (EC), the National Counter-Corruption Commission (NCCC), the Constitutional Court, the Administrative Courts, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the State Audit Commission would curtail abuses of power by both elected politicians and government officials (McCargo 2002, 9–12). Many Octobrists who had developed expertise and carried on their political and social activities in the political and public realms on issues related to these new bodies, were recruited into these independent state bodies. Some of them gained positions in the NHRC, which was created to promote

civil, political, economic, social and cultural liberty (Streckfuss and Templeton 2002, 84-86).

Even though many Octobrists succeeded in winning election to the Senate and attaining positions in the NHRC immediately after the new constitution was implemented, structural constraints obstructed their push for a progressive agenda. The elected Senate was in fact still dominated and manipulated by party politics (Sombat 2002, 207-210). Elected Octobrist senators who were independent from party politics became a minority in the upper house. As a result, all they could do was to advocate a progressive agenda while finding it almost impossible to achieve concrete results. In the same vein, in spite of its independence from the elected government, the NHRC lacked any law enforcement function. Consequently, its efforts to halt human rights violations were limited.

#### *Elected Senate Octobrists*

In the elected Senate, Nirun Phitakwatchara, Sompong Sakravee, Maleerat Kaewka, Karun Saingarm and Pichit Pantachot were successful examples of Octobrists who won seats. The elected Senate also opened new opportunities for other Octobrists who had earlier failed in electoral politics. Sompong, Maleerat, Karun and Pichit, who had been less fortunate in party politics, managed to succeed in the 2000 Senate elections. Alongside veteran Octobrist politicians like Maleerat and Sompong, a newcomer like Nirun also found an opportunity in the Senate elections. Nirun was an activist medical student. He was a leader of a successful leftist student party at Mahidol University, the Mahidol Alliance Party (phak naew ruam mahidon). In 1973-1976, he worked in support of election campaigns as well as other activities of leftist student movements. After the 1976 massacre, he did not join the armed struggle with the CPT, choosing instead to work in a rural hospital in Ubon Ratchathani Province, North-eastern Thailand, but still continuing to provide indirect support for local CPT staff (Nirun, interview by author, 27 March 2007, Ubon Ratchathani).

After the decline of the CPT, he continued his social and political activities. Through his medical network, he worked with the Rural Doctors Foundation (munlanithi mo chonabot) which linked him with the progressive medical movement as well as

politically active royalist and reformist elite doctors like Prawes Wasi. At the same time, he worked with middle class, rural people and NGO networks in Ubon Ratchathani Province in environmental conservation activities. He later became the chairperson of the NATURE CARE Foundation (munlanithi phithak thammachat phuea chiwit). These networks connected him to further political activities in the anti-military movement in May 1992, the political reform process, and direct participation in the Senate elections. In May 1992, in Ubon Ratchathani, he was one of the major figures mobilising the middle class, NGOs, rural people and many of his former leftist comrades in supporting the national campaign against the revival of the military in parliamentary politics. Immediately thereafter, at the invitation and with the support of Prawes Wasi, he became chairperson of the independent organisation monitoring the general election or P-Net (ongkon klang) in Ubon Ratchathani Province. During the political reform and constitutional drafting process in 1997, he joined the Democratic Development Committee (khana kamakan phathana prachathipatai) and became the key person in charge of public hearings on the 1997 constitution in North-eastern Thailand.

Nirun Phitakwatchara decided to run for the elected Senate in 2000. His triumph in the Senate election was the result of his prominent reputation as a politically active medical doctor as well as the constituencies he had built up with both middle class and rural networks during his political and social activities. His decision to enter parliamentary politics was based on his desire to link his work in what he called ‘people politics’ with the formal political process. Distrustful of Thai political parties, he found that the structural transformation of the Senate elections offered him a chance to enter politics without being dependent on political parties and corrupt political networks (Nirun, interview by author, 27 March 2007, Ubon Ratchathani).

Compared with those in party politics, the Octobrist elected senators were more progressive and radical in pushing forward their political and social agenda. The two main underlying conditions for their progressive role were their intention to be independent from party politics, and the loose network successfully built among the minority of progressive senators. Despite the fact that in reality the upper house was still dominated by elected senators who were connected with and influenced by political parties, the Octobrist senators who entered the upper house independent of political parties benefitted from this situation. They had more political freedom in their political

decisions and actions. Besides, independent Senate elections encouraged and allowed people outside party politics to enter parliamentary politics. These small groups of progressive people became good resources for the Octobrist senators in building supportive alliances in the upper house.

At the individual level, Nirun Phitakwatchara, Maleerat Kaewka and Sompong Sakravee became senators who worked at the forefront of efforts to initiate and support progressive programmes in the upper house. At the same time, their efforts in developing a loose network among formerly non-leftist progressive senators became one of the success stories of parliamentary politics. During his six-year term in the upper house, Nirun played an outstanding role in proposing and obstructing laws, policies and government projects. As Chair of the Senate Committee on Social Development and Human Security and as Secretary of the Committee on the Environment, he was one of the leading senators who supported the community forest charter proposed by social movements and NGOs, and special medical treatment for the poor in the government health scheme (*MR 2001d*). He opposed many mega projects of the government, for instance, the Thai-Malaysia gas pipeline project (*KT 2000b*), and the Pak Mun dam project. Moreover, he played an active role in monitoring administrative power including forming a special commission to monitor corruption in the Ministry of Public Health (*KT 2000a*), in the construction of Suvarnabhumi Airport, and in the Khlong Dan waste water treatment project (*SR 2001*).

Maleerat Kaewka was an outstanding figure promoting women's issues during her term as elected Senator from Sakon Nakhon Province. She was elected Chair of the Senate Committee on Women, Children and the Elderly. She pushed for an increased budget for social development work, a progressive law on abortion, outreach anti-drug policies, etc. Moreover she actively worked on mainstreaming women in parliamentary politics at both national and local levels (*KS 2001d; MR 2001b; MD 2000b*).

Besides their individual efforts, these Octobrist Senators also promoted a progressive network in the upper house as well as alliances outside parliament in pushing forward progressive political issues and activities. Inside the Senate, there were efforts to promote a loose network among progressive senators. A group of around 40 senators with Octobrist and other non-left progressive backgrounds was gradually developed and

called itself the Independent Senator group, or what was known as the NGO-friendly Senate group (*Post Today* 2004). Despite the fact that this network was very loose and each member had his/her own political agenda and varying level of progressiveness (Nirun, interview by author, 27 March 2007, Upon Ratchathani), it was effectively used in mobilising support among these Senators for a progressive agenda and political action from time to time. Nirun Phitakwatchara effectively mobilised this network in conducting fact finding in support of opposition to the Pak Mun dam and the Southern gas pipeline projects. Moreover, this Senate group also played an aggressive role in initiating a no confidence vote against the government on different problem issues including bureaucratic centralisation, militant measures dealing with the violence in Southern Thailand, etc. (*PCT* 2000).

At the same time, in dealing with these problem issues, many Octobrist Senators linked with and supported other progressive networks outside parliament. In the case of the Pak Mun dam and gas pipeline projects, the Octobrist senators collaborated with former comrades who were leading NGO figures working with the social movements. In the same vein, Maleerat Kaewka maintained strong connections and worked closely with former Octobrist activists in civil society in promoting an alternative women's group called 'We Move – the women's movement promoting political reform' including Sunee Chaiyaros at the National Human Rights Commission, Rosana Tositrakul from an independent anti-corruption campaign, and Thicha Na Nakhorn, a leader in the Women and the Constitution network, in promoting a progressive agenda against other conservative women groups and MPs who were organised by the government (*TS* 2006b).

Because of restrictions under the reformist structures, most initiatives and activities of Octobrists and other progressive senators brought about hardly any radical changes. The direct and indirect interventions of political parties and politicians in the lower house still dominated and influenced the majority of the elected Senators in upper house voting. Direct vote buying was also widespread in blocking votes in the upper house on laws and other political matters, especially the selection of members of independent bodies such as the Election Commission and the National Counter-Corruption Commission, etc. (*TN* 2006a). Moreover, as relatives of MPs, many senators could hardly deny being indirectly influenced by politicians and political parties in the lower

house. As a result the majority of elected senators supported proposals from the lower house and opposed the agenda of independent Senators. The upper house was clearly divided into three major groups. A bloc of around 100 were government supporters, 40 former NGOs and academics comprised a progressive bloc, and around 60 shifted between these two sides (PT 2004). Under these conditions, progressive Senators could hardly succeed in pushing their agenda in the upper house. The failure to pass the progressive Community Forest charter drafted by the people's movement and to halt several governmental mega projects was an outstanding example.

### *The Octobrist National Human Rights Commissioners*

Alongside opportunities in the elected Senate, several Octobrists also benefitted from the creation of independent bodies like the National Human Rights Commission (khana kamakan sithi manut - NHRC). Jaran Dhitthapichai and Sunee Chaiyaros are prominent Octobrists who managed to attain positions as National Human Rights Commissioners. After failing in electoral politics, Jaran shifted his interest to human rights issues, which became a major asset for his entry into politics through the NHRC in the late 1990s. During the 1990s, Jaran became a prominent human rights activist and advocate. He became chairperson of the Union for Civil Liberty (samakhom sithi seriphap khong prachachon), the long standing Thai-based civil rights NGO, and a member of the committees of many human rights and democracy advocacy NGOs. He provided serious support to the Free Burma campaign, for which he was arrested in 1998. Although he was not very optimistic about the political reform process as a major force for change for Thai politics, he benefitted from the 1997 constitution. With his reputation and experience in human rights advocacy work, he applied for and was selected as a National Human Rights Commissioner.

Sunee Chaiyaros, another Octobrist who managed to obtain a position as a National Human Rights Commissioner, was from the 14 October generation. She graduated from the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, in 1973, and was a leading figure in the leftist movement working with women's and labour groups. After graduation, she decided to experience life as a worker and organised a labour union in a garment factory. She was arrested and jailed in 1974 as a communist for her work mobilising worker protests. She joined the CPT after outbursts of violence in 1976 and remained in

the jungle for 6 years. Upon her return, she was again prosecuted by the Thai government and jailed for several years. She even gave birth to her child in prison. After being released, she worked as editor of '*Green World (Lok See Khiao)*', an environmental magazine supported by a network of former comrades. In 1984, she decided to run for a seat on the Nong Bua Lamphu Provincial Council with the support of the Democrat Party (Prachathipat). Her drive to promote women's, environmental and development projects at the local level made her a well-known activist and devoted local woman politician. Nonetheless, she failed when she moved to the national level. Because the constituency was large, a newcomer without financial support could hardly manage to compete with the incumbent MP. After this failure, she carried on working as the Chair of the Provincial Cultural Council in her province. She was also elected as the provincial member of the 1997 Constitutional Drafting Committee. She was given an award as a 'successful woman in politics'. She then decided to join the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai - TRT) Party, as a prospective MP candidate and campaign strategist on women's issues. She initially found TRT an opportunity. She worked on the Executive Committee of the TRT for more than 2 years while the party was being formed. However, she was later disappointed by the TRT, which replaced her as a candidate with her former rival who had recently entered the TRT and put her far down the party list. She therefore publicly denounced the TRT and finally resigned from the party. Shortly thereafter she decided to apply for and was successfully nominated to, the NHRC (Sunee 2004; Sunee, interview by author, 12 February 2007, Bangkok).

Under the newly-created structures in the 1997 constitution designed to deal with the earlier problems of electoral politics, the Octobrists were able to play a progressive role in pushing forward their issues of concern. The NHRC and the elected Senate were expected to perform new functions in monitoring and providing checks and balances against executive and parliamentary power, as well as to promote social and political agendas which governmental bodies were not capable of doing. With these conditions and expectations, Octobrists were allowed to push forward a radical political agenda and counter state power from within. Designed to deal with human rights issues under the guidance of Saneh Jamarik, a prominent former political scientist from Thammasat University and a member of the liberal elite, and comprising commissioners with progressive elite and leftist backgrounds, the NHRC became an NGO-like human rights advocacy organisation. This provided an opening for Octobrists like Sunee Chaiyaros

and Jaran Dhitthapichai to play a radical role in pushing forward a human rights agenda (Sunee, interview by author, 12 February 2007, Bangkok).

During their terms as National Human Rights commissioners, both Sunee and Jaran dedicated themselves to pushing forward radical issues and political activities. Their role in the NHRC included fact finding, publicising problem issues and pushing issues of concern into the parliamentary arena. Jaran focused his work on two main areas: protecting the rights of ethnic minorities; and opposing state political violence. Consequently, he became the key person in the NHRC in pushing forward the rights of ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees along the border. He also pushed forward a series of public denouncements of the TRT government for violence in the anti-drug campaign and anti-terrorism operations in Southern Thailand and made interventions to promote and defend media freedom (*TP* 2001b).

Sunee's work focused more on promoting and protecting the rights of grassroots people to participate in political and policy processes. She was involved in many cases where the rights of people affected by governmental development projects and policies were violated. She paid a great deal of attention to local communities affected by gas pipelines (*KT* 2002b; *MR* 2003e), dams, power plant construction, and state housing projects (*TN* 2005b). She also helped small scale fishermen affected by an irrigation project of the Royal Irrigation Department (*KS* 2003a).

Although they were surrounded by rather progressive colleagues, the Octobrists in the NHRC were ultimately powerless to take political action. Their role was limited to provoking public concern and denouncing the government rather than stopping the government from violating human rights. Many reports of human rights violations were produced and publicised by the NHRC. In their six-year terms, both Sunee and Jaran conducted hundreds of investigations. But few of them led to serious prosecutions against human right violators.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The political liberalisation of the mid-1980s created new political conditions. These conditions permitted the first wave of Octobrists who either had political family backgrounds or direct connections with progressive politicians or military personnel to enter electoral politics. Soon thereafter, the second wave followed. Octobrists who had been skilful in political campaigns and were eager to join electoral politics but did not have direct access made contact with their former comrades, who had already established themselves as politicians, as a bridge to political parties.

However, to survive and succeed in electoral politics dominated by coalition and machine politics, these Octobrists needed more than the progressive image of being Octobrists, out-of-date political networks and political skills developed in the 1970s. Those who were able to survive in competitive electoral politics had to be skilful and capable of adapting to mobilise support from new non-progressive political cliques and capable of cleverly playing the political game of coalition and factional politics to negotiate cabinet quota positions alongside their efforts to be more progressive than corrupt politicians. Most of those who still preferred to keep a distance from dirty political norms and were not capable of playing the game were eventually alienated from politics.

In the late 1990s, new opportunities opened up for those who either failed or were not willing to become involved in coalition, machine and money politics. Many new political channels and positions in the elected Senate and other independent bodies, especially the NHRC, became available. Many former Octobrist politicians were disappointed with fierce political elections and Octobrist social activists eventually won seats places in parliament. However, there was no easy road in performing these new political functions. The Octobrists still faced many structural obstacles in pushing their political agenda to success.

## Chapter 5

### **The Revival of the Octobrists in Extra-parliamentary Politics in the 1990s**

Upon their return from the armed struggle with the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai – CPT), the majority of Octobrists started new lives in non-state sectors including private companies, NGOs, academia, the media, and the entertainment industry. In terms of careers, many became successful businesspersons, prominent NGO workers, influential popular intellectuals, critical journalists, and famous singers and writers. From the early 1990s onwards, many of them also successfully revived their political roles in extra-parliamentary politics. Countless Octobrists reappeared on the streets both as protest leaders and active participants in the May 1992 people's uprising. Also, many Octobrist NGO workers, academics, journalists and businesspeople played leading and supporting roles in promoting and advocating the rise of social movements throughout the 1990s. Significant numbers of Octobrist political activists and active members of the middle class also participated in the late 1990s in the successful movement for political reform and called for the 1997 people's constitution.

In examining these trends, this chapter identifies four major interrelated conditions which explain why these Octobrists managed to survive a changing socio-economic context and revive their political roles. Firstly, as members of the large urban middle class of educated Thais, Octobrists benefitted from the new supportive structure of political opportunity enhancing the formation and active political participation of the Thai urban middle class of the 1990s. The double-digit economic growth and influx of foreign investment and funds to Thailand from the late 1980s onwards provided new career opportunities for Octobrists in all sectors including the business, academic, entertainment, journalism and development sectors. In addition, the increased role of the middle class in the May 1992 people's uprising against the revival of military in parliamentary politics, the proliferation of social movements throughout the 1990s, and the political reforms in the late 1990s opened up new windows of opportunity for Octobrists to participate in extra-parliamentary politics. Secondly, their prestige education, skills and contacts through their activism in the 1970s and into the early

1980s offered Octobrists a vital basis for ascendancy in their occupations and recent political activities. Thirdly, the successful construction of a new ‘Octobrist’ identity worked to legitimise their new political roles. Fourth and finally, after persisting to a certain degree in their earlier ‘revolutionary’ aspirations for social change in the 1970s, many Octobrists eventually shifted toward ‘reformist/liberal’ goals and actions. This slippage gave rise to new and more compatible ideological tools for Octobrists to use in non-leftist political activities and movements.

### 5.1 Revival of Octobrists as successful members of the middle class

Octobrists started to build their new lives by the mid-1980s when new opportunities in the private sector expanded. The percentage of workers in the urban industrial-service-professional sectors as opposed to agriculture and fishing increased from 17%, 24% and 31% in 1960, 1971 and 1980 respectively to nearly 36% in 1990. This change reflects the expansion of opportunity for a growing middle class (Hewison 1996, 143).

Table 5.1: Category of work of the economically active population in Thailand 1960 and 1990 in %

Category	1960	1971	1980	1990
Professional and technical	1.3	1.57	2.48	3.3
Administrative, executive and managerial	0.2	0.65	1.31	1.5
Clerical	1.1	1.28	1.74	2.8
Sales	5.3	7.96	8.34	8.7
Service industries	2.00	1.73	2.66	6.3
Agriculture and fishing	82.3	76.91	70.86	64.0
Production and related workers	7.1	9.85	12.61	13.2
Other	0.7	1.57	2.48	0.1

Source: ILO, Employment - 2C Total employment, by occupation, Thailand

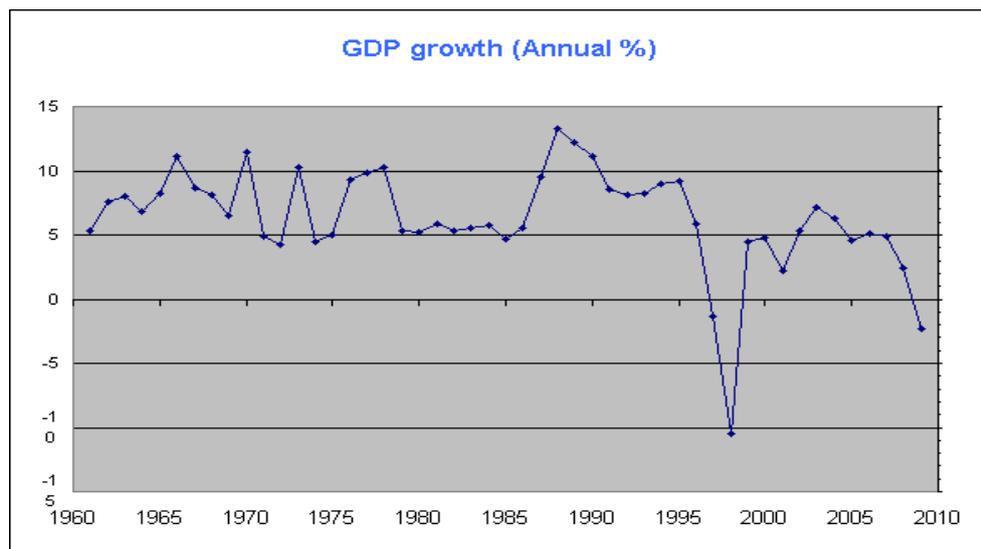
The Octobrists were a part of this new rising middle class who benefitted from these new career opportunities. The Octobrists had acquired an education and many other unique qualifications which made them competent human resources for the growing

private and professional sectors. As a by-product of Sarit Thanarat's US-backed policy of expanding higher education, the Octobrists were part of the first generation of mass university graduates (Anderson 1977). Their university education prepared them to enter and share the expansion of wealth in the private and professional sectors which required more highly skilled labour. Moreover, their professionalism, unique interpersonal and management skills, extensive contacts ranging from the elite to rural grassroots movements, and critical thinking, which had been developed through their activism in the 1970s and into the early 1980s, were crucial assets in accessing and promoting work in organisations requiring unique skills and experience, such as the public relations departments in private companies, rural development NGOs, academic institutions, newspapers, music bands, and publishing houses. However, to become successful in these new careers, education, networks and social skills from the 1970s were not enough. To reach the top positions in these new organisations, the Octobrists needed to abandon a certain degree of their earlier radicalism and to adapt and incorporate their earlier ideas and language to promote more liberal and reformist goals and actions.

#### *Octobrists in the business world*

By the mid-1980s when the Octobrists returned home, a decade of Thai economic stagnation had come to an end. The biggest Thai economic boom took off before reaching its peak in the early 1990s. After the 1973 global oil shock, the Thai economy suffered from long-term low growth. GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth in the mid-1970s dropped to 4.4 and remained at merely 4.6 in 1980. Dramatic changes took place by the mid-1980s. Thai economic growth rose sharply by 1986 and reached double digits in 1987 (Figure 5.1: GDP growth).

Figure 5.1: GDP growth

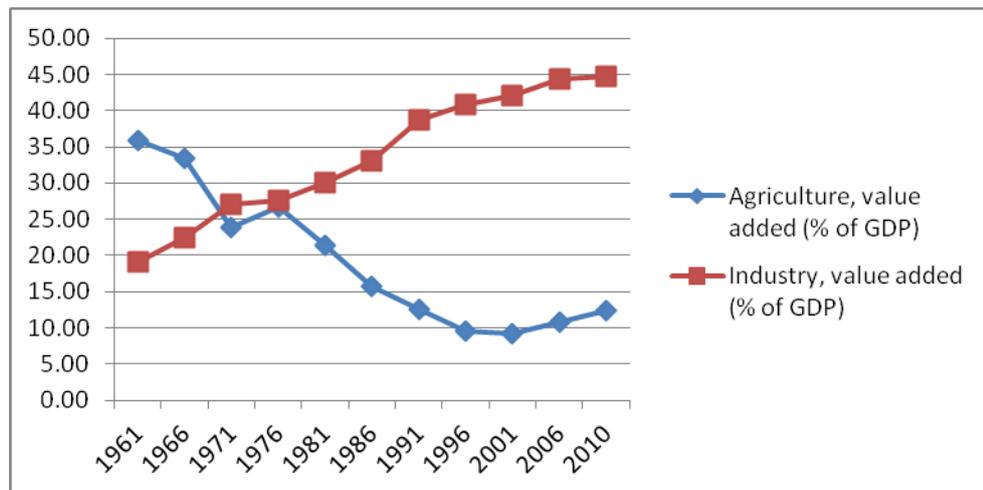


Source: World Bank, NESDB (National Economic and Social Development)

2009

This growth was a result of the devaluation of the Thai baht in 1984 which increased its export capacity, as well as the Plaza Accord in 1985 and the resulting appreciation of the Japanese yen in relation to the US dollar which encouraged foreign direct investment and the relocation of Japanese manufacturing to Thailand. This new growth was driven by the expansion of the industrial-service-professional sectors. The share of GDP of the formerly predominant agricultural sector dropped from 34% and 27 in 1966 and 1976 to 16% and 10% in 1986 and 1996, while that of industry and the service sector shifted from 22% and 28 in 1966 and 1976 to 33% and 41% in 1986 and 1996 (Figure 5.2: GDP by sector). Subsequently, demand for and employment of skilled and educated labour in the private sector increased.

Figure 5.2: GDP by sector



Source: Source: World Bank, NESDB (2010)

Against the backdrop of expanding opportunities in the private sector, many former student activists successfully utilised their 1970s connections and activist skills in accessing new careers in the private sector and business opportunities. Many managed to reach top positions in various companies or succeeded in their own businesses. For example, Prasarn Maruekpitak, a leading student activist during 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, started a career in public speaking training and personality improvement in a company founded by his brother, who had also joined the CPT, in the 1970s after five years in the jungle. With public speaking and unique interpersonal skills, he quickly became a successful trainer. Furthermore, using new non-left networks and making his work more business-oriented, by the early 1990s he quickly became a successful businessman in public speaking and business training. He later became a prominent instructor for many companies, including Siam TV and Communication (a company under Royal Patronage). At the same time, he had his own company producing TV programmes, books and cassettes on how to succeed in business (*Manager Magazine* 1995).

Not only leading activists but also many rank-and-file student activists had very successful careers in the private sector. Vipa Daomanee is an interesting example of an Octobrist who turned the skills learnt during her time as a student activist and with the CPT into an asset in pursuing work in the marketing and advertising business. Vipa was

an ordinary rank-and-file leftist activist from the Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University, in the public relations Unit of the ‘People’s Chula (Chula Prachachon)’, a leftist student political party at Chulalongkorn University. At that time, she actively organised many exhibitions against the military government, and worked as head of the Entertainment Unit in Tanaosri CPT military base after 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. Upon her return, she went back to finish her undergraduate studies. After graduation, instead of pursuing a job in science, she instead started her career as a copy writer, event organiser and news analyst. Later on she successfully became a well-paid marketing and advertising manager in many different advertising companies during the economic boom of the mid 1990s. For instance, before the economic collapse in 1997, she earned around 120,000 Baht (4,800 US\$) per month as senior executive member for Siam TV. Vipa admitted that she owed all her success in marketing to the experience and skills developed during her time in the jungle. As head of an Entertainment Unit, she had to organise and work out all the details for welcoming and farewell ceremonies, weddings, funerals, plays and other entertainments, involving everything from the writing of news, poems and play scripts, to arranging costumes and preparing food. As a result, even though she was not formally trained in marketing, she found that her time with the CPT equipped her for a marketing career. For her, producing books, organising company events, and inventing sales campaigns were ‘a piece of cake’ (Vipa, interview by author, 28 January 2007, Bangkok).

Many other successful examples included Pridi Boonsue, a former leading figure at the Thammasat University Dome Assembly (Sapha Na Dome) and critic of the CPT upon his return, who currently acts as Vice President, Alliance & Loyalty Management Department, Thai Airways International plc; Prasarn Trairatvorakul, formerly a politically active engineering student from Chulalongkorn University during the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 incident, who was Director and President of Kasikorn Bank plc and was recently offered a position as Governor of the Bank of Thailand; Sathien Setthasit, a former rank-and-file Thammasat University economics leftist student activist during 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 who became a very successful businessman with a hundred-million-baht ‘German Tawandeng’ brewery and ‘Red Buffalo (Carabao Daeng)’ energy drink businesses in collaboration with Aed Carabao (Yoonyong Opakul) – a famous Octobrist singer – who spent time with him in the Southern Isan revolutionary base.

Although not all Octobrists achieved leading positions and wealth, these new opportunities and their assets at least allowed them to survive after their failed political struggle in the 1970s and to maintain in most cases a middle class living standard. Suthisak Pavarathisan successfully exploited earlier leftist connections and skills in achieving middle class status. During his time with the CPT, with his background as a first year university student at the Faculty of Associated Medical Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Suthisak was sent by the CPT to study Chinese medicine in China. With fluent Chinese communication skills and an inside understanding of China, Suthisak, after his return to Thailand, was invited by his former comrades to work for a politically connected company to expand trade between Thailand and Southern China. This Thai-Chinese trading company hired more than thirty to forty of his former comrades. Furthermore, his Chinese medical skills eventually enabled the success of his Chinese medical clinic in his hometown of Chiang Mai. He was one of the few practitioners of Chinese medicine when the market for alternative medicine started booming in Thailand. (Suthisak, interview by author, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

As with Suthisak, the majority of Octobrists were able to find decent jobs and maintain their middle class status. Tanit Vijitsukhon and Veerasak Kukantin, former singers in the leftist Kammachon (Labourer) band, both became owners of small businesses including bookshops, restaurants, and music studios. Varis Mongkholsri, an active pioneer member of the 'Siam Youth' group, now owns a medium sized construction company. Prachoom Sirithamwat, an active Thammasat University student and founding member of the 'Dharma Party (Phalang Tham)', a leftist student political party at Thammasat University, was initially successful with a real estate business before going bankrupt. Jariya Suanpan, who joined the CPT when she was a high school student, now makes a living as the manager of a laundromat in Bangkok. Lert Edison (pseudonym), a former leftist Chiang Mai University science student and an important inventor at Nan revolutionary base, became a successful insurance representative after several agro-business failures.

### *Octobrists in the newspaper business*

Since the first Thai newspaper was founded in 1844 until the mid 1980s, the Thai press has struggled through ebbs and flows of development, in spite of sporadic periods of political press freedom such as during the premiership of Pridi Banomyong (March-August 1946) and the post-14<sup>th</sup> October period between 1973 and 1976. For most of the time, the press was suppressed by the state, especially during the dictatorship of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963) and the period after 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 (Boonrak 1982; McCargo 2002a, 9-16). However, by the mid 1980s, the Thai newspaper business boomed dramatically before being hit by the 1997 economic crisis. From the mid-1980s to 1997, journalism became a prestige career with a well-paid salary, as well as social and political status. There were three main factors explaining this phenomenon. The first was the gradual expansion of press freedom under the more moderate governments of Kriangsak Chomanan, Prem Tinsulanonda and Chatichai Choonhavan. Even though Kriangsak and Prem did not take any steps to abolish legislation which undermined press freedom and still used arbitrary power to punish publications from time to time, a new progressive press was allowed to grow. And under Chatichai, the first elected government since 1976, and later during the 1992 May incident, freedom of the press in Thailand flourished (McCargo 2002b, 15-25). The second was the 1980s-1990s economic boom. While the Thai stock market rose sharply during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the share value of newspaper groups increased at a phenomenal rate. At the same time, the growth in profits came from increased income from advertising and sales. Subsequently, many newspaper owners became multi-millionaires. Journalists and reporters received better salaries and benefits, sometimes in the form of shares. The third was an increase in financial support from politicians to newspapers which caused an expansion in printed media. Countless politicians had a direct financial stake in particular newspapers (McCargo 2002b, 30-33; Ockey 1992, 325-327).

Against this backdrop, journalism was the first career choice offered to many Octobrists upon their return, which many of them took. Strong experience in various printed media and skills in political analysis developed during the 1970s made these people uniquely qualified to work at newspapers and magazines. At the same time, extensive connections with both leftist and non-leftist networks helped these Octobrists to win

jobs and provided access to inside stories for their newspapers which no other groups of people in their generation enjoyed. Also, adjusting to more commercial and liberal media widened the career opportunities for these people.

The success of Pirun Chatwanitchakul in the media sector is an interesting example. Pirun was one of the most influential mentors among leftist students. Amidst the conflict within and decline of the CPT, Pirun still worked actively to reunify and revive the CPT upon his return to Bangkok. Nevertheless, he ended up being arrested and detained in prison for several years on charges of communism. After his release from jail, he started a new life working with countless newspapers, political magazines and radio programmes through connections with liberal journalists and his former close friends in the business sector. He won a job as special reporter for *Khao Phiset (Special News)*, a radical political magazine of Chatcharin Chaiwat, a well-known liberal journalist who was charged by the government as a leftist. Nevertheless, he later collaborated with other non-left connections particularly his non-left close friend during his time at Chulalongkorn University, Paiboon Wattanasiritham, the media tycoon of GMM Grammy plc. As a result he was offered jobs in various newspapers and media including the *Khu Khaeng (Competitor)* newspaper, Thai Time News, and Open Radio programmes, etc. In building up the Thai Time news centre, he recruited many former leftist friends including Kamol Kamoltrakul and Wichai Bamrungrit (now having changed his name to Nattapat Bamrungrit), to work with him. Furthermore, through his extensive connections, he was easily able to find prominent political figures to be interviewed for his newspaper and radio programmes. In adjusting to the media business, he shifted to a softer tone vis-à-vis the capitalist world. For example, when he started working with a business newspaper like the *Khu Khaeng*, he argued that as a result of media liberalisation it was unnecessary to work only in radical media to promote progressive issues as the mainstream media was now also more free and able to present progressive news. He also appreciated working with Paiboon as he was a progressive businessman. He even claimed that his influence during the 1970s made Paiboon progressive. He further argued that there were several good elements in the capitalist world, as they allowed former leftists like him to pursue their dream job (NS 2005; Pirun, interview by author, 2 February 2007, Bangkok).

