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## SIAM SINCE THE WAR

By A. C. S. ADAMS

Lecture given on January 12, 1949, Lieut.-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, V.C., K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., in the Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Adams came home last November from Bangkok, where he had been First Secretary to the British Embassy. He first entered the Siam Consular Service in 1932 at Bangkok, and has served for three subsequent periods in that country—eight years out of those seventeen. During the last war he took part in political warfare in the Far East and was later appointed First Secretary and head of Chancery at the British Embassy, Bangkok. That has kept him in touch with the trend of political developments between Siam and the rest of the world. He returned to England last year and he tells me he is going shortly to the United States to take up a new post. He seems pleased about that and we wish him good luck.

NOT long ago two friends of mine were dining at a restaurant not far from here. They fell into an argument about the relative merits of different countries, and one of them deplored the general ignorance that prevails about certain parts of the world. He went on to say that he did not suppose ten per cent. of the people in that restaurant even knew, for instance, where Siam was. The other, a lady, took him up on this and put the matter to the test by asking everyone nearby. She got quite a variety of answers, the most accurate of which came from a waiter who said that he always read his newspaper with an atlas and dictionary alongside. He was able to give the latitude, the longitude, the population and a great many other statistics about Siam. A diner, on the other hand, reckoned that Siam was in North Africa—"just to the left of Cyrenaica." So the lady's enquiry produced rather inconclusive results, but showed that, on the whole, many people are vague about Siam. I hasten to add that I impute no such vagueness to present company.

There have been quite a few references to Siam in the British Press in recent months. Many of them have concerned the visit to Great Britain of a Siamese Purchasing Mission. So to give you the general background of my subject to-day I can hardly do better than quote the leader of that Mission (Luang Charan Snidvongs), who broadcast a few days ago saying what his Mission was here for and what it hoped to accomplish. In the course of his remarks he said: "Siam is a sovereign independent state, governed by a constitutional monarchy, lying in a central position in South-East Asia with Burma as her western neighbour, French Indo-China to the north and east, and the Federation of Malaya to the south." I add here that, contrary to fairly popular belief, Siam has no common frontier with China, but there is a very large Chinese population in Siam itself. For a long time past the Chinese have emigrated from Southern China to Siam to make an easier living than they can in their own country. Siam's population is about eighteen millions, of whom three millions are either pure Chinese or partly Chinese. It is difficult to draw an exact line of demarcation to show where Chinese nationals cease and Sino-Siamese nationals begin.

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Bangkok, which lies on the River Menam Chao Phya, some nine miles from the sea, is by far the largest city in Siam and accounts for nearly one million out of the total Siamese population, and of that million a large section is Chinese since it is the main business centre and the Chinese are, first and foremost, the retailers and dealers in Siam.

At this stage let me make some brief comment on Siam's politics. A benevolent and tolerant kind of absolute monarchy was displaced in June, 1932, by means of a very neat and gentlemanly *coup d'état*. I will not go into the details of this, save to say that the constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary system were the outcome. And I must add that though political parties came into being in due course, they are not parties as we know them, with clearly-defined and divergent policies. Politics work largely on the basis of personalities in Siam. The two key personalities in this system are the present Prime Minister, a soldier, Field-Marshal Pibul Songgram, and the other, the ex-senior statesman, Nai Pridi Banomyong, who, during the war, headed the Siamese underground movement against the Japanese. They were both, especