

From the city, via the jungle, to defeat: the 6th Oct 1976 bloodbath and the C.P.T.

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Abstract

The blood-stained shadow of the ruling class massacre of students on the 6th October 1976 and the subsequent collapse of the Communist Party still have important effects on modern Thai politics. This massacre marked the start of the eradication of the Thai Left from both official history and present day formal politics. The process was completed after the collapse of the Communist Party in the mid 1980s. The manner in which ex-Left-wing activists have been rehabilitated back into society after the 6th October, has paved the way for gradual democratic reforms, in a form which does not challenge the real power and privilege of the ruling elite. The result is a corrupt parliamentary system devoid of any socialist politics. This chapter presents details of the 6th October massacre, provides a Marxist critique of the Communist Party and examines the present day implications and lessons from the collapse of the Left in that period.

In the early hours of 6th October 1976, Thai uniformed police, stationed in the grounds of the National Museum, next door to Thammasat University, destroyed a peaceful gathering of students and working people on the university campus under a hail of relentless automatic fire. At the same time a large gang of ultra-Right-wing “informal forces”, known as the Village Scouts, *Krating-Daeng* (or “Red Gaur”) and *Nawapon*, indulged in an orgy of violence and brutality towards anyone near the front entrance of the university. Students and their supporters were dragged out of the university and hung from the trees around *Sanam Luang*; others were burnt alive in front of the Ministry of “Justice” while the mob danced round the flames. Women and men, dead or alive, were subjected to the utmost degrading and violent behaviour. One woman had a piece of wood shoved up her vagina. Hopefully she was already dead. Village Scouts dragged dead and dying students from the front of the campus and dumped them on the road, where they were finished-off. A young man plunged a sharp wooden spike into the corpses while a boy urinated over them. Not only did the state’s “forces of law and order” do nothing to halt this violence, some uniformed members of the police force were filmed cheering-on the crowd ¹.

From before dawn that morning, students had been prevented from leaving the campus by police who were stationed at each gate. The operation was what Thais call “*slamming the door to beat the cat*”. Inside the sealed university campus violence was carried out by heavily armed police from the Crime Suppression Division, the Hua Hin airborne division of the Border Patrol Police and the Special Forces Unit of the Metropolitan Police. Un-armed women and men students who had fled initial rounds of heavy gunfire to take refuge in the Commerce Faculty building were chased out at gun point and made to lie face down on the grass of the football field, without shirts. Uniformed police fired heavy machine guns over their heads. The hot spent shells burnt the skin on their bare backs as they lay on the field. Other students who tried to escape from campus buildings via the rear entrance to the university, were hunted down and shot without mercy. Wimolwan, a Mahidol University nursing student and volunteer member of “Nurses for the Masses” was shot dead in the Chaopraya river, at the back of Thammasat, while she and her friends tried to swim to safety. At least 5 medical and nursing students from Mahidol University who were volunteer members of

Nurses for the Masses, were killed on that day (Friends of Mahidol 1997). The invading police showed no respect towards anyone found in the temporary field hospital in the basement of the Commerce Faculty. Some seriously wounded students who were lucky enough to make it to a single ambulance that had been called to the campus, had to wait for hours without proper medical help or even water, until the police allowed the ambulance to leave the campus. Volunteer student nurses tried to keep the wounded alive by feeding them their own saliva.

Examples of courage and the struggle for human dignity shone through the violence and brutality of that day. Auntie Mien, a middle-aged machine shop worker from Makasan Railway yard, was sheltering in the Commerce building along with many students. As a trade unionist she had opposed the military dictatorship of Tanom and Prapat since before it was overthrown during the 14th October 1973 uprising, 3 years previously. At that time she had encouraged her husband to also take an interest in politics. On the 14th October 1973 her husband was shot dead while protesting against the military dictatorship. Mien was in Thammasat on 6th October 1976 because she wanted to protest against the return of ex-dictator Field Marshal Tanom from exile in Singapore. It was Tanom whom she held responsible for her husband's death. In fact all those present on the university campus on the morning of 6th October were there as part of a protest against Tanom's return and the threat of a new dictatorship.

As Auntie Mien was rudely herded out of the Commerce building at gun-point, she refused to allow police to steal her hand bag and all its belongings. She had previously seen men in uniform systematically kick and rob the youngsters as they left the building. She also refused to bow her head down as ordered; she felt that she had done nothing wrong.

Pachern and his wife risked their lives to help wounded students. When the police finally found him they beat him with their guns and kicked and punched him. Sixteen years later Pachern's wife and fourteen year old son were killed by the military in the bloody May uprising of 1992. Such are the lengths to which the ruling class are prepared to go to cling on to power. Such are the lengths to which many brave Thais are prepared to go to fight for freedom and justice.

Many of those who died on that day gave up their lives to save others. The student security force, which was set up by necessity to protect peaceful student demonstrations from violent attacks, took heavy casualties. This force was necessarily armed because on previous occasions Right-wing goon squads had shot at, and thrown bombs into, unarmed student gatherings causing many deaths. For example, in March 1975, at Siam Square, four people died and 24 were injured after a bomb was thrown into a demonstration against U.S. military bases. Socialists, and prominent leaders of student, worker and farmer organisation were systematically murdered in that period. On each occasion, the police did nothing to stop such violence. In fact there is evidence that organisations linked to the security forces helped to organise such attacks². Only one minute after the Siam Square incident, the Tank Corps radio station announced news of the bomb attack, as though it had helped to plan it and *Krating-Daeng* thugs were seen using police radios (Morell & Samudavanija 1981:167).

On the morning of 6th October 1976 the brave members of the student guard fired their meagre collection of small hand guns in a last minute attempt to delay the invading hoards, while thousands of their friends escaped out through the back of the university towards the river. Their task had always been to fight off the *Krating-Daeng* and other groups of thugs, not take on the armed might of the state. They were heavily outgunned and most of them eventually died.

Apart from the student guard, student leaders like Thongchai Winichakul and Somsak Jeamteerasakul also risked their lives to save others. As the football field at the centre of the Thammasat campus came under sustained heavy fire from the police, they continued to give speeches from the makeshift open-air platform,

erected at one end of the field. Since the police could not see all the football ground at this time, the aim was to draw police fire towards the open-air assembly area while people took refuge in the Commerce and Journalism buildings. Towards the end, Thongchai had to continue his speech while lying on the ground as the stage itself came under heavy fire. There, he repeatedly asked the police to stop shooting. He was ignored.

Shopkeepers and ordinary house-holders around the back entrance of Thammasat tried to hide students from the police as they escaped via the river. One Chinese shopkeeper, in his 60s, saved half a dozen students from arrest by pulling them off the streets to hide in his shop. On many occasions the police threatened to open fire on shops and houses which sheltered students. The students were not kicked-out by these good people; they left so as not to bring trouble to their hosts. Other examples of acts of courage included the volunteer medical students from Sirirat Hospital, who came across the river by boat to tend the wounded in Thammasat University under fire.

The director of Channel 9 state-owned TV station, Sampasiri Wirayasiri, observed what was happening at first hand that morning. *“It was our sons and daughters that were being murdered. How could they do such things? I didn’t have a gun. My only way to fight this injustice was to film what was happening, so everyone could see the truth”* (I.T.V. 1999a). Sampasiri was sacked from his job immediately afterwards.

That morning thousands of students were arrested in Thammasat while many more escaped. Their friends, relatives and supporters watched the scenes of brutality on Thai TV screens in horror before they were blanked-out by government censors. Even some low-ranking police officers, especially ones from the local Chanasongkram police station, were shocked. These officers initially tried to help the students escape from the campus before their units were replaced by hardened units of the Boarder Patrol Police.

1. State Crime

In August 2000 a non-government group of academics and social activists established *“The 6th October 1976 fact-finding and witness interviewing committee”* in order to clarify the events surrounding the 6th October 1976 bloodbath. Members of the Committee included Chontira Satayawatana , Ji Giles Ungpakorn, Sutachai Yimprasert, Somsak Kosaisuk, Surasawadi Hoonpayon.

The Committee found that on the morning of the 6th October 1976, the police force of the Thai State committed a political crime by crushing the student movement at Thammasat University with weapons of war. The crushing of the student movement on this occasion was without any legitimate reason. In addition to this, the police cooperated with Right-wing gangsters who had gathered outside the university to oppose the students. In doing so, they allowed innocent people to be murdered in the most barbaric manner at *Sanam Luang*, opposite the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and *Wat Mahatart*.

In coming to this conclusion *“The 6th October 1976 fact-finding and witness interviewing committee”* studied evidence from many sources and many points of view. This evidence was made up of 62 eye-witness reports, evidence given in court by the police officers, documentation such as academic books and papers and newspaper reports, and tape recordings from radio and television stations.

In coming to the decision that the repressive actions of the state on the 6th October were without legitimacy *“The 6th October 1976 fact-finding and witness interviewing committee”* considered 4 reasons given by the state for crushing the students. These were:

1. That the students staged a play insulting the Crown Prince
2. That the students assembled an arsenal of weapons inside the university in order to stage a revolt.
3. That clashes occurred between “patriotic groups” and the students which the police were unable to contain by any other means other than to enter the university by force.

4. That the students used the “excessive amount of democracy” which existed since the 14th October 1973 in order to spread communism and destroy the nation.

It is the assertion of the “*The 6th October 1976 fact-finding and witness interviewing committee*” that none of these 4 reasons carry any weight or supporting evidence (details can be read in Chapter 3 of the Report, published in Thai see Ji Ungpakorn & Sutachai Yimprasert 2001).

2. Understanding the brutality of the 6th October 1976

The actions of the police and Right-wing mobs on 6th October were the culmination of attempts by the ruling class to stop the further development of a socialist movement in Thailand. The events at Thammasat University were followed by a military coup which brought to power one of the most Right-wing governments Thailand has ever known. In the days that followed, offices and houses of organisations and individuals were raided. Trade unionists were arrested and trade union rights were curtailed, centre-Left and Left-wing newspapers were closed and their offices ransacked, political parties, student unions and farmer organisations were banned. The new military regime released a list of 204 banned books³. University libraries were searched and books were confiscated and publicly burnt. Over 100,000 books were burnt when Sulak Sivaraksa’s book shop and warehouse was ransacked (Bowie 1997: 30). Apart from obvious “Communists” like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao or Jit Pumisak, authors such as Pridi Banomyong, Maxim Gorky, Julius Nyerere, Saneh Chamarik, Chai-anan Samudavanija, Charnvit Kasetsiri and Rangsan Tanapornpan appeared on the list of banned books (Satian & Suebwong 1984, Rachakitchanubegsa 94).

The Thai ruling class’ desire to destroy the further development of the socialist movement, especially in urban areas, can be understood by exploring the political climate at the time. Three years earlier, on 14th October 1973, a mass popular movement for democracy, led by students, had overthrown the military, which had been in power since 1957. This mass movement was the peak of a wave of protests against social injustice that gradually accumulated over the period. It was preceded by strikes and demonstrations over a whole range of issues like the cost of living, rural poverty, the price of petrol, U.S. and Japanese imperialism, abuse of power by the military and the destruction of the environment. However, the establishment of parliamentary democracy on its own did not begin to solve these deep-rooted social problems. Therefore the protests, strikes and factory occupations intensified. At the same time the U.S.A. was losing the war in Vietnam. By 1975 Communist governments were in power in Lao, Vietnam and Cambodia and in Thailand rural insurgency by the Communist Party of Thailand (C.P.T.) was on the increase. The events of the 6th October and the subsequent coup were not a simple return to military rule. They were an attempt to crush the popular movement for social justice. They were an attempt to eradicate the Left and strengthen the position of the elite.

However, a mere 3 years after the military had been thrown out of power by a popular uprising, the ruling class could not simply stage another coup. The memory of the 14th October 1973 was still too fresh. The military lacked legitimacy for any blunt political interventions. Simple military means were not enough. This explains the importance of using the police at Thammasat on 6th October and also the creation and use of the various “informal forces”.

In his analysis of Fascism in Germany, written in the early 1930s as Hitler rose to power, Leon Trotsky wrote ... “*At the moment that the ‘normal’ police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium - the turn of the fascist regime arrives.*” (Trotsky 1989; 87) Although the military regime that came to power on 6th October was not actually a fascist regime, there are many similarities between the methods used by the Thai ruling class to destroy the Left, previous to the coup, and methods used by European fascists in the pre-war period.

In Europe, fascism obtained its mass support from the disenchanting middle classes and the urban unemployed. As Trotsky put it: “*Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralised lumpen proletariat ...*”. Similarly, in Thailand in 1975 and 1976 the middle classes and the urban unemployed became the base of support for ultra-Right-wing forces (Anderson 1977: 18).

Unlike fascism in Germany, which arose from outside the ruling class, but later became a tool of that class, it was the Thai ruling class which created the three main organisations with which to deal with the Left, although in an uncoordinated fashion. The largest Right-wing organisation was the Village Scouts. At the peak of its existence, 20% of the Thai adult population were members, numbering over 3 million scouts (Bowie 1997: 83, 298). Initially this movement was a rural movement initiated by the Border Patrol Police in order to counter C.P.T. influence in the villages (Bowie 1997: 22).

There are three similarities between the Village Scouts and the European fascist movements. Firstly the Village Scouts was an organisation primarily based among the rural middle classes. Anderson and Bowie describe how the leaders of the movement were small-town business people and rich peasants. Poor peasants were pressurised to join the Village Scouts with much reluctance (Anderson 1977: 20, Bowie 1997: 255). In the later stages, the Village Scouts took on an urban character, recruiting again among the urban middle classes. It was in this form that it came closest to resembling the European movements (Bowie 1997: 110).

Secondly, villagers were recruited to the organisation and bound to it by mythical rituals (Bowie 1997: 46, 219). Trotsky describes how the European fascist movement needed myths in order to deflect the anger of the middle classes away from the capitalists and on to the Jews and other scape-goats: “*The petty bourgeois needs higher authority, which stands above matter and above history ... In order to raise it above history, the nation is given the support of the race ..*” (Trotsky 1971: 410). In the Thai case, myths and rituals served the same purpose; to whip-up a frenzy of patriotism and hatred against the Left, which served as a diversion to prevent people from thinking about and discussing the real causes of the crisis in Thai society. For the vast majority of the members of the Village Scouts, the problems and social ills that they were experiencing did not result from the actions of the Left. They resulted from the unequal structures of Thai society created by the ruling class, together with the global economic recession at the time.

Thirdly, the Villages Scouts was an organisation committed to violent confrontation with the Left. This characteristic, although useful in destroying enemies of the ruling class, was a potential danger to stability and order. For this reason, Trotsky argued, the ruling class will attempt to muzzle and wind-up fascist movements at the earliest opportunity (Trotsky 1971: 455). This is in fact what happened to the Village Scouts after 1976. Initially, Samak Sundaravej, a Right-wing politician with a strong following among the urban Village Scouts, was appointed as Minister of the Interior, not because his political faction was in power, but “in order that the government could control the Village Scout movement” (Bowie 1997: 136). After that, a general moratorium on Village Scout recruitment was announced and senior Border Patrol Police officers who were part of the movement were transferred to inactive posts. (Bowie 1997: 118). Although the moratorium on recruitment was later lifted, the Village Scout movement was allowed to die a slow natural death.

The other main “fascistic” organisations were the *Krating-Daeng* and the *Nawapon*. Both organisations were spawned from the Internal Security Operations Command (I.S.O.C.). The *Krating-Daeng* were recruited by Sudsai Hasdin from the ranks of discontented technical college students and drop-outs. Anderson reports that during this period the unemployment rate among technical college graduates was 50% in Bangkok and 75% in the provinces (Anderson 1977: 27). Out of public money, the *Krating-Daeng* were taken on drunken trips to brothels and paid expenses to carry out their “duties”. These duties included throwing bombs into and shooting at Left-wing demonstrations and breaking strikes. They also tried to burn

down Thammasat University in August 1975. Chartchai Choonhavan, the *Chart Thai Party* politician who became Prime Minister in 1988, was involved with the *Krating-Daeng* (Anderson 1977: 28). Chartchai was also close to the Village Scouts and took an interest in their activities on the 6th October (Surin 1998: 171).

The *Nawapon* were a small organisation of middle-class intellectuals (such as the writer Tomayantee), priests (such as Kittiwuto) and army personnel and their wives. The wife of Suchind Kraprayoon, the man who staged a coup in 1991 and ordered the shooting of unarmed demonstrators in “Bloody May 1992” was a member of *Nawapon*⁴. The *Nawapon* were led by I.S.O.C. lecturer Wattana Kiewvimol⁵ (Puey 1976).

Nawapon accumulated weapons in order to attack the students in Thammasat and low-ranking army personnel, out of uniform, were believed to have driven the buses which wrecked the gates of the university, allowing the police to storm on to the campus⁶. Some people believe that the worst acts of brutality which were carried out on the morning of the 6th October were actually committed by specially trained military personnel, perhaps from *Nawapon* (Nidhi 2000). However, this belief may rest upon the hope that “normal human beings” would be incapable of such acts.

The *Nawapon* also had an important role in making propaganda against the Left, both in a religious and secular context. The ruling class used the media, especially the Tank Corps Radio Station and *Dao Sayam* newspaper, to propagate a continuous campaign of lies about anyone to the left of Adolph Hitler. Even Chuan Leekpai (later to become Democrat Party Prime Minister) was called a “Communist”. In the months before 6th October, the Tank Corps Radio suggested that tens of thousands of students ought to be killed “for the good of the country” and the *Nawapon* priest, Kittiwuto, announced that killing Communists was not a sin (Puey 1976). Kittiwuto was out performing his “Buddhist” duties on the morning of 6th October 1976. He moved through the compound of *Wat Mahatat*, next door to Thammasat, clearing out students who had taken refuge from the violence there. As in the case of the Village Scouts, both the *Krating-Daeng* and the *Nawapon* were wound down after 1976 (Bowie 1997: 135).

The use of Right-wing mass movements against the Left was beneficial to the ruling class in a number of ways. Firstly these groups could use violent and illegal means while the state denied any responsibility. Naturally no one was ever brought to justice for murdering socialists or union leaders and claims were constantly made that groups such as the Village Scouts, *Krating-Daeng* and *Nawapon* represented genuinely patriotic citizens.

The second reason why the use of Right-wing groups was of benefit to the ruling class was that the army, the traditional “keeper of law and order”, was in no position to openly crush the Left. Less than 3 years before the 6th October the army had suffered a significant defeat at the hands of a mass popular movement for democracy.

Thirdly, the use of such informal Right-wing groups created a great deal of fear among Left-wing activists because their actions were never constrained by the legal system. This climate of fear grew to its peak after the brutal pictures of burnings and hangings on the 6th October were broadcast throughout the country. Among some, the fear is still present to this day.

Finally, since the state could deny any involvement with the Right-wing groups, any mass disturbances resulting from their actions, such as the brutality of 6th October, could be used as an excuse to stage a coup “to restore order” and this is exactly what happened on that day.

3. The role of the Thai ruling class in 6th October

It would be wrong to think that there was a tightly coordinated plan, by the entire Thai ruling class, which led to the 6th October events. Conversely, it would also be wrong to suggest that only one or two individuals or groups were behind the crushing of the Left. Over-emphasis on the role of the military, the monarchy or a particular political party would show a misunderstanding of the period. What happened on the 6th October was a result of a consensus among the entire ruling class that an open democratic system was allowing too much freedom for the Left. However, it is likely that there were both areas of agreement and disagreement within ruling circles on exactly how to act and who should act. The general view that “extra-parliamentary methods” would have to be used led to the uncoordinated establishment of various Right-wing groups. The activities of these groups were not tightly controlled or coordinated by one single power centre and this became a problem for the new Tanin government after the coup (Bowie 1997: 114).

The turn of events leading up to the 6th October contained both planned and unplanned elements. One group who made special plans to crush the Left and stage a coup came from a coalition of *Chart Thai Party* and Right-wing Democrat Party politicians. General Pramarn Adireksan, leader of the *Chart Thai Party*, openly called for “the Right to kill the Left” during the April 1976 general election campaign (Anderson 1977: 24). He also stated in the cabinet meeting, early on 6th October, that it was now the right moment to destroy the student movement for good (Surin 1998: 172). The Right-wing politicians plotted with soldiers close to the ex-dictators, Tanom and Prapat. They also had significant influence among the urban section of the Village Scouts and the *Krating-Daeng*. It is believed that this coalition deliberately brought Prapat back into Thailand for a short trip to test the waters for a coup in August 1976. On that occasion, when the students demonstrated against Prapat, there was a mobilisation of paramilitary police assembled in the National Museum, ready to attack Thammasat, just like on the morning of 6th October, 2 months later⁷. After that, the plotters then brought Tanom back in September. They guessed that the students would mount a protest and that any disturbances that followed could be used as an excuse for their group to stage a coup (Morell & Samudavanija 1981: 270).

The role of the monarchy has also been discussed by many writers. Bowie’s survey of the literature indicates that there is much debate here. Some observers believe that the monarchy supported a coup, hoping to stop the swing to the Left, but also in order to prevent power falling into the hands of unpredictable ultra-Right-wing forces. Others believe that the monarchy’s plans for a coup were thwarted by the group who actually took power. However, most writers express the view that the monarchy helped to pave the way for a coup, in a broad sense, by showing open support for the Right-wing (Bowie 1997: 128). What we know is that the monarchy openly supported and encouraged the Village Scout movement. In addition, the monarchy was close to the Border Patrol Police who established the Village Scouts and also took part in the killing at Thammasat. Finally the monarchy supported the return of ex-dictator Tanom by paying him a visit soon after he arrived back in Thailand (Anderson 1977: 134, Morell & Samudavanija 1981: 271, Morell & Morell 1977: 337, Girling 1981: 156, 213-215, Winichakul 2002).

Naturally when the ex-dictator Tanom returned to Thailand, there were legitimate protests against him. Then on the 4th October the forces of reaction managed to find a perfect excuse for the mass mobilisation of the Village Scouts, *Krating-Daeng* and *Nawapon*. There were also mobilisations of various police units, including the heavily armed Border Patrol Police from Hua Hin, in order to crush the student movement in general and the Left in particular. The “excuse” was a play put on by the students in order to condemn the murder and hanging of the two trade unionists in Nakorn Patom by police. A deliberate campaign of misinformation was carried out by the newspaper *Dao Sayam* and the Tank Corps Radio in order to claim that the students had staged a play where they pretended to hang the crown prince. The English language newspaper, the *Bangkok Post* was also used in this campaign of misinformation. In evidence given during the trial of student leaders after 6th October, a number of police officers, acting as prosecution witnesses for the state, claimed that they were convinced that the students had insulted the monarchy after seeing photographs in the *Bangkok Post* (Tawatchai 1978/1979). The editorial board of the *Bangkok Post* today

maintain that they had no part in the campaign of misinformation and that they were merely used by Right-wing elements. This is very likely to be true. Nevertheless, the paper never had the courage nor enough commitment to printing the truth to deny the false reports about the students, either in early October 1976, or during the trial of innocent student leaders in the following two years⁸.

On the 5th October the Tank Corps Radio station called for a mobilisation of Right-wing forces to “deal with” the students. Announcers urged people over the radio to “kill.. kill... kill” students. *Dao Sayam* issued a special one page leaflet carrying the photo of the play and this was distributed to Village Scouts in Bangkok. Needless to say there was not a shred of truth in the claim that the students had insulted the monarchy⁹. However, this claim was enough to launch the final assault on the Left and the student movement. Some people believed at the time that “doctored” photos of the play were used in *Dao Sayam* and *the Bangkok Post* (Seni 1998, Puey 1977). However, this is not the case, since one of the actors bore a slight resemblance to the prince anyway and the police file of photographs of the play, collected from various media sources, all look similar, indicating that no photographs were doctored¹⁰. The fact is that merely claiming via *Dao Sayam* and the Tank Corps Radio that the students had insulted the monarchy was enough to provide an excuse for the crackdown the next day. Furthermore, it is clear that if *this* particular excuse had not been available, another excuse would have been found at some point in the near future.

The military coup which was actually staged at 18.30 on the afternoon of 6th October was not in fact staged by *Chart Thai* and Right-wing Democrat factions and their military allies. Instead, the “National Administrative Reform Council” (N.A.R.C.) under Adm. Sangad Chaloryu, which took power and subsequently appointed Prime Minister Tanin Kraivichien, did so in order to prevent the first group from staging a coup (Bowie 1997: 131, Morell & Samudavanija 1981: 276). The N.A.R.C. was supported by those factions in the military opposed to Thanom and Prapat. Thus as George McArthur of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote: “*Only a facade of unity under 60-year-old Adm. Sangad Chaloryu hides the discontent of several senior army generals*” (*Los Angeles Times* 12 Oct 1976:12).

The general picture of the ruling class that emerges during 1976 is therefore one of a degree of unity on the need to crush the Left, but disunity on how to do so and, much more importantly, how to proceed after the crack-down. This had important consequences on the evolution of the dictatorship post-1976. Within one year, the extreme Right-wing government of Tanin Kraivichien was removed from power. Three years later, the government decreed an “amnesty” for those who had left to fight alongside the communists, and by 1988 Thailand had returned to a standard parliamentary democracy. Those gaining the upper hand within the ruling class were convinced, not only that the nature of the 6th October crackdown, but also the way the Tanin government was conducting itself, was creating even greater divisions and instability within society and helping the Communist Party of Thailand to grow. Not surprisingly, those army officers who advocated a more liberal line were those actually involved in front-line fighting against the C.P.T. They understood, like so many military personnel in this position, that the struggle against the Left must involve some kind of political settlement in addition to the use of force. As General Prem Tinsulanon, Prime Minister from 1980-1988, observed: “*The students joined the Communists because they were brutally suppressed. The way to undermine the Communists was to establish justice in society*” (I.T.V. 1999b).

4. The Thai Left after 1973

Although in the minds of many Right-wingers, there was little distinction between the student movement and the Left, it was not true that the students were all Left-wing or that the Left was only made up of the student movement. Not surprisingly, there was an entire spectrum of opinion throughout the student movement at the time. Nevertheless, a combination of external and internal events, such as the post-1968 growth of the Left, world-wide, the defeat of the U.S.A. in the Vietnam war and the failure of post-1973 parliamentary politics in Thailand to address social ills, resulted in a significant shift to the Left among students. A number of student parties, such as *Palang Tum*, *Chula Prachachon*, *Neaw Pracha*, *Sachatum*,

Yoong-tong etc. won elections to student bodies in various universities. These parties were vaguely socialist, being in favour of democracy and social justice and against imperialism and conservative student traditions (such as the S.O.T.U.S. seniority system where older students bully younger students).

Students had played an important role in leading the overthrow of the military on the 14th October 1973. After 1973, they continued to play a leading role in progressive politics. They involved themselves in labour disputes and farmers' movements and they led protests against U.S. military bases and the destruction of the environment.

Outside the campuses, the general shift to the Left was reflected in the influence of Left-wing ideas among the growing trade union movement and the movement of peasants. Left-wing political parties, such as the Socialist Party, the Socialist Front and *Palang Mai* (New Force) stood candidates and won 14.4% of the national vote (2.5 million votes) in the 1975 General Election. These parties won many seats in the north and north-east of the country (Morrell & Samudavanija 1981: 265). Outside the arena of legal politics, the Communist Party of Thailand was increasing its influence, both by the spread of "Communist" ideas through books and publications, and via its radio station: *The Voice of the People of Thailand*. The party recruited student, worker and peasant activists and at this time the C.P.T. was also engaged in armed struggle against the Thai government in remote rural areas.

The Left-wing ideas circulating among Thai society in the early 1970s were a mixture of old and new, East and West (see Tejapira 2001). Since the 1917 Russian Revolution there had been an intermittent presence, at various times, of Communist organisers in Bangkok and other Thai towns. Both the Chinese Communist Party and the Malay Communist Party worked among the urban working class in Bangkok (Jeamteerasakul 1991: 53). Due to initial labour shortages during the infancy of Thailand's capitalist system, significant numbers of workers in Bangkok were of Chinese origin. This does not indicate in anyway that Communism was somehow "alien" to Thailand. The early forms of Communist organisation were a matter of urbanisation, not of "Chineseness". During the colonial period many Communists and anti-colonialists from neighbouring countries also sheltered in Thailand from the colonial authorities. Tan Malaca, an activist from the Indonesian Communist Party visited Thailand on a number of occasions and Ho Chi Minh spent some time sheltering from the French.

Before and after the Second World War Communist ideas from the West began to take root among urban workers and some intellectuals, such as Supa Sirimanon and Gulab Saipradit. Pridi Banomyong, leader of the 1932 revolution that overthrew the absolute monarchy, was also significantly influenced by socialist ideas when he studied in France, especially the ideas of the cooperative movement.

The victory of the Chinese Communist Party and the rise of Mao brought a second wave of Left-wing ideas to Thailand in the shape of Maoism and the orientation upon the peasantry. By the 1970s the C.P.T. had adopted Maoism in totality. Where the student movement was concerned, the greatest influence that the C.P.T. had over the students was not in terms of the numbers of members, but in the shape of the acceptance of Left-wing ideas. However, there was an important "Western" influence upon the Thai Left at the time, which came from the 1968 revolt in Europe and the United States. This influence was significant among the student movement, especially among art students who played a very important role in political agitation in the 1970s. Kamol Tasananchli, an art student who graduated from the United States did much to influence the thinking and work of the younger generation at *Po-Chang* art college before 1973. (Sinsawat 1994: 15). Western socialist ideas contained a whole mix of ideas generated by the 1968 revolt and among these were both Stalinist and anti-Stalinist currents. It is this mixture of ideas that the students carried with them when they went to the jungle to join the C.P.T. after the 6th October blood bath.

4.1 Stalinism and the C.P.T.

When analysing the politics of the C.P.T. it is important to have a brief understanding of "Stalinism" and its off-shoot, "Maoism", as currents of political thought on the Left. "Stalinism" is not merely the creed belonging to one man, or some form of insult to be hurled at political opponents on the Left who are seen to be authoritarian. Stalinism is a set of political ideas which reinterpret or distort (depending on your views) Marxism. The main components are the promotion of nationalism and cross-class alliances and the top-down approach to struggle. This set of ideas arose out of the difficulties facing the Russian revolution in the mid-1920s. The main cause of these difficulties was the inability to spread the Bolshevik revolution successfully to Germany and other developed countries in Europe. This had been the original hope of both Lenin and Trotsky, in the classical internationalist style of Marxism. Thus Stalinism, which eventually triumphed in Russia, by 1928, represented a theoretical clean break with the traditions of Marxism and the Bolsheviks (see Serge 1980). It represented an attempt by the now bureaucratised Communist Party to cling to power by using dictatorship and nationalism in the process of state capital accumulation under the title "building socialism in one country" (see Callinicos 1991, Cliff 1974).

What many have found confusing is that this clean break with Marxism occurred alongside the continued use of Marxist jargon, the red flag and the building of Lenin into a God-like hero. This process of Stalinisation spread to Communist Parties throughout the world¹¹. Repressive and exploitative societies were thus built in Russia, Eastern Europe and China in the name of Socialism and Marxism. The contradictory situation that we must grasp is that outside Russia or China in countries where the Communist Party was not the ruling party, Communist Parties were made up of rank and file activists who genuinely believed that they were struggling for a socialist revolution and a better society. It would be a mistake to think that most members of the C.P.T. were consciously trying to build a repressive and exploitative society or that in the main, they hungered for personal power. The authoritarian and moralistic nature of the C.P.T. was a result of Stalinist and Maoist policies rather than the individual failings of certain leaders. While there are many reports concerning the authoritarian nature of the C.P.T., there are also many reports that the individual cadres were some of the best mannered, considerate and principled people the ex-students had ever met.

When one strips away the surface "Marxist" rhetoric, Stalinism in Asia can be roughly characterised as a form of radical nationalism. It was an attempt to build an independent nation-state by the process of cross-class alliances between workers, peasants, small businesspeople and national, "patriotic", capital. Therefore nationalism and the down-playing of class struggle are central to Stalinist policies. Added to this is the disregard for the self-emancipation of the working class. Instead we see the authoritarian Party substituting itself for the Working Class and Leninist "Democratic Centralism" transformed into Stalinist "Top-down Centralism".

Maoism should be regarded as an off-shoot of Stalinism, where the use of a peasant army and the emphasis on rural armed struggle replaces urban agitation. In addition to this, Maoism introduces a heavy dose of moralism because the subjective ability of activists is raised above material or objective conditions (Harris 1978). Thus in Mao's Great Leap Forward, will power can be substituted for the realities of industrial development and in the C.P.T., any failings can be explained by the failings of the individual, rather than incorrect policy.

4.2 Urban students come face to face with the C.P.T. in the jungle

Previous to the 6th October massacre, in Bangkok and other urban areas, students and intellectuals had been free to read and discuss a whole range of Left-wing ideas. Some, of course, did not have much time to read, since they spent their days engulfed in activity. However, when they arrived in the jungle strongholds of the C.P.T., they found that they could only read and discuss the works of Mao¹². They found also that debates

and arguments were not encouraged. Initially both these factors were not a problem. Faced with the brutality of the 6th October, the stature of the C.P.T. was enormous, in terms of a well-organised vehicle to lead the fight-back. The C.P.T. controlled areas where government troops could not enter. It was a well-organised political organisation of decent and committed activists that could fight the government and exact revenge for the blood bath in Thammasat. In the first few years after 1976 the upsurge in support for the C.P.T. from urbanites looked like it might result in a defeat for the government. Nevertheless, as time went on, the urban intellectuals and students became increasingly disenchanted by the narrowness and authoritarianism of the C.P.T.'s Stalinist politics. This was one significant factor in the internal collapse of the party in the early 1980s (Po MuangChompoo 2000: 355).

It is often expressed (see Seksan Prasertkul's film "The Moon Hunter" and Tejapira 2001) that an important problem with the C.P.T. was its "Chineseness" and that this did not fit with the "Thai" situation. This refers both to the ethnicity of the top leadership and the way the C.P.T. followed the Chinese Communist Party line. However, the two issues are best regarded separately. This is because it is quite possible for Maoist parties to exist in countries where the leadership was never of Chinese ethnicity. Peru, India or Italy are prime examples. While the Maoist peasant warfare strategy was a mistaken strategy in Thailand (see Ungpakorn 1997), the ethnicity of the C.P.T. leadership is a red-herring¹³. As already mentioned, the urban working class in many South-East Asian countries was dominated by ethnic Chinese immigrants in the early twentieth century, it is hardly surprising that a communist party in such a country would be dominated by people of Chinese origin¹⁴. The ethnicity of the private, non-state sector, capitalist class was also of Chinese origin. Thus the ethnicity of the C.P.T. is merely a reflection of the nature of urban class societies in the region. To regard such urban "Chineseness" as "non-Thai" is to reconstruct the history of nation building in South-East Asia to fit a modern nationalist frame-work, which never really existed. Explaining the collapse of the C.P.T. on its "alien non-Thai" nature fits nicely with the conservatives who wish to argue that Communism or Marxism are somehow "alien" to Thai culture.

4.3 Missed Opportunities

An examination of the situation in the jungle after the 6th October shows that the C.P.T. squandered the input from the student movement. It threw away a vibrant and powerful force, which joined its ranks after the Thammasat massacre. The C.P.T.'s narrow and mechanical Maoism was totally bankrupt when trying to relate to a powerful urban social force which had previously played an important role in sweeping away the dictatorship in 1973. This is despite the fact that the C.P.T. had experienced some spectacular successes in recruiting young, pre-university students in the early to mid 1970s¹⁵. These students were very well placed to build the party and expand the struggle in Bangkok. Yet, the party regarded Bangkok, not as a battle ground in the class struggle, but merely as a recruiting ground for the rural struggle.

It was not merely the urban repression that prevented the C.P.T. from taking urban work seriously. Its Maoist strategy meant that the party never engaged with the rising urban current, which finally resulted in the 14th October 1973 uprising. In addition to this, after the 6th October 1976 blood-bath when the Thai government began to promote more liberal policies, leading members of the party refused to allow student activists to return to the urban areas in order to carry out agitational work there¹⁶. Having said this, it must not be forgotten that the Thai government's more liberal policies in the early 1980s were a result of pressure from the C.P.T.'s armed struggle and therefore it should not be concluded that the C.P.T. was totally ineffectual.

Even in its own terms, there is much evidence to suggest that the C.P.T.'s Maoist strategy of politicising the peasantry in order to overthrow the government by armed struggle was ineffective¹⁷. Many ex-student activists report that it was extremely hard to discuss a wide range of Left-wing political ideas with villagers. For example, one comrade reported that he was never quite sure whether the villagers really agreed with him during discussions because he always carried his M16 strapped to his back during agitational work. The

discussions never really went much further than state repression or the price of agricultural produce, either. Another comrade hinted that before open armed struggle started, C.P.T. agents were quite successful in the north-east, in recruiting villagers to The Party on a broad political basis. However, after the armed struggle began and the government started to use armed oppression, long-term political discussions with villagers in government controlled areas became more difficult. Recruits to the struggle in this latter period were much more a result of government brutality than support for Communism. Nevertheless, many villagers actively sought out the C.P.T.'s jungle fighters in order to deal with brutal local officials or bosses. Another comrade,¹⁸ a peasant-movement activist today, suggests that as a result of the difficulties in discussing politics, some C.P.T. cadres secretly looked down on common peasants.

State repression seems to have been an important factor in increasing rural support for the C.P.T. In areas where the peasantry did join the C.P.T. armed struggle, it was usually as a result of the oppressive behaviour of the security forces. Surat Tani or the north-east are good examples. In other areas, such as the north, much of the C.P.T.'s army was also made up of ethnic minorities who had suffered due to systematic exclusion from Thai society.

4.4 The lack of Marxist education in the C.P.T.

At a recent get-together of Old Comrades from *Danao-sri* area in September 1999, affluent businessmen arrived in their expensive foreign made cars to warmly hug rugged Karen villagers. An ex-C.P.T. fighter from a Karen village explained that "*Marxism was still a valid political theory because Marxism taught villagers to be thrifty.*" On another occasion, an ex-C.P.T. businessman remarked that he used his "understanding" of Marx's *Das Kapital* in order to run his business more efficiently. This poor understanding of Marxism is not surprising given the fact that the C.P.T. only allowed its followers to read Mao. Rudee Ruengchai (1996: 171), who at one time worked for the Voice of the People of Thailand radio station, based in China, expected to find an atmosphere of study, research, discussion and freedom in the C.P.T. areas. Instead it was the exact opposite.

It is the central contradiction found in Stalinism, between the use of Marxist rhetoric and the distortion of Marxism into something opposite, that explains why the C.P.T. were so bad at educating members and supporters in Marxism. Were student members and supporters in the jungle allowed to read a wide variety of Left-wing or Marxist texts other than Mao, they would soon discover serious contradictions between theory and practice and they would start to think for themselves and ask awkward theoretical questions. Of course there were ways round this problem. Lenin's works when read out of context can always be interpreted in many ways and if the writings of Marx or Engels are regarded as "sacred texts" this can discourage serious analysis. However, it remains a fact that throughout the 1970s and early 80s, the C.P.T. provided almost no serious Marxist education for its members and supporters, and this has modern day consequences. In order to re-discover a Thai Marxist current, Thais have to either return to the early writings of non-C.P.T. intellectuals such as Supa Sirimanon, Samak Burawad or Gulab Saipradit or to look at some of the newer post-C.P.T. Marxist literature that is being produced today.

4.5 The weakness of Maoism

In 1976 the impact of the Thai Left in urban areas was much more of a threat to the Thai ruling class than the C.P.T.'s armed struggle in remote rural regions. The urban Left were located right in the heart of the beast. They were part of a mass movement which had previously overthrown a military government. This is why it was the Bangkok based urban movement that the ruling class chose to crush with such force in 1976. Initially the result of the blood bath strengthened support for the C.P.T. This was one of the pressures on the extreme Right-wing government of Tanin Kraivichien. A whole generation of the best students had fled to the jungle. Their families and friends who remained in Bangkok sympathised with them. This was not the way to bring about a defeat of the Left.

When examining the failure of the C.P.T.'s Maoist strategy of rural armed struggle, it is worth remembering that all significant political changes in 20th Century Thailand have been led by urbanites and occurred in urban areas (the 1932 revolution and the 1973 and 1992 overthrows of the military, for example). This is hardly surprising since the heart of political and economic power in a modern capitalist society lies in the cities. For this reason, the crushing of the Left in urban areas on 6th October 1976 was quite effective, especially because the return of the intellectuals and students from the jungle a few years later was on ruling class terms. A vital aspect of the terms of re-integration was that those returning from the jungle had to reject socialist politics. Democratic views were acceptable, but not socialism and class struggle. In fact complying with such terms was not that difficult for many. This was because of a number of reasons. Firstly there was the disillusionment with the C.P.T. and the confusion brought about by the war between China and Vietnam. Then there was the gradual collapse of Stalinist regimes throughout the world in the late 1980s. Finally the Stalinist politics of the C.P.T. itself, which constantly stressed nationalism and cross-class alliances with businessmen, helped many former comrades to integrate themselves back into the now booming Thai capitalist economy (Ungpakorn 1997: 79, 88).

When considering the events on 6th October 1976. One final point remains to be discussed concerning the C.P.T. This is whether a different approach from the C.P.T. could have helped to prevent the massacre and preserve a strong socialist current in urban Thai society. There is a legitimate case for asking this question about the effectiveness of the C.P.T.'s emphasis on rural guerrilla struggle without appearing to blame the victims of the 6th October for their own massacre (see discussion later) or accepting in any way the preposterous accusation that the C.P.T. somehow conspired to let the massacre happen in order to strengthen its position in the rural areas (Morell & Samudavanija 1981: 282, Sirote 2000). It is quite clear from interviews with ex-students and ex-C.P.T. members that the C.P.T. was caught off-guard by the number of students who rushed to join the guerrilla struggle. It had neither the weaponry nor the resources to properly take advantage of such an influx.

The problem with the C.P.T.'s Maoist strategy is that it more or less abandoned the city to the ruling class. The C.P.T. argued that since the cities were the centre of ruling class power, a communist victory in Thailand would only come about by surrounding the cities with "liberated zones". To justify this profoundly un-Marxist and un-Leninist view, the C.P.T. claimed that Thailand was not a fully developed and independent capitalist society, implying not only that the primary struggle would have to be one of national liberation, but also that the Thai working class was too weak to lead a struggle in the city (Ungpakorn 1997: 88). This ignored the fact that the 1973 uprising against the military had been preceded by a massive urban strike wave which continued after the successful revolt. The May Day 1975 rally attracted a quarter of a million workers and in early 1976 half a million workers took part in a general strike against price increases.

The fact that the ruling class was planning some kind of crack-down against the Left in 1976 was not a secret. The C.P.T. started to remove key activists from the city well before October 1976. Their Maoist strategy meant that they never at any time planned to resist a Right-wing backlash in Bangkok. The fact that there was no organised defence of the student and trade union movement in Bangkok, by the only political organisation with the experience and ability to do so, left those who couldn't escape to the jungle to await their fate. A section of the trade union movement, in fact, voted for a general strike in the event of a coup and the United Front of Artists planned a mass anti-coup postering campaign to agitate for an uprising, but both these initiatives came to nothing¹⁹.

Not only did the C.P.T.'s Maoist politics fail to defend the Left in Bangkok in 1976, it also ensured massive demoralisation among the Left when international events began to undermine Stalinism and Maoism as a world current. On the 20th anniversary of the 6th October, a large gathering of former students and former Communists came together at Thammasat for the first time since the massacre. Not one speaker from the platform at any of the meetings believed that there was still a future for socialism. The present green shoots

which mark the revival of the Thai Left today have had to depend on an anti-Stalinist, anti-Maoist tradition which sees the various “Communist” regimes, which once existed, as being the opposite to socialism and Marxism.

5. Rehabilitation of the October Generation

Many of the urban students and intellectuals who joined the Communists “in the jungle” after the 6th October (now called “the October Generation”) were eventually rehabilitated back into mainstream society. Their names can be seen among lists of successful businessmen, government ministers, lawyers and academics. For those who have achieved the most success, this process involved the rejection of any previously held ideas of socialism. Examples of ex-“Communist” intellectuals and academics are Thirayut Bunmee, Seksan Prasertkul and Anek Laothamathas, who are now advocating liberalism (Thirayut 1998, Seksan 1994, Anek 1993), Sangsit Piriyaarangsarn, who recently worked closely with the Ministry of Interior on local community projects (Sangsit 1998), and Narong Petprasert and Yook Si-areeya who have become pure nationalists who also embrace market capitalism (Narong 2000a, 2000b, Yook 1998). Naturally people’s views can change with time, but perhaps the most disappointing cases are those ex-“Communists” who have become mainstream politicians or political advisors to the various capitalist parties, changing their outlook for purely personal gain.

The other side of this rehabilitation and reconciliation coin is that those who were involved in the 6th of October crackdown, on the side of the ruling class, are no longer viewed in such a good light. Thongchai Winichakul has described in detail how the perpetrators of the violence have changed their mood from “jubilation to shame” (Winichakul 2002). Nowadays, to accuse someone of being involved in the blood bath is regarded as a political insult ²⁰.

Given that the Thai ruling class would prefer that the whole 6th October incident be buried and that many of those responsible for the bloodshed are still in positions of authority, it has been extremely difficult to raise issues concerning the truth of the massacre in official circles. It took twenty years for the event to be discussed openly in Bangkok (Winichakul 2002) and it took another 4 years for a monument to be built at Thammasat. It is very understandable that many people who experienced the painful events in the mid 1970s, today just want to quietly get on with their lives in a private manner. Others, especially the activists, may experience “survivor guilt” and wish to shoulder part of the blame for the whole event themselves. We should sympathise with these feelings. But there are other interpretations of 6th October and the crushing of the Left which are not justifiable. These reactionary arguments can be loosely grouped into 3 main categories.

5.1 Blaming the victims for the violence of 6th October

There are two arguments which are currently circulating which result in blaming the victims for the massacre. These arguments are put forward by those who must obviously agree with the ruling class that the Thai elite should not be blamed for 6th October. To those who dare raise the issue of the 6th October at all, they are told that the finger of blame, which once pointed upward towards the ruling class, must now be pointed down at the students themselves. The arguments are as follows:

(a) ‘Why didn’t the student leaders dissolve the demonstration before it was too late?’ With the advantage of hind sight the reactionaries ask, why, given that it was “obvious” that the state was about to “*slam the door to beat the cat*”, did not the student leaders dissolve the demonstration in Thammasat? (see Winichakul 2002). Firstly many of those ordinary people present at the time did not want the demonstration to dissolve. Secondly, there is the matter of when it is safe to dissolve a demonstration without putting the departing participants at risk of attack from roving Right-wing gangs. Apart from this, if the demonstration had been dissolved it would have merely postponed the violent crack-down to another day, since a retreat by the students would have encouraged the Right to further actions. The only possible logic of this argument is to

say that the anti-dictatorship demonstration should have been dissolved and no further student or Left-wing demonstrations organised. In other words the students should have allowed a dictatorship to return without a fight and given up all hope of struggling to change society.

Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a student leader at the time of the 6th October, thought it necessary, recently, to devote an entire newspaper column to the subject, defending his part in the decision not to demobilise the demonstration. In his column he explained that even while he and his colleagues were still in prison in 1978, there was pressure to “explain” why they had not demobilised (Somsak 2000). An example of such disgusting pressure can be seen in the text of another column in the same newspaper, a few days later, where it was claimed that Somsak’s explanation was “unconvincing”. As if this were not enough, the writer of the second column then went on to state that the leaders of the May 1992 protests against the military had “led people to their deaths”. No criticism was made of anyone who ordered the killing of unarmed protesters (Sirote 2000). No criticism was made of the fact that the Thai state imprisoned innocent student leaders for two years.

Much more importantly, when it comes to the 6th October (and May 1992) the question should be: ‘*Who ordered the killing and when will they be brought to justice?*’ The reactionaries of today, fawning before the power of the Thai state, seek to blame the victims for their own deaths. In their eyes, those that order the use of live ammunition on unarmed demonstrators are clearly the innocent ones.

(b) ‘The students went too far and invited a crack-down’ The second argument which deflects the blame for the massacre away from the ruling class is to claim that the students and workers were right to overthrow the military back in 1973, but they just did not know when to stop. All those demonstrations and strikes alienated the students and the Left from the rest of society, so the argument goes (Iamtham 1987, Pitaya 1998, Morell & Samudavanija 1981: 172). This is not a uniquely “Thai” issue. After the brutal crackdown and destruction of the democratically elected Allende government in Chile, many ex-radicals, including those in the Communist Party of Chile, came to the conclusion that the Left ‘had gone too far and provoked the Right-wing backlash’. This idea was used as a way to justify the new alliance which the Communist Party was making with the Christian Democrat politicians in Chile. The stupidity of this argument can be seen in the case of Indonesia, in 1965, where the Indonesian Communist Party (P.K.I.) had spent the last remaining years under the Sukarno regime telling workers to restrain themselves and make sacrifices for the good of the nation. The P.K.I. did this because it did not want to “alienate” itself from the Sukarno government. Yet this policy did not in any way save the P.K.I. from total destruction in 1965. In fact, it could be argued that by demobilising workers the P.K.I. threw away the only power in Indonesian society that could have defended it.

Why should students, workers and peasants not have the right to be “Communists” and to demand social justice without being murdered? Let us consider the consequences of extending the argument that ‘the Left must not go too far in order to avoid a backlash’ to other situations. What other victims can we blame? Mandela for his 25 year incarceration or the Jews for the Holocaust?

How did the students and the Left supposedly “go too far” in 1976? They organised protests on political issues, such as opposing dictatorship or calling for the removal of U.S. military bases, they were interested in social and economic issues, such as the rising price of petrol and bus fares and they supported workers and peasants in their struggles for social justice. Workers disputes over this period included strikes for union recognition, demands for a decent level of minimum wage and strikes against poor working conditions. Peasants protested against the level of debt, landlessness and indiscriminate methods used by the police and army in the suppression of rural rebels. The comfortably well-off reactionaries argue that all these protests “were unjustified” and what is more, they alienated the Left from Thai society, especially from the urban middle class. But the urban middle class did not react to protests in a simple and unified manner. This was

the reaction of one prominent member of the reformist section of the urban middle class: “(After 1973)...*All this improvement (land reform measures etc.) ... was accompanied by disturbance. How else could you negotiate with reluctant employers if you did not strike? How else do you push government to intervene in your favour against a mining company without some rally and demonstration? Looking back, I think we were all short-sighted when we complained about the disturbances.*”²¹

Sutham Saengprathum, one of the student leaders who was arrested on the morning of the 6th, explained that the student movement became a red-hot chimney for funneling all the grievances of society. “*The farmers went to government officials to complain about their problems, but no one was interested. Who else could they turn to but the students?*” (I.T.V. 1999a) The reactionaries are suggesting that the students should have turned a deaf ear to the plight of the farmers.

5.2 White-washing the “Reds”

In his speech at the opening of the 6th October 1976 monument at Thammasat University on 6th October 2000, Thongchai Winichakul called for acceptance of those who did not, or those who do not, respect the “Nation, Religion and Monarchy”. He argued very strongly for the fallen of the 6th October to be remembered as they really were. If indeed they were Communist sympathisers, then so what? Did they not have the right to live their lives and hold such views in Thai society? Similarly, Kasian Tejapira (2000) in a newspaper column, the next day, echoed this view by saying that it was no shame to have been a socialist back in 1976. The significance of this is not in the fact that it calls for the tolerance of opposing ideas, but in the fact that it highlights the way in which the victims of 6th October had previously been remembered. In an attempt to “prove” that the massacre was unjustified, some had chosen to remember their comrades as ‘innocent, non-Left-wing or even apolitical’. While such defensiveness is understandable, in the long run it does nothing to further an understanding of the events. Worse still, it shows how the process of rehabilitation, on ruling class terms, involved the self-denial of socialist ideas.

5.3 ‘What a relief that the Communists did not win’

Another common belief among some is that really it was a good thing that the C.P.T. did not win in the end, for if they had done; ‘*who knows?, we might have ended-up with another Pol Pot*’. Now, it is true that the C.P.T. was a Stalinist-Maoist organisation with no internal democracy. For the C.P.T. “democratic centralism” meant centralism without democracy, a concept totally different from the meaning of the term in Lenin’s Bolshevik Party. In the latter, the comrades spent most of the time in constant argument. Much of Lenin’s writings form part of these arguments. But just because the C.P.T. was undemocratic does not mean that if it had beaten the government, Thailand would have become a Stalinist dictatorship. It should also be recognised that the nature of the Pol Pot regime was not that of a classical Stalinist or Maoist regime, but more like an ultra nationalist dictatorship based on the views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Chandler 1991, Thion 1993: 168). It might have been the case that a C.P.T. government would have been dictatorial, but the alternative scenario has never been discussed. The students and intellectuals who joined the C.P.T. had an obvious track record in fighting against dictatorship. Their political awareness developed in a society with a mixture of Left-wing influences which were not all Maoist. Initially they accepted the dictates of the C.P.T., but only in reaction to the appalling brutality of the 6th October and the need to fight-back. Perhaps in the process of a Left-wing victory this student movement might have asserted its strong belief in democracy alongside its belief in socialism. Along the way, it might have been able to transform some of the C.P.T. members away from Stalinist ideas. What is more, it is clear that the eventual dissent in the jungle between the students and the C.P.T. was one key reason why the C.P.T. collapsed. For this reason, and for other reasons discussed below, we should reject the idea that it was beneficial in the long run for the Left to have been crushed on 6th October.