Dozens of other Octobrists took this career line. Nithinand Yorsaengrat, a member of the Thammasat University student council in 1974 and an active member of the radical Thammasat University Ton Kla (Seedling) band, did not join the armed struggle but remained in town to provide support for friends in the jungle. Throughout her career, she went back and forth between *The Nation* and *Matichon (Public Opinion)* newspapers. Recently, she became senior editor of the *Nation* Broadcasting Corporation Plc (Nithinand, interview by author, 2 March 2007, Bangkok). Bandit Chansrikkham started working as a writer and journalist after returning from the jungle. He is currently an executive editor of *Nation Sutsapda (Nation Weekend)* political magazine under the Nation group. He was also widely known for his columns in the *Nation Sutsapda* under the pseudonym of Khaen Sarika, which were full of insider political analysis and news about Octobrists. Through him, the *Nation Sutsapda* was full of columns contributed by former leftist activists. Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, Secretary General of the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai) in 1975, was a member of the leftist anti-CPT group and follower of Pin Buo-on, who split from the CPT. He actively worked behind the scenes to support *Thai Nikorn* (Thai group), an important anti-CPT magazine. He later worked for many other political magazines including *Su Anakhot (Toward the Future)* and *Chaturat (Square)*. In 1990, he moved to work for the *Phuchatkan (Manager)* group. Recently, he became a senior editor and had his own column and radio and television programmes under the Manager group (Somsak 2007a; Thailand Political Base 2011). Kasian Tejapira, currently a political scientist professor at Thammasat University, was a journalist in his first job before moving on. During his studies at Thammasat University, he worked part-time as a journalist at *Setthakit Kanmueang (Politics and Economics)*. Tanet Charoenmuang, a political scientist lecturer at Chiang Mai University, also got a job as a journalist at *Matuphum Thurakit (Motherland Business)* newspaper though the connections of friends.

#### *Octobrist singers and writers*

Economic growth from the mid-1980s to 1997 increased the consumer power and culture of an expanding middle class. One interesting phenomenon was an expansion in entertainment and leisure-related businesses, especially music, books and films. Many small and big record companies, publishing houses and bookstores sprang up. Market demand for more diverse music and literature increased (*Business Review* 1986).

With this expansion of music and literature businesses, many Octobrists reappeared as famous singers, song writers and musicians, in both the mainstream music business and the alternative stream of 'music/literature for life'<sup>37</sup>, prominent writers, and owners of several new publishing houses and bookstores. For example in the music industry, the fourth album of the Carabao band<sup>38</sup>, 'Made in Thailand' surpassed the one-million sales record of the 'Impossible', the most popular 1980s 'bubble-gum' band. This meant that 'songs for life' were no longer radical and illegal but had become popular music (Sutthasinee 1990, 8-12 and 97). Seksan Prasertkul and Surachai Jantimatorn were recognised as national artists in 2009 and 2010, a conservative and conventional award granted by the Ministry of Culture. Seksan's wife, Jiranan Pitpreecha and Winai Boonchoay received popular writing awards like the S.E.A Write Awards (Southeast Asian Writers Award) in 1989 and 1993.

In exploiting these opening opportunities, the Octobrists used their professional skills, critical perceptions, reputations and connections developed since the 1970s. Nearly all the Octobrists who are currently in the music and literature businesses were professionally trained and formerly worked as writers, singers and musicians to support the cultural activities of either the Leftist student movements or the CPT. These skilful artists and writers could easily compete with others in the mainstream entertainment industry. However, the really successful ones were those who knew how to adjust to more popular music and literature.

One good example is Visa Khanthap, a very well-known poet, songwriter and student activist during the 1970s. After returning from the jungle, he composed many popular songs for several advertising companies, plays and films, as well as less radical songs for a younger generation of 'songs for life' singers. Sek Saksit and Thirasak

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<sup>37</sup>'Songs/literature for life' reflect economic, political and social problems. The genre actually emerged during the 1950s, but was suppressed by authoritarian regimes. Only after the declaration of the new constitution in 1968 and throughout the 1970s political struggle was it revived, becoming very popular among radical student activists, labourers and farmers. During that time, it was influenced by the songs and literature of the 1950s leftists like *Art for Life*, *Art for People* (sinlapa phuea chiwit sinlapa phuea prachachon) of Jit Phumisak, anti-war songs and literature, and revolutionary songs. After the 14<sup>th</sup> October victory, it turned more leftist and its content focussed more on class struggle and revolution (Sutthasinee 1990, 3-7, 54-67 and 67-88; Myers-Moro 1986)

<sup>38</sup> The word carabao is Tagalog meaning "buffalo".

Atchimanon, former members of the 'Khuruchon (Teacher)' and 'Khrong-Lo (Wheel)' bands, composed many popular songs and acted as producers for many younger 'music for life' bands after returning from the jungle. Suwat Sichuea (now Thoranong Sichuea), a critical writer during the 1970s, became a successful film director. By 1980, the 'War Animal (sat songkram)', a film directed by Suwat, received the Thai award for Best Script of the Year. Both his action and erotic films were commercially successful (Jan-Aksarapijan 2011). Kritsanapong Nak-tana, a former member of the Tawan Phloeng (Blazing Sun) drama group from Ramkhamhaeng University, based on the good reputation he earned from producing the critical film 'Weeping Kula Plain (Thung Kula Ronghai)', was recruited and worked as the right-hand man for Bandit Rittikol, one of the most famous film directors producing many popular films (PR 2009; Sukhum 1996b).

Their reputation as high-profile radical figures built up since the 1970s were also crucial assets for these Octobrists to return to the stage immediately after returning from the jungle. On the one hand, younger activists made efforts to revive the 'literature for life' (Veera 1981). On the other hand, Octobrists attempted to mainstream leftist literature and continuing social critiques. Many radical and leftist poems and songs were reproduced and repeatedly echoed in public (Vanich 1997, 70-71). In one individual case, Jiranan Pitpreecha, a leading female activist from Chulalongkorn University, produced countless writings, poems and translations to support the anti-military and leftist movements during the 1970s. Many of her works included golden phrases which many Octobrists learned by heart. After conflicting with and abandoning the CPT, she became a successful writer, poet and film subtitle translator. Most of the works for which she became famous soon after her return from jungle were those drawing on her time with leftist movements. For example, she obtained many writing awards, including the S.E.A. Write Award in 1989 for *Lost Leaves (bai mai thi hai pai)*, a compilation of poems reflecting her political disappointment and struggle during the 1970s (Thanon Nangsue 1986, 58-59). Another example is Winai Boonchuay, known by his pseudonym Sila Khomchai, a former Ramkhamhaeng University student, writer, lead singer and founder of the Khom Chai (Shining Lamp) band, a Ramkhamhaeng University leftist music band. During his time with the CPT in the jungle, he was sent for special training in music and composing at Jinghong, Xīshuāngbǎnnà, China. Also, during his 6 years with the CPT, he wrote many short stories for radio programmes of

the Voice of the People of Thailand which were printed in the *Athipat Nai Satanakarn Surop (Sovereign at the War Zone)* newsletter. After several years of struggling to adjust to life in city, he eventually recovered as a successful writer and poet for many weekly newspapers and produced countless books and articles of social criticism. In 1993 and 1997, Winai was also awarded the S.E.A. Write Award and an honourable mention from the Ministry of Education and the Sri Burapha Award. His books were repeatedly reprinted and some even turned into famous films (Sutjaphoom 1993, 39-40).

Singers such as Yoonyong Opakul, Surachai Jantimarn, Mongkol Utok, Virasak Soontornsri, Thongkran Tana, and Phongthep Kradonchamnan, of the Carabao band, and the Caravan band, came back as singers in the music for life business. As with writers, many singers and bands had already been widely recognised since the mid 1970s. Caravan became a famous band and was on the cultural front line of the leftist student movement. Their music made money and a nation-wide concert tour started in the mid 1970s (Caravan 2000, 32-33). On their return, on the strength of their earlier reputation, many of their members were invited by radical singers and students in Japan to organise a concert tour and in 1982 the whole band was asked to join the 1<sup>st</sup> UNICEF concert. Even though it was just a part of the whole concert which comprised many other famous singers, the success of the concert was overwhelmed by the news of their return to the stage. Their revival in the music industry began at that time (*Sri Burapha* 2006, 16-40).

Aside from their skills, reputations and experiences, social connections with leftists and non-leftist colleagues in the music and literature circles offered Octobrists easy and quick access to writing and musical careers. During the 1970s, both leftist and radical non-leftist artists worked very closely to promote political activities. For example, the United Artists Front of Thailand (naew ruam sinlapin haeng prathet thai), established in the late 1960s among liberal, progressive and radical artists, writers, poets and musicians to support the anti-authoritarian movement (Nai Krawek 1996, 216-184; Wongmai 1994), was useful to Octobrists. Many non-left and liberal senior writers and artists from this network, including Nawarat Pongpaibul, Suchit Wongthet, Khanchai Boonpan and, Satien Jantimarn, who had already achieved a high profile, were sympathetic and supported the Octobrists on their return. Suchit Wongthet was a major shareholder and Satien Jantimarn was an important figure at the *Matichon (Public*

*Opinion*) publishing house, which was the first place for many Octobrist writers to get their work published after their return. For example, after returning from the jungle, Winai Boonchuay got his first publication printed at Matichon through a connection with Satien. Later on, he was offered a job at *Krungthep Thurakit (Bangkok Biznews)* and *Khu Khaeng (Competitor)* newspapers founded by senior Octobrists. He currently has his own weekly columns at several weekly newspapers like *Matichon Sutsapda (Public Opinion Weekend)* (Sutjaphoom 1993, 39-40).

Eventually, the efforts to reduce their radicalism and integrate more popular ideas, as well as more professional marketing strategies allowed the works of these Octobrists to reach a wider audience. During the 1970s, the content of their songs and writings was a cultural weapon to fight against the Thai authoritarian state, capitalism, class exploitation and imperialism, as well as to promote social and political revolution. However, from the mid-1980s onwards, the works of these Octobrists were confined to calls for liberal democracy and Thai nationalism, peace and volunteerism, and above all criticising specific social problems like poverty, drugs, family issues, prostitution, consumerism, etc (Sutthasinee 1990, 117-269). The meaning of their works was limited to a symbol of rebellious culture at the individual level rather than promoting a mass movement as it once did. On the one hand, this was a response to earlier lessons that too radical content would either be censored by the Board of Censorship or accepted only with great difficulty by music companies. Many Octobrists thus initially avoided content which would threaten the political regime. On the other hand, this was a reaction to a changing political and social context with no leftist movement. The Octobrists learned that in the post-leftist era, people still searched for political criticism but were not ready for leftist or militant revolutionary mobilisation. Therefore, they produced more 'mainstream' work in response to the demands of the market. Many Octobrists viewed this change in themselves as a process of adjusting to a changing world and preparing to become again a source of inspiration and possibly an engine of change (*Parithatsan* 1982; *Thanon Nangsue* 1985a; *thanon Nangsue* 1985b).

Carabao's first few albums were entitled 'Lung Khi Mao (drunken old man)' and 'Pae Khai Khuat (old bottle collector)'. Their content reflected only the lives of ordinary poor people and underprivileged groups but not structural problems (Sutthasinee 1990, 108 and 182-183). The most popular album of Phongthep Kradonchamnan, another

prominent Octobrist singer appeared in 1990 and was called 'Khon Jon Run Mai (new generation of the poor)', also far from being revolutionary songs. The most successful songs which Sek Saksit composed for a younger generation of songs-for-life bands, were 'Dek Pump (Gas Station Boy)', 'Sao Ramwong (Dancer Girl)', 'Racha Sam Cha (King of Cha-cha-cha)', and 'Tam Du Phu Thaen (Follow up Member of Parliament)', and touched on minor social issues. The book which won Winai the S.E.A Write and other awards was '*Khrobkhrua Khang Thanon (Family by the Side of the Road)*', a book which reflected the problems of the contemporary urban middle class.

In addition to changes in content, Octobrists learnt that to survive and succeed in the music business, they needed more professional production and marketing plans to improve their record sales. After several failures with their first few albums which they launched themselves, many Octobrists eventually decided to work with and accepted assistance from music companies. Starting from production, the Carabao band was assisted in its third album, 'Wanipok Phanejon (Wandering Beggar)', by a professional composer to incorporate the earlier generation of 'songs for life' which had been dominated by western anti-war, folk, local folk and revolutionary marches and waltzes with 'cha-cha-cha' and country and western themes. This meant that the album was more successful and reached wider audiences than the first two. Its songs were used as dance music in discos and clubs. Furthermore, they followed the distribution, promotion and advertising plans of the music individually. For example, they had to put on commercial tour concerts in pubs, big hotels, private parties, discos, etc., according to a schedule set by the companies (Suttasinee 1990, 98-109 and 111-116). In the book business, the Octobrist publishing houses which initially tried to reproduce their 1970s radical literature and new works by Octobrists also had to publish other conventional books for wider targets in order to survive in a competitive market. Successful examples include Phosop (Ceres, goddess of grain), Thanon Nangsue (book road) and Suan Akson (garden of letters) magazines, Dok Ya (grass flower), Chonniyom (populism), Ming Mit (close friend), Winyuchon (wise man), and Sai Than (stream).

#### *Octobrists in NGOs and Civil Society Organisations*

Before the late 1960s, Thai NGOs were predominantly philanthropic in nature. Nearly all of them were under the control either of the royal family, western missionaries,

Chinese businesses, or political groups. The history of more liberal and progressive NGOs started only four decades ago. By the late 1960s, liberal intellectuals led by Puey Ungpakorn initiated several projects and organisations promoting rural development including the Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement Foundation (munlanithi burana chonabot haeng prathet thai), the Graduate Volunteer Centre (sammak bandit asasamak), and the Meklong Integrated Rural Development Project (khrongkan phatana lumnam mae klong). In response to the 14th October incident, several academics, lawyers and activists also founded the Union for Civil Liberty (samakhom sitthi seriphap khong prachachon) (Benjamas and Surapol 2003, 13-27; Sanguan and Surapol 2001, 41-89; TDRI 2001, 4-6).

After the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 massacre, while radicals ran into the jungle, liberal NGO workers and activists remained in Bangkok and proliferated especially in the early and mid 1980s. By the end of the 1970s, both the Thai and western governments shifted away from purely military strategies to rural development and poverty eradication approaches in dealing with the earlier spread of Communist movements. From 1975 on, Thailand also started receiving refugees from Indochina. As a result, huge amounts of financial and technical assistance from foreign governments and international NGOs flowed into Thailand (Simpkins 2003, 256-259; TDRI 2001, 5-6). Flow of money from foreign NGOs to Thailand rose sharply from around US\$10 million during the 4<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) Plan (1977-1981) to US\$40-80 million in the 5<sup>th</sup> (1982-1986), 6<sup>th</sup> (1987-1991) and 7<sup>th</sup> (1992-1996) plans (Table 5.2: Financial aid received from foreign NGOs to Thailand between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> NESDB plans). In addition, in responding to new social and political issues, more diverse categories of NGOs addressing environmental issues, homosexuality, alternative energy and agriculture mushroomed. From the mid-1980s onward, the number of new local and international NGOs and their staff proliferated. During the mid 1970s, there were less than twenty NGOs. But the number rose to around 50 in 1980, 200 in 1997 and 1,557 in 2001 (Simpkins 2003, 258-259 and 282).

Table 5.2: Financial aid from foreign NGOs to Thailand between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> NESDB plan (US\$)

NESDB Plan	Total Amount (US\$)
2 (1967-1971)	6,953,200
3 (1972-1976)	11,157,600
4 (1977-1981)	10,144,300
5 (1982-1986)	44,282,000
6 (1987-1991)	80,167,000
7 (1992-1996)	81,737,300
8 (1997-2001)	23,583,400

Source: The Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation

This expansion of the NGO sector became a refuge or retreat for many distressed Octobrists who had difficulty adjusting to either the private or public sectors upon their return from their failed revolutionary missions. From the mid-1980s onward, countless Octobrists were recruited into various NGOs. And many of them became prominent figures in those organisations.

For example, Vanida Tantiwittayapitak and Watchari Paoluangthong, two former leftist student activists from Thammasat University, took jobs at the Foundation for Ecological Recovery (munlanithi fuenfu chiwit lae thammachat) after a long struggle in the private sector upon their return from the jungle. By the mid 1990s, both of them had become persistent NGO campaigners against mega development projects which exploited the environment and local people's livelihoods. While Vanida worked with the Mun River Conservation Project as a locally based NGO to support villagers' organisations, Watchari initiated Nuclear Watch – Alternative Energy Project for Sustainability (klum sueksa phalang ngan thanglueak phuea anakhot). Suwit Watnoo, a student leader of Bangsaen College of Education (now known as Burapha University), later became one of the most respected figures among NGO workers on slum issues. Somchai Homla-or, a law student from Thammasat University and one of the founding members of Thammasat University Dome (sapha na dome) indirectly organised by the CPT from the very beginning, turned into a leading human rights advocate after the collapse of the CPT. Usa Lertsrisanthat, a former leftist student, became the Director of the Foundation for Women, an organisation working on the issue of violence against women. Supa

Yaimuang, another Thammasat University student, became a leading figure campaigning for alternative agriculture and supporting the struggles of small farmers for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems. Supa became currently a committee member of the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (Thailand) and General Secretary of the Sustainable Agriculture Institute.

The return of these Octobrists to the NGO sector was based largely on their 1970s assets of political commitment, knowledge and skills in working with grassroots and poor people in the 1970s, as well as their ability to adjust to non-leftist organisations. Most Octobrists who later pursued a career in the NGO sector shared a common background of having worked closely with grassroots people during the 1970s. And this training made them the few members of the middle class who had firsthand experience in working with grassroots marginalised people as well as conveying their problem issues and agendas to the public and the policy-making process. However, the decline of the CPT forced them to abandon grassroots movements. Thereafter, these Octobrists found that work with NGOs was more relevant to their activist nature and skills compared to the dissatisfaction of working in the private and public sectors. During the 1970s, there were ideological debates and fights between these NGOs and leftist activists. While radical activists perceived NGOs as reactionary, dominated by the US as an anti-communist insurgency mechanism through its financial support, liberal NGOs and activists looked at these radicals as extremists (Benjamas and Surapol 2003, 13-27; Sanguan and Surapol 2001, 41-89; TDRI 2001, 4-6). Upon their return, the NGO sector offered them the only career with the financial resources, technical support and new social status to continue their unfulfilled missions.

During the 1970s, Vanida Tantiwittayapitak actively worked with the HARA labour group in garment factories as an advisor during the negotiating process which led to the five-month long protest and successful seizure of the plant. After the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident, she fled to join the CPT in the jungle with her HARA worker friends in Songkhla Province. Even though the CPT declined, Vanida was not discouraged but still wanted to fight for disadvantaged people. Upon her return, after struggling in many low-paid jobs like tour guide, insurance salesperson and street vendor to sustain her studies and solve the debt problem of her family, she joined the Foundation for Ecological Recovery in 1990 as an environmental campaigner focusing on two local

communities threatened by large dams, Kaeng Suea Ten in Northern Thailand and Pak Mun in the Northeast (Vanida, interview by author, 12 January 2007, Bangkok).

Suwit Watnoo played a leading role in mobilising more than a thousand students from his university to support the anti-military dictatorship movement in 1973, and was one of the major speakers on protest stages during the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident. Later, he worked especially closely with the Farmers Federation of Thailand and supported leftist student activities at the Phraram-hok Technology School where he was a lecturer. During the armed struggle with the CPT in Southern Thailand, he volunteered for frontline military duty and remained in the jungle until 1985. As he did not report to the government upon his return, it was hard to find a proper job. After nearly a decade in the jungle with rural people, adjusting to normal private life was very difficult. After trying several jobs including journalist, restaurant proprietor, and gardener, he decided to join a slum NGO where he continued to work until his death in March 2007. With the slum NGOs, Suwit had the chance to utilise his skills, knowledge and networks developed since the 1970s both in negotiation between slum networks and state and private sectors for structural change and advocating slum issues in the national agenda, as well as promoting slum movements and networks (Nitirat 2007). Somchai Homlor's 1970s experience in providing support for leftist activists and victims of political violence laid the foundation for his return as a human rights advocate. After 14<sup>th</sup> October, he worked as lawyer for the Union for Civil Liberty and also helped the Socialist Party of Thailand (sangkhomniyom haeng prathet thai) in mobilising rural constituencies. During his time with the CPT, his main tasks were taking care of the families of those who joined the CPT in the jungle, and mobilising resources and expanding alliances in the city to support those in the jungle even until the very last minute of the party in 1985. In doing so, his cover was working as a lawyer at the Union for Civil Liberty while hiding his real underground work for the CPT. In addition, he was trained in human rights issues during a two-year period seeking refuge abroad, especially in the US, from political conflict with Prasong Sunsiri, a leading figure in the government, because of his public revelations of corruption by the Thai government with respect to Cambodian refugees. Upon his return, he actively advocated human rights issues through his work at the Union for Civil Liberty, and later the Law Society of Thailand and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA). This also helped him in economic terms. Alongside his activism, he and his

Octobrist friends also opened a law firm providing business and law consultation for many foreign companies who appreciated Somchai's reputation as human rights lawyer (Somchai H., interview by author, 5 February 2007, Bangkok)

Furthermore, networks of both 1970s non-left activists and other Octobrist friends who had earlier entered non-government organisations offered pivotal points of access for these Octobrists into the NGO sphere. For example, the very first few jobs in NGOs for Vanida Tantiwittayapitak came through her younger sister who had been a human rights activist against the CPT during the 1970s, in the Socially Engaged Religion Group (klum sasana phuea sangkhom) campaigning for peace and human rights, and another sister who worked at the Human Settlement Foundation, a slum-based NGO (Vanida, interview by author, 12 January 2007, Bangkok). Returning from the jungle, Suwit Watnoo was invited by Prateep Ungsongtham, a pioneer slum NGO worker who had always supported leftist student activists even before the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident, to work at the Duang Prateep Foundation, a slum NGO in Klong Toey, Bangkok and a hub for many Octobrists (Nitirat 2007). Watchari Paoluangthong took several part-time research jobs through her Octobrist connections: a health care research job from a leftist medical doctor who formerly helped her leftist activist boyfriend, a job at the advertising company of her leftist sister; and helping Vanida sell shirts to tourists in Phuket. In 1990, she immediately accepted an invitation from Vanida to work as office manager at the Foundation for Ecological Recovery. Even in establishing Nuclear Watch - Alternative Energy Project for Sustainability, she gained advice and support from the monk Paisarn Wisalo, a former 1970s peace and non-violence student activist (Watchari, interview by author, 18 January 2007, Bangkok).

In working with these organisations, which were less radical than earlier leftist organisations and the CPT, some Octobrists quickly accepted the new norms and adjusted accordingly. Others who tried to insist on a certain degree of radicalism had to go with the flow from time to time in sustaining their organisation. Ideologically, many Octobrists tried to challenge the predominance of localism and communitarianism<sup>39</sup> over development NGOs. At the same time, they advocated a political economy approach as an alternative. Nevertheless, they did not succeed but ended up applying localism as an ideological instrument in pushing forward grassroots single-issue

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<sup>39</sup> Further details and debates of localism and communitarianism in Hewison 1999.

movements (Vi, interview by author, 8 December 2006, Chiang Mai). In practice, both Vanida and Watchari disagreed with the position of the Foundation for Ecological Recovery (munlanithi fuenfu chiwit lae thammachat) in acting only in a supportive capacity without becoming too directly involved with the movement. They eventually left the Foundation for Ecological Recovery and set up the Mun River Conservation Project as a locally-based NGO to support villagers' organisations (Missingham 2003, 102-105). Suwit was also dissatisfied with the charitable approach and relief work of the Duangprathep Foundation. He thus moved to work with the Human Settlement Foundation Thailand, which was a more movement-based organisation. To convey the demands of the poor people with whom he worked to the policy level, he had to develop networks with elite and even royalist groups. For example, although he always insisted on not engaging with politicians and the elite, in order to obtain permission from the Crown Property Bureau Foundation to rent their land to slum dwellers, he had to develop connections with Anand Panyarachun to gain access to Chirayu Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya, Chairman of the Crown Property Bureau Foundation (Thai Post Editorial Team 2007).

#### *Octobrist intellectuals and academics*

Octobrists returned home from the armed struggle at the initial stage of the boom in graduate education. From 1916 until 1981, Thailand created only eleven registered universities. However, in response to the increase in demand for skilled labour from both the private sector and the new middle class, within only a decade more than thirteen new universities were established, and there were twenty-two more in the decade to 2001 and seventy-three in the decade to 2011. Moreover, the earlier generation universities extended their range of courses. By the early 1990s, Thammasat University started adding new faculties of science, technology and health science to those in the social sciences and humanities. By 2011, the Thammasat University had around 21 faculties and colleges. In parallel, Mahidol University, which originated as a health science university, gradually expanded. By the mid-1980s, it added several social science and humanities faculties. Subsequently, this raised the demand for intellectuals to work at these new universities.

Table 5.3: Number of public and private universities in Thailand in 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total number of registered universities	6	9	11	24	46	119
Number of new Universities	6	3	2	13	22	73

Source: Anderson 1977, 16-17; Hewison 1996, 144-145; Wikipedia/List of Higher Education Institutions in Thailand 2011

Aside from the increase in their number, university lecturers became more influential and prominent. Independent research centres and think-tank NGOs remained very few. Investment in research and development in the private sector was limited. But the private sector's need for research and technical support grew. Requests for policy and organisational consultation from the government and bureaucracy increased. Above all, the demand for critical political analysis and alternative political directions among the media and public expanded amidst political liberalisation. A huge number of research projects were offered to university lecturers. Academic opinion pieces and commentaries on political, social and economic issues were attractive to all media.

Against this backdrop, many Octobrists reappeared both in universities and research institutes. In addition to dedicating themselves to teaching and research in their specific fields, many became influential popular intellectuals advocating political critiques and proposing alternative political directions to the public. However, by this time, they were no longer homogenous. Instead, they focused and campaigned on different specific issues and more divergent political stances and ideologies. Thirayuth Boonmee, one of the 14<sup>th</sup> October student activist icons, became an influential intellectual promoting reformist and conservative liberalist political reform during the last two decades. Jaran Dhitthapichai, one of the first few students to present himself in public as a leftist even before the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident, later became a prominent popular intellectual advocating human rights issues. Tanet Charoenmuang is another important example of an Octobrist who is now a well-known popular intellectual campaigning for political decentralisation and empowerment of local governance. Kasian Tejapira, a leftist

student activist during the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident was one of the most prominent popular intellectuals campaigning against political corruption and supporting the rise of Thai social movements in the 1990s. Anek Laothamatas, a former radical medical student activist and President of the Thammasat University Student Council in 1976 was Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University (1999-2000) and later at the Public Administration Institute at Rangsit University. Sangsidh Piriyanarangsak, a leftist Thammasat University economics student activist, became a lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University and Director of the Political Economy Centre. He was an important academic who conducted research on and persistently advocated campaigns against corruption, local mafias and black business. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a radical 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist known as 'Big Head' and one of nineteen students who was jailed after the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident, has been a lecturer at the Department of History, Thammasat University, and one of the most radical Thai historians especially on critical histories of the Thai left, and the monarchy. Somkiet Pongpaibul, a former activist from Srinakharinwirot University (formally Prasarnmit Teachers College), who worked closely with the Farmers Federation of Thailand during the 1970s both in town and in the jungle, became a lecturer at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University (formerly Nakhon Ratchasima Teachers College) and also an outspoken intellectual activist writing and campaigning in support of small-scale farmers and social movements throughout the 1990s. Thongchai Winichakul, first secretary general of the Student Centre of Thailand in 1974, is currently a world-class scholar and Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. From the early 1990s until now he has long advocated intellectual campaigns to promote multi-culturalism and deconstruct Thai state-centric nationalism. Cholthicha Sutthinirandkul, a critical Chulalongkorn University lecturer who joined the armed struggle with the CPT at an early stage, is now a linguistics professor at Rangsit University. Tanet Apornsuan, a former leading member of the Thammasat University Dome Assembly (Sapha Na Dome), was Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University. He has been an activist historian focusing on human rights issues and continued writing political articles for several political weekly newspapers in criticising governments and commenting on the political situation. Somchai Phatharathananunth, a former rank-and-file leftist student activist from Ramkhamhaeng University, was Dean at the College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University and consistently produced research works on rural social movements and local politics. Sucheela Thanchainan was a leading Thammasat

University political scientist student activist in the socialist women's movement before being jailed for several years after the 6<sup>th</sup> October massacre. After being released from jail she continued her life as an intellectual. She was once a lecturer at Thammasat University and is currently teaching at the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Mahidol University. At the same time, she carried on working on women's issues with several organisations including the Friends of Women Foundation, and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) (Sucheera 2003).

The recruitment of a large number of Octobrists into the academic sector and as popular intellectuals was a result of their bright intellectual backgrounds, and political advocacy skills developed during their 1970s activism, and their desire to continue their intellectual journey. Very many Octobrists were bright young students in the 1970s. Upon their return, they were still the cream of the crop, and competed successfully with others in the same generation. Those who wished to continue their career in academia, were either quickly offered scholarships to continue their higher education abroad or successfully acquired university lectureships.

Thirayuth Boonmee, Thongchai Winichakul and Somsak Jeamteerasakul had been rising stars since they were at Suankularb high school. Even Tanet Charoenmuang and Seksan Prasertkul, who had had upcountry backgrounds, were able to get American Field Service (AFS) scholarships for one-year exchange programmes to the USA. Most succeeded in entering the most competitive undergraduate programmes in prestige universities. In spite of a poor family background, Thirayuth Boonmee received national recognition in 1968 by getting the highest score in the science exam to enter the Faculty of Engineering at Chulalongkorn University (Morell and Chai-anan 1981, 143). Thongchai and Somsak were outstanding history students at Thammasat University. Despite upcountry backgrounds, Anek, Tanet and Seksan competed in the university entrance exam to get places in the faculties of medicine and political science, Chulalongkorn University.

Furthermore, owing to their distinguished university academic performance, several were offered either lectureships or scholarships to continue graduate study right after graduation. For example, in early 1976, shortly after graduation, Tanet Charoenmuang was offered a lecturer position at Chiang Mai University and later a Thai government scholarship to continue to his PhD in Russian Studies at Georgetown University. After returning to Bangkok, Kasian Tejapira continued his studies at Thammasat University. Soon after graduation, he obtained a teaching job at Thammasat University and a scholarship to pursue his PhD at Cornell University. Tanet Apornsuwan obtained scholarships to continue his studies in history. And after obtaining his PhD from Binghamton University, USA, he returned to be a lecturer at Thammasat University. After that Sucheela continued her academic work at the International Institute of Social Studies, the Netherlands, and completed a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), UK. As for Cholthira Sattayawattana, despite being arrested shortly after returning to Bangkok and remaining in jail for several years owing to her leading position in the CPT, she soon was awarded a scholarship to continue her PhD in Anthropology at the Australian National University. She was also offered a lectureship at Rangsit University even before completing her PhD.

The political skills developed during their 1970s political activism in advocating radical ideas and the demands of grassroots movements made these Octobrists unique as popular intellectuals. Thirayuth Boonmee is an outstanding case. His activities as the 4<sup>th</sup> secretary general of the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai) and a key person in many political campaigns since the 1970s including those against Japanese imports that had left Thailand with a heavy trade deficit, against the seniority system and corruption within Chulalongkorn University, for a democratic constitution and elections, made Thirayuth a skilful popular intellectual since the 1970s (*Sri Burapha* 2003, 30-35). After returning to Thailand in 1987, through his new position as researcher and lecturer at the Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University, and later at the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology, Thammasat University, he actively conducted regular social and political polls, and arranged many public presentations of his political commentaries and proposals for government and society. These became a phenomenon, being famously called 'Thirayuth's polls' and 'Thirayuth's points' and were always covered on the front page

of nearly every leading newspaper. Whatever he proposed was regularly claimed as a guideline for society. He himself was called a ‘social engineer’ by many media. Even though his academic freedom was regularly threatened by the government, by the mid 1990s, he became one of the most prominent popular intellectuals (MS 1993b).

In the same vein, during the 1970s, Kasian Tejapira spent most of his time at Thammasat University participating in political activities particularly with the Thammasat University Student Union. During his time with the CPT at revolutionary bases in Southern Isan, he wrote many articles and poems for the *Thongchai (Victory Flag)* newsletter. Upon his return, he went back to study at Thammasat University and worked part-time as journalist at the *Setthakit Kanmueang (Politics and Economics)* newspaper. With the hope of reviving people power and the radical movement, he started his popular intellectual project. Throughout the 1990s, he was one of the champions of ‘people’s democracy’ and a campaigner against corrupt elected politicians. In popularising these ideas, he produced countless newspaper articles and talks with the support of 1970s leftist and other non-leftist progressive journalists who still shared his political interests. Suchit Wongthet and Khanchai Boonpan, former radical journalists and the major shareholders in *Matichon (Public Opinion)* and *Sinlapawattanatham (Culture and Art)*; Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, a former student activist who later became a leading member of the *Phuchatkan (Manager)*, and other Octobrists in the editorial team of the *Siam Post* were all close to Kasian Tejapira since the 1970s. They respected Kasian’s critical works and always offered him space in their publications. Leading conventional publishing houses like Dok Ya, which belongs to an Octobrist, published collections of Kasian’s newspaper articles.

Due to their disappointment with the decline of the CPT and its rigid Maoist approaches, many Octobrists were eager to search for alternative ideologies and political directions. Academic university positions offered them chances to explore new western and Thai leftist ideas, as well as earlier non-leftist roots including liberal, conservative and other ideological beliefs. Many Octobrists, even those with educational backgrounds in science, shifted into the social sciences. On these new intellectual journeys, they explored, redeveloped and advocated a wide range of new

ideas from the socialist end of the ideological spectrum to other non-leftist ideas including liberalism, and reformism.

Kasian Tejapira's case is interesting. He returned home from his revolutionary base in 1983 profoundly disappointed and in conflict with leading CPT members. For him, the CPT dehumanised and de-intellectualised the Octobrist intellectuals, lacked internal democracy and any system of checks and balances, and emphasised only Maoism and Leninism. During the late 1980s, Kasian devoted his time to exploring and advocating other streams of Marxism and trying to go beyond the dominant liberal reformism (Kasian 1984a; Kasian 1984b). He was inspired by several non-left popular intellectuals. In his 'Peace and Non-Violence' class at Thammasat University, Kasian Tejapira said that Chaiwat Sata-anan was the person who helped him out of the vicious cycle of 'class-historical materialism-violent revolution' and introduced him to a 'humanism-subjectivism-non-violence' strategy which was relevant to his disagreement with the CPT. He viewed these people as those who opened his eyes and guided him beyond leftist ideas. In several books in the 1990s, he always paid tribute to these people. He wrote, 'for teacher Ben [Anderson], Chanwit [Kasetsiri], Chaiwat [Sata-anan] and Nithi [Eawsriwong]: who changed my world view' (Kasian 1994a, 228; Kasian 1999, 177-180).

Similar to Kasian Tejapira, Thongchai explored diverse aspects of Marxism during his academic sojourn at University of Sydney (Thongchai 1983a, 82-85; Thongchai 1983b, 54-60). Under the supervision of Prof. Craig J. Reynolds, he was inspired to explore a wider range of ideas and literature beyond Marxism. Furthermore, through the PhD process, he became more interested in the politics of nationalism. His PhD thesis, later published as a book, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, was a breakthrough in Thai studies on the development of the Thai state and its nationalist project. Since then he has become a figurehead of the academic anti-nationalism campaign calling for political freedom and multi-culturalism.

By contrast, to overcome his disappointment with the collapse of the CPT, Tanet Charoenmuang went back to his upcountry roots. By the end of the CPT, he still had not given up on it. While waiting for the revival of a Thai revolutionary party, he went to the US to complete his PhD at the University of Northern Illinois. However, after

returning to a lectureship at Chiang Mai University in his hometown, he turned his political interests into local governance and empowerment. He started conducting research and campaigns for political decentralisation including direct elections at the local authority level. Furthermore, he actively participated in and organised a local movement to campaign for environmental and historical protection in Chiang Mai Province. He argued that after twenty years outside of his hometown, he had just realised that the reason why people in peripheral areas were suppressed was political centralisation. Due to the lack of local intellectuals, he thought it was his duty to go back to advocate localism in strengthening local power and liberate these people from national structural suppression (Tanet, interview by author, 14 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

In conclusion, by the end of the 1980s, the Octobrists had successfully exploited opportunities which gave rise to the new middle class. To do this, they utilised the privileged higher education, social and political skills, and extensive connections both within and across sectors which they had obtained and developed in the 1970s. And to reach the top of their careers, they readjusted to the new norms of these new social and economic institutions. They selectively dropped radical elements of their thinking and took in a wider range of non-leftist ideas and popular language. Nonetheless, they did not confine their success to their careers. These Octobrists revitalised and developed their political roles and participation in different political transitions throughout the 1990s in parallel with the new middle class.

## **5.2 Political participation of the Octobrist middle class in extra-parliamentary politics**

Over the past three decades, the newly established middle class among whom Octobrists loomed large grew not only in numbers and economic power but also in their political role and importance. After the earlier predominance of the bureaucratic and conservative elites in Thai politics, by the early 1990s, the middle class in various groups and sectors developed into a major political power, especially in extra-parliamentary politics.

The public witnessed the first emergence of the middle class in the mass movement against the return of the military into parliamentary politics in 1992. After more than a decade of semi-democratic government, in 1988 Thailand had an elected government under Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan (1988-1991). Nonetheless, in 1991, it was overthrown by a coup led by the National Peace Keeping Council, a group of senior military personnel making accusations of corruption and an attempt to destroy the military and monarchy institution. At the beginning, the middle class did not entirely oppose the coup. However, by the end of 1991, the National Peace Keeping Council revealed its intention to remain in power by pushing forward a constitution which allowed a non-elected Prime Minister. A mass democratic campaign then began. In May 1992, the protest developed into a mass movement and ended as the biggest confrontation between the people and the authorities since 1976. Eventually on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1992, General Suchinda Kraprayoon (April-May 1992), a non-elected Prime Minister, announced his resignation.

Even though there was some evidence that the middle class was neither the majority nor a genuine democratic force in the May 1992 movement (Connors 2002, 41; Giles 2003a, 18; Somsak 1993; Yoshifumi 2004, 28; Ockey 1999, 244), various academics, including modernists and pluralists (Anek 1992; Anek 1996; Prudhisan 1992; Suchit 1996), those in international relations (Chai-anan 1993: 42 -57) and even Marxists (Hewison 1997, 5-10; Hewison 2003; Giles 2003a, 19) came out to explain the reasons and impulses behind this rise of the middle class according to their approaches. The 1992 protest was called a 'middle-class' revolt with the image of Bangkok and provincial middle-class protesters, with the Volvo or Mercedes Benz parked nearby and mobile phone in hand, challenging armed troops (Anek 1992; Girling 1996, 20; Sangsidh and Pasuk 1993). The roles of media and provincial business people were emphasised (LoGerfo 2000; Thitinan 1997). The opinion of the middle class was reported by the media as 'legitimate opinion' and 'public opinion' (Yoshifumi 2004, 2-4 and 34).

The political role of this new middle class did not end in the May 1992 democratic movement. Many members also played an active role in facilitating and supporting the rise of many social movements throughout the 1990s. From the mid-1990s onwards, there was a proliferation of vibrant radical social movements of marginal people in

Thailand in response to the negative impact of economic development on grassroots people (Bell 2003; Chantana 2004: 235; Hirsch 1997, 190-192 and 180; Praphat 1998, 38-41; Sayamol, Atchara and Kritsada 2002, 263), the failures of the Thai state in dealing with new problems and articulating the people's interests (Connors 2002: 214; Kanokrat 2003), the new capitalist crisis (Bell 2003) and above all political liberalisation and relaxation of political control (Chantana 2004, 234–235; Connors 2002, 214). Initially, there was a rise of single-issue movements promoting environmental conservation, labour, the urban poor, small-scale farmers and fishermen, sustainable development, and opposition to state development projects (Hirsch 1997; Praphat and Anusorn 2002). Later, to enhance their negotiating power and mobilise resources, many of these issue-based movements developed into social movement networks. Some allied with similar movements, such as the regional and national networks of slum people and small-scale farmers. Others pulled themselves into a powerful 'cross-sector network movements' under the name of Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) advocating the interests of the poor and underprivileged (Baker 2000; Missingham 2003; Praphat 1998; Rungrawee 2004).

Against this backdrop, various middle class groups, especially NGO workers, intellectuals and journalists, provided support for these social movements from the very initial stage of their formation. They helped to organise, mobilise resources, lobby and network both within the movements themselves and with the middle class, intellectuals, media, and politicians. In the anti-Pak Mun dam movement, NGOs worked to provide sources of information and acted as a 'secretariat of the movement' in stimulating and strengthening the movement's structure, network and agenda. Academics and the media conducted academic work to legitimise the demands of the movement and negotiate with government. They also advocated concepts of the 'New Social Movement' and other democratic ideas in promoting social movements including cross-class networking, identity/cultural politics, grassroots empowerment, participatory democracy, and alternative development discourse (Baker 2000; Kanokrat 2003; Missingham 2003; Nalinee, Sulaiporn and Siriporn 2002, 188; Naruemon 2002, 468; Pasuk 2002; Praphat 1998; Prudhisana and Maneerat 1997; Rungrawee 2004; Sayamol, Atchara and Kritsada 2002).

In addition, many members of the middle class played prominent roles in the political reform process of the 1990s. Right after the 1991 coup and the 1992 democratic transition, there was certain degree of common agreement, at least among the liberal reformist elite and middle class, to push forward institutional reform to prevent any future return of undemocratic forces and to sustain Thai democratic development. In 1994, public pressures successfully forced the Chuan Leekpai government to establish the 'Democratic Development Committee (khanakamakan phathana prachathipatai)'. Furthermore, the constitution drafting process was designed to be and look deliberative. The 1997 Constitution was the first constitution to be drafted by a popularly-elected Constitutional Drafting Assembly (sapha rang rathathanun). It comprised seventy-six directly elected representatives from each of the provinces out of ninety-nine members. In addition, a nation-wide process of public consultations took place. On top of this, the mass 'green flag' campaign, led by a group of 1997 Constitutional drafters and the middle class in Bangkok, successfully pressured parliament to pass the 1997 Constitution. Hence it was popularly heralded as a "People's Constitution".

On the one hand, the reform was perceived as one of the most outstanding democratic efforts in Thai political history, as a response to the problems of money politics in the electoral system, the lack of ideological political parties and policy platforms, and the instability of coalition governments (McVey 2000, 4-12; Nakharin 1991; Ockey 2000, 80-83; Ockey 2004, 22-55 and 80-100; Pasuk and Baker 2002, 31-50; Sombat 2000; Suchit 1996; Surin and McCargo 1997). On the other hand, many intellectuals argued that the so-called 'People's Constitution' was the result of negotiation between the progressive/reformist, liberal and conservative elites, and the neo-liberal private (constitutionalist) bourgeoisie, sharing the common ground of opposing a strong state controlled by elected local politicians (Connors 1999; Connors 2002; Somchai 2002; Kanokrat 2003; Ockey 2004, 166-170; McCargo 1998, 5-9 and 26; McCargo 2002a, 4-5 and 9-12). The majority of the middle class went along with this. Only a minority of the middle class supported a more radical agenda. Nonetheless, the non-elite power alliance eventually functioned only as the instrumental supporter of the elite reformist project without any real influential power (Connors 2002: 38-52; Streckfuss and Templeton 2002).

In parallel with the rise of the middle class in extra-parliamentary politics, many Octobrists successfully revitalised their political role in these political transitions. There are four common points explaining why these Octobrists managed to return to politics and maintain their political significance in these new political movements. Firstly, the effort of the middle class in promoting different political movements opened up new windows of political opportunity for those who wished to advance their political role and encouraged those who still hid themselves from politics to return to political activism. Secondly, connections with leftist and non-leftist friends from the 1970s brought them back to politics. Their skills and experience developed since the 1970s also made them skilful political mobilisers and popular intellectuals for the movements. Thirdly, Octobrists successfully constructed and utilised the Octobrist identities. They rewrote the roles and the history of the 1970s from extreme leftist activists to consistent fighters for democracy. Their new identity as Octobrists also helped to legitimise their role in new movements. Finally, they made a decision to compromise with non-leftist ideas and interests in promoting and sustaining movements of the classic liberal bourgeoisie calling for the restoration of democracy (and constitutional reform) and the mass mobilisation of the rural and urban poor.

#### *Octobrists in the May 1992 people's uprising*

Literature on the democratic transition during 1991-1992 acknowledge the activists of the 1970s as a crucial element in the people's uprising in the 1992 mass protests (Anek 1992; Bamber 1997, 240-242; Chantana 2004, 242-244; LoGerfo 2000, 221-252; Mukdawan 1992; Nuannoi 2002; Ockey 2004, 151-171; Pasuk 1997, 32-35; Thitinan 1997, 216-232). While many leading Octobrists played prominent roles in the inner circle of organisers and their allies in strategising, facilitating and mobilising the movement, countless other Octobrists participated in the movement as ordinary protesters and supporters.

Many Octobrists played crucial roles in both the Campaign for Popular Democracy (khana kamakan ronarong phuea prachathipatai - CPD) and the Confederation for Democracy (samaphan phuea prachathipatai - CFD), the two major mobilising organisations behind the May 1992 people's movement (Callahan 1993, 114; Suthy 1995, 121-122). Several joined the CPD at the initial stage in advocating democratic

issues and campaigning against the constitution and political parties supported by the National Peace Keeping Council (Callahan 1993, 103). Somchai Homla-or acted as General Secretary of the CPD . Vanida Tantiwittayapitak and Pairoj Polpetch were committee members representing their NGOs; Foundation for Ecological Recovery and Union for Civil Liberty. Amorn Amornratananon, former General Secretary of the Student Centre of Thailand in 1976 also joined the CPD. For the CFD, Weng Tojirakarn, a leftist medical student activist from Mahidol University, was one of its founding committee members and worked on the front lines of the movement (The Confederation for Democracy 1992, 48).

Many other individual Octobrists supported the protest in the name of their new affiliations. Suwit Watnoo and Somkiet Pongpaibul mobilised hundreds of members from the ‘Slum Organisation for Democracy (ongkon slum phuea prachathipatai)’ and the ‘Teachers for Democracy Co-coordinating Committee (khana kamakan prasan ngan khru phuea prachathipatai)’. At the same time, many Octobrists who worked in the private sector established the ‘Democratic Businesspeople (chomrom nak thurakit phuea prachathipatai)’, a politically active business network in the 1992 May incident. Prasarn Maruekpitak acted as its chairperson. Pichien Amnatworapraserkul and Thida Tavornseth (Weng’s wife) were active Octobrist members in the network. Furthermore, Thirayuth Boonmee and Seksan Prasertkul were among many intellectuals who regularly provided consultation and ideas to the movement (Krittaya and Suporn 1997, 38; Seksan 1993, 118). Thirayuth Boonmee, Tanet Apornsuwan, Apichai Puntasen were among 42 academics who submitted a petition to the King opposing all political parties changing the constitution in support of a non-elected Prime Minister.

In addition, research and interviews show countless ordinary Octobrists joined the May movement. Yoshifumi (2004, 25-26) argued in his research that ‘the well-educated people who had engaged in social activities earnestly since the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident in 1973’ were one of the major groups of people in the middle class movement in May 1992. According to statistics, 59% of participants in the May incident were above 30 years old and 69% held a BA or higher. These attributes matched the qualifications of Octobrists. An eyewitness, Kriengkamol Laohapairoj, met more than 60-70 of those who once fought in the jungle and were part of the 14<sup>th</sup> October generation (*TP* 2003f).

In explaining this phenomenon, first of all, it is important to note the emerging role of the middle class encouraged many Octobrists, especially those in private sector, to return to politics. For instance, in her workplace, Vipa Daomaneer generally hid her earlier leftist political background. At the beginning of May 1992, Vipa kept her eyes and ears on the political situation and gave moral support to the protesters. She did not dare to be the first to be active in politics. However, she became active and regularly participated in the protests with the encouragement of her middle class colleagues and the politically active ambience in her business on Silom Road, the centre of middle-class protesters. At the peak of the protests, her liberal foreign boss gave the green light for all staff to join the demonstrations. From her office, Vipa disseminated a political fax shaming and denouncing the power of the government. However, the degree of participation still varied. Ped (pseudonym), who had just recovered from his financial difficulties and started a bakery, found that he was not ready to appear in the protests. Nevertheless, he regularly followed news from his former comrades who actively participated in the movement, and sent bakery products to support the movement. In the same vein, Vi (pseudonym) did not openly participate in the protests but helped in back stage support in producing posters and other political campaign materials in Chiang Mai. To a lesser extent, Porn-narong Pattanaboonpaiboon admitted that he did not want to risk his job as a doctor in a private hospital by participating in the May protests, even though he kept his eye on the political situation at all times and always sent moral support to the protesters. At that time, he thought that it would take him some time to collect money and when he was ready, he would return to politics (Ped, Porn-narong and Vipa, interview by author, 25 November 2006, 7 March 2007 and 28 January 2007, Bangkok; Vi, interview by author, 8 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

In addition to this new political impulse, the 1970s networks, skills and social embeddedness provided a political foundation encouraging Octobrists to promote their political role. Social connections among Octobrist friends were important. Jariya Suanpan was encouraged by her Octobrist friends, particularly those from the same revolutionary base, to participate in the protests. Jariya said that there was a common agreement and organised network among her close 1970s friends to collect money and other supplies to support the movement (Jariya, interview by author, 24 February 2007, Bangkok). Pan luckily regularly joined the May protests with Octobrist colleagues from

her workplace, PLAN company, which was owned by a group of Octobrists (Pan, interview by author, 12 March 2007, Bangkok).

Octobrists also used their 1970s skills and social embeddedness to support the 1992 democratic movement. For instance, owing to his well-known role on protest stages since the 1970s, Suwit Watnoo knew how to mobilise people, take mass control and avoid violence and was thus asked to be the Master of Ceremonies and speaker on the stage in May (Nitirat 2007, 17-18 and 39-40; Salai 2003, 101). Kriengkamol Laohapairoj was another person invited to be a major speaker on the protest stage and strategist in mobilising mass support and protests (*TP* 2003f). In addition, a branch of Octobrist singers and artists formed the ‘Artists Confederation for Democracy (samaphan sinlapin phuea prachathipatai)’ as a means to fight authoritarian government. Countless Octobrist writers and singers also produced new songs and writings to support the movement and condemning the violence used by the military (*MS* 1992). By the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, songs of four artists, including 2 Octobrists (Surachai Jantimatom and Aed Carabao or Yoonyong Opakul), were banned from government radio stations.

In parallel with their participation in the protests, Octobrists democratised their 1970s history and normalised their ‘Octobrist’ identity. At the same time, they turned this identity into an asset to revive their networks and political collaboration. They started to integrate the history of 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October into May 1992 as part of a democratisation process. Tanet Apornsuwan, Octobrist historian at Thammasat University, is an example of those who spelled out these ideas.

‘The origin and process of this [May 1992] incident and 14 October are partly similar. At the beginning, it seemed like a victory of the people and of the students. The government was changed according to the demand of the people. But on 14<sup>th</sup> October, the people’s movement perhaps did not maintain political power. Eventually, the power was taken back [by the state] ending in the 6<sup>th</sup> October bloodshed. ... I think the demands of people during May 1992 were clearer than on 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October. ... people with the highest power must come from elections. ... the recent uprising [the May 1992] was a continuation of the political will and proved that during the last 19 years Thai democracy has never been suspended’

Jaran Dhitthapichai spoke at the October anniversary about the connection and similarity between 14<sup>th</sup> October and May 1992 (Jaran 1992, 6-9). Also in celebrating and commemorating the three incidents, Somchai Homla-or, the Secretary-General of the Campaign for Popular Democracy (khana kamakan ronarong phuea prachathipatai - CPD), in 1998, organised a political art exhibition and auction in memory of the three incidents. The exhibition by both Octobrists and other professional artists at a luxury hotel was called 'Ratchadamnoen Memory' as all the incidents took place on Ratchadamnoen Avenue (Callahan 1998, 146). Many buyers were former 1970s students who were then corporate executives and middle level government officials. Under the new Octobrist brand as 1970s democratic fighters, more and more Octobrists started to join the new political campaigns under the new common banner of Octobrists. The victory of May 1992 was the turning point which made the Octobrists start talking to each other. The military base and university network among Octobrists like the Southern Isan and the 'Chula friends club (chomrom phuean chula)' networks were reconnected shortly after May 1992 (Jariya and Pha, interview by author, 24 February 2007 and 3 March 2007, Bangkok).

Moreover, participating in the May incident, Octobrists came with competing and contradictory political stances and interests. In 1991, many Octobrists were part of business groups which initially welcomed and supported the military coup in 1991 against the elected Chatichai Choonhavan government out of concern about its corruption. Only when they thought that for the military to remain in power would ruin economic prosperity, did they shift to support the anti-military movement (Ockey 2004, 151-171). Their views on movement mobilising strategies were divided by the clash between the Campaign for Popular Democracy (khana kamakan ronarong phuea prachathipatai - CPD) and the Confederation for Democracy (samaphan phuea prachathipatai - CFD), over the leadership within the May movement (Callahan 1998, 121-122; Krittiya and Suporn 1997, 29-31). Leading Octobrist figures in the CPD and other individuals like Kriengkamol Laohapairoj argued that the establishment of the CFD hijacked the protests away from the CPD, which had earlier been the leading organisations supporting the movement, and to the Chamlong Srimuang faction (TP 2003f). Many gradually faded away from the movement due to disagreements over the

confrontational strategies led by Chamlong. Many Octobrist academics like Seksan Prasertkul and Thirayuth Boonmee argued from their 1970s experience that the movement should not continue overnight protests. The tension between exhausted and frustrated protesters and the authorities would lead to fierce confrontation (Krittiya and Suporn 1997, 38; Seksan 1993, 118). Kriengkamol disagreed with Chamlong's hunger strike and persisted in temporarily suspending the protests during confrontations (TP 2003f). By contrast, Weng Tojirakarn, one of the committee members in the CFD, persistently supported permanent protests by arguing that they did not think the authority would use guns on the protesters (The Confederation for Democracy 1992, 48; Krittiya and Suporn 1997, 39).

### *Octobrists in the rise of social movement in the 1990s*

In analysing the proliferation of the 1990s Thai social movements, many writers have taken account of the role of Octobrists and their 1970s legacy (Hewison 2003, 144-145; Missingham 2003, 30; Phumtham 1986, 24-25; Prudhisana and Maneerat 1997, 199-201; Simpkins 2003, 255; Suthy 1995, 121-122; Giles 2003c, 291). Many works identified Octobrist journalists, senators, academics, and businesspeople who helped in mobilising support for the Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989; Kanokrat 2003; Missingham 2003, 50-51, 91, 105, 131, 135, 148-152, 162-165; Praphat 1998; Rungrawee 2004, 552; Somchai 2006, 60-63).

After initial failing to promote a radical agenda in their own organisations, many Octobrist NGO workers shifted to work directly with people and communities directly affected by development problems. They taught grassroots people to link their problems to political and economic structures. And in responding to these problems, they asserted the idea of both dealing with problems at the policy level and mobilising power in collective action in communicating with the public and putting pressure on the state authorities. For instance, after leaving a philanthropic slum organisation, Suwit Watnoo expanded the work on slums to other urban poor groups and became the key person promoting the Four Region Slum Network (khrueakhai slum si phak). Furthermore, he turned the slum networks into major supporters of the AOP. Beside the slum movement, Suwit played a crucial role as NGO adviser in many other movements including the Khor Jor Kor protests, small scale farmer movements, and many other movements

against state development projects (Nitirat 2007, 15 and 37-39). Vanida Tantiwittayapitak also left the Foundation for Ecological Recovery in 1988 as it had refused to support her political mobilisation work. Since then, Vanida devoted her life to work with the anti-Pak Mun dam movement. She not only turned this movement into one of the strongest and most persistent anti-dam movements in Thailand, but she also worked with other anti-dam groups and promoted an anti-dam network which later became a core network in the formation of the AOP (Vanida and Watchari, interview by author, 12 January 2007 and 18 January 2007, Bangkok).

Also, many Octobrist intellectuals helped social movements especially during the peak of the AOP in strategising their political actions, legitimising their moves through their academic works and petitions, as well as connecting the movement with other non-left progressive academics. Seksan Prasertkul, Kasian Tejapira, Thongchai Winichakul, Nuannoi Treerat, and Sucheera Thanchaina, came out to sign petitions to support various campaigns initiated by the AOP and their Octobrist NGO friends including campaigns against the Thai-Malay gas pipeline, and the Bo Nok and Hin Krut power plant projects. In Thirayuth's public talk 'The Fight of the Poor: Guiding Values for Thai Society', he argued that the 18-month protest of the AOP set up new strategies for movements of the poor in Thailand (*MR* 27 August 2001, 2). Somkiet Pongpaibul wrote countless articles in support of the AOP and small scale farmer movements. At the same time, some, like Sangsidh Piriyarangsan (1998) tried to mainstream progressive development work in Thai state mechanisms like the Ministry of Interior on local community projects. Moreover, many Octobrist artists, singers and journalists helped to popularise and communicate the issues of the social movement with the public and government. Phongthep Kradonchamnan organised concerts in connection with environmental and anti-deforestation issues. Owing to a long-term friendship with Vanida, Tue, Ti Kammachon and many other Octobrist singers in the 'Kamlangjai (Enthusiasm)' band composed many songs and an album called 'Fish Ladder (bandai pla jon)' dedicated to the anti-Pak Mun dam movement. Many Octobrists in the business sector also tried to support and legitimise the AOP. The Social Venture Network, which was led by many Octobrist businessmen like Prasarn Maruekpitak, gave awards for people working for society and the environment. In 1999, three out of four awardees were their former Octobrist friends: Vanida Tantiwittayapitak, Jaran Dhitthapichai, and Khamron Kunadilok.

In addition, the Octobrists' promotion of social movements was grounded in their 1970s networks. Much of their work was to help their former urban poor, farmer and ethnic minority comrades. They were alienated from both local communities and the Thai state as former communists. Many became landless and powerless farmers and poor people. Others were affected by government development policies and projects. Various networks of Octobrists and 1970s non-left progressive people in NGOs, politicians, and academic activists were significant both in publicly campaigning for them as well as in penetrating government policy-making processes. These networks became a part of the new loose network structure and cross-sector alliances, especially in the case of the AOP.

In addition to the 1970s legacy and new status, the newly constructed 'Octobrist: democratic fighter' frame helped to legitimise their role and the activities of their movements. They cleverly combined the Octobrist identity and the rise of the AOP in re-writing the history of people politics in Thailand. Thirayuth Boonmee pointed out that the rise of movements of the poor and the alliances with NGOs and other progressive civil society organisations were a later stage of democratic development after 14<sup>th</sup> October, 6<sup>th</sup> October and May 1992. Thirayuth and a network of 30 democratic organisations also compared the Chuan Leekpai government with the corrupt military dictatorships of Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Jarusathien during the 1970s. This was because of its suppression of social movements which promoted democracy initiated by the 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists (*BP* 1993; *KT* 1999c; *MR* 1993b; *MR* 2001c). Many other media echoed the same message. *Matichon Raiwan* (*Public Opinion Daily*) compared the role of Sulak Sivarak in obstructing construction of the Thai-Burma gas pipeline with that of Thirayuth Boonmee before 14<sup>th</sup> October 1976 when he called for elections and a democratic constitution as both were illegal civil actions fighting against injustice and state power (*MR* 1998). In return, Octobrists highlighted the issues of new social movements, and people's democracy in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October commemoration ceremonies. On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 6<sup>th</sup> October, a whole series of commemorative seminars and events were overshadowed by talks about 'people's political reform', and 'non-violent conflict resolution in Thai society'. Furthermore, the 6<sup>th</sup> October Relatives Fund committee presented the 'Rangwan Khom Tula (Sharp October Prize)' award to Charoen Wat-aksorn, leader of the protests against the Bo Nok and Hin Krut power

plant projects, who had been recently assassinated. They explained that the award was to show the gratitude of the Octobrists toward those who shared the same values as people who fought for social justice during the 1970s.

In terms of ideology, the Octobrist NGO workers, intellectuals and social activists did not advocate radical and leftist ideas in mobilising movements. They no longer highlighted the ideas of a class-based movement, communist network or Leftist movement. Instead, in legitimising the movement and mobilising support both within and outside the movement, they moved to four other major non-left political concepts: notions of ‘direct’, ‘participatory’ and ‘grassroots’ democracy to legitimise non-state actors in the political process (Naruemon and Jaran 2002, 495); a ‘New Social Movement’ and its element of cross-class networking strategies, identity/cultural politics, and single-issue campaigns (Baker 2000; Missingham 2003; Nalinee, Sulaiporn and Siriporn 2002, 188; Naruemon 2002, 468; Pasuk 2002, 25; Praphat 1998; Prudhisana and Maneerat 1997; Rungrawee 2004; Sayamol, Atchara and Kritsada 2002); a new approach of seizing ‘the state’ without revolution but through reformation (McCargo 2002a, 4-5); and liberal concepts including neo-liberalism, nationalist localism, communitarianism, moderate civil society and the humanist left, post-modernism, anarchism and autonomism (Connors 2002, 231-233; Hewison 2002, 144–145).

### *Octobrists in the 1990s political reform*

As the political reform movement grew, many Octobrist academics, NGO workers and businesspeople came out to press for government ratification and public acceptance of the 1997 constitution drafted by the Constitution Drafting Assembly. Countless leading Octobrist popular intellectuals became pioneers in mobilising political resources and asserting new political ideas in the process of reform. From the middle of 1994 Thirayuth Boonmee was a pioneer in urging cross-sector collaboration and organising petitions among academics in support of political reform (Connors 2002; Thirayuth 2007, 87-92). Many other ordinary Octobrists spent much time and energy on street campaigns and advocacy at the grassroots level. Ped said that he helped to distribute pro-1997 constitution banners at Chatuchak, the biggest weekend market in Bangkok (Ped, interview by author, 25 November 2006, Bangkok). Vi also worked with many Octobrist campaign leaders in Chiang Mai and campaigned for the 1997 constitution in

rural areas of Chiang Mai (Vi, interview by author, 8 December 2006, Chiang Mai). At the same time, several other Octobrists applied to be members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly. Even though many of them knew that they may not have any chance to win election, they were there to vote for candidates they supported. Those in civil society organisations like the Women's Constitution Network (khrueakhai phuying rathathanun), the Campaign for Popular Democracy (khana kamakan ronamong phuea prachathipatai - CPD), the Anti-Corruption Network, the Rural Doctors Association and 30 NGOs working on health issues and business groups worked together in promoting the Independent Mechanisms in the constitution (Naruemon and Jaran 2002, 492). In social movements, many leading Octobrist NGO workers played leading roles in facilitating Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) participation in constitution drafting and consultation through organised 'Political Schools' (Missingham 2003, 159-162). In parallel, many also worked to advocate the agendas and demands of the organisations they were affiliated with. For example, Ticha Na Nakorn, Anjana Suvarnanonda and Octobrists working on feminist issues worked hard in advocating equal rights in the draft constitution for men and women as well as the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgendered (Sirilak 2007).