6. The dreadful legacy of the defeat of the Left

The 6th October 1976 and the eventual collapse of the C.P.T. has had at least 3 profound influences on the nature of modern Thai society and politics. Firstly, the resulting destruction of the student movement, the labour movement and the legalised Left, became a green light for increasing the rate of exploitation. Profit rates rose on the backs of workers and peasants. During the economic boom of the 1980s and early 1990s, living standards for most people rose, but the vast majority of newly created wealth went straight to the ruling elite. The proportion of value added in manufacturing industry that went towards profits, increased by 23% between 1976 and 1988 (Glassman 1999). Thailand came to rank 5th in the ignominious list of the world's most unequal countries and this inequality continues today. In 1998 the top 20% captured 55% of the wealth, while the bottom 20% shared only 4.5% of national wealth (Worawit & Teeranart 1998) and the problem is probably worse after the economic crisis.

What is worse, any attempt to suggest that such inequality can be redressed through even mild proposals for a welfare state and progressive taxation of the rich, has until recently, been met with derision. The defeat of the Left established "as fact" that the poor will always be poor and the rich will live in luxury and rule over the rest of us. The market mechanisms under capitalism are also taken for granted. Apart from modern Thai Marxists, there are no reformist academics or trade union leaders who oppose the market. This can best be seen over the issue of privatisation of state enterprises, where the main opposition is to the sale of these enterprises to foreign companies, not opposition to privatisation on principle. On the political front, there has been whole sale acceptance of a Right-wing liberal agenda for political reform, resulting in the new so-called "peoples" Constitution (Connors 1999, Ungpakorn 2002).

A second legacy from the defeat is that many of the victims have been persuaded into blaming themselves. This has already been discussed in terms of the actual events in 1976, but there is another aspect to this which is related to modern politics. As a result of the defeat of the Left, the present day progressive opposition has a tendency to censor itself, wary of calling for any significant change. This suits the elite very well. For over 20 years the memory of the 6th October has created a climate of fear among anyone who wished to question the status-quo. It is only recently that university students have been able to study courses in Marxism and read Socialist books which were banned and burnt by the post- 6th October government. Not only was the Left destroyed, but also the history of the Left. Today, many of the post-1976 generation are under the illusion that the Left never existed in Thai history.

A third and final legacy for modern Thai society resulting from the defeat of the Left is the present corrupt electoral system. Before 6th October various Left-wing and Socialist parties contested elections. They stood for policies which would benefit the poor. The Socialist Party of Thailand advocated nationalisation of large businesses, a welfare state and real land reform (Trocki 1977). The electorate, then, had a real choice. However, when the electoral system was reintroduced some years after 6th October, it was one devoid of class politics. Thai democracy, even after the reformed Constitution of 1997, has now become a monopoly for elite capitalist parties. In such circumstances election time is when citizens can choose between various Big-shots who will enter parliament, promising to build a local road or two and of course, "to do their best for the good of the nation". The qualification for becoming a Big-shot is to have enough money to buy votes and buy politicians to join your party at election time. In other countries, such as Britain, corrupt pork-barrel politics were the norm until a working class party emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Similarly in Thailand, until working class or peasant parties are re-established, vote buying will continue as sure as the sun rises each morning. It makes little difference whether we have an Election Commission under the new Constitution or not. It is common knowledge that all the major parties spent millions buying votes in the January 2001 election (*Bangkok Post* 27/11/00).

The fact that the more liberal and far-sighted section of the Thai ruling class managed to dictate the nature of the recent political reforms under the new constitution and then claim it was all the idea of "the people" shows how weak the Left-wing opposition is today. But it would be wrong to think that the ruling class has

had it all their own way ever since the 6th October. Both resistance from the jungle strong-holds of the C.P.T., the May 1992 uprising against the military, and the discontent following the economic crisis have forced the ruling class to make compromises. So far they have managed to do this while still maintaining their positions of privilege. However, in the face of continued economic uncertainties and the possibility of heightened class struggle it is unclear whether this will always be the case.

7. The return of Socialism

On the 6th October 2000 the monument for the 6th October, which had been planned since 1996, was finally finished. Those attending the opening ceremony were in the majority ex-October generation. No high-up officials of the Thai state came, or were invited. *The International* was played as the monument was unveiled. One column in the Thai language daily *Krungtep Turakit* reported the ceremony under the headline “socialism will return” (*Krungtep Turakit* 11/10/2000). It is clear that any revival of the Thai socialist tradition will have to confront the history of 6th October and all its legacies head-on. There is no real mystery concerning the event. Some details of who actually ordered the killings do need to be established. But the main point that the Thai ruling class collectively resorted to violence and brutality in order to destroy the struggle for social justice is obvious to all who care to look. The modern Left has to win the argument with significant sections of society that 1976 shows the real nature of those who control the capitalist system and continue to rule over us to this day. Two even greater tasks of winning the argument for socialism today involve, firstly, learning the lessons from both the achievements and mistakes of the C.P.T., and secondly, the re-examination post-C.P.T. ideology and methods of struggle within the social movements and N.G.O.s. This latter point will be discussed in detail in a later chapter within this book.

¹ “6 October 1976” video compiled from live television footage at the time.

² Witness No. 54, Songchit, at “The 6 October 1976 Fact-finding Committee” in September 2000, stated that while listening to police radio communications in March 1975, he heard police give direction to the bombers at Siam Square.

³ A Thai language copy of Lenin’s “*State and Revolution*” was successfully hidden in a library cupboard at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, until it was rediscovered by Michael Connors in 1997.

⁴ Witness number 46 at “The 6 October 1976 Fact-finding Committee” in September 2000.

⁵ Wattana Kiewvimol was recently appointed by the newly elected Senate to be chief adviser to the Senate Committee for the Administration of Justice! He is also honorary consul for Tanzania.

⁶ Witness number 46 at “The 6 October 1976 Fact-finding Committee” in September 2000.

⁷ Saneh Chamarik, personal communication, 10 Nov 2000.

⁸ The *Bangkok Post* also sought to censor an article commissioned from Ji Giles Ungpakorn in October 2000. The parts which the editors wished to cut were those mentioning the role of “the Thai ruling elite” in the 6th October massacre.

⁹ A police investigation of the play and the charges of lèse majesté under Police General Jumrat Juntarakachorn concluded that there was not enough evidence to press charges against the students.

¹⁰ Evidence given to “The 6 October 1976 Fact-finding Committee” November 2000.

¹¹ For a comparative study of Communist Parties in South-East Asia see: Ungpakorn 1998.

¹² Based on interviews with a number of student activists that went into the jungle after 1976 in different regions of Thailand.

¹³ This is confirmed by interviews with many ex-C.P.T. student activists.

¹⁴ The same point is made by Somsak Jeamteerasakul (1991: 134)

¹⁵ Comrade *Nu* became active in politics and left for the jungle while still at school. She confirmed that there were Youth members of the C.P.T. at her all-girls school. (The presence of Youth members in many

Bangkok Secondary schools is supported by many interviews carried out by the 6th October 1976 fact-finding and interviewing committee.) She explained that most of the students who joined with the C.P.T. in the jungle expected to take part in the struggle for socialism. In stead, they found themselves kicking their heels in jungle areas, behind the front line.

¹⁶ Comrade *Sswat* Personal Communication.

¹⁷ Based on interviews the comrades *Wanla* and *Pai* . Also Udom Sisuwan, ex-Central Committee member of the C.P.T. reported that the main supporters of the party in the countryside were middle income peasants, not poor peasants. (Po MuangChompoo 2000: 307)

¹⁸ Comrade *Mod*, personal communication.

¹⁹ Sinsawat Yotbangtoey, personal communication Sept 2000. *Bangkok Post* 6/10/1976: 1.

²⁰ Thus the author was almost sued by Samak Sundaravej during the 2000 election campaign for Governor of Bangkok!

²¹ Puey Ungphakorn 15th February 1977 speech at George Town University, Washington, U.S.A..

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