In participating in the reform movement, success in exploiting their new Octobrist identity and adopting new non-leftist ideas in promoting their work were crucial factors for the success of Octobrists in the movement. They successfully connected their 1970s history and political reform as a path of democratisation. By this time, the term 'Octobrist' became established among the Thai public. In participating in the movement, these former activists always referred to themselves as 'Octobrist'. For instance, Thirayuth Boonmee always mentioned his 14<sup>th</sup> October success in promoting political reforms. In his writing to promote political reform, he portrayed the development of Thai democracy through comparative studies of democratisation after 1932, 14<sup>th</sup> October, May 1992 and the 1997 political reform (Table 5.4: the three phases of democracy).

Table 5.4: the three phases of democracy

Phases of democracy	Problem and goal	Change agent	Method
1. 1932	To change political regime from absolute monarchy to democracy	Civil servants and military	Coup d'état
2. 14 October 1973	To overthrow military authoritarian regime and establish democracy, parliament and elections	Student activists, intellectuals and grassroots mass	Protest
3. Political reform: May 1992 until present	To reform and modernise political system, eradicate corruption, money politics, and enhance discipline and ethics among politicians	Intellectuals, students, middle class, military and senate	1.Revision of constitution based on constitutionalism 2. Promoting new political ideas in a cognitivist approach 3.Empowering civic movements or populism

Source: Thirayuth 1996a

Many Octobrists played an active role in advocating new political ideas. Nevertheless, their opinions on reform and process were divided. The most dominant and powerful Octobrists in the reform process were those intellectuals who actively advocated an 'elitist perspective – ideal of electoral democracy' and collaborated with the liberal reformist elite in pushing forward reform nationalism. Others perceived the reform process as a means of asserting radical ideas for the benefit of the lower class.

At the onset of the reform, Anek Laothamatas, Octobrist Thammasat University lecturer, set out his analysis and reform proposals through his powerful article, 'A Tale of Two Democracies: Conflicting Perceptions of Elections and Democracy in Thailand' (1993 and 1996). From his observations of Thai electoral politics until May 1992, he argued that Thai society and politics were divided into two. The majority of uneducated rural constituencies dominated power in choosing and forming governments. They

tended to choose corrupt politicians who responded to their short term benefits. Meanwhile, an educated urban middle-class minority played a crucial role in overthrowing corrupt governments chosen by the majority rural class. They were more concerned with transparent and effective government. As a result, reform was required in replacing representative and electoral politics with participatory democracy which offered new access and power for the educated middle-class minority, as well as encouraging the uneducated rural poor to be more concerned with long-term policy (Anek 1993a; Anek 1995; Anek 1996). His analysis met a quick response from reformist academic and liberal elitists on how to reduce the power of the majority poor and to increase the power of the educated middle class.

At a later stage of reform, Thirayuth Boonmee supported Anek's argument. He pointed out that Thai politics was dominated by the major capitalist groups and their vote-buying and patron-client relationships with their rural constituencies (*MR* 1997c). These capitalist politicians promoted liberal economic policies which caused difficulties at all economic levels and were inefficient in solving the economic crisis in 1997 (*TR* 1 August 1997, 1, 17 and 23). In responding to these problems, Thirayuth was the first person to incorporate the term 'good governance' in political reform which earlier had been used in the private sector in achieving economic reform (*MR* 1997b; Thirayuth 2002). He insisted that Thai society needed a 'democracy of checks and balances' to monitor corrupt representative democracy as well as promote social movements to establish the minimal state in society (Thirayuth 1997a; Thirayuth 1997b). To be more concrete, he urged the public to support the 1997 constitution as the most democratic to date due to its deliberative drafting process (*KS* 1997; *MR* 1997a). Above all, it contained the new electoral system of one-MP-per-constituency and a party list system by which the educated people in urban areas could choose politicians who have the least corruption problem and offered a way for technocrats and educated people who did not want to run in elections to win cabinet seats (Thirayuth 1996a; Thirayuth 1996b).

Other Octobrist NGO workers and academics proposed more radical demands. Nonetheless, they were sidelined. Their efforts helped to support a liberal reformist agenda rather than radical change. They were sceptical of the 1997 liberal elitist and reformist constitution from the beginning. However, they expected to use this opportunity to insert the issues on their agenda such as promoting progressive

capitalism, sharing and limiting state power at the structural level, and creating a concrete bridge between extra-parliamentary and parliamentary politics through a reformist constitution. They thus pushed their organisations and networks to participate in the consultation process in the drafting of the constitution, to support the campaign to pass the constitution and later to follow up its implementation. For example, Vanida Tantiwittayapitak argued that the 1997 constitution was a liberal capitalist constitution which was humanist and at least functioned as a political tool for those who were powerless to fight for their rights and balance the power of the state (Vanida 2004). Nevertheless, in the process, they had to compromise with liberal reformists. In spite of their efforts to assert their agenda, the whole drafting process ended up dominated by a handful of reformists, constitutionalists and liberal royalists (Connors 2002, 46). Many of their proposals were turned down (Connors 2002, 336-337; Naruemon 1998). Although they were not satisfied with the overall process and the outcome of the constitution, they continued to follow up implementation of the reformist constitution, because several articles and mechanisms within the constitution looked promising for their future work. After the passing of the 1997 constitution, Octobrist NGOs and their movements paid more attention to implementing the new constitution in the activities of their movements. However, they faced many difficulties in making use of this constitution as a means of promoting political participation for social movements. The Octobrist NGOs also indirectly supported people in the movement as candidates in new mechanisms created by new constitution, in the parliamentary system and in local politics. They tried to lobby for and support people from their side to run for election as senators, commissioners in the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and members of several governmental special advisory committees.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

With the rise of the middle class and their increasing economic and political power, many Octobrists recovered. Initially, they developed as successful educated white-collar businesspeople and professionals in various sectors. Later, these Octobrists went beyond their careers. They became politically active in various key developments in Thai democracy outside the realm of parliamentary politics, most notably the 1991-92

mobilisation for the restoration of democracy, the new social movements and protests of the decade, and constitutional reform in 1997.

There were several assets, advantages, opportunities and impulses which forced the Octobrist middle-class who had hidden themselves from politics after their failure with the CPT. Firstly, changes in demography and career made the educated 1970s activists part of the 1990s middle class. Subsequently, the economic boom of the late 1980s, which helped the rise of the middle class, also benefitted the Octobrists. The expansion of the private sector offered the Octobrists prosperity in business, entertainment, media, and academic careers. The increase in funding for social and rural development projects provided many Octobrists promising positions in various NGOs. Above all, the participation of more and more members of the middle class in extra-parliamentary politics including the 1992 May people's uprising, the rise of social movements and the drafting of the 1997 people's constitution, encouraged the Octobrist to revitalise their political activism.

Secondly, the set of skills and experience obtained during their political activities in the 1970s made these Octobrists uniquely qualified for various competitive careers. Contacts and linkages developed since the 1970s with both leftist and non-leftist groups were valuable for the Octobrists, especially at the initial stage of entering new jobs and organisations. Thirdly, participating in various democratic and grassroots movements helped in building up their new identity and rewriting the history of their 1970s leftist activities as Octobrist democratic warriors. Also, when the Octobrist identity was established, it later helped in legitimising the role of the Octobrists in new political activities and movements.

Lastly, in promoting and mobilising resources for the movement, many Octobrists opted for liberal reformist and other non-leftist ideas including new social movements and localism. Although, initially, many of them insisted on advocating radicalism in their works, in order to sustain and obtain legitimacy for their political activities, they had to integrate more compromising positions. In this process, different Octobrists pursued different directions and ideas according to their new affiliations. Therefore, in spite of wrapping themselves in the loose identity of 'Octobrists', they were highly diverse and pulled in different directions. These differences would only deepen in the years to come.

## Chapter 6

### The Octobrists and the Rise of the TRT government

By the end of the 1990s, the Octobrists had already recovered from the failures of the 1970s and established themselves as successful members of the middle class. They occupied prominent roles in both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. These people were no longer perceived as extreme leftists. Instead, their radical reputation was normalised as that of ‘Octobrists’ - innocent student activists fighting for democracy and social justice during the historic episode of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. Their political participation during the democratic transition throughout the 1990s was viewed as the return of the democratic fighters of the 1970s. On top of this, many Octobrists reached the peak of their political power during the rise of the Thaksin Shinawatra government during the first half of the 2000s. In mobilising all kinds of political strategies and human resources in constructing the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai – TRT), formulating policies and winning the election, Thaksin recruited countless Octobrist politicians, campaigners, NGO workers and other professionals alongside other non-progressive forces. The victory of the TRT Party in January 2001 owed much to the contribution of Octobrists from various sectors. Youthful Octobrist politicians were placed in the party to build up its progressive image and to balance the old-style ‘mafia’ politicians. Veteran Octobrist NGO workers and intellectuals played prominent roles in formulating pro-poor policies. Octobrist political campaigners and spin doctors were trusted to deal with election strategies and communications in connecting the party with different classes and groups of voters. During the first term of the TRT government, many Octobrists reached the peaks of their political careers. Many were granted top positions in the party, the government and the cabinet. ‘People-oriented’ policies influenced by many Octobrists were implemented. Furthermore, Octobrist outsiders were sympathetic to the TRT, owing to their trust in the party’s leadership and their friendship with Octobrist insiders. Therefore, many worked in support of the TRT. Nevertheless, the Octobrists were a loose faction in the TRT. They joined the TRT with different expectations, proposals and points of entry. Some became permanent protectors of Thaksin. Others appeared to become increasingly marginalised as Thaksin’s rule continued.

The rise to prominence and power of the Octobrists under the TRT government was the result of their success in exploiting the new opportunities accompanying the rise of the TRT government and its initially inclusive form of politics and policy. In building up a modern policy platform party and a professional political campaign, as well as successfully exercising conventional coalition and machine politics, Thaksin demanded a wide range of potential politicians, spin doctors, and campaigners. Their recently developed reputations as youthful politicians and professional campaigners made them attractive for Thaksin and the TRT. The direct connection with Thaksin and their friends in the party gave Octobrists close and easy access to the TRT. Above all, in reaching and maintaining their top positions in the government, they followed a moderate line rather than pushing in too radical a direction.

### **6.1 The rise of the TRT Party and the Thaksin government**

The landslide victory of the TRT Party and Prime Minister Thaksin in January 2001 changed the Thai political landscape. Aside from winning an almost absolute majority of seats in the House of Representatives, the government aggressively centralised state power in many respects. It was able to control and balance power among different political cliques and parties, as well as reform state structures and functions according to the demands of the party. In addition, it managed to reduce the power of political brokers by linking grassroots constituencies directly to the party through its populist policy platforms. Subsequently, it was the first elected government which was able to maintain power until the end of its 4-year term. And above all, in spite of dissatisfaction among various elite, middle-class and civil society groups, the TRT Party still overwhelmingly won the election in early 2005 and went into a second term (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 7-10; Pasuk and Baker 2004).

The first condition which set the stage for the rise of Thaksin and the TRT Party in a way which no earlier political parties or politicians had ever achieved was a result of the 1997 constitutional reform. While throughout the 1990s, Thai politics had been governed by unstable governments with fractious coalitions of several small parties (Connors 1999; Hicken 2001; Klein 1998; McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 215; Pasuk and

Baker 2004, 94; Rangsan 2003), the 1997 constitution aimed to create more stable government and enabled the TRT to control its politicians and coalition partners. On the one hand, it gave an unprecedented boost to the power of the executive branch and made parliament very much subordinated to the executive power of the Prime Minister's office. For instance, no-confidence motions were made more difficult with the requirement of two-fifths of the lower house to demand a no-confidence vote on the Prime Minister and twenty percent for other ministers (Office of the Council of State 1997; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 94-95). The constitution was also designed to make the position of political cliques and small parties virtually untenable with political power concentrated among a limited number of larger parties. For example, the election law which required MPs to switch parties at least 90 days before an election and constrained party swapping during the term of a government made most MPs vulnerable to conflict with party leaders. Otherwise, they could be frozen out of an election. Only those parties securing more than five percent of the popular vote were entitled to any party lists seats. Therefore, senior figures running on the party list of small parties found themselves without seats. Small and medium-sized parties became 'subsidiaries' of the TRT. Eventually, the party absorbed the New Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai) and by March 2002 Thaksin presided over a grand coalition with Thai Nation Party (Chart Thai) and National Development Party (Chart Pattana), opposed only by the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) (Baker 2005; McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 1-18, 80 and 215).

Secondly, Thaksin was a new choice for both the middle class and the poor in the context of disillusionment and boredom with earlier politicians (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 66). This was a result of his reputation as a new generation politician with a successful but humble business background. Despite his wealthy family background in Chiang Mai Province, Thaksin successfully and deliberately constructed his life story as a legend of an ordinary man from a modest family who experienced the hardship of rural poverty. His recent success as an ordinary Chinese member of the middle class who climbed up the social and business ladder also made him an idol of the newly emerging middle class (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 25-26 and 34). Moreover, his wealth convinced people that he would not be involved in petty corruption like other politicians. His claim that it was time for a rich person like him to pay back to the country became a favourable image. Above all, his reputation as the embodiment of a new generation of businessman in the modern world convinced the public that he would run Thailand according to

business principles or in a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) style. He would be quicker, more decisive and more effective than the bureaucratic and corrupt administrations of earlier governments (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 5, 17, 108-110 and 219).

The third factor lay in Thaksin's outstanding public policies, a professional election campaign, and a modern political marketing strategy, or what Pasuk and Baker term the 'New Politics' (2004, 83-84). The TRT Party and Thaksin were seen as the first serious 'electoral professional party' and a Thai politician committed to manifesto-based politics. The campaigning and marketing team successfully branded the party as a 'policy-based party' with the slogan of 'think new, act new' during the 2001 election. And in responding to the interests and problems of various constituencies, which the previous government had failed or refused to do, research and public policy units were vigorously constructed. The party integrated a wide range of people into the policy formulation process, including grassroots movement leaders, progressive academics, and NGO activists, with ideas ranging from left to right wing, and liberal to anti-neoliberal. Subsequently, on the one hand, the TRT Party actively promoted pro-poor rhetoric, policies and projects including the 30-baht medical services scheme, SME (Small and Medium Enterprise) funds, a one million baht loan fund for each village, the 'one *tambon* (sub-district), one product' (OTOP) project, and a 'people's bank'. On the other hand, it also covertly promoted many other elitist economic and political policies to win big business support. It gave the green light to economic monopolisation, and political centralisation (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 18, 78, 91-92, 100-102, 184-188 and 217-218; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 69-82; Pasuk and Baker 2008, 64 and 66-70). The nationalist protectionist rhetoric of the TRT won the hearts of leading big businessmen (Glassman 2004, 40). Through these policy platforms, the TRT managed to build direct connections with grassroots and other extra-parliamentary forces. Unlike earlier parties which employed only individual MPs and old-style canvasser networks, its policies functioned as a shortcut to the constituencies, bypassing traditional patronage politics. (Nelson 2002, 290-291). Furthermore, both public and private media were successfully used in communicating with the population at large (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 64-65).

The fourth factor was a complex mixture of old and new politics. The TRT employed old-fashioned coalition and money politics in parallel with a new-style political strategy (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 82-83 and 88; Somchai 2008). In entering politics, Thaksin

followed in the footsteps of other businesspeople. He began by providing financial support to leading political parties in exchange for benefits related to his telecommunications business. Through extensive bureaucratic and political connections, Thaksin was one of the very few businessmen to survive the 1997 economic crisis while many other tycoons lost. In joining electoral politics, Thaksin decided to go to the Moral Force Party (Palang Dharma) owing to its reputation as free from corruption. However, he quickly abandoned the party owing to its failure in the election, and a series of internal conflicts and constraints on small and medium parties as a result of political reform (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 30-63; Worrawoot 2005). In inaugurating his own party, the TRT Party, Thaksin wisely used his financial wealth and cabinet quota to attack and control other political cliques, smaller political parties and political canvassers (*BP* 2000; Somchai 2008, 108). Subsequently, the TRT was criticised as the 'sucking' and 'vacuuming' party (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 80-83; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 95 and 192). In spite of its initial plan to field 75 percent 'new face' politicians, in practice, the younger generation MPs came from close patronage or family relationships with old-style corrupt politicians. In sustaining its power, the TRT developed a grand coalition strategy and controlled over 300 seats of small political factions through 'divide and rule' tactics (Ockey 2003, 663-680). Crucial positions in the cabinet were concentrated among old politicians. In parallel with its professional marketing and political campaign, the TRT Party continued traditional methods of electioneering, including vote-buying, electoral manipulation in connection with government officials, mobilisation of traditional patronage networks and straightforward violence and intimidation (Kengkij 2006, 95-96; McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 81 and 99-100). Through these conventional means, in 2005, the TRT managed to win re-election and form the first elected single-party government.

The fifth factor was the TRT's success in centralising state power and enhancing the efficiency of the state apparatus. The TRT Party was aware of the inefficiency of the bureaucratic system as an obstacle to effective policy implementation. In tackling this problem, the party chose strong measures of structural change. It promoted bureaucratic reform by reducing the power of previous bureaucratic functions and enhancing the power of those directly controlled by the government. In October 2002, the party re-organised governmental departments and divisions in setting up more effective and short-cut state mechanisms on implementation of its populist policies. For instance,

Thaksin expanded the scale of the national lottery to increase revenue to support its increased spending. He also managed to consolidate a remarkable and extensive network of power among the military and police force through his kinship, marriage and class network (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 121-157 and 213-233; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 176-188).

The sixth reason why the TRT gained the momentum of victory was the failure of Thai civil society and social movements in party politics. In fighting against the state and asserting their demands, most civil society organisations and social movements persisted with protest and lobbying strategies instead of shifting to promote an alternative political party. Without a membership-based or party-based system to attain state power, these people saw the TRT as a potential option especially during their protracted conflict with the Chuan Leekpai government. Prawes Wasi, social activist and a leading architect of the political reform movement, publicly announced his support for Thaksin and the establishment of the TRT. He even argued that Thaksin was one of only a few politicians who understood the country's problems and was suited to serve as Prime Minister (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 81 and 87; Worrawoot 2005, 90-95). Unlike earlier party leaders, Thaksin was sympathetic towards NGOs and rural protest groups. He adopted some of their ideas and vocabulary. In formulating its policy, the TRT also welcomed ideas and suggestions from many activists and progressive academics. On the day after the election victory, Thaksin even visited and had lunch with Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) members on the pavement at their protest camp outside Government House. Thaksin also ordered a temporary opening of the Pak Mun dam sluice gates and commissioned research to evaluate the dam's project on the local environment and fisheries as a temporary solution (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 144).

Against the backdrop of this success, a great number of Octobrists played crucial roles in promoting the rise of the TRT from the beginning. Soon thereafter, they became prominent spin-doctors, policy formulators, political campaigners and politicians in the party. The pages below illustrate how the Octobrists managed to access the TRT Party, influence its policy formulation process, and maintain their power in the TRT government.

## 6.2 Octobrists inside the TRT Party

From day one of the TRT Party, many politicians, political activists, NGO workers, academics and media people with Octobrist backgrounds were recruited into the party alongside other groups of politicians and canvassers. With a mixture of reasons and incentives ranging from the chance of survival in parliamentary politics to new opportunities to fulfil their unfinished radical missions from the 1970s, Octobrists joined the TRT through three major channels including the conventional path of party politics, direct recruitment by Thaksin, and connections with other Octobrists already established in the TRT Party.

For already successful Octobrist politicians, the progressive reputation of the TRT Party was one reason for joining the party. But more importantly, shifting to the TRT was a calculated strategy for success and survival. The constraints of the 1997 reform of electoral law and the abundant financial support of the TRT Party forced Octobrist politicians from other smaller parties to opt for the TRT Party by mid 1998 (*PR* 1998). Chaturon Chaisang and Pinit Jarusombat were outstanding examples. During the 1970s, Chaturon was a leader of the leftist student political party at Chiang Mai University and a former President of the Chiang Mai University Student Council in 1976. In the jungle, he was part of the editorial team of the *Athipat Nai Satanakarnsoorop (Sovereign at the War Zone)* magazine and worked closely with many other leading Octobrists who later played leading roles in the TRT like Kriengkamol Laohapairoj. By the late 1990s, he was a rising young blood politician in the New Aspiration Party (Khwam Wang Mai) (*KT* 1999a). After a long battle to seize the general secretary position in the party against old-style politicians with reputations for corruption, he eventually resigned and attempted to build up his own party with other progressive and Octobrist politicians (*BP* 27 June 2000, 10; *KT* 1998a). Nevertheless, the party failed to take off as several key members declined and moved to the Democrat Party (Prachathipat). He finally joined the TRT in August 2000 as 15<sup>th</sup> in the party list, which was considered a very high position.

Pinit Jarusombat was a Ramkhamhaeng University student leader during 14<sup>th</sup> October who had later worked to support the leftist movement and joined the armed struggle with the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai – CPT). Like Chaturon, by the late 1990s, he was a successful politician and a long-term leader

of the Liberal Integrity Party (Seritham). Between 1995 and 2001, he was consistently successful in using his small party to negotiate for a good position in coalition governments. At the beginning, Pinit Jarusombat and his Liberal Integrity Party were not willing to merge with the TRT Party. Nonetheless, because of the 1997 constitution bias toward big parties, his small party experienced a big failure in the 2001 general election. By February 2001, Pinit eventually joined the TRT.

In addition to these two, many other Octobrist politicians joined the party including Sutham Saengprathum, Chamni Sakdiset, and Adisorn Piengket. Those who did not join the TRT, to survive in the changing context had to be offered reasonable deals from other medium-size parties. Chamni Sakdiset and Wittaya Keaw-Paradise, veteran Octobrist politicians from the Moral Force Party (Palang Dharma), were able to join the Democrat Party through Sutham Saengprathum, their Octobrist comrade.

Those who instead tried to fight the TRT by shifting to other small parties could hardly survive. Anek Laothamathas, President of the Chulalongkorn University Student Council in 1976 and a well-known academic at Thammasat University, lately became a politician with the Democrat Party. Prior to the 2001 election, he left the Democrat Party and built up a new small party, the 'Mass Party (Mahachon)'. In spite of a strong policy on a welfare state and pro-poor policies, his party could hardly get any seats in parliament.

Apart from party politics, many Octobrists decided to join the TRT Party either directly through Thaksin or through their former comrades inside the party. For these non-politician Octobrists and unsuccessful Octobrist politicians, the rise of the TRT was a new opportunity to access state power and to recover and establish a role in parliamentary politics. At the same time, because of the initial progressive intentions of the TRT, they perceived it as a potential channel to promote progressive policies, as well as to revive their 1970s radical ideas and identity. Pirun Chatwanitchakul, one of the most senior leftist mentors during the 1970s who did not join the TRT affirmed that many of his former comrades generally worked not merely for money but for ideological and political support (*TP* 2001c).

In joining the TRT, some were directly recruited by Thaksin. When he first drafted his campaign team and policy think-tank, he enlisted all sorts of people from earlier connections and also consulted leading figures in various sectors to recommend policy proposals and potential personnel. Through this process, many Octobrists were taken into the party. For Thaksin, these people were not merely democratic activists from the 1970s, but, more importantly, veteran and skilful political campaigners and strategists, because they managed to formulate sophisticated policy proposals and connected the party with their extensive network of grassroots, middle-class and elite constituencies (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 64).

Prommin Lertsuridej, a former medical student activist from the Mahidol Medical School, was a good example of those who were brought into Thaksin's business empire and political activities. During the 1970s, Prommin graduated from the prestigious Suankularb high school. Although he was not a well-known medical student activist, he was an active 'leftist underground mobiliser' in the Mahidol Alliance Party (phak naew ruam mahidon), the successful leftist student party at Mahidol Medical School. He was a theorist behind the medical doctor student movement and one of the key supporters of the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai - NSCT) (NS 2003a). During his four years with the CPT in the Southern Isan-Phanom Dongrak revolutionary base, he developed a wide range of networks with both CPT leaders and local members. After his return from the jungle in 1980, Prommin spent several years as a rural doctor before returning Bangkok to work as an official in the Policy and Planning Division at the Ministry of Public Health. Because of his long experience in public policy management and his extensive social networks, in 1993 he was recruited directly by Pojaman Shinawatra, Thaksin's wife, into the Shinawatra Company as a senior executive in charge of new stations for Shin Satellite in Cambodia and Laos. Within less than eight years, he had become Managing Director of CS Communication Co. By this time, Thaksin had joined the Moral Force Party (Phalang Dharma) but did not have a trusted person to help him with political campaigning. He therefore asked Prommin to be his personal advisor for his first MP candidacy for the Moral Force Party. During the formulation of the TRT, he was once again called to help from time to time on party administration and also in political campaigning (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 68-69).

Kriengkamol Laohapairoj and Phumtham Wechayachai had known Thaksin since 1975. At that time, while Thaksin was a ministerial aide, Kriengkamol was General Secretary of the NSCT and Phumtham was a leading activist from the Chula Pracha Dharma Party, the leftist student political party at Chulalongkorn University. Also, these two shared the same revolutionary base in Southern Isan. They were among the first few Octobrists who Thaksin asked for political advice (*PCT* 2006b). Apart from their reputation as leading 1970s activists with extensive political networks, what Thaksin recognised in these two was their long experience as spin doctors working for the people's movement and many politicians (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 64). Before joining the TRT, Phumtham established himself as a prominent NGO worker as the first Director of the Thai Volunteer Service, as well as a political campaigner for several young politicians in the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) and many other parties (*NS* 2006b). Thaksin asked Kriengkamol to be his political consultant even before accepting the position of leader of the Moral Force Party (*TP* 2001c). Phumtham was hired into the Shinawatra Company in 1996. For both of them, joining the TRT was the overcoming of their long-standing failures in party politics. After failing to push their proposals with other parties, including even the Democrat Party through connections with youthful politicians, and to establish their own political party for lack of political and financial support (*NS* 2006b), the TRT was the best option. At the very beginning of the government, Kriengkamol frequently emphasised the initial optimistic impression he had of Thaksin and the TRT in pushing forward progressive policies.

‘No one knows how this government is going to turn out. But at least Thaksin himself is a capable person. He was ready to accept new ideas and push forward change. He was really different from earlier politicians and Prime Ministers. For instance, the 30 baht free medical scheme was actually proposed by academics in the Ministry of Public Health. But no previous ministers listened to this. When TRT, Prommin and Surapong proposed it, Thaksin immediately accepted the ideas. I do not mean that Thaksin is a good person who sympathises with poor people. But at least he accepted all of these ideas... But whenever he [Thaksin] stops accepting our good proposals, we will no longer stay with him’

(*TP* 2001c)

In addition, Praphat Panyachatrak, a heroic icon of the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident, became a crucial figure in formulating pro-poor policies for the TRT Party (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 64). On 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973, Praphat, a rank-and-file student activist from Kasetsart University, faced down soldiers in full battle gear armed with a wooden stick and shouted ‘I am ready to die for democracy!’ The next morning, the picture of Praphat – with bullet wounds in his waist, left thigh and leg and grasping a stick - were splashed across the front pages of several national newspapers with the caption ‘Walking Tall’. After his return from the jungle in the early 1980s, he started investing in a contract forest and logging business in North-Eastern Thailand and Myanmar. Later he moved on to farming organic orchards in Lampang Province. This involved him again with farmers’ problems (Supradit 1996). In 1999, after hearing of Thaksin’s intention to formulate new policies, he directly faxed Thaksin his policy statement. It was welcomed and became part of the TRT programme. He later was rewarded with the post of Deputy Agriculture Minister (2001) when the party took office (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 68-69).

In addition to direct connections with Thaksin, many other Octobrists joined the party through connections with Octobrist first comers and successful politicians in the TRT. For example, Amorn Amornratananon was General Secretary of the NSCT in 1976 before spending three years with the CPT in the Southern Thailand. After returning home in 1980, he carried on his political activism in parallel with his interior design and decorating business. He actively participated in the protests of May 1992. Four years later, as general secretary, he brought an ‘October network’ to support the 1997 political reform as well as to monitor corrupt politicians. In spite of not joining the TRT at its founding, he was sympathetic to the party. When in 2000, he attacked the Democrat Party in his anti-corruption campaign, he was denounced as Thaksin’s defender in the scandal of concealing share holdings in Shin Corporation (NS 2007a). Even after the landslide victory of the TRT in 2001, he still planned to prepare an ‘October network’ political party for the next election in four years. Nonetheless, in December 2001, he formally accepted an offer to work with the TRT Party as a Deputy General Secretary of the Debt Rehabilitation Fund for Farmers. He won this position through connections with Phumtham Wechayachai as well as Saman Lertwongrat, an Octobrist who acted as its General Secretary.

After joining the TRT through different routes and for various reasons, the Octobrists

became one node or loose political network and support team behind the success and power of Thaksin (McCargo and Ukrist 2005; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 67-68). More specifically, they served as:

*Political advisors and spin-doctors:* Many Octobrists worked as personal advisors for Thaksin in both political and business issues. Those who were trusted would even be offered high ranking positions in the TRT Party and cabinet positions under Thaksin's ministerial quotas in order to work side by side with him.

*Policy strategists and implementers:* Octobrists performed crucial work in both formulating and implementing pro-poor policies for the TRT Party (Glassman 2004, 50-51; Kasian 2004; Giles 2001). Because of their comprehensive understanding of both urban and rural problems, their pro-poor policy proposals matched Thaksin's ideas for formulating policies responding to all groups in society. At the same time, they worked as key persons in connecting the TRT with leading intellectuals, NGOs and civil society organisations in progressive and radical movements in the process of policy consultation and formulation. They successfully incorporated their 1970s political assets into the policy and political network formation of the TRT Party.

*Political campaigners:* Because of their direct experiences and extensive networks with a wide range of people, many Octobrists were assigned to work as political brokers connecting the party with the media, and middle-class and above all grassroots constituencies. Moreover, many of them helped to articulate the TRT's social agenda and gave Thaksin a tinge of legitimacy with journalists and activists from the same generation (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 69).

*Conflict mediators and public relations:* Octobrists became key mediators in handling conflicts and problems between the government and social movements and civil society organisations, particularly those led by their former comrades. The media criticised Thaksin for transferring all work with mass protests to Octobrists (KS 2002b; KS 2002c).

*Successful politicians:* Octobrist politicians were brought into the party as part of a

process of building the progressive reputation of the party and the extensive political connections of veteran politicians. At the initial stage, they obtained several top positions in the TRT Party and many ministerial posts.

To illustrate these roles in the TRT, examples of individual active and successful Octobrists merit special mention.

*Prommin Lertsuridej – Thaksin’s ‘super secretary’:* Although he himself always kept a low profile in the media, Prommin was publicly known as Thaksin’s ‘super secretary’, as he was not only able to read Thaksin’s mind and articulate his ideas, but also to know how to take on the bureaucracy, which was seen as the main stumbling block for the Thaksin government (TN 2005a). In 2001, when Thaksin first became Prime Minister, Prommin was appointed as the Prime Minister’s general secretary. He coordinated all state mechanisms in pushing forward policies. Also, Prommin was among the core initiators of the village fund, debt moratorium and 30-baht healthcare scheme. Furthermore, he was in charge of conducting surveys to gauge TRT’s popularity (TN 2001a). In October 2002, he assumed the role of deputy premier overseeing economic affairs. And in mediating conflict, he was appointed as secretary of the Special Committee to Solve the Problems of Protest Appeals of the People. Even during his tenure as Energy Minister in early 2003, Prommin continued to act much like a secretary to the Prime Minister. He coordinated relief operations after the tsunami disaster and played a key role in plotting TRT’s strategy in the upcoming election (TN 2005a).

*Phumtham Wechayachai – versatile spin-doctor:* Phumtham was able to work in different areas including public relations, policy implementation, conflict management and national electoral campaigns. In 1999, his very first job was to draft a biography of Thaksin and party publicity (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 68). Through his connection with NGOs and Octobrists in social movements, he was trusted and promoted as a secretary to the Interior Minister to build a good relationship between government and protesters and to resolve conflicts between them.

‘Formerly an activist and a NGO worker, he managed to persuade the protesters to return home shortly before the Songkran festival last month.

He also arranged for Thaksin to join a ‘farewell party’ with the villagers at their protest site, giving a boost to the Prime Minister’s image...Thaksin has also assigned Phumtham to deal with certain issues that are viewed as hot potatoes: a project to build two power plants in Prachuap Khiri Khan, a planned waste-water treatment plant in Samut Prakan, and the Thai-Malaysian gas-pipeline project in Songkhla.

(TN 2001a)

In policy implementation, Phumtham was appointed Deputy Prime Minister in 2003 and played a major role in putting pro-poor policies into effect. For instance, in the ‘One Tambon One Product’ policy, he was a key man in establishing the National Office of the General Secretary of the One Tambon One Product project with its main function of enforcing the policy on old-style bureaucrats. His role as electoral campaigner was also prominent. In 2002, he was head of the secretary-general’s office, a position which party insiders describe as similar to director of the election campaign. He dedicated himself to preparing for the 2005 election with political marketing research and comprehensive surveys of the political allegiance of key civil servants and community leaders across the nation. Success in the 2005 election, where TRT won 355 seats, made Phumtham an even more important person in the TRT (MR 2005; TN 2002b).

*Kriengkamol Laohapairoj – behind-the-scenes personal advisor and lobbyist:* Although Kriengkamol did not hold any position in either the party or the government, he was another powerful person in the inner circle of the TRT. He regularly appeared at Government House beside Thaksin. The media even called him Thaksin’s bodyguard. Especially during the court hearings on Thaksin’s concealed shareholdings, he always stayed by Thaksin’s side (PCT 2006b). He also helped Thaksin solve problems in policy implementation and was a key contact person between the government and activist groups (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 68-69; TP 2001c).

*Praphat Panyachatrak – pro-poor policy formulator and implementer:* Praphat was one of the key persons in formulating successful pro-poor policies for the TRT. In 1999, the policy team was still focused on urban issues and had as yet no substantive rural programme. But when rural protests reached their peak, the team began to consult rural leaders and NGO workers. It took up Praphat’s three-page policy. Thereafter, Praphat

started participating in the policy process. After the victory of the TRT in 2001, he was appointed Deputy Agriculture Minister in 2001 and later Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment (2002-2004) with responsibility for implementing rural pro-poor policies (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 68-69).

*Amorn Amornratananon – bit player in pro-poor policy enforcement:* Even though he argued that he joined the TRT not only to work for the government but to push forward progressive policies, in reality, he was recruited into the party to promote the Debt Rehabilitation Fund and to mobilise support from networks he had earlier developed. For instance, he mobilised people from his former military base area, Chokchang revolutionary bases in Surat Thani Province, to support the TRT.

**Table 6.1: Political path of Octobrists in TRT governments**

Political period	Name and Position						
<p><b>2001</b> Thaksin 1: Feb 2001</p>	<p>Chaturon C. Prime Minister's Office Minister</p>	<p>Praphat P. Minister of National Resources and the Environment</p>	<p>Sutham S. Minister of University Affairs</p>	<p>Phumtham W. Secretary to Interior Minister</p>	<p>Adisorn P. Deputy Government Whip</p>	<p>Prommin L. Secretary to Prime Minister</p>	
<p><b>2002</b> Thaksin 2: Mar 2002</p>	<p>Chaturon C. Minister of Justice</p>		<p>Sutham Advisor to Prime Minister</p>	<p>Chaturon Deputy Prime Minister</p>	<p>Phumtham W. Secretary to Interior Minister</p>	<p>Prommin L. Secretary to Prime Minister</p>	<p>Pinit J. Deputy TRT party leader the</p>
<p>Thaksin 3: Oct 2002</p>	<p>Chaturon C. Deputy Prime Minister</p>		<p>Surapong S. Minister of Technology and Communications</p>	<p>Phumtham W. TRT election campaign manager, or Secretary-General's Office of TRT</p>		<p>Prommin Deputy Prime Minister</p>	<p>Pinit J. Minister of Science and Technology</p>

Political period	Name and Position				
<b>2003</b>	Chaturon C. Deputy Prime Minister	Sutham S. Deputy Minister of Education	Phumtham W. Deputy Prime Minister	Prommin L. Minister of Energy	Pinit J. Minister of Industry
<b>2004</b>	Chaturon C. Deputy Prime Minister	Sutham S. Deputy Minister of Interior			Pinit J. Deputy Prime Minister
<b>2005</b> February 2005 Ranking of Octobrists in the Thaksin II party list	Chaturon C. 4th	Sutham S. 20th	Surapong S. 14th	Thinnawat Maruekapitak 85 <sup>th</sup>	Pinit J. 6th
2005 cabinet	Chaturon C. Minister of Education	Phumtham W. Deputy Minister of Transport and Communication	Adisorn P. Deputy Minister of Agriculture		

*Chaturon Chaisang – tamed progressive politician:* In spite of providing neither strong financial support nor a large number of MPs in his clique, Chaturon was offered a good position in every cabinet under TRT governments due to his credentials as a progressive and effective politician. In every position, he almost always promoted progressive policies and provided support for his former comrades. Nonetheless, most of his actions violated the interests of the authorities and capitalists. Many times, Thaksin intervened and eventually moved him away. Several media commented that Thaksin was scared of Chaturon usurping his leadership (*MR 2003a*). However, instead of going against orders, Chaturon turned to silence and went with the flow.

At the beginning of the TRT government, Chaturon was given the position of Minister in the Prime Minister's Office with responsibility for the political decentralisation process, bureaucratic reform and the Energy Policy Committee. In pushing forward decentralisation of local revenue collection and direct elections of local leaders, he encountered many conservative forces in the Ministry of Interior on the one hand (*KT 2001b*), and on the other hand disagreement with several members inside the TRT and Thaksin who promoted centralised CEO mayors (*MD 2002*). On energy policy, he fought with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) in promoting new consumer-friendly electricity fee calculations as well as progressive policies on the demands of social movements and NGOs to cancel several power plants and dams (*KS 2001c; KT 2001a*). He revealed to the public EGAT's mistake in initiating power plants which eventually forced the government to pay compensation to private companies (*KS 2001b*). Faced with confrontation, he was forced to step back. The decision-making authority was transferred back to the Director-General of the National Energy Department (*TN 2001b*). And eventually he was moved to become Minister of Justice. At the beginning, he was rather frustrated with Thaksin's interventions. He even gave a sarcastic interview saying that Thaksin broke his promise of more opportunities to deal with these problems (*KS 2002a; TR 2002*). But soon after that he went silent and accepted the change

In the Ministry of Justice, Chaturon found himself in a powerless position in comparison to the dominant powerful judiciary and prosecution service. In response to this, he set up the Department of Special Investigation as special unit to balance against the power of the judiciary, prosecution service and police. Even though he received a

positive response from a public frustrated with these authorities, he faced a counterattack from powerful bureaucratic forces (SR 2002). To end this conflict, Thaksin again removed him from his position. In October 2002, he was placed in a genuine non-job as Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for social affairs. He was assigned non-political jobs, for instance promoting a campaign to reduce alcohol consumption, controlling on-line computer games, problems with the university admission examinations, and children's television time. Even in this position, Chaturon still proposed a progressive law banning alcohol advertisements on television during prime time, and time and zone controls on the sale of alcohol. However, in this he had to fight the business sector. Amidst the political crisis and violence in Southern Thailand, he also proposed a reconciliation and ceasefire plan formulated from public consultations and admired by local partners in the conflict area, for instance, appealing for an amnesty for Muslim separatists, a reduction in police numbers and the lifting of martial law. Nonetheless, his proposal was immediately rejected. (TN 2004a; TN 2004b). As could be guessed, his proposal was rejected by Thaksin and his security team. After the failure of his peace plan, Chaturon was removed to the Ministry of Education. Although he again tried to promote innovative policies including Education Funds and reform of the law and structure of the Ministry of Education, he ended up in conflict with conservative forces within the Ministry (TP 2005).

*Pinit Jarusombat – successful conventional TRT guardian:* Despite not being an MP, Pinit still gained prominent positions both in cabinet and the TRT Party under the new system of the 1997 constitution. Furthermore, he succeeded in using his small Liberal Integrity Party (Seritham), which had only 10 MPs, and an accumulation of other North-eastern region MPs to build a medium-sized power clique called the 'Phaya Naga group' comprised of more than 40 MPs. Furthermore, due to his extensive networks and political experience in managing competing interests, Pinit managed to maintain leadership of his clique despite not being an MP. Pinit was called a 'ten-dimension political coordinator' not only among government coalition parties, but also linking the TRT with opposition parties like the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) and other old-style politicians. Thaksin appointed him as the party's candidate to the Election Commission selection committee to replace Adisorn Piengket, a prominent Octobrist politician in the TRT, who had been known for his frequent clashes and poor relations with the Democrat Party. In addition, Pinit was close to local mafia-style politicians like Sanoh

Tientong.

In spite of his success in conventional party politics, unlike Chaturon Chaisang, Pinit Jarusombat never put himself in conflict situations in pushing forward progressive policies. Instead, he compromised in dealing with conflicts of interest between the party and public. He sometimes tried to push forward progressive policies but only those which did not attack the interests of any major group inside the TRT Party. If that happened, he always supported those major powers rather than insisting on his progressive ideas. In the case of the Tobacco Act prohibiting retail outlets from displaying cigarettes to the public, he immediately stepped back when the policy disturbed the interests of a powerful company running a chain of convenience stores, CP 7-Eleven Co (TN 2005c). He also helped his former comrades in small matters but did not deal with structural problems. Vanida Tantiwittayapitak, advisor of the Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP), said that 'Pinit [Jarusombat] is a nice former comrade. You can ask him for rice and food to support the movement, but don't expect him to seriously help you to put forward the policy you want' (Vanida, interview by author, 12 January 2007, Bangkok).

In conclusion, the rise of the TRT Party opened up a new window of opportunity for Octobrists both to survive through changing political conditions and access to state power. Through direct networks either with Thaksin or their Octobrist friends in the TRT, countless Octobrists joined the party. And because of their unique political skills and connections, they were trusted by Thaksin not only to act crucially for the TRT in formulating, promoting and implementing innovative policies, but also significantly in political campaigning and connecting the party with wider constituencies. At the beginning some put efforts into pushing radical changes. But to sustain their position in the government, many of them dropped several initial attempts and opted for more compromising policies and status quo political stances.

### **6.3 Octobrists outside the TRT Party**

Besides those inside the TRT Party, many other Octobrists outside the party also played a significant supporting role for the party. The initial sympathy which Thaksin had had for civil society organisations and radical movements made the TRT an ally after the

discontent and distress they faced with the earlier more conservative Chuan government. The introduction of a participatory approach in developing pro-poor policies motivated these Octobrists to support the party. Many ideas and proposals from Octobrists outside the party were taken into account in policy formulation. But this also meant that they had high expectations of their friends in the TRT. Although many Octobrist friends had previously been involved in parliamentary politics, this was the first time that a significant number of Octobrists managed to reach the very top positions in politics as well as steering the TRT in a progressive direction. Participation in the policy-making process of the TRT through connections with their former comrades was a supreme opportunity for Octobrists outside TRT. This meant that they would be able to access state power without relying on old-style corrupt politicians and parties as they had previously had to do.

From the very beginning, many expressed their hopes and sympathetic perceptions of the TRT and their former comrades inside the party. For example, Pipob Thongchai, a senior Octobrist NGO worker, gave his support to several policies, including the 30-baht healthcare scheme, village funds, and the debt moratorium. He also wanted the Octobrists inside the government to deal with conflicts between earlier governments and the movement, such as electricity power plant projects, the Pak Mun dam, political decentralisation and media reform (*TP* 2001c). Chaiwat Surawichai, the former Vice President of the Chulalongkorn University Student Union and then a veteran political activist in the 1970s, publicly stated:

‘Chaturon, Surapong and Praphat are still good examples; they still carry on their good intentions. But they did not have much chance. I am still proud of Ming [Prommin], Phumtham and Saman. At least, I do know that they will not be corrupt like old-style politicians. Although we sometimes have different attitudes about work, we have a sense of brotherhood. They will link to the people’s movement. They listened to and tried to understand the people. My suggestion to them is that they have to maintain their connection with those Octobrists who still pursue our good intentions and ideology’

(*TP* 2003c)

Somchai Homla-or, a former leading Octobrist, was then a human rights lawyer and chair of the Union for Civil Liberty. After a long failed struggle to negotiate with the Chuan Leekpai government on compensation for workers affected by the Cobalt-60 incident, Somchai became enthusiastic about the good response from Pinit Jarusombat when he became Minister of Science and Technology (*MR* 2002a).

As a result, many Octobrists did not hesitate to collaborate with the TRT. Some were contacted by Octobrists inside the TRT to help in formulating and promoting new progressive policies, while others approached their old Octobrist friends in the TRT to help them either to include their proposals in the party's policies or to sort out problems which their organisations had faced with state agencies and previous governments. Kriengkamol Laohapairoj invited Sucheera Thanchainan, a former radical feminist activist from Thammasat University, one of the nineteen prisoners during the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 incident and then a university lecturer, to revise and push forward changes in Village Fund regulations for women (*TP* 2001c). In organising policy workshops, like that on 'Establishing Village Funds through Community Organisation' at Government House in 2001 where Thaksin wanted to push money into villages, Phumtham and Prommin brought in several grassroots leaders and progressive NGO workers from their networks during Phumtham's time as coordinator of the Thai Volunteer Service, and Prommin's as a medical doctor activist in community development work (*KS* 2001a). Chaturon invariably brought in his former student comrades to act as his political assistants. For instance, in formulating progressive policies in education during his term as Minister of Education, Chaturon invited Tanet Charoenmuang, a former Chulalongkorn University activist and later prominent academic at Chiang Mai University, who had been close to him both in the jungle and later during his studies in the US as his academic advisor (Tanet, interview by author, 14 December 2006, Chiang Mai).

Furthermore, from time to time, Octobrists both inside and outside the party collaborated in mobilising the resources of the TRT government to enhance the legitimacy of their Octobrist identity. Octobrists inside the TRT helped in allocating a government budget of nearly US\$2.5 million to organise the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident. It became one of the biggest nation-wide 14<sup>th</sup> October celebrations ever (*MR* 2003b). Kanya Panyachatrak, wife of Praphat Panyachatrak, acted as

chairperson of the committee providing funds for relatives of those who lost their lives in both the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October incidents. Furthermore, with the support of Octobrist politicians, they succeeded in including the history of 14<sup>th</sup> October in the national school curriculum as well as declaring 14<sup>th</sup> October as '14<sup>th</sup> October Democratic Day' (Prajak 2005, 6 and 10-12).

In contrast, many Octobrists were sceptical about the TRT government and the power of their Octobrists friends as a result of painful experience they had with earlier governments and the consequent distrust (*TP* 2003c). Nevertheless, they did not attack them directly from the beginning. They still perceived the TRT and their comrades as strategic allies whom they could use to mobilise support for the political goals of their organisations and movements. Many turned a blind eye to controversial issues and inconsistencies in the pro-poor ideas and programmes of the TRT in the belief that they would be able pressure the government and their comrades if the policies were misguided (further details in Chapter 7).

In summary, the initial outreach approach and policies of the TRT government as well as the connections with their former comrades in the TRT offered new chances for many non-TRT Octobrists to take part in the policy process and to push forward their long-term unfulfilled demands ignored by earlier governments. Nevertheless, several other Octobrists were sceptical about the intentions of the TRT and Thaksin.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

During the rise of the strong TRT government, Octobrists were one of the major groups who played a significant role in constructing the Thaksin government. In establishing the party, the TRT demanded all potential resource people to support its policy think-tank and political campaign. It mobilised people able to formulate and implement innovative policies which the former bureaucratic system was incapable of doing. It also called for political intermediaries or brokers who would help in expanding their constituency by connecting them with both majority rural grassroots groups and minority urban middle class people. Against this backdrop, Octobrists seemed to have the qualifications to respond to these demands. Nearly two decades after returning from

the armed struggle with the CPT, several Octobrists had already established themselves as rising star politicians and campaigners in many political factions, as well as prominent social movement activists. Their 1970s political experience and assets, and their continuing political activities gave these Octobrists a profound knowledge of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. Their networks and skills in connecting and communicating with varying political groups and constituencies, including the elite, the middle class, academics, the media, radical social movements and grassroots people, perfectly matched the demands of Thaksin in establishing his party policy platform and reaching a wider constituency. Therefore, from day one of the TRT Party, large numbers of Octobrists were recruited into the party through direct connections with both Thaksin and the Octobrist networks.

However, the emergence of Octobrists in the TRT was not as a unified force to revitalise the radical movement. They joined the party at different times and through different channels according to their new status. Above all, in spite of the fact that they all perceived the TRT as an effective political vehicle, they joined the party with different interests and ideas. While the main objective of Octobrist politicians was to survive under the new constitutional reforms and conditions, other Octobrist spin-doctors and campaigners joined the TRT either to push forward progressive public policies or to achieve their political ambitions. At the same time, those in social movements and other civil society organisations worked hard to advocate the demands of their movements and organisations in this new strong government. And from time to time, their interests conflicted. For their survival and the maintenance of their status, Octobrists politicians and TRT staff did not go against Thaksin and his cronies but went with the flow in several non-progressive directions. These went against the expectations of their friends outside the party. Nonetheless, at this stage, these people were still bound by a loose old-boy networks and ‘Octobrist’ identity from the 1970s. The values they shared were broadly progressive and democratic ideas and discourse, not their 1970s radicalism. However, reconnecting with friends from the 1970s was more a path to legitimise their current roles and interests as well as their newly constructed ‘Octobrist’ identity than to revive the leftist movement as a whole.

## Chapter 7

### Octobrists amidst the rise of the Yellow and Red Shirt conflicts

From the mid 2000s onward, Thai politics was dominated by the complicated and intense colour-coded conflict between the ‘Yellow Shirts’ (People’s Alliance for Democracy - phanthamit – PAD) opposing the exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his alleged ‘nominee’ governments, and the pro-Thaksin and anti-coup ‘Red Shirts’ (United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship – no pho cho - UDD). In participating in these contradicting and contesting movements, Octobrists not only battled to promote and defend their movements, but they also fought against each other. This brought about a conflict among these 1970s former radical activists that could not be concealed; their earlier loose and compromised ‘Octobrist network’ no longer functioned effectively or harmoniously. While some worked to defend the Thais Love Thais (Thai Rak Thai - TRT) Party and were supportive of the rise of the radical red shirt movement, many others participated in the more conservative Yellow Shirt movement. However, when the anti-TRT campaign shifted too far toward the right wing and eventually supported the 2006 coup d’état, many Octobrists who had earlier supported the Yellow camp left. Some opted for the ‘Two-No: No Thaksin and No Coup’ campaign. Others switched to supporting the Red Shirts and fighting against the Yellow Shirts.

Why did these former 1970s student activists who had once risked their lives in defence of radicalism turn out to be so bitterly divided? In answering this question, this thesis argues that there were three parallel causal conditions. Firstly, the differences in their ideas and interests had recently developed into something more deeply rooted. Even though the diverse 1970s embeddedness affected their early political path as shown in chapters two, four and five, what really made their ideas and interests more contested developed after they returned from the ‘jungle’. When the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai – CPT) declined, they diverged into new different affiliations and explored more diverse ideas. Amid the Yellow-Red Shirts conflict, Octobrists were received by and became affiliated with all sides. In promoting different and mostly contradictory interests and pursuing ideological strategies, the gaps among

these Octobrists turned to be uncompromising conflicts. Secondly, the dramatic political trajectory of the Thai political landscape set the stage for the explosion of differences among the Octobrists. Under coalition governance, the Octobrists inside weak elected governments had to negotiate with those in the extra-parliamentary forces in exchange for their support. However, with the strong Thaksin government, they no longer found any need to compromise with the interests of their Octobrist friends on opposing sides. Therefore the earlier differences turned out to be conflicting interests. Lastly, the broad term and identity of Octobrist could no longer function as an effective means of unifying them and concealing their growing differences. Worse still, the mantle of ‘Octobrist’ was used as a frame to fight against each other. All competed in utilising the ‘Octobrist’ frame to legitimize themselves and delegitimise Octobrists in the opposite camp. This exacerbated the conflict and their comradeship deteriorated.

To illustrate these arguments, this chapter starts with a brief overview of the complicated colour-coded conflict among the Yellow Shirts, Red Shirts and others, as well as its significance for the battles among Octobrists. It then follows the development of Octobrists on different sides of these political divides and shows how their participation and roles worsened their conflicts.

### **7.1 Octobrists during the rise of the anti-TRT movement and the Yellow Shirts**

After its landslide victory in 2001, the rise in popularity of the TRT among the majority grassroots people and its dominance over parliamentary and party politics threatened non-elected and traditional elite groups. The systematic corruption and negative consequences of implementing the policies of the TRT and its coalition partners caused disappointment among the urban middle class, civil society organisations, and radical social movements (Askew 2010a, 1-3; Connors 2008a; Kasian 2006a; Pasuk and Baker 2008). Gradually, these dissatisfied forces turned into a loose anti-TRT grouping and later the strong Yellow Shirt movement.

The success of TRT’s pro-poor and welfare policies hijacked grassroots supporters from the royalist elite and started the development of a new relationship between the government and the people. The TRT managed to convince people that the party and

government were genuine political institutions which could provide them with concrete support and solutions (Askew 2010a, 2; Hewison 2008, 205-207; Hewison and Kengkij 2010; 192-198; Pasuk and Baker 2008, 78). The bureaucrats were discontented with its bureaucratic reform and restructuring package in increasing the efficiency of policy implementation and centralising power to the government (Yoshifumi 2008, 247-248). They argued that the TRT, Thaksin and coalition parties used the reform to centralise administrative power solely for the benefit of members of the clique supporting the TRT and corrupt politicians. The bureaucratic restructuring was to reward those who had a close relationship with the government and to punish its opponents (Pasuk and Baker, 2004, 172 and 185-188; McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 215-233). Furthermore, older business powers were threatened by the rise of the TRT. While most of them were strongly hit by the 1997 economic crisis, Thaksin's business empire survived and expanded enormously thereafter (Hewison 2001, 92; Hewison 2008, 200-201; McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 35-36, 42, 47-48, 50-63 and 215; Pasuk and Baker 2000, 58-59). The greatest concern of business was the use of state power by Thaksin and political cliques within the government to promote their business empires and distance others from the business opportunities related to state concessions (Ukrist 2008, 133-136).

In addition, different political cliques and coalition parties were also frustrated by the TRT government's quasi-absolute control over parliament. The financial and political resources of Thaksin and the conditions of the 1997 constitution reform meant that small and medium sized parties could hardly survive. Nearly all either had to merge with TRT or remain with little negotiating power for cabinet quotas (Baker 2005). Furthermore, the success of pro-poor policies hijacked grassroots constituencies from earlier successful politicians (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 189-191).

Outside state power, the initial sympathy for Thaksin and the TRT among the middle class, civil society organisations and social movements turned sour. They found that the TRT actually followed the same path as earlier corrupt politicians or on an even bigger scale. Many academics and social critics started to condemn Thaksin and the TRT Party for its corruption (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 149 and 153-155). The success of the TRT in securing majority support among the poor through pro-poor policies threatened the legitimacy and power of the minority middle class in the political process (Kasian 2006a; Connors 2008b, 483). The middle class, who had earlier played a crucial role in

removing unsatisfactory governments, found that it was nearly impossible in the case of the strong TRT government, owing to its quasi-absolute control over nearly all government sectors, the media and the majority of the electorate (Askew 2010a, 7; Pittaya 2007, 20-30; Anek 2006, 122-124; Pasuk and Baker 2008, 78; Pasuk and Baker 2009, 353-354).

Civil society organisations and social movements concluded that the TRT used pro-poor projects and ideas merely as rhetoric and as a means to hijack grassroots people from the anti-neo-liberalist NGOs (Put 2005, 100-101). After their political triumph in 2001, Thaksin and the TRT learned that its grassroots constituencies were actually based on conventional money politics and pro-poor policies rather than the support of radical actors, and progressive agendas and demands seemed to be contrary to their interests. Subsequently, the earlier promises were dropped (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 144-156). Furthermore, they suffered from stronger laws and violent measures by the government in controlling and delegitimising demonstrations (Pasuk and Baker 2004, 147-148). The TRT Party condemned NGO workers who disagreed with its policies as 'brokers of the poor'. It claimed that the TRT Party had already replaced these 'third hand' agencies and created a short cut between the people and government funding (*TP* 2001a). Forceful action in removing the Assembly of the Poor (*samacha khon chon* - AOP) protest camp in late 2002 caused exasperation among the grassroots and progressive movements. The most crucial cases of human rights violations were the series of the executions in dealing the domestic terrorist and people's uprising in Southern Thailand, including Tak Bai and Krue Se. The TRT government intervened in both public and private media. For instance, any TV or radio programmes that criticised the government were either taken off the air, closed down, or subjected to censorship (Han 2010, 211; Montesano 2009, 2-3).

By the mid-2000s, when control over political power, corruption scandals, and the use of violence by the TRT government dramatically increased, initial dissatisfaction turned into polarised conflict between the TRT government and a well-organised anti-TRT movement.

In fighting against the strong authority of the TRT government, the earlier loose and diverse anti-TRT forces reformulated themselves into a more unified and stronger

movement. Around February 2006, all anti-TRT groups coalesced under the People's Alliance for Democracy (phanthamit – PAD). The PAD was an amalgamation of a wide range of anti-Thaksin political and social forces. The first group was widely described as the Bangkok middle class and the urban middle class in other provinces (Connors 2008b, 488). The second was the personal leadership of Sondhi Limthongkul, bankrupt multi-millionaire owner of the Phuchatkan (*Manager*) Media Group and former crony of Thaksin's, turned militant oppositionist (Kasian 2006a; Pye and Schaffer 2008, 40-42; Ukrist 2008, 130-131). The third was the urban elite or conservative forces including royalist civil servants, aristocrats and members of the military who were being marginalised by the TRT, and businessmen who were not part of Thaksin's patronage system (Pye and Schaffer 2008: 40-41; Connors 2008b, 488-489). The last was a wide range of civil society organisations, social movements and NGOs with grassroots bases, such as workers, farmers, university lecturers, state enterprise trade unionists, and teacher and student activists (Pye and Schaffer 2008, 40-41).

By 2005, the Yellow Shirt movement and its organisation, the PAD, became a well-organised protest movement. With support from various social and political forces and the strong leadership of Sondhi Limthongkul, it was equipped with professional communications tools including ASTV, a satellite television station, and *Phuchatkan* (*Manager*) newspaper, as well as strategic groups. The loose constellation of anti-TRT force started unifying in early 2006 when Sondhi took his weekly programme *Muang Thai Raisapda*, which was banned by the Thaksin government, to Thammasat University, and then to an open-air setting in Lumpini Park in Bangkok. It then expanded and gained crucial momentum when Thaksin faced the scandal of his tax avoidance in connection with the sale of his Shin Corporation to the Singaporean state investment company Temasek Holdings. In early 2006, the PAD reached its first peak. It was able to mobilise more than 300,000 protesters in Bangkok and other provinces to oust Thaksin as Prime Minister. By the end of February, under strong pressure from the opposition, Thaksin dissolved Parliament and quickly called for new elections. Nonetheless, the anti-TRT forces and the three major political parties – the Democrat (Prachathipat), Thai Nation (Chart Thai) and Mass (Mahachon) – declined to participate in the general election. They knew that Thaksin would win the new election owing to his continuing mass support. To relieve social pressures, Thaksin promised not to become Prime Minister in the new parliament. However, after another landslide victory

in the April 2006 election, Thaksin returned to act as interim Prime Minister with the excuse of taking care of the King's sixtieth jubilee celebrations. On his return, he quickly faced efforts to oust him, both on the streets of Bangkok and on the part of powerful members of the Thai establishment. The tension between the protesters and the government intensified. This confrontation temporarily ended with a military coup d'état on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2006 which successfully overthrew the Thaksin government and forced Thaksin to flee Thailand for exile abroad (Montesano 2009, 3-9).

The victory of the Yellow Shirts did not last long. Although the coup-installed government of retired General Surayud Chulanont (2006-2008) oversaw the judicially-ordered dissolution of the TRT Party, the freezing of Thaksin's assets, and the drafting of a new constitution which was expected to diminish support for Thaksin's rule (Chairat 2009, 55-68), it could neither reduce the popularity of Thaksin among his mass supporters nor uproot his political influence. In the December 2007 elections, in spite of strong efforts by the military and bureaucracy to dampen the influence of vote canvassers in former TRT strongholds, the People Power's Party (phalang prachachon), successor to Thaksin's TRT Party, won again. Furthermore, although Thaksin was officially judged guilty (in absentia) of conflict of interest involving his then wife Pojaman in a land deal while he was in office, the Thai authorities were unable to apprehend him. Subsequently, the Yellow Shirt movement resumed its fight. In May 2008, the PAD began its campaign to topple the government in what was proclaimed as a 'final war'. In June, they seized Government House to put pressure on the People Power's Party leader and Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej (January-September 2008), a veteran right wing-politician with royalist credentials. In September, Samak was sued and forced to resign over his violation of Article 267 of the Constitution on conflict of interest by hosting two television cooking programmes during his term of office. Nonetheless, a majority of votes in the lower house replaced Samak with Somchai Wongsawat (September-December 2008), Thaksin's brother-in-law. In the eyes of the PAD and anti-Thaksin groups, Somchai was a 'nominee' of the exiled Thaksin. A violent clash between the PAD and the government in October 2008 aggravated the conflict. At the end of 2008, the PAD Yellow Shirts occupied Bangkok's Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi International Airports to demand the resignation of the government. Only a few days after the airport was occupied, the People Power's Party was dissolved

by the Constitutional Court<sup>40</sup>. Nonetheless, instead of a general election, as the For Thais Party (Pheu Thai) (successor to the People Power's Party) demanded, six parties pulled together and formed a coalition government headed by the Democrat Party (Prachathipat), the second biggest party strongly supported by a Friends of Newin group, a defector from the People Power's Party backed by the military (Askew 2010b, 36-42; McCargo 2009, 7; Nostitz 2009, 33-38).

In spite of its victory, under the rule of Abhisit Vejjajiva (2005-2008), the Yellow Shirt movement soon encountered fragmentation and decline. The major issues were the effort to establish a Yellow Shirt political party and the position with regard to the Abhisit government. Whilst the PAD leadership intended to form the New Politics Party and persistently criticised the Democrat Party government for its corruption and policies, the majority of Yellow Shirts were Democrat Party supporters (Nelson 2010). As the Abhisit government stayed on in power, huge numbers of Democrat Party Yellow Shirts distanced themselves from the movement.

In terms of ideology and discourse, the PAD at the beginning mainly focused on a liberal campaign and styled itself as a democratic watchdog. The PAD campaigned against the inefficiency of populist policies, and the corrupt, authoritarian and hyper-capitalist nature of the TRT government (Kasian 2006a; Connors 2008b, 483; Montesano 2009, 2-3). As the conflict developed, the movement's strategies were gradually framed around more controversial concepts including royalism, nationalism and anti-democratic ideas. The PAD integrated royalist ideological strategies (Askew 2010, 3-4; Thongchai 2008b, 30-33). From the beginning of 2006, the PAD used Yellow Shirts to symbolise its members as protectors of the King (yellow represents the colour of the day of the week on which the King was born). Later, the PAD campaigned for a premier directly appointed by the King, based on the putative applicability of Article 7 of the 1997 constitution, as well as enforcement of a *lèse-majesté* suit as a tactic against Thaksin. Eventually the PAD and its liberal-conservative elite allies labelled Thaksin and his mass supporters among the poor as a threat to the royal institution and alleged that Thaksin was an anti-monarchist motivated by the intention

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<sup>40</sup> 'Critics noted a number of irregularities in the court proceedings, which suggested that judges had made up their minds on the dissolution before the final defending statements of the People Power Party (Phalang Prachachon)' (Askew 2010b, 40-41).

to establish a republic (Connors 2008a; Connors 2008b; Han 2010, 211-212; McCargo 2009, 14-16; Ukrist 2008, 131-132; Montesano 2009, 5-6 and 10).

In the same vein, the PAD promoted ultra-nationalist sentiments among its supporters. The selling of Thaksin's Shin Corp shareholders to Temasek, a Singaporean company, and his tax evasion were highlighted, and it was alleged that Thaksin was a national traitor selling national interests to a foreign company. The PAD mobilised xenophobic paranoia to challenge the verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the ownership of Preah Vihear. With the support of the Democrat Party (Prachathipat), they argued that Thaksin intended to accept that this UNESCO heritage site belong to the Cambodia in exchange for business concessions in Cambodia (Askew 2010b, 34-35; Connor 2008b, 489; Pavin 2010).

Furthermore, the PAD supported non-democratic politics in fighting against the TRT government. Initially, it campaigned to legitimise a revival of the non-elected elite. In mid-2006, the PAD leaders promoted the role of Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda, Privy Councillor, as an 'extra-constitutional figure' as a plot against Thaksin (Montesano 2009; Connors 2008b, 483). Moreover, its militant demonstrations provided a pretext for the military to intervene against the TRT government (Ukrist 2008, 125). After the 19<sup>th</sup> September coup d'état, PAD leaders worked to legitimise the military by arguing that the military was a new instrument in uprooting the 'Thaksin regime' and stood side-by-side with the non-elected Surayud Chulanont government (NS 2007c). In subsequent proposals for the 2007 constitution and later in 2008 in campaigns against the Samak government, the PAD aggressively fostered the ideas of a 'New Politics' – occupational/sectoral representation in parliament, and reducing directly-elected representatives to just 30 per cent of parliamentary seats (later modified to 50 per cent). This move expressed pent-up frustration with the opportunities offered by conventional electoral democracy for corrupt politicians to maintain power and for the majority rural and urban poor to dominate Thai parliamentary politics through majoritarian rule. (McCargo 2009, 18; Connor 2008b, 490; Nelson 2010; Askew 2010a, 8-9).

Even though some of the PAD leaders argued that they did not agree with or believe in these regressive ideas, but used them only as symbolic strategies to block the powerful corrupt regime of Thaksin (McCargo 2009, 19), by late 2007, the anti-TRT movement

was identified by several academics as a liberalist-conservative force with ideologies connected to the palace, military, bureaucracy, and the liberal elite against the politics of new capital and its democratic mass supporters (Connor 2008b, 490-491).

As the power of Thaksin and the Octobrists inside the TRT Party grew, they no longer compromised with any opposition forces or the Octobrists on the opposing side. In fighting against the TRT government and their Octobrist friends inside the party, countless Octobrists joined the PAD and pursued its right wing ideological tactics in mobilising legitimacy and support to attack the strong TRT regime and their former comrades inside the party. At the same time, they utilised the term ‘Octobrist’ to legitimise themselves and delegitimise their former comrades among the ‘Red Shirts’. In response to these pressures, some Octobrists inside the TRT started abandoning the party, while many others remained with the TRT and persisted in protecting both Thaksin and the party, and using the same non-progressive tactics against their former comrades in the Yellow camp.

#### *Octobrists in the anti-TRT movement*

As the conflict began, Octobrists who had been negatively affected by and disagreed with the TRT government started to perceive the TRT Party as a political threat to them. However, owing to their diverse interests and affiliations, they initially participated in different anti-TRT groups rather than form a unified movement. Those with authority like Nirun Pitakwatchara, Karun Saingarm (Octobrist senators) and Jaran Dhitthapichai (National Human Rights Commission member) mobilised to attack Thaksin and the TRT, whilst independent Octobrist social activists like Weng Tojirakarn worked wholeheartedly to fight against the corruption of Thaksin in the name of the People’s Network Against Corruption (khruetakhai prachachon tan khorapchan) and the Democratic Federation (klum samaphan prachathipatai). Successful Octobrist businesspersons like Prasarn Maruekitak joined hands with other politically active businessmen to criticise Thaksin through the ‘Democratic Business Club (chomrom nak thurakit phuea prachathipatai)’. Octobrist academics like Somkiet Pongpaibul, Kasian Tejapira, and Thirayuth Boonmee, came out with petitions against the government and other campaigns and protest actions. And countless other Octobrist NGO workers promoted their campaign criticising its development policies, such as Vanida

Tantiwittayapitak (Assembly of the Poor - samacha khon chon), Pittaya Wongkul and Pipob Thongchai (Campaign for Popular Democracy – khana kamakan ronarong phuea prachathipatai), and Suwit Watnoo (Four Regions Slum Network - khruetakhai slum si phak).

In the formation of the PAD, Octobrists in the loose anti-TRT networks gradually joined in. Some were active core leaders and organisers. Others acted as major supporters and participants. Among the nine formal leaders of the PAD<sup>41</sup>, six of them shared a common background as Octobrists: Pipob Thongchai, Somkiet Pongpaibul, Somsak Kosaisuk, Chaiwat Sinsuwong, Amorn Amornratananon and Terdphoom Jaidee. In spite of their numbers, in reality, they did not have as much power as other more conservative leaders like Sondhi Limthongkul and Maj-Gen Chamlong Srimuang. This was partly because of two major reasons. Firstly, in comparison with Sondhi, with elite and middle class support, and Chamlong, with his Dharma army from the Santi Asok Buddhist sect<sup>42</sup>, they, rather than the real followers or financial supporters, were chosen to shore up the good reputation of the Yellow Shirts (Ukrist 2008, 132-133). Secondly, their different affiliations were fragmented. For example, Somkiet Pongpaibul had been prominent in the PAD rallies as an MP of the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) (Askew 2010b, 44). In terms of unity, most of them did not trust Amorn. This was because before joining the PAD, he had long worked with the TRT and many other corrupt politicians. He turned 180 degrees against the TRT only in mid 2006 (*KT* 2006d). Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, who was the real right-hand of Sondhi, was distrusted by several Octobrists in the movement. Kamnoon broke with other radical students in the 1970s. He was a former Thammasat law student activist and General Secretary of

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<sup>41</sup> There were six leaders at the beginning of the movement. Three more were later appointed in August 2008 when the first group of leaders was charged with an attempt to seize Government House.

<sup>42</sup> Chamlong Srimuang has long successfully mobilized support both for his political parties and other political campaigns from members of Santi Asoke, a Buddhist sect established by Samana Phothisarak. Both during the formation of the Moral Force Party (Palang Dharma) in 1988 and Chamlong's political involvement in the May 1992 people's uprising, members of the Santi Asoke sect worked as the backbone for all political activities under his leadership. Although from time to time, there were fights between Santi Asoke members like Chamlong who intransigently insisted on their principles and rejected compromise (the so-called "temple" faction) and its pragmatic faction of secular politicians within the party, these members consistently stood on the side of Chamlong (Mackenzie, Rory 2007, 128-130; McCargo 1997). Even when Chamlong moved to the TRT party and eventually the PAD, Santi Asoke members wholeheartedly supported his political campaigns and guidance.

the National Student Centre of Thailand (sun klang nisit naksueksa haeng prathet thai) in 1975. Above all, as a liberal student he went against the leadership of the CPT and supported Pin Buo-on, a prominent socialist activist who left the CPT after an ideological conflict. Since then he had become a black sheep among Octobrists. His later close relationship with Sondhi rather than with his generation in the social movement distanced him from others (Kan, interview by author, 2 February 2006, Bangkok).

Besides those leading figures, a large number of Octobrists supported the PAD. At the beginning of the movement in 2006, around 70–80 percent of Octobrists supported the movement (*TP* 2006a). Many leading Octobrist figures either joined the PAD protest or publicly announced their support of the PAD (*PT* 2006; *BP* 2006a). Moreover, several Octobrists encouraged their heirs to organise student political groups in the name of the ‘Democratic Student Group (klum nakrian phuea prachathipatai)’ and ‘Thinking Force – Democratic Seed (klum raeng khit ton kla prachathipatai)’ to support the PAD on its protest stage (*KT* 2006b).

In terms of ideas and activities, many leading popular intellectual Octobrists started their anti-TRT campaign with liberal ideas monitoring the corruption in the government and its inefficient populist policies. Kasian Tejapira and Anek Laothamatas were leading figures. From the early stage of the government, Kasian (2001b; 2001c) and Anek (2006) used the term *prachaniyom* (*populism*) to illustrate the irresponsibility of the government in using huge funds for non-sustainable development policies in exchange for the support of the mass poor (Pasuk and Baker 2008, 65). And later on when the anti-TRT movement sparked up, Kasian successfully coined the powerful term of *rabob Thaksin* (*Thaksin regime*), a frightening image of a quasi-absolutist regime, which was later used repeatedly by all anti-TRT forces (Kasian 2006b). Countless Octobrist academics and NGO workers also produced works and campaigns in line with these ideas.

However, when the PAD started to integrate royalist, nationalist and anti-democratic ideological strategies, most of the Octobrists inside the PAD followed suit. Thirayuth Boonmee, who had never publicly announced his support for the PAD, made a public statement that paralleled the PAD nationalist, royalist and non-democratic campaign.

Also, many echoed the nationalist attack on Thaksin for selling his Shin Corp shares to the Singaporean Temasek Co. Weng Tojirakarn gave a speech on the PAD stage to protest that ‘Thaksin no longer has the legitimacy to rule this country. Today he [Thaksin] sold off national autonomy, lied to all the Thai people, and behaved as the authoritarian owner of Shin Corp. It is enough. We have to get Thaksin out’ (NN 2006).

Furthermore, the royalist ideological strategy was accepted by majority of Octobrists in the PAD (TP 2006a). Many prominent Octobrists signed a petition calling for the King’s intervention in politics by royally nominating a Prime Minister, and petitioned the Crown about the problem of Thaksin<sup>43</sup>. Popular intellectual Pittaya Wongkul used his weekly articles to reveal his moral support for implementation of Article 7 of the Constitution (Pittaya 2004, 4). Thirayuth Boonmee was really scared that the PAD might fail to dislodge Thaksin. Therefore, he publicly expressed his support for the controversial appeal for royal intervention to appoint a new Prime Minister under Article 7 (MR 2006b):

‘According to Thai tradition people can seek help from His Majesty. I have no objection to that and I don’t think those calling [for it] are regressive...theoretically speaking, [critics of royal intervention] should step beyond the Western frame of thinking. His Majesty the King can provide the final resolution or conclusion to the conflict when all system of checks and balances have become dysfunctional or the country faces grave crises like the uprisings of October 1973 or May 1992’

(TN 2006b)

Furthermore, they supported enforcement of the *lèse-majesté* law in attacking the pro-TRT movement. Kamnoon Sidhisamarn wrote many articles supporting and legitimising the role of the monarchy to intervene in political crises. He argued that

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<sup>43</sup> Kahmnoon Sidhisamarn (journalist), Thirayuth Boonmee (lecturer at Thammasat University), Prasarn Maruekapitak (businessman and politician), Pipob Thongchai (NGO activist), Wasan Sittiket (Artist), Viroj Tangwanij (businessman), Somsak Kosaisuk (labour unionist), Sarachai Jantimartorn (singer), Pichien Amnatworapraserkul (activist) are examples of Octobrists who signed the petition appealing for the King’s intervention. Furthermore, Sangsidh Piriyanangsan (lecturer at Chulalongkorn University), Nirun Pitakwatchara (senator), Maleerat Keawkah (senator) and others signed a petition to the Crown about corruption and abuse of power by Thaksin on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

while governments and cabinets changed, the monarchy continued as an institution and it had long experience in taking care of the country (*KT 2006c*). As a member of the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) of the Surayud government, equivalent to an MP in an elected parliament, Kamnoon argued in support of new measures to use the *lèse-majesté* law in handling illegal protests and preventing violations of the *lèse-majesté* law.

Not only did Octobrists in the PAD promote strategic right wing issues, they also pursued its anti-democratic ideas and supported undemocratic and non-elected forces. In fighting against the TRT government, many of them publicly stood up to support the military coup d'état, something they fought against during the 1970s. While Pichian Amnartworaprasert and Cholthira Sattayawattana spoke at the of 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of 6<sup>th</sup> October, about their sympathy for and pride in the coup, others like Thirayuth Boonmee did not stand up against it. Instead, they carried on criticising the TRT government and said that they would give the nominated government and military time to solve the political crisis (*LWN 2006a*). Somchai Homla-or criticised the impact of retaining the emergency decree as the law violated human rights. However he did not condemn the coup (*TP 2006b*).

These Octobrists collaborated with the non-elected government appointed by the King and backed by the military. Instead of strong criticism, like that against the Thaksin administration and earlier governments, Thirayuth Boonmee coined a sympathetic name for the government as the 'OT' government, which he said could stand for either the 'Old Technocrat' or 'Over Time' government which devoted its retirement years to solving the crisis for the country (*MS 2006; NS 2007b*). Sangsidh Piriyarangsan and Kamnoon Sidhisamarn accepted positions as members of the National Legislative Assembly, and under the 2007 constitution, Kamnoon was appointed as senator under the PAD quota. These Octobrists urged the Surayud government to take retaliatory measures to uproot the TRT regime and its cronies. Thirayuth Boonmee, Prasarn Maruekpitak, Chaiwat Sinsuwong, Anek Laothamatas, Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, Somkiet Pongpaibul and Sangsidh Piriyarangsan echoed this message regularly in the media (*NS 2007b; NS 2007c*).

At the same time, these Octobrists actively advocated ‘New Politics’ and political intervention by extra-constitutional powers. Octobrists in the PAD strongly supported the idea of having 70 percent of MPs nominated (by a method that was never made clear by the PAD) and 30 percent elected. At the same time those on the constitutional drafting committee and in the National Legislative Assembly proposed and supported non-electoral political ideas like changing the selection method for senators from election to nomination. Also, popular Octobrist intellectual Thirayuth Boonmee became a major advocate of the ‘judicialisation’ of politics under the neologism ‘*tulakarn piwat*’ (*judicialisation*) (*MR* 2006c). This was the effort to use judicial power to counter the power of the TRT and the support of their ‘16 million votes’. In the end the Constitutional Tribunal successfully dissolved the TRT. In supporting this process, Thirayuth suggested that the judiciary should play a role in reforming the country’s political system amid a prolonged deadlock. He referred to the King’s April 25 speech in which judges of the Supreme Administrative Court and the Supreme Court were urged to step in to resolve the months-old political deadlock (*BP* 2006b; *TN* 2006d; *TN* 2006e). This idea later became very popular among the anti-TRT movement.

In pursuing these non-progressive ideological strategies, most Octobrists interviewed argued that they did not believe in these conservative ideas. They agreed with them only as strategies for the movement to attack their antagonists. As the Thaksin regime was powerful, there were few political forces which could fight against TRT. Although they disagreed with Article 7 and the coup, they could hardly deny that these actors could bring them political victory in fighting a corrupt government like the TRT. Similarly, they did not wholeheartedly trust Sondhi, the PAD leader. They perceived those in the PAD as potential allies and stepping stones to getting rid of Thaksin. For example, Amorn Amornratananon argued that he wrote many newspaper articles on his disagreement with the coup and Surayud government (*NS* 2007a).

In addition to their dissatisfaction and battle with the TRT Party, Octobrists in the anti-TRT movement also fought against their former friends from the 1970s. Their initial strategy was to call Octobrists in the TRT naïve, misguided and traitorous, attacking their former comrades for their poor work performance and abuse of power. Initially, some criticised their friends in the party with the soft arguments that they were naïve former leftists with good intentions (*KH* 2002). Suwit Watnoo commented that

Octobrists were just in the outer circles of the party and were daydreamers. He warned these people to stop thinking that they would be able to make use of Thaksin. In reality, they were being used by Thaksin. Thaksin was a cunning executive and manipulator who had known how to exploit both left and right wings (*TP 2003e*). Some like Vanida Tantiwittayapitak, prominent Octobrist Assembly of the Poor (*samacha khon chon - AOP*) advisor, also tried to warn her friends about the excessive use of force in dealing with AOP protesters by reminding them about the mistakes of the government during the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident of discrediting the people's movement and creating a culture of hatred (*MR 2002b*).

Even though they knew that in reality, their friends did not have the authority or opportunity to respond to their demands (*KH 2002*), when the problem of mishandling protesters appeared, Octobrists who worked closely with this social movement were immediately condemned. Phumtham Wechayachai, secretary to the Interior Minister, was publicly attacked and accused of acting behind the government use of the Anti-Money Laundering law against NGOs and journalists (*TN 2002a; KCL 2003*). When the protest camps of the AOP in front of Government House were destroyed by unknown people and were forced to move away by the Bangkok governor, Vanida Tantiwittayapitak called on Octobrists in the government to take responsibility (*MD 2002b*). Chaturon Chaisang and Phumtham Wechayachai clarified that they were neither aware of nor involved in these actions (*KS 2003b*). In the campaign against the privatisation of state enterprises and the construction of new electric plants, Weng Tojirakarn, who actively supported many organisations on consumer rights issues, gave a sarcastic interview about the changing behaviour of Prommin Lertsuridej, his senior friend since the Mahidol Medical School who had been appointed as Minister of Energy.

‘After the demonstration of state enterprise workers, he (Prommin) called me. So I told him (Than) as a ‘Phu Yai [important person]’ of this country he should be generous and open-minded to listen to the ‘Phu Noi’ ordinary citizens like us. He should look at us with a friendly attitude, not as an enemy. ... I also suggested a referendum on this matter. But he refused and argued that it was too late. But I think nothing is too late for improving any law regarding public affairs’.

After learning that their former comrades insisted on remaining in and supporting the TRT, stronger criticisms linked with their 1970s political background escalated. Countless comments in the newspapers called these people ‘leftist traitors’ who had already sold their souls to capitalism and corrupt politics. The core argument was that these former socialists turned away from radical and democratic ideas in exchange for their own political and financial interests (*TP* 2003b; *LWN* 2003b). Some pointed out that these Octobrists obtained their political positions and interests by trading on their ‘Octobrist’ status, networks and skills developed during the 1970s (*TP* 2001c). Amorn Amornratananon, who had also earlier worked for the TRT, revealed in his open letter to their friends in TRT about how these people used money to buy the support of former CPT comrades in rural areas for the TRT (*KT* 2006d). Pittaya Wongkul, a freelance academic and social critic, assaulted these Octobrists as servants of authoritarianism.

‘Some volunteered to be servants of an authoritarian CEO for the benefit of power. They are no different from someone who paddles the boat for a pirate. They claimed to be working for society in the name of democracy and the Octobrist soul. They only know how to construct and manipulate the Octobrist image. And now they try to use the October anniversary as a ritual to legitimise their role. ... Thus, we have to be careful about inviting any of these politicians to give a talk or opening remarks at the October anniversary. Don’t offer opportunities for these supporters of authoritarianism.’

(Pittaya 2004, 4)

Many revealed their disappointment with the Octobrists who were in power. Suwit Watnoo, veteran slum NGO worker complained that the situation and the relationship among Octobrists inside and outside government under TRT was worse than during the Chuan Leekpai government. He argued that at least the Octobrists in the Chuan government did not act against the Octobrists in social movements. Meanwhile his trusted former comrades in the Thaksin government took severe action against him in defence of the government. Similarly, Jaran Dhitthapichai, the National Human Rights Commissioner, was disappointed with his friends in the TRT. He said that during the

first two years, most people in the government were always willing to help those in social movements and civil society, but no longer in the third year. Many stopped being involved with their friends and issues related to social movements. They carried on working in their positions (*TP* 2003e).

Several individuals were severely attacked in corruption scandals. Phumtham Wechayachai was denounced over the rapid increase in his assets due to his connections with corrupt politicians. For example, *Phuchatkan Raiwan (Manager Daily)* newspaper revealed that through his connections within the TRT Party, he owned a restaurant in a National Park in Chiang Mai Province, and one of his relatives, Sunisa Wechayachai, owned more than three companies connected with the Thaksin family (*PCT* 2006a; *MD* 2006). They were also alleged to be promoting old style money and coalition politics. For example, as a head of the TRT Secretary-General's office, Phumtham was described by party insiders as election campaign manager. He was at the centre of a controversy when it was reported that the TRT was undertaking a comprehensive survey of the political allegiance of key civil servants and community leaders across the nation. Although the party denied that it was behind such a survey, nobody provided assurances that it was not taking place (*TN* 2002b).

Many of them were also called 'loyal guard dogs of Thaksin' or 'flunkeys of a tyrant', because of their protective actions in defence of the TRT and their loyalty to Thaksin (*MD* 2005). Phumtham, as Deputy Minister of Transport, was sued by Veera Somkwamkit, an Octobrist anti-corruption campaigner, over his protection of Thaksin and TRT's business cronies (*PCT* 2006c). For instance, Phumtham pushed the privatisation of state enterprises like the Thai Maritime Navigation Co. Ltd. which were bought by companies with which he had connections. He also dissolved the Express Transportation Organisation of Thailand which offered new opportunities for private companies (*KT* 2005; *PCT* 2006a). He was also accused of providing support for Thai Air Asia which later had a majority share-holding by the Shin Corporation owned by the Shinawatra family (*TS* 2006a). Surapong Suebwonglee, a former medical student activist who was then Minister of Communication, was also denounced for providing support to Asia Info Services, Thaksin's company (McCargo and Ukrist 2005, 27).

There were campaigns calling for Octobrists in the TRT to resign and suspend their support for Thaksin and the party. For instance, after the Tak Bai incident and many other cases of state violence, many gathered in the name of Dome United (Dome Ruam Jai) and (former) 'Thammasat University student' groups called on their Octobrist friends to resign from the Thaksin government. Dr. Prayong Temchawala, former President of Mahidol University Student Union, called on his 1970s activist friends to stand up against the government (KT 2006b).

In parallel with the term 'Octobrist', Octobrists in the People's Alliance for Democracy (phanthamit – PAD) used royalist, nationalist and non-democratic language and arguments to assault their former comrades in the TRT. Some were surprisingly similar to those used by 1970s ultra-right wing movements to attack radical movements. They labelled their friends as extreme leftists who intended to overthrow the monarchy, revive the CPT, and make Thailand a republic. In mid 2006 when the PAD had its broadest base of support, several Octobrists and activists in the PAD released information about a 'Finland Declaration'. They claimed that in 1999, Thaksin was inspired by anti-monarchy Octobrists during their trip to Finland to overthrow the monarchy. This initial idea was later termed the 'Finland Declaration (patinya Finland)'. Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, Sophong Supapong and Pramroj Nakornthap, took turns to allege that under this plot the TRT and former radical student activists attempted to disempower the monarchy (Han 2010, 211-212). They also claimed that they pushed forward many anti-royalty policies including changing the national anthem, eliminating the Garuda (symbol of state and royal approval) from national ID cards, defending the book *The King Never Smiles* which criticises the role of the current King, and acting in a contemptuous manner toward His Majesty the King by asking him to sign an illegal declaration. Through this initiative, Octobrists outside the TRT sent a strong message that Thaksin's Octobrist political advisors were leftists joining hands with new capitalists to overthrow the monarchy. Amorn Amornratananon and Pittaya Wongkul were among those who aggressively advocated this issue. Amorn used to work with the TRT and then turned his support to the PAD. He claimed to guarantee that the Finland Declaration was real as he used to work in the TRT (Thanapol 2007, 309-10). Through his popular weekly articles, Pittaya confirmed the Finland Declaration. He argued that the Octobrists in the TRT were radicals who applied out-of-date leftist ideology in promoting a capitalist revolution and overthrowing 'Sakdina-Thai feudalism' or the

institution of the monarchy to legitimise and support their authoritarian capitalist CEO regime (Pittaya 2006, 4).

In addition to allegations about the Finland Declaration, Yellow Shirt Octobrists also attacked individual Octobrists for plotting against the monarchy. Kamnoon Sidhisamarn alleged that Somsak Jeamteerasakul was used to sustain Thaksin in power and his proposal for reforming the monarchy was an attempt to push Thailand to becoming a democratic country without the King (Kamnoon 2007b). He claimed that there were movements attempting to oppose the monarchy comprising ‘aggressive capitalists’ and ‘broken-hearted communists’. He explained that the second group was those who tried to fight the monarchy during the 1970s. But he argued that not all former communists now thought the same (Kamnoon 2007b). On the other hand, Kamnoon claimed that Pichit Likitjitsomboon, a critical Octobrist academic at Thammasat University, who later on was labelled as a pro-TRT popular academic, had worked to advocate ‘democracy of the people’ as opposed to a democratic system of government with the King as Head of State. There were also several open letters from Octobrists in the PAD against Thongchai Winichakul for his critiques of the royalist and nationalist ideas of the PAD. They claimed that his ideas were a result of his painful personal experiences during the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident without reconsidering the changing political context. They also rejected his argument that they had all turned into right wing supporters. Instead, they said that Thongchai was the one who forgot what Thaksin did to Thai society which was even worse than the 6<sup>th</sup> October incident (KT 2006g; MR 2006h).

Beside the anti-monarchy issue, Octobrists in the TRT were also alleged to have the intention of reviving the CPT through their work with the TRT. Through his famous political column in *Phuchatkan (Manager)* newspaper, Kamnoon Sidhisamarn was a major advocate. He released evidence of their efforts to mobilise support from leading figures in the TRT and former comrades in the rural areas by advocating the idea that they had to support a capitalist party to achieve a capitalist revolution and overthrow the monarchy before establishing a capitalist and later a socialist state (Kamnoon 2007a).

Although the Finland Declaration has never been verified, these allegations were powerful enough to become one of the major political accusations of the PAD. It was proclaimed as a momentous affirmation of a linkage between the influential role of

Octobrists and Thaksin's alleged intention to erode the constitutional monarchy and establish a republic. This kind of message reshaped public perception about the ideological legacy of the Octobrists. It forcefully guided the public to believe that the Octobrists were following a mission to destroy the monarchy and capitalism.

*Reaction from Octobrists inside the TRT – leave the party or fight to defend their stronghold*

Under severe attack from the anti-TRT movement and with the temporary downturn of the TRT after the coup, some Octobrists inside the party persistently and combatively defended Thaksin and the TRT Party against the anti-TRT campaigns. However, many others dropped out and switched to work with other political cliques.

Those who remained with the party argued that the TRT was still the party with an alternative policy platform and was democratically supported by the majority in comparison with other parties and non-state actors. Both Prommin Lertsuridej and Kriengkamol Laohapairoj repeatedly proclaimed the success of TRT's pro-poor policies and defended the party against negative comments about their failure in policy implementation (*TP* 2003f). They claimed that the unprecedented popular mass vote for the TRT reflected the popularity of the pro-poor policies with the public (*TR* 2006a). They also sent out the message that Thaksin was still the only capable and legitimate choice for Prime Minister. Against public critiques of Thaksin's authoritative CEO working style and corruption scandals, Phumtham Wechayachai and Kriengkamol Laohapairoj argued that Thaksin Shinawatra was sincere, wise, creative and decisive (*TP* 2003d). They claimed that they were close to Thaksin and understood how difficult his job was and how much effort he put into promoting progressive policies (*MR* 2002b). Although they admitted that he was sometimes outspoken, Thaksin was still the most capable person to be Prime Minister compared to other choices (*TP* 2003g). Furthermore, they persistently worked to defend Thaksin and fought against the coup and the PAD. During the last minutes of the government before the coup when Thaksin was in New York attending the UNGA conference, Prommin was still coordinating with all television stations to broadcast Thaksin's statement. Even after he left the party, he still worked for Thaksin but kept a low profile. After Thaksin suspended his political role after the coup, Chaturon Chaisang accepted an offer to act as interim TRT Party

leader. By protecting the elected political party, he fought strongly against the anti-TRT groups (*SR* 2006). Adisorn Piengket and Saman Lertwongrat were among the few who stood side by side with Chaturon and promoted him as a ‘democratic hero’. Adisorn remained a committee member of the TRT, while Saman acted as party registrar (*NS* 2007b).

At the same time, they fought back against direct insults from their friends and the rise of anti-TRT campaigns. Initially, most Octobrists inside the TRT called for an understanding that working in real politics was tough and insisted that they would still actively work to promote a progressive agenda. Phumtham was one of those who emphasised his standpoint of developing a better relationship between state and society. He asked his friends to understand the limitations of dealing with all demands and expectations. He was condemned for not joining a meeting with his Octobrist friends in the anti-Rasi Salai dam movement when he had to be in another meeting dealing with the problem of the Assembly of the Poor (*samacha khon chon* - AOP) (*TP* 2002). Similarly, Kriengkamol tried to argue that he did not work with the TRT for money (*PCT* 2006b), and would remain with the TRT only if it allowed him to pursue what he would like to do. In the case of the Pak Mun dam, he claimed that he understood both the demands of the movement and the limitations of the government. He asked Octobrist NGO activists, like Vanida Tantiwittayapitak, to be more patient (*TP* 2003f).

However, after being attacked by their Octobrist friends, many of them started fighting back on two major grounds. First of all, they competed to appropriate and monopolise the meaning of Octobrist. They began in soft tones by criticising their opponents for being too naïve, romantic and stubborn, stuck on polarised ideas of left/right and state/people without understanding the reality of parliamentary politics. They also complained that their friends did not respect the middle path and put too much pressure on the government with militant strategies. Phumtham was really upset and turned his back on his friends in the AOP after being shamed by the AOP, when they put a mask of his face on a monitor lizard (which is a term of abuse in Thai). He blamed Octobrists in the AOP for being behind this even though they denied it (*TP* 2002). Kriengkamol Laohapairoj reckoned his former leftist friends would be wiser to seize the political opportunities offered by the TRT. He reckoned that they should shift toward more academic and policy-oriented work rather than movement activities (*TP* 2002; *TP*

2003f). He condemned the mistake of NGO workers in provoking confrontations between inexperienced protesters and the police in the case of the movement against the Thai-Malaysia gas pipeline, which, he claimed, later caused a violent night-time clash in the middle of business district of Hat Yai (*TP* 2003f).

Furthermore, when the Octobrists' friends in the PAD turned more conservative, they also shifted to denounce them as 'traitors to the left'. They argued that these people had reverted to conservative and right wing ideas and joined hands with the conservative elite. Phumtham Wechayachai was one of the first persons in the TRT to start a movement against the call for the King's political intervention in the crisis. He argued that it was a symbolic war which Sondhi Limthongkul was trying to manipulate by linking royalist ideas with former Octobrists to delegitimise the TRT. He distributed parts of an article, 'Discourse on the King's power or short-sighted democracy' written by Thongchai Winichakul, a prominent Octobrist academic activist who strongly opposed the use of Article 7, presenting only those parts about the danger of any intervention by the King. However, he ignored the parts in which Thongchai criticised the Thaksin government (*NS* 2006b).

Furthermore, they condemned their Octobrist friends and the PAD as anarchists and anti-democratic forces. They argued that their friends helped the PAD to promote militant protests and support extra-constitutional power in overthrowing a democratically elected government which was supported by the majority poor. Moreover, they saw the 'New Politics' as an anti-liberal democracy and a pro-aristocratic state campaign (*KT* 2006e). From the beginning of the PAD until the coup, Phumtham Wechayachai condemned the rise of the PAD and the efforts of the former elite in promoting the coup as an attempt to topple the government (*TN* 2005d; *TN* 2006f). Aside from attacking the PAD, these Octobrists argued that they were 'guardians of democracy'. They worked wholeheartedly to protect an elected political regime against anti-democratic movements and non-elected elites. Especially after the coup, the leading Octobrists in TRT like Prommin Lertsuridej and Chaturon Chaisang condemned the coup for destroying democracy by violating the 1997 constitution, the so-called 'people's constitution' (*TN* 2006g; *TN* 2006h; *TR* 2006c). Chaturon also refused to send a representative from the TRT to join the National Legislative Assembly or work with any organisation of the non-elected government (*BP* 2006d).

Second, they used conservative discourse and measures to delegitimise their comrades in NGOs, civil society organisations and academia as obstacles to development. Like the government, they intentionally condemned Octobrist NGO development workers as ‘brokers of the poor’ (KT 2003). They also assailed Octobrist political activists for being dominated by foreign agendas and threatening national security because they obtained funding from international agencies. They even proposed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs disclose the budget of targeted NGOs and called on international agencies to stop supporting these agencies (KCL 2002; Pasuk and Baker 2004, 144-148; MD 2003). In addition, they criticised the role of Octobrist activist academics who monitored the TRT as unproductive. For instance, in response to the research about corruption under the Thaksin government by Sangsidh Piriyanangsan, a student activist during the 1970s and recently a veteran academic focusing on corruption issues, Phumtham argued that it was easy for academia to criticise. But their government had to get things done and understand the whole system. He also complained about academics’ exaggeration of ‘policy corruption’ in their attacks on the TRT (TP 2003a).

To counter accusations of being anti-royalist, they defended their royalist credentials and condemned their friends in the PAD for disturbing the King. To survive in a conservative political context, most of them repeatedly added that they were and had been loyal to the Thai royal institution and the current King and his family even during their time as student activists (TN 2005e). In presenting their concerns about the monarchy, they denounced the PAD for calling for application of Article 7 as inappropriate behaviour disturbing the King. To seize political space through the same strategies as the PAD, Phumtham wrote an article interpreting the King’s speech, saying that he would like society to be united and not in conflict. He further claimed that the PAD’s mobilisation of the anti-TRT movement went against the King’s intention (MR 2006e). To prove this, he sued Sondhi Limthongkul for writing an article in *Phuchatkan Raiwan* (*Manager Daily*) that he was a key player in the Finland Declaration. The court ruled that the Finland Declaration had no involvement in an overthrow of the monarchy (Han 2010, 211).

Nonetheless, not all Octobrists remained as protectors of the TRT. In an atmosphere of crisis, several Octobrists who had been disappointed with Thaksin and the TRT

withdrew their support from it. For instance, Sunee Chaiyaros left the TRT because of her disappointment with the party's electoral strategies. Sunee was a radical Thammasat University feminist activist during the 1970s. Upon her return and before joining the TRT, she became a successful local politician, but could not succeed at the national level. With a promise from the TRT to support her to run for an MP seat, Sunee spent nearly two years formulating women's policies for the party. However, as a newcomer in national elections, she was eventually replaced by her earlier opponent, the former successful MP who shifted to the TRT. In compensation for her disappointment, the party offered her a low ranking position in the party list which was almost certainly not going to win a seat. Eventually, she resigned from the TRT (*NN 2000; MD 2000a*). Meanwhile, other Octobrists were disappointed with the party for distorting radical and progressive policies after the electoral victory. In 2003, Praphat Panyachatrak, a non-politician Octobrist who had been promoted as Minister of National Resources and the Environment, was dismissed from his position after several efforts to promote progressive programmes which threatened the interests of business groups within the party. The TRT and Thaksin also recognised that he could not stop conflicts between the party and social movements.

Soon after the coup, the TRT Party was dissolved on charges of violating electoral law and corruption in 2007, and the 111 executive members of the party were banned from politics for five years. With the decline of the TRT Party, many Octobrist quietly left the party and continued their political career with other political parties and cliques. With their established reputation as veteran Octobrist politicians and spin doctors, they were welcomed by many new parties. Octobrist politicians, spin doctors and campaigners like Phumtham Wechayachai, Prommin Lertsuridej and Kriengkamol Laohapairoj were contacted by the proposed Sovereignty of Righteousness Party (*dharma thippatai*), led by Somkid Jatusipitak as political coordinator for the party with civil society organisations and other former TRT MPs from the northeast (*MW 2007*). Prominent politician Pinit Jarusombat quickly abandoned his image as a TRT supporter to become a neutral politician. He announced that his Phaya Naga faction would support the role of the Council for National Security (CNS) in solving the political crisis. He rallied with other political groups even including earlier opposition parties in establishing a 'Political Reconciliation Alliance'. He quickly developed a new close relationship with the Council for National Security and the newly appointed

government. Through this he became the only former TRT member who was selected as a member of the National Legislative Assembly. Nonetheless, after the dissolution of the TRT Party, Pinit and the 110 other members of the TRT were banned from politics for five years by the Constitution Tribunal and Pinit finally resigned from the National Legislative Assembly. There was a rumour that Pinit planned to support the establishment of an ad hoc political party to allow the leader of the Council for National Security to step into electoral politics in exchange for an amnesty for the 111 banned TRT members. But because of social pressure, the Council for National Security could not push forward an amnesty. Phumtham also promptly resigned from the TRT in October 2006 immediately after the coup. He carried on his political advisory work with new political groups. Praphat Panyachatrak instead was offered the position of deputy leader by the Thai Nation Party (Chart Thai) to work on poverty eradication for Thai farmers (Pan Bang Keaw 2006, 10-11).

In conclusion, with the proliferation and development of the liberal royalist Yellow Shirt movement, Octobrists who had been threatened by the rise of the TRT government joined the campaign. As the movement developed, they shifted toward more conservative and non-democratic approaches and strategies in attacking both their opponents and their Octobrist friends on the opposite side. Nonetheless, those who remained with the TRT were little different. In responding to attacks from the Yellow Shirts and their friends on the opposite side, they acted as defenders of Thaksin and used similar conformist and conservative rhetoric, while those who left the TRT continued their political careers in the mode of 'politics as usual'.

## **7.2 Octobrists and the rise of the Red Shirts**

With the rapid growth of the anti-Thaksin forces in 2005-2006, the Red Shirt movement started and expanded. Although the Red Shirts were stereotyped as tools of the exiled Thaksin, their components and ideologies are diverse and from time to time contradictory (Askew 2010a, 3). Initially, the majority of the Red Shirts were from TRT constituencies under the loose formation of the National United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (no pho cho - UDD) and joined the movement simply with the strong and limited intention of protecting Thaksin, the TRT and its populist policies.

Nonetheless, later on when the Yellow Shirt movement shifted in a more conservative direction, using nationalist, royalist and anti-democratic ideas, the Red Shirts expanded their political agenda to include liberal democracy and more radical elements (Askew 2010a, 4-5; Surachart 2009).

The initial turning point was the 2006 coup. This incident pushed the Red Shirts beyond pro-Thaksin sentiment and made them pay more attention to the significance of electoral democracy (Askew 2010a, 8). The coup took away Thaksin and the Constitutional Tribunal, set up by the coup group, eventually used the coup declaration as law to dissolve the TRT Party, removed the elected leader and government, and replaced it with the non-elected Surayud Chulanont government. Therefore, to protect the government they had voted for, they had to fight for the return of free elections.

Further radicalisation among the Red Shirts was provoked during their campaign for liberal democracy against the 'double standards' of the '*ammatt*' (aristocratic bureaucrats) and middle class by law enforcement and judicial decisions which went against the Red Shirts but supported the Yellow Shirts. While there was no attempt by the military and other authorities to intervene in the occupation of Government House and Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang international airports by the PAD Yellow Shirts, demonstrations of the Red Shirts against the Abhisit Vejjajiva government were condemned, and their networks were either eliminated or restricted by backlash measures of the conservative elite during 'Bloody Songkran' in April 2009. While the two parties (the TRT and the People Power's Party - Palang Prachachon), and three Prime Ministers (Thaksin Shinawatra, Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat) which the majority Red Shirts had elected were dissolved and ousted by extra-constitutional and bureaucratic forces, the second biggest party, the Democrat Party (Prachathipat) was allowed to form a government and kept out the People Power's Party, the new version of the TRT Party. They strongly denounced the new coalition government led by the Democrat Party as a 'silent coup' engineered by the military and the courts (Askew 2010b, 47-53).

Furthermore, they adopted an agenda of class struggle and equality before the law. During the mass mobilisation in 2010, red shirt orators provided a new frame for the movement's cause, identity and enemies: the language of class. They cast the movement

as an uprising of *phrai* - the term for bonded commoner in the pre-modern Thai social system - against the conservative *ammat*. They also embraced Thaksin as an honorary *phrai* (Askew 2010c, 304-305). Furthermore, they identified their movement as an ‘eye-opening (ta sawang)’ phenomenon. The influence and support of the royalists for the Yellow Shirt movement, and the use of Article 112, the lèse-majesté law, to victimise Red Shirt leaders, made the Red Shirts prioritise the royal institution as one of the most important threats and major forces behind the strength of the Yellow Shirts. Especially after the bloodshed in May 2010 when the Abhisit government used a full military crackdown on the Red Shirt protest camp at Ratchaprasong, one of the busiest and most prestigious shopping districts in Bangkok, after a three-month protest calling for a new general election, the Red Shirts turned more and more radical against the royal family in the belief that this institution was the real cause of the problem and the violence against them (Hewison and Kengkij 2010).

Aside from the Red Shirts from the TRT constituency, many of Thailand’s academics, intelligentsia and columnists, many of whom had formerly been Yellow Shirts, started turning against the conservative direction of the PAD and criticising the 2006 coup and the constitutional/judicial rearrangement that followed it. Several eventually went further to support the Red Shirts (Askew 2010a, 9-11). This started when the PAD appealed for royal and military intervention. Especially when PAD leaders called for implementation of Article 7 of the constitution, many potential allies started distancing themselves from the PAD and announcing their disagreement with the PAD’s ideas on royal intervention (Pye and Schaffer 2008, 42). They campaigned against the PAD for its anti-democratic and pro-bureaucratic bias, its moves to align with the conservative elite, and above all its militant campaign in setting up the pretext for the coup and the revival of the military in politics (Askew 2010a, 6 and 9-10). Immediately after the 19 September 2006 coup, they formed a loose network of anti-coup groups acting collectively under the name of the ‘19<sup>th</sup> September network against the coup’. In parallel with the Red Shirt movement, they actively campaigned against the non-elected government of Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont, the supporting coup group, and Prem Tinsulanonda as the person behind the coup, and also against the drafting of the 2007 constitution and judicialisation of politics as regressive ideas which could lead to the domination of the political process by an elite minority (Connor 2008b, 487; *MR* 2006d; *MD* 2007).

By mid 2007, the 19 September network split into two. While one part joined hands with the Red Shirts, the other launched its new campaign of the ‘Two-No: No Thaksin – No coup’. The first group, led by radical academics and activists like Giles Ungpakorn, and Sombat Boon-ngam-anong, viewed the TRT’s supporters as a potential progressive and radical mass in fighting against the Yellow Shirt movement and the conservative elite. In pushing these people beyond being merely Thaksin’s supporters, they argued that it was essential to mainstream the more progressive and democratic agenda in the Red Shirts movement. The second group was led by a number of scholars and writers, for example those in the Midnight University and *Same Sky Magazine (Fa Diao Kan)*, still reluctant to join hands with the pro-TRT movement and unsure if it was an organised movement for the political benefit of Thaksin. They therefore insisted on campaigning against both the coup and the TRT government. Nonetheless, as the Red Shirt movement evolved to become a more spontaneous and more radical movement, the latter eventually considered the Red Shirts as the progressive movement and switched back to fight either alongside or as a part of the Red Shirt movement. Furthermore, because of the increasing use of the lèse-majesté law and other ultra-right wing propaganda to silence political dissent, they perceived the non-elected elite and the PAD as a more dangerous threat than a corrupt elected Thaksin (Askew 2010a, 10-11)

In this proliferation of the Red Shirts, countless Octobrists played active roles both as leading figures or supporters of the movement. In doing so, they not only fought against the PAD and supported the Red Shirts, but were in severe competition with their former comrades on the opposing side. Nonetheless, Octobrists among the Red Shirts were far from unified and sometimes very contentious. Different Octobrists pursued different routes to the movement with various ideas. While long-term Octobrists in the TRT Party immediately supported the Red Shirt movement, many others began with the anti-PAD and anti-coup 19<sup>th</sup> September network, and later on with the ‘Two-No’ campaign. However, as the Red Shirts turned more radical and were criticised by their friends within the Red Shirt spectrum, they gradually shifted to be either supporters or sympathisers of the Red Shirts.

### *Octobrists in the TRT*

As mentioned earlier, many Octobrist politicians in the TRT immediately abandoned the party after the TRT was dissolved. Nonetheless, several of them were still determined to stand beside the party and support the Red Shirts. At the initial stage of the Red Shirt movement, there was an effort by Thaksin to promote Phumtham Wechayachai, Kriengkamol Laohapairoj, Prommin Lertsuridej and Chaturon Chaisang to be the leaders of the Red Shirts (KT 2009). Some of them like Chaturon were alleged by Panitan Wattanayakorn, spokesperson of the Abhisit government, to be the mentors behind the Red Shirt movement to promote an anti-monarchist approach (US Embassy Bangkok 2010). However, because of the diverse and decentralised nature of the movement, they became just a small faction within the Red Shirt leadership. Octobrist politicians and campaigners like Chaturon, Adisorn, and Kriengkamol, joined the Red Shirts on their protest stage, providing strategic assistance, and gave countless interviews to enhance and legitimise the movement (KT 2010). Chaturon gave a strong speech about his disagreement with the use of violence by Abhisit and the military to demolish the Red Shirt movement. He also tried to assert a democratic frame to the movement to maintain its reputation for independence from Thaksin. When the movement was dominated by a hard-core militant leadership, they tried to convince the movement to adopt a non-violent strategy by warning the Red Shirts not to repeat the same mistake of the Yellow Shirts (TP 2009). Unlike Chaturon, who kept a certain distance from the Red Shirt leadership, Adisorn performed as one of the National United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (no pho cho - UDD) leaders. He acted as chief executive of the Red Shirt People Channel satellite TV. After the May 2010 clash, Adisorn faced terrorism charges over the uprising. After a year of hiding underground, he surrendered. He was arrested, imprisoned and released on bail in March 2011.

### *Octobrists in the anti-PAD and anti-Coup movements*

When the People's Alliance for Democracy (phanthamit – PAD) started calling for the implementation of Article 7, allying with former elite and bureaucratic powers in fighting against the TRT and calling for the judicialisation of politics, some Octobrists in the anti-TRT movement started moving away and turned to attack the PAD and their

former comrades in the PAD. For them these were dangerous ideological strategies which supported the revival of the royalist movement and bureaucrats in Thai politics. Many leading Octobrists individually came out to criticise the PAD and their former comrades in the PAD as ‘right wing lackeys’ who so hated Thaksin that they would even use regressive ideological strategies and ally themselves with the conservative elite. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, Thongchai Winichakul, Kasian Tejapira, Jaran Dhiththapichai and Weng Tojirakarn were prominent Octobrists who acted on the front lines against the royalist, nationalist and pro-bureaucratic elite of the anti-TRT movement.

Even though Thongchai had earlier attacked the Thaksin government for using nationalism in dealing with the southern separatists and other opposition groups, by the end of 2005, he criticised the PAD and other former elites on their royalist strategies in fighting Thaksin and warned the public of the danger (KS 2006b; Thongchai 2007). He argued in his public talk on the 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 that the use of ultra-nationalist and royalist ideas among the PAD and Thai elite promoted the role of royalist forces (MS 2005). He disapproved of Thirayuth Boonmee, his senior, on the idea of the judicialisation of politics and many other elitist, royalist and anti-democratic views (MR 2006f; Thongchai 2008b, 30-33). He called Thirayuth’s view of the coup as a necessary step for democracy and the proposal for a selected (not elected) ‘council for moral security’, as ‘nakedly aristocratic,’ with the aristocrats (*aphichon* - literally the superior or higher people) flocking onto the upper level ‘above’ politics (Thongchai 2006). Even though the former radical activists claimed they embraced a ‘good’ nationalism, Thongchai argued their ideas were drawn from conservative nationalism. He also criticised Anek Laothamatas’ appeal for elected politicians to learn from the *aphichon* and monarchy (Thongchai 2008b, 31-32).

Although Kasian Tejapira continued to criticise Thaksin as a threat to Thai democracy due to his semi-fascist and soft-authoritarian actions, he joined other academics in condemning the call by the PAD for a royally appointed Prime Minister. For him, it was ‘ad hoc absolutism’ which would create a huge dilemma for Thai democracy as well as the conditions for confrontation and violence (MR 2006a; TN 2006c; Kasian 2007).

Jaran Dhitthapichai, as a National Human Rights Commissioner, disagreed with the PAD campaign over the call for Article 7, the judicialisation of politics in dissolving TRT Party, and its condemnation of TRT supporters as a hired mob. He argued that what the PAD and its fellows in the anti-TRT movement were currently up to was undemocratic. He argued that political parties were supported by people. Thus, in dissolving the TRT Party, the political rights of more than 10 million people who voted for the TRT were violated (*TP 2006a*).

In the case of Weng Tojirakarn, because of his close relationship with Chamlong Srimuang, his support for a nationalist ideology in attacking Thaksin and his prominent leading position in the PAD, his shift against the PAD and royalist ideas was a surprise among the PAD and the public (*KT 2006b*). Nevertheless, royalist ideas, especially the PAD proposal on the Article 7 issue made eventually caused Weng to announce the withdrawal of himself and the Democratic Federation (*klum samaphan prachathipatai*) under his leadership from the PAD in March 2006 (*KT 2006a; TR 2006b*). Furthermore, he disagreed with the PAD in promoting conditions for a coup and royal intervention by mobilising more and more people to put pressure on the government and creating confrontation between people on both sides (*KS 2006a; DN 2006a*).

After the 2006 coup, these Octobrists went even further to organise and publicly campaign in support the '19 September' or the 'No Coup' movements. They collaborated with the broad common political goals of opposing the coup, non-elected government and the anti-democratic ideas of the PAD and their friends inside these groups. Nevertheless, the participation of different individual Octobrists in these alliances was not unified.

Right after the coup, Weng Tojirakarn and other Octobrist friends like Suthachai Yimprasert and Pichit Likitjitsomboom conveyed strong messages of disagreement with the coup in their talks at the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 6<sup>th</sup> October at Thammasat University (*MR 2006g*). Later on, Jaran and Weng publicly announced their formal participation in the 19<sup>th</sup> September network (*LWN 2006b; DN 2006b*). Weng played an active role helping the group in daily street protests including giving speeches at the protest site and mobilising supporters. In March 2007, at the peak of the 19<sup>th</sup> September group, Weng led anti-coup groups to the house of Prem Tinsulanonda, Privy Council President,

to denounce the man they believed to be the mastermind behind the military takeover six months previously and to call on Prem to support democracy and get Surayud Chulanont out (*MD* 2007). They called for an immediate return to democracy and general elections. Weng further submitted a petition to the Constitution Drafting Assembly opposing a clause to be added to the new charter that granted an amnesty to the coup makers (*BP* 2007; *TN* 2007b).

Thongchai Winichakul provocatively condemned the PAD intellectual advisors, many of whom were former leftist friends, as ‘pragmatists’. In his well-known and controversial article, ‘Pragmatism of Thai intellectuals and the 19 September 2006 coup’, he angrily denounced pro-PAD academics, senators and activists, including many Octobrists, who either supported or were sympathetic to the coup. He argued that these people were merely pragmatists who would exploit any means for their success. He further claimed that they supported the coup and violence to get rid of Thaksin and the TRT without considering whether those means were undemocratic, conservative, royalist, nationalist, right wing, illegal or socially violent (Thongchai 2006).

Unlike Thongchai Winichakul and Weng Tojirakarn who opposed the coup even before the coup itself happened, Kasian Tejapira did not immediately show his concerns about the coup. His weekly articles still perceived the coup as merely a normal phenomenon to get rid of the corrupt TRT government, and military and the nominated government had to leave soon (Kasian 2006d; Kasian 2006c). Also, Kasian criticised the coup for violating the political right to have political gatherings (Kasian 2006e). Furthermore, he argued that the PAD leaders had already planned their campaign as the path for the coup and intended to promote the non-democratic New Politics 30:70 idea to empower a non-elected regime (*Prachatai* 2007). Nonetheless, he was still criticised by Somsak and Thongchai for his delayed action against the coup and his earlier works which called the Thaksin regime an ‘elected capitalist absolutism’ (Kasian 2004). For instance, Thongchai argued that his influential works helped to condemn and delegitimise democracy (Thongchai 2008b, 27).

Following their campaigns against the coup, these Octobrists in the 19-September alliance went further to oppose the non-elected government. Several Octobrists who disagreed with the coup, acting in the name of 14<sup>th</sup> Octobrists, urged the interim

government to lift martial law and argued that it was against the fundamental rights that people fought and died for 33 years previously (*BP 2006c*). As a National Human Rights Commissioner, Jaran Dhitthapichai also claimed that the new government supported by the coup was no different from the TRT government as it violated the rights of protesters and continued promoting regressive policies like privatisation including the privatisation of universities (*KT 2007*). Furthermore, he took the symbolic action of returning his Thammasat University degree as the current administration had turned its support to the PAD and the interim government nominated by the coup (*LWN 2006b*). In the same vein, Weng Tojirakarn started the revelation of a corruption scandal involving Prime Minister Surayud's illegal occupation of land in a forest reserve in Northeast Thailand and asked him to step down (*TN 2006i*).

The anti-coup Octobrists all united to act against the drafting of the 2007 constitution, referendum and political reform following the coup. They argued that not only was the process undemocratic, but it also revitalised the political role of the bureaucracy. In collaboration with Midnight University, the academic group who opposed the coup, Kasian Tejapira acted as spokesperson announcing their disagreement with the 2007 constitutional referendum and calling for the return of the 1997 constitution (*Prachatai 2007*). Jaran Dhitthapichai formed and acted as general secretary of the Friends of the 1997 Constitution Group. He disagreed with the constitution drafting process particularly the exclusion of several groups of people, including the poor (*TN 2007a*). Weng Tojirakarn, besides condemning the National Legislative Assembly as tool to serve the Council for National Security (Weng 2006a), also argued that the 2007 constitution was a political process to maintain the power of the coup group; the public was deceived by the superficial participatory process of drafting the constitution as there were only 2,000 members who were nominated and indirectly elected; and the referendum did not offer a thorough public debate as there should be for the people's participation in the referendum process (Weng 2006b). Beside the issues of the constitution per se, Thongchai Winichakul argued against Thirayuth Boonmee's proposal supporting the new constitution as a 'constitution of Thai wisdom' against one oriented to western electoral politics, and the role of charismatic persons and educated people in the new constitution and political reform. Thongchai argued that what Thirayuth was supporting was a problematic Thai culture where those with charisma are better than ordinary people and had higher moral standards than others. He further

argued that this contradicted democracy and made Thai society worship only privileged people including the King, aristocracy, technocracy, university lecturers, politicians, and senior citizens (KT 2006f).

*From the anti-Coup to the 'Two-No' and Red Shirt campaigns*

Amidst the fragmentation of the anti-coup groups, Octobrists in the 'No Coup' campaign group were also split into two. The first group switched to realign with the Red Shirts and their former comrades in the TRT in fighting against the Yellow Shirts and extra-constitutional elite. They argued that the National United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (no pho cho – UDD) which later developed into the Red Shirt movement was the most potential political force countering the revival of conservative and non-democratic forces. They thought that a corrupt elected government like the Thaksin regime was better than a military and bureaucratic state supported by the royalist movement. At least there was still a checks-and-balances system and concern for lower class people. Furthermore, they criticised their friends in the 'Two-No' movement as naïve, as in reality, there was no neutral position in politics (DN 2006b). Jaran Dhitthapichai and Weng Tojirakarn were the most outstanding examples. Jaran started a political dialogue with Kriengkamol Laohapairoj and Chaturon Chaisang. With Kriengkamol, they made a 'Soontari Declaration' at the Soontari restaurant, Prachachoen district in Bangkok, to fight in support the Red Shirts and cut relationships with former leftist friends in the Yellow Shirt movement (NW 2007b). Jaran subsequently became one of the first generation of UDD leaders. In October 2007, the PAD accused him of political partiality for publicly participating in UDD activities and asked the court to remove him from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). During the peak of the Red Shirts in the May 2010 protests occupying Ratchadamnoen Ave., many of these Octobrists mainly affiliated with the moderate 'dove' faction (Sai Phirap) fought against the militant and extremist 'eagle' faction. While their group sought a middle ground solution for the movement to compromise with the government, its internal opponents insisted on their immediate goal and provoked the militant mass to fight the government. Weng and Jaran collaborated with other Octobrists from the TRT including Chaturon and Kriengkamol to campaign for a protracted movement for structural change. They were the core group in advocating the idea of *phrai-ammatt* class war (KT 2010; KCL 2010). After the May 2010 clash, he was charged and had to seek

refuge in France. In the same vein, Weng provocatively acted as one of the five leaders of the 'Red Shirts' group in late 2008 and early 2009. Weng was charged and later arrested. In the 2011 election, when Yingluck Shinawatra – Thaksin's sister – won and brought her For Thais Party (Pheu Thai) into power, Jaran returned home and Weng became a party-list MP (*KCL* 2010).

The second group declared themselves the 'Two-No' group, insisting on opposing both the conservative Yellow Shirt movement as well as the TRT government. At the same time, they disagreed with their friends who joined the UDD and questioned how they could forget what Thaksin had done to Thailand. Nevertheless, as the Red Shirts grew in number and turned more radical, those with the Two-No campaign became more sympathetic to and supportive of them. Kasian Tejapira and Thongchai Winichakul were leading Octobrist figures in the campaign. Kasian explained both those supporting Thaksin and those supporting the coup by the term 'double false consciousness'. On the one hand, the middle class and Octobrists hoped that the military and *sakdina* bureaucrats/technocrats would be able to deliver political and economic freedom against big monopoly capitalism and the governments of the TRT. On the other hand, that grassroots mass opted for big monopoly capitalism to deliver them justice and equality (*MR* 2006h). Furthermore, they criticised the switch of their friends to the Red Shirts as a short-sighted strategy. Kasian angrily criticised Jaran:

'Jaran Dhitthapichai gave an interview that if he had to choose between being a servant of Thaksin and of a dictator, he would choose Thaksin. He further said that Thaksin did not do very much wrong. He only wanted too much power. However, Jaran once gave an interview to the Bangkok Post. I still can remember the date. During the 'War on Drugs' when many people died, he said that Thaksin was creating 'a Kingdom of Fear'. Jaran was a member of the sub-committee of the National Human Rights Commission investigating the Jana case. The report signed by Jaran himself clearly indicated that there was a violation of many articles of the constitution. How could he say that Thaksin did not do very much wrong?'

(*prachatai* 2007)

However, the 'Two-No' campaign did not last long. As the Yellow Shirts and extra-constitution elite turned more ultra-right wing, and the Red Shirts become more radical, many leading Octobrists in the Two-No shifted to support to the Red Shirts. Their shift was partly the result of the increase in the degree of conservativeness in the PAD and royalist elite. The manipulation of the *lèse-majesté* law and backlash measures against the Red Shirts gradually convinced many Octobrists that the royalist elite was more dangerous than a corrupt elected government. Many Octobrists tried to promote public debate about reform and criticism of the royal institution along the same lines as the Red Shirts. Under the very restricted political situation and the rise of royalism, Thongchai Winichakul organised a panel on the monarchy at the 10<sup>th</sup> Thai Studies Conference in January 2008. This panel discussed many issues which were not earlier discussed within Thai society, including a review of the banned book 'The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej' by Paul M. Handley.

Many of his writings throughout 2008 onward reflected his strong intention to oppose the monarchists (see, e.g., Thongchai 2008a; Thongchai 2008b; Thongchai 2008c). For instance, he argued that the 2006 coup was the latest effort of the monarchists to take control over the democratisation process.

Furthermore, as several elements with the Red Shirts became more radical and independent of Thaksin, many Octobrists in the Two-No movement became more sympathetic to them and started to see them as a potential mass movement against the conservative and non-democratic elite. Many of them produced analyses and writings that legitimised the Red Shirts and delegitimised the Yellow Shirts. Kasian Tejapira explained the conflict between the TRT and anti-TRT as class politics between the rural/urban poor, and the capitalist/middle class and former elite. He argued that the PAD was a middle class movement which was threatened by the conjoined power of the majority poor and the corrupt elected government of Thaksin (Kasian 2008). He further argued that to get rid of these threats, they dared to join hands with former conservative forces of the royal institution, bureaucratic state and conservative capitalists which all had been threatened by the rise of new aggressive capitalists and also used non-democratic political strategies like advocating 'New Politics', which diluted the power of representative democracy with appointed representatives in the 2007 constitution drafting (Kasian 2007). Somchai Phatharathananunth, a former Ramkhamhaeng

University activist who later became an active lecturer at Mahasarakham University, in legitimising the democratic element of the Red Shirt movement, pointed out that the Red Shirt movement signaled a real revolution in political consciousness and organisation in the countryside reflecting changes toward a post-peasant society (Askew 2010a, 9; Ittipol 2009)

In summary, as with the Yellow Shirt movement, countless Octobrists stood alongside the Red Shirts. However, they were heterogeneous and from time to time in disagreement. Some had long been associated with the Red Shirts. Others opted for that side as a result of disagreements with the Yellow Shirts and their sympathy for the radical prospects of the Red Shirts.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

The 1990s was the golden age for Octobrists. They successfully constructed strong networks and transformed their 1970s political deficit into valuable assets in supporting their political activities and status (as shown in chapters three to six). Nonetheless, in the 2000s this temporary unification came to an end. In participating in the colour-coded conflict between the Yellow and Red Shirt movements, they were spread among all parties. They fought against each in advancing their new movements and contesting ideas. Their earlier long-term friendships were torn apart. This development reflected the outbreak of their long developed contradictory interests and ideas under a new political constellation, and the failure of the earlier Octobrist identity in concealing their differences amidst the conflict.

Differences among Octobrists accumulated since the 1970s and developed over successive decades. The frustrations among Octobrists regard their divergent degrees of radicalism and different views toward revolutionary strategies remained with them even after the collapse of the CPT. Upon their return, in affiliating with different sectors, ranging from big business, corrupt political parties, liberal reformist NGOs, and the bureaucracy, these Octobrists were exposed to new ideas and political stances. Nonetheless, during the 1990s, under coalition politics and weak governments, Octobrists with access to state power were more compromised than their outsider

friends, whilst from the 2000s onward under the changing political conditions of the strong Thaksin government, many Octobrists in the TRT no longer had to either ask for support or compromise with their friends in extra-parliamentary politics, they did not hesitate to clash with their former colleagues outside the state to protect their new political space and interests. Subsequently, many Octobrists were heartbroken with Octobrist friends inside the party. The earlier sanguine feeling was subdued and replaced with anger and hatred. Furthermore, in participating in the Yellow and Red Shirt movements, they all shifted to new sets of ideas and movements. While the Yellow Shirts attached themselves to the non-elected elite and conservative ideological norms, they followed suit. As the Red Shirts turned more and more radical, those Octobrists who disagreed with the right wing and non-democratic approaches of the Yellow Shirts helped the Red Shirts to radicalise their movement.

In addition, the 'Octobrist' frame, which earlier had been used for covering up their differences and building up a loose Octobrist identity, instead became a tool for Octobrists to fight against each other. Amidst the conflict, Octobrists on all sides re-defined the term 'Octobrist' in legitimising their new interests and ideas as well as delegitimising their friends on the opposite side. At the same time, they attacked their friends in conservative terms proposed by the PAD. They all claimed to be genuine Octobrists while blaming their comrades as 'leftist traitors'. Subsequently, the earlier loose alliance which had recently been built among former student activists from the 1970s was under tension during the 1990s. The previous conflicting interests and ideas which had been concealed by the broad term of Octobrist exploded, devastating their long-term comradeship.

By the end of the 2000s, no one would believe that these people were once radical student activists who stood side-by-side both in Bangkok and in the jungle against authoritarian regimes and promoted radicalism. They were now known as highly conflict-ridden school-boy networks.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

As detailed in the preceding chapters, this thesis has chronicled the rise of left wing student activists – ‘Octobrists’ – to positions of prominence and power in Thai society and politics over the past three decades. The Octobrists managed to survive repressive conditions in the late 1970s and to maintain their political activism and achieve positions of status and power in a wide range of political arenas over successive decades. After the decline of the Communist Party of Thailand (phak communist haeng prathet thai – CPT) by the mid 1980s, these activists returned home under a political amnesty granted by the Thai government. Amidst grim conditions upon their return, they scattered into different social and political sectors. Within less than a decade, many of them started to reclaim their political status as young active politicians and veteran political campaigners in nearly all political parties, ranging from the conservative to the more progressive. From the early 1990s onward, they quickly achieved prominent positions in various parties, cabinets and governments. Outside parliament, countless Octobrists re-appeared as successful young businesspeople, leading NGO workers, social activists, provocative journalists, prominent university intellectuals, popular artists and writers, and high-ranking government officials. At the same time, they successfully re-established themselves as ‘Octobrist-1970s democratic fighters’ and played a vital role in different political transitions including the successful campaign against the military-led government in 1992, the rise of radical social movements throughout the 1990s, the political reform movement in the late 1990s, the establishment of the Thaksin government, and the political conflict between the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt movements in recent years.

#### **8.1 Why success?**

Drawing on the literature on social movements, this thesis has offered an explanation for the nature and extent of the Octobrists’ success in Thai society and politics over the past three decades. The thesis has shown that the trajectory of the Octobrists since the

mid-1970s has been profoundly shaped by dramatic shifts in political environment (or ‘opportunity structure’) in Thailand, by the networks, mobilising structures, and resources developed among the Octobrists in the 1970s, and by the construction and modification of ‘collective frames’ around which their identities and activism has been organised over the past three decades. As detailed in Chapter 7, moreover, this thesis has also shown how shifts in the structure of political opportunities over the past decade led first to unprecedented power and prominence for Octobrists under the administration of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and then to bitter divisions and conflicts among Octobrists in the context of polarisation in Thai politics beginning with anti-Thaksin protests in 2005 and continuing through the military coup of 2006 and a succession of unstable governments. Thus the thesis provides a framework for understanding both the evolving roles and positions of the Octobrists in Thai society and politics, on the one hand, and the changing dynamics among the Octobrists themselves, on the other, over the course of the decades since their emergence as activists in the tumultuous politics of the 1970s.

#### *Political Opportunity Structure*

As detailed over successive chapters, this thesis has shown how shifts in the political environment in Thailand provided new opportunities for the Octobrists to re-emerge and re-engage with Thai society and politics, and to rise to positions of power and prominence in due course. Over the course of the 1980s, the power of ultra-right wing groups in Thai politics declined, and overt repression diminished, as a gradual process of liberalisation unfolded under the long tenure of General Prem Tinsulanonda as Prime Minister (1980-1988). The gradual reduction of the role of the military in Thai politics, and the expansion of parliamentary politics over the 1980s and 1990s, the emergence of a highly fragmented form of parliamentary rule, the proliferation of civic groups and non-governmental organisations, and the increasing importance of the media provided a wide range of opportunities for Octobrists to participate in Thai politics.

In the 1980s, the Thai state abandoned its harshly repressive policies and shifted towards a more inclusive and tolerant stance vis-à-vis the former left wing student activists who had fled to the jungle and joined the CPT in the wake of the coup of 1976. They granted a political amnesty and returned student and citizenship status to those

who decided to abandon the CPT. This became the initial stage enabling student activists to return home without penalty and continue their lives at least as ordinary citizens.

Democratisation from the late 1980s and political transitions during the whole 1990s brought about an opening of institutional access both in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. In parliamentary politics, the increase in demand for human resources in the form of youthful politicians, political brokers, facilitators and mediators between urban and rural constituencies amidst the expansion of electoral politics enlarged the political space for the Octobrists. With unique political assets developed since the 1970s, Octobrists were recruited by all parties. Furthermore, under the new system of coalition politics, each election, change of government and governmental reshuffle gave Octobrist politicians from small parties the chance to obtain positions in government and join government coalitions. Not only the Octobrists in parliamentary politics, but those in extra-parliamentary politics also benefitted from shifts among the elite. Because governments and political parties sought support from those in the public sphere, especially civil society organisations, social movements, the private sector, etc., during different political realignments, many Octobrist NGO workers, journalists and businesspeople gained opportunities to assert their political demands and to influence political decision making.

In addition, during each of the political transitions throughout the 1990s, there were new political opportunities for access to potential alliances for these Octobrists to revitalise their role and power. Conflicts and fragmentation within/among the elite during this period encouraged Octobrists to revitalise their political activism and engage in contemporary politics.

Initially, the democratic uprising of the middle class in May 1992 offered a supportive political context and opportunity for the Octobrists to participate in the anti-military government movement in the name of a politically active middle class, NGO workers and political activists. At the same time, the economic liberalisation since the 1980s turned the liberal and reformist elite into influential allies of the Octobrists in pushing forward the movement against the return of the military in politics.

The proliferation of various social movements throughout the 1990s provided political access for the Octobrists to extra-parliamentary politics. Octobrist NGO workers, academics and journalists had new spaces to promote radical social movements and work on problem issues they had advocated and been interested in since the 1970s. Octobrist NGO workers who upon their return had earlier worked with philanthropic organisations on development projects with the non-politicised rural and urban poor became key political consultants and facilitators for the Assembly of the Poor (samacha khon chon - AOP) and many other single-issue movements. Also, many Octobrist academics and journalists were offered opportunities to serve as popular intellectuals and progressive media for the social movements.

The rise of the political reform movement of the late 1990s and its product, the 1997 “People’s Constitution”, provided new points of access for the Octobrists. Although most of their radical demands were mitigated by reformist forces, the reform process opened up political channels for the Octobrists and activists to assert their political demands and concerns in the constitutional drafting process as well as to re-establish their ‘Octobrist’ status in national politics. New political positions created by the 1997 constitution, like elected senators, and membership in various independent governmental bodies, became new sources of political position and power for the Octobrists who had earlier failed to access parliamentary politics.

Furthermore, the formation of the TRT Party was one of the most promising opportunities for the Octobrists to access party politics. The landslide victory in the 2001 election and the successful populist policy, gave Thaksin Shinawatra a position of unprecedented power in Thai politics. With abundant political resources and Thaksin’s strong desire to create a grandiose party policy platform, Octobrists with unique political skills were highly valued for their role in policy formation, and campaign promotion. Many Octobrist politicians were integrated into the party to balance against familiar corrupt politicians. Nonetheless, from 2005 onwards, the mobilisation of the anti-Thaksin movement set the stage for the coup and the end of the Thaksin government. In response to this, the pro-TRT movement grew and developed into the Red Shirt movement. The confrontation between these two movements triggered serious political violence and political polarisation within Thai society. And this new political environment created unprecedented divisions and conflicts among the Octobrists.

### *Mobilisation Structures*

As shown in the thesis, the rise to prominence and power by the Octobrists over the past three decades has been enabled not only by successive shifts in political environment and opportunities, but also by the mobilising structures and resources developed by the Octobrists from their emergence in Thai politics in the 1970s. Over the past three decades, Thai Octobrists have been successful in mobilising and integrating all kinds of resources including higher education, political activism and skills, and schoolboy networks into their adult careers and political participation during distinctive political transitions. After the decline of radical ideologies, what the Octobrists were left with was different political embeddedness, activism, knowledge and skills. These offered them unique and vital life-long assets and turned them into a unique human resource for the private and public labour markets as well as electoral politics.

Immediately after their return, repressive political conditions and their limited legal status did not allow these Octobrists to reconnect formally and publicly. Their networks were loose and informal. Gatherings among Octobrists were irregular and informal as alumni groups and night-out parties and were limited to small groups of people from the same revolutionary bases, political clubs and duty assignments. However, their schoolboy networks gradually functioned as points of access to careers. For most, their first job came through networks of 1970s activists as well as non-left high school, university and politician friends who had already reached a mid-range executive level, and succeeded as well-off businesspersons during economic booms. Furthermore, these cross-sector connections helped Octobrists in government offices, political parties and the private sector to connect easily with friends who worked with grassroots and civil society organisations.

In time, the initial informal mobilising structures of the Octobrists became more formal and professional and gained resources and support from the government, the elite and the wider public. Starting from the anniversaries of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October incidents in later years, the Octobrists started organising themselves into various formal associations with more concrete political agendas and procedures. At the same time, they began to play active roles in both extra-parliamentary politics with other social movements, and

in parliamentary politics under various names of 1970s activist groups. Some even tried to organise their own political parties.

In a broader sense, socialisation through radical movements marked them as political activists. Even after abandoning leftist movements, political activism or the instincts of a political animal remained with them. Nearly all of them eventually resumed political roles and participation in contemporary politics in one way or another. Furthermore, higher education from prestigious universities offered these people a social and economic competitive advantage. Upon their return from leftist movements, an economic boom awaited. Despite the background of political failure of the former leftists, they were a group of people with a university education which was required by both the private and public sectors. Trained as the elite in prestigious institutions like Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Triam Udom Suksa High School and Suankularb High School, the Octobrists were close to elite power and elite networks.

More specifically, promoting their political activities in diverse and flexible functions and locations during the 1970s, the Octobrists were endowed with versatile skills, networks and bodies of knowledge. Firstly, through mobilising, managing, strategising and sustaining mass movements, many had become veteran public speakers, negotiators and alliance builders. Secondly, many developed skills useful in electoral politics as politicians, spin-doctors, deal-makers, and campaigners, through their work on election campaigns and policy formulation for socialist oriented parties. Lastly, in providing intellectual and academic work for the movement, many leading Octobrists developed writing, analytical and translating skills.

Moreover, working in a wide range of political locations allowed Octobrists to develop unique interpersonal skills with different power groups. Negotiating and mobilising support from the state, officials and elite groups enabled these people to speak the language of the elite. Advocating their agenda in urban areas allow them to learn to modify their agenda in middle class language. Agitating on issues with the urban, rural and ethnic minority poor, the Octobrists developed communication skills in simplifying their agenda in common language. In another words, the Octobrists were a unique middle class group who understood popular culture and knew how to speak both the

‘Nakleng/Phrai’ or rural poor language, and the ‘Phudi’ or urban elite/middle class language.

Octobrists also successfully turned personal and informal networks both among themselves and with other grassroots and elite groups into collective vehicles for extracting political resources and legitimacy, as well as for sustaining their political activism. Octobrists developed strong personal networks and ties with each other through their activities in different networks based on high school, university, faculty, political club, political party, duty assignments, and various grassroots movements. At the same time, they developed profound personal connections and networks with other non-left groups including high schools, universities, non-left intellectuals, progressive politicians, and reformist and liberal elites. Also, during their time with the CPT, they developed other sets of networks according to the political location of and role of revolutionary bases. Owing to the loyalties developed during their education and their elite class socialisation, these personal networks continued even after the decline of student movements. Upon return, they succeeded in integrating these cross-sector connections with new networks cultivated in their new careers and political settings, and transformed them into concrete political alliances and channels for the revival of the Octobrist movement structure.

### *Framing process*

The success of the Octobrists in Thai society and politics entailed the construction of a new inclusive identity of ‘Octobrist – democratic fighter’ in normalising their radical past and legitimising their current ideas and roles in politics. At the same time, they adjusted to new systems of political governance, and successfully incorporated other non-leftist language and ideas in promoting their political status and power. Although the Octobrists shifted toward various new ideologies, including regressive ones such as reformism, nationalism, anti-democracy, and monarchism, over the course of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, the identity they constructed as ‘Octobrists’ and as ‘democracy fighters’ successfully created a progressive image and language incorporating radical and non-radical ideological elements. Furthermore, this inclusive identity became a valuable asset in mobilising political resources, constructing their new collective

identity in temporarily unifying their earlier fragmentation, as well as building non-left alliances throughout the process of revival and during different political transitions.

Framing skills obtained since the 1970s and newly cultivated political positions and authority laid the foundation for the framing process of the Octobrists. On the one hand, the framing process is nothing new for the Octobrists. They have been skilful frame specialists since the 1970s. For instance, during the 14<sup>th</sup> October incident, leading activists played crucial roles in combining liberal, socialist and royalist ideas in campaigning against the authoritarian regime. Between 1973 and 1976 and afterwards with the CPT, many Octobrists were both socialised through and advocated Maoist and nationalist ideas in pushing forward their revolutionary mission. On their return from the jungle, their skills in processing frames since the 1970s remained with them. On the other hand, their new political status enhanced their capacity in frame amplification and extension. Successful careers in both the public and private sectors, and achievements in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics provided the Octobrists with the political tools and authority to mainstream their new frame among themselves, the elite and the public.

The construction of the Octobrists' identity was composed of two major efforts and interconnected framing processes in their struggle to revive their roles in contemporary politics. Firstly, upon their return, the Octobrists constructed a new meaning in explaining themselves through a rewritten history of their own. They selectively re-crafted their 1970s history in the relevant new democratic context. Their image and historical background as extreme leftist failures were replaced by those of democratic heroes. Particular parts of their history were highlighted and emphasised in retelling their history to the public, especially the victory and role of student activists in leading a successful democratic movement and mass uprising against the authoritarian regime on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. During every single anniversary commemorating 14<sup>th</sup> October, pictures and stories were promoted of brave and dedicated young activists hungry for democracy and progressive young intellectual networks. Democratic activities including election monitoring, calls for a democratic constitution, and anti-seniority campaigns were retold as the legend of the Octobrists. At the same time, they worked hard in de-radicalising their own leftist history and extremist image. Pictures of innocent student activists fighting for democracy and social justice and suppressed by ultra-right wing

authorities replaced extremist, socialist and violent elements. The massacre at Thammasat University on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 was reproduced as a killing field of innocent students. While normalising and toning down their earlier extremist elements, they also successfully romanticised their leftist history with the leftist movements in the towns and the revolutionary mission with the CPT. Countless books, articles, seminars, concerts and commemorative ceremonies were organised in recounting the lives of these Octobrists during the time of their revolutionary mission with the CPT. Nonetheless, most of these emphasised cultural aspects and stories of authentic livelihood in the jungle. Stories of those who were loyal to Maoism and the CPT were downplayed by complaints from those who portrayed themselves as democratic student activists against the undemocratic and authoritative norms and practices of the CPT. The process of normalising their earlier leftist identity and re-packaging themselves as democratic heroes was relevant to the whole idea and flow of liberal democracy and the context of a world without space for leftists or socialism. Its design as a broad progressive political idea allowed these frames to connect and absorb all sorts of reformism, liberalism, radicalism, nationalism and even monarchism.

Secondly, while rewriting their 1970s history, Octobrists reinvented their political identity as ‘Octobrists’, democratic fighters since the 1970s. They not only constructed it, but also utilised it as means of securing political legitimacy, unification among themselves, and political support from non-left alliances. Even though during the 1970s, many incidents happened in many other months, and many actors were involved in these political processes, the official history of the 1970s was reduced to ‘October’ and student power. Against the backdrop of a successfully rewritten 1970s history, the Octobrists limited the whole of the 1970s to the success of student activists in promoting democracy and their sacrifices in protecting social justice during the two political incidents of 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976. On the one hand, many of them started calling themselves Octobrist–1970s democratic fighters and innocent students fighting for social justice. By the mid-1990s, the term ‘Octobrist’ became recognised and accepted by the public and media as the name for this whole generation who were either directly or indirectly involved in these incidents. Furthermore, the framing of the Octobrists succeeded because it was relevant to the existing narrative of Thai cultural politics. While Thai politics was moralised, the Octobrists portrayed themselves through an ideal picture of former innocent students who had fought for

democracy and against an authoritarian regime. Subsequently, through this Octobrist identity, their return to politics was treated as a continuation from the former activists and their fight against social and political injustice, although their new political interests and ideas were different from their 1970s history.

The concept of Octobrist helped to reunify their earlier fragmentations. The Octobrist identity and concept comprise a congruent and complementary set of individual interests, values, beliefs and collective activities which all different groups of Octobrists accepted and found compatible with their new status. First of all, the Octobrist identity linked all former activists with their past memory through the ‘community of memory and hope’. Through the concept of Octobrist, they came together at anniversaries and also brought other people in their new organisations into this Octobrist movement. ‘Community of memory’ explains the common sentiment of activism based on their common repressive historical experience that they were unable to tell the public. One that does not forget its past, the community of memory ties them to the past (McCarthy 1996; Woliver 1993, 2, 46-48). Against this backdrop, the Octobrists linked together former activists who shared painful and traumatic experiences during the 1970s but could not tell anyone. In parallel, the Octobrist concept bound and turned them toward the future as communities of hope. It included a meaning that allowed them to connect their personal aspirations. For former student activists, the concept of Octobrist offered the hope that when opportunities came and if they joined the Octobrist movement, they would be able to revive their role and resume the political dignity which they lost at the end of the 1970s.

Second of all, the Octobrist concept was designed as an inclusive ideology and identity. It was broad enough to absorb and conceal both past and current ideological fragmentation and personal conflicts. It created a sense of ‘we-ness’. Without mentioning leftist ideological elements, but defined by broad ideas of progressiveness, democracy and social justice, it brought all conflicting elements during the 1970s under the umbrella of the Octobrist generation. The Octobrist concept was broad enough to create temporary unification among Octobrists who have spread into new political settings and used new ideas and interests because it was inclusive enough to assert their new ideas under the concept of Octobrist. For example, normalising 1970s leftist history into the success of the democratic movement and construction of a broad Octobrist

identity created a comfortable common ground of collaboration among all conflicting groups, including the more liberal socialist 14<sup>th</sup> and the more extreme Maoist 6<sup>th</sup> Octobrist generations. At the same time, all Octobrists in different sectors found the broad concept and identity of Octobrist beneficial for legitimising and advocating their ideas and interests.

In addition, the ‘Octobrist’ frame helped to gain support from non-leftist alliances and attracted a more sympathetic perception of former activists in the eyes of the authorities and the public and created political opportunities to access new political spheres and positions. The earlier picture of extremists was replaced by Octobrists, former radical students who had already given up radicalism in favour of liberal and progressive approaches. They were no longer perceived as a threat to the Thai state. They were now perceived as a non-radical group ready to collaborate with any non-left progressive and liberal groups. With this new identity and alliances, the Octobrists were accepted by the public and gained stronger negotiating power with the state and their countermovement. Above all, they are valuable political assets for all sides. For instance, politicians who presented themselves or were known as Octobrist politicians were credited with being progressive. The Octobrists in the private sector were viewed as socially concerned businesspersons.

In participating in different phases of political transitions between the 1990s and 2000s, the Octobrists extended the definition of Octobrist as continuing the democratic struggle as well as utilising the Octobrist concept in legitimising their new ideas and roles. They argued that the May 1992 incident, various social movements throughout the 1990s, the political reform of 1997, and the rise of the TRT Party and anti-TRT movement, were following stages of democratisation which followed what they initiated in 14<sup>th</sup> October 1973. Furthermore, they combined the Octobrist identity with their new status. In participating in any political activities, they regularly called themselves Octobrist politicians, NGO workers, intellectuals, businesspeople, middle class, journalists or political campaigners, as a guarantee to the public that they were the continuation of the progressive Octobrist 1970s democratic fighters in the process of democratisation.

Apart from constructing and utilising a new identity, the Octobrists succeeded in building their ideological frames in order to overcome the new political constraints and

adjust to new political governance. The collapse of the global leftist movement closed all windows of opportunity for the Octobrists to continue their radical collective actions and movements and forced them to seek alternative ideological stances. The withdrawal of financial and technical support from and changes of international policy of the Eastern world, especially from the CCP, affected the organisational decline of CPT, and the abandonment of radicalism among the Octobrists. Left in Thailand with no meaningful connection with any external leftist movement throughout the 1980s, they were susceptible to other local non-left progressive, liberal and reformist movements in recovering from the ideological crisis when the left Octobrists returned home in disappointment and exhaustion. Initially, isolation and regret in the aftermath of the 1970s, life-course changes and a shift in the political context made these people turn away from politics and keep a low profile. Some even felt regret about the career opportunities lost in the 1970s. Whether they left the CPT with sympathy or empathy, nearly all the Octobrists expressed a certain degree of agreement in shifting away from earlier orthodox Maoist and extreme leftist approaches. The 14<sup>th</sup> October generation who had been socialised through more flexible ideas of liberalism, social democracy, nationalism, and royalism, and had initiated debates with the CPT about its rigid Maoist, non-democratic and authoritative political culture, shifted away from the left to other alternatives. They argued that orthodox Maoism and the CPT could hardly offer an ideology relevant to changing and developing Thai politics. In contrast, the 6<sup>th</sup> October generation, who had been radicalised through rigid Maoist-CPT thinking between 1973 and 1976, attempted to improve and solve ideological problems within that framework. Owing to limited exploration of and connection with Western leftist movements and other available leftist streams, when they recognised that the ideological and organisational crisis within the CPT was unsolvable, they abandoned the whole idea of leftism and revolution. They quickly opened up to new ideologies outside the radical spectrum.

Furthermore, with the nature of the Thai state changing toward the 'coalition' rule of electoral politics, the Octobrists learnt to embrace liberal democracy and compromised with the Thai state and corrupt politicians in order to resume their activist role. By the end of the Cold War, the Thai elite and state had become fragmented and liberal in their eyes, but managed to maintain a stronghold on real political power and co-opted their challengers into formal channels. The Thai state was pressured by international forces to

shift toward more neo-liberalist economics and liberal democracy. The large role of the state was delegitimised. Therefore, the Thai state wrapped itself in liberal and progressive language and distorted democratic discourse to gain a new type of legitimacy. It integrated new non-state actors into its political sphere as long as these new actors did not challenge their power. Nonetheless, royalist groups, the former elite and the bureaucrats remained strong and controlled hegemonic power over contesting elected politicians, reformist forces and other political structures and functions. Against this backdrop, the Octobrists shifted toward a moderate position in meeting and collaborating with the Thai state in the middle ground. In other words, they shifted from conflict against the Thai state to consensus with it, and eventually experienced consensus with and co-optation by the Thai state. Under the ‘rules of coalition politics’ in Thai party politics and the domination of ‘liberal reformism’ in extra-parliamentary politics, to gain strategic support to access cabinet positions and to promote social movements and political reform, the Octobrists who initially attempted to act as radical and progressive politicians and campaigners learned to reduce their radicalism and compromised with reformist/liberal or ex-conservative and business-oriented politicians.

## **8.2 Why conflict?**

If the 1990s saw the Octobrists enjoy unprecedented power and prominence as well as a loose consensus among themselves, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a growing legitimacy crisis and deepening internal conflict within their ranks. This thesis has suggested two explanations for this development. Firstly, the trajectory of political governance from the coalition politics of weak governments to the strong government of the TRT turned the earlier compromising relationship among Octobrists into confrontation. Secondly, the earlier successful Octobrist frame and identity failed to maintain unity but instead were utilised as a means of fighting against other Octobrists amidst the Red-Yellow Shirt conflict and their divergent ideas and interests.

### *New political environment*

The turn of the twenty-first century saw a dramatic shift in the political environment which profoundly influenced the status of the Octobrists and relationships among them.

Up through the 1990s, under coalition governments, elected politicians were weak and required support from other non-elected elite and non-state actors as their strategic allies. Against this backdrop, Octobrists temporarily unified and cooperated in spite of different political settings and contradictory political interests. Whilst Octobrist politicians required support and collaboration from their NGO, intellectual and journalist friends to back up their legitimacy, Octobrists outside parliament needed the help and connections of their politician friends to support their demands in the parliamentary and political processes.

Nonetheless, in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the emergence and successful consolidation of power of Thaksin and his TRT government destroyed the earlier co-existence under a balance of power among different groups of the elite, middle class and politicians. Quasi-absolute political power in parliament, overwhelming popular support and widespread corruption threatened the interests and popularity, and reduced the negotiating power, of the former elite and different groups of politicians, and the legitimacy of higher middle class. To this extent, the government and its supporters no longer needed to compromise with the elite and minority middle class in exchange for their support.

In this context, the relationship between Octobrists who had then taken opposite positions turned sour. Octobrists who were in the TRT and supported its policies viewed the TRT as an effective tool either to promote progressive policies or protect their interests and worked wholeheartedly to defend the government. In addition, the strong political power of the government offered Octobrists in the TRT the authority to push forward their roles and interests without relying on support from elsewhere and made them ready to fight against their former comrades who did not agree with the party. In contrast, Octobrists who were threatened by the TRT government and its policies perceived the government and their friends who worked for the government as political threats. Therefore, in protecting their strongholds, they not only waged war against the government but also with their friends inside it.

On top of this, the rise of the Red and Yellow Shirt movements turned the initial disagreements among Octobrists into a severe battle. The expansion of these counter movements offered strategic alliances and a new organisation for divided Octobrists.

Those who were frustrated and struggled with inferior negotiating power against the TRT government found the Yellow Shirt group the optimal option to form a powerful movement to fight back against the government and their friends in the TRT Party. At the same time, the emergence of the Red Shirt movement reacting against the coup that toppled Thaksin and the increase in power of the non-elected elite and middle class formed a new political constellation and empowered Octobrists who either had supported the TRT or disagreed with non-elected forces to fight back against their friends in the Yellow Shirt movement.

### *Frame competition*

Aside from the changes in political environment which turned temporary cooperation among Octobrists into conflict, frame competition also forced them to confront and eventually encounter with a crisis of legitimacy in utilising the Octobrist frame. Actually, the competition in constructing and making use of frame was nothing new for these Octobrists. These people had long fought against each other to promote the 1970s student movement and recently to revitalise their role in contemporary politics. When competition to insert their different political stances and interests into a master frame was minimal during their participation in May 1992, the rise of social movements, and the political reform process, the concept was broad enough to legitimise their differences. However, when the gap was huge, frame competition became more and more severe. Their temporarily unified network exploded and they became adversaries. Under the polarised political conditions of the rise of the TRT and the anti-TRT movement, different Octobrists took positions on opposite sides.

Initially, the unified appearance of the Octobrist frame could no longer conceal the contradictory ideas and interests of Octobrists in different parties in the conflict. The Octobrist identity was constructed through a loose and broad concept of progressiveness, democracy, and social justice. Thus, it built an image of harmony for Octobrists only when their differences were not too contradictory. While Octobrists used the concept to promote different roles and interests, it enhanced the unified look for former activists, at least in the public eye. However, when they took contradictory and uncompromising political stances and interests, the Octobrist frame could no longer help them to hide their differences.

Furthermore, not only did the Octobrist frame not help to veil their controversy, it also became a powerful weapon to wield against each other and devastate their long successful networks and identity. Different groups of Octobrists exploited the Octobrist frame as a means of legitimising their new interests and ideological stances, and of delegitimising their former comrades on the opposite side. Both TRT supporters and those who went against the government argued that they were the genuine Octobrists who continued to promote democracy and social justice. At the same time, they condemned their friends with different stances as betrayers of the Octobrist ideal. Those in the People's Alliance for Democracy (phanthamit – PAD) even used royalist strategies in arguing that their friends who acted as advisors to Thaksin were ex-communists who would like to promote a republic and overthrow constitutional monarchy. These right wing strategies caused deep conflict among those on both sides.

In summary, over the past two decades, former leftist activists throughout the world have struggled to survive and return to politics. Some failed. Others partly succeeded. The Thai Octobrists – 1970s left-leaning activists – expanded their roles and influence in nearly all political arenas over the course of the past few decades. Unlike their counterparts in other countries, the Octobrists successfully managed to exploit new political opportunities and overcome structural constraints. They were able to mobilise all sorts of political assets including skills, networks and activism, both retained since the 1970s and recently cultivated, to promote and sustain their power. Above all, as successful frame specialists since the 1970s, they again constructed a new identity of 'Octobrists-democratic fighters' in legitimising their new political activities, ideas and interests.

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*Kom Chad Luek (Sharp Clear Deep - KCL)*

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*Khao Hun (Stock News - KH)*

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*Krungthep Thurakit (Bangkok Biznews - KT)*

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One of the leaders of the 'We Move' group [1 ในแกนนำกลุ่ม 'วีมูฟ']. 2006b. *Than Settakij*, 20 June, 52.

### **List of interviews, including both identified individuals and those with pseudonyms**

1. Anun Hanpanichpan, 17 May 2007, Bangkok.
2. Chatri Hutanuwat, 5 May 2007, Bangkok.
3. Cheep (pseudonym), 21 March 2007, Bangkok.
4. Jaran Dhitthapichai, 15 February 2007, Bangkok.
5. Jariya Suanpan, 24 February 2007, Bangkok.
6. Kan (pseudonym), 2 February 2006, Bangkok.
7. Kriengkamol Laohapairoj, 13 March 2007, Bangkok.
8. Lert Edison (pseudonym), 7 February 2007, Bangkok.
9. Nirun Phitakwatchara, 27 March 2007, Upon Ratchathani.
10. Nithinand Yorsaengrat, 2 March 2007, Bangkok.
11. Pan (pseudonym), 12 March 2007, Bangkok.
12. Parakorn Chirasopone, 7 February 2007, Bangkok.
13. Ped (pseudonym), 25 November 2006, Bangkok.
14. Pha (pseudonym), 3 March 2007, Bangkok.
15. Phra (monk) Suthep Chinwaro, 16 December 2006, Chiang Mai.
16. Pirun Chatwanitchakul, 2 February 2007, Bangkok.
17. Porn-narong Pattanaboonpaiboon, 7 March 2007, Bangkok.
18. Prida (pseudonym), 11 December 2006, Nan.
19. Somchai Homla-or, 5 February 2007, Bangkok.
20. Somchai Phatharathananunth, 29 March 2007, Mahasarakham.
21. Sunee Chaiyarose, 12 February 2007, Bangkok.
22. Suthachai Yimprasert, 19 November 2006, Bangkok.
23. Suthisak Pawarathisan, 13 December 2006, Chiang Mai.
24. Tanet Charoenmuang, 14 December 2006, Chiang Mai.
25. Vanida Tantiwittayapitak, 12 January 2007, Bangkok.
26. Vi (pseudonym), 8 December 2006, Chiang Mai.
27. Vipa Daomane, 28 January 2007, Bangkok.
28. Watchari Paoluangthong, 18 January 2007, Bangkok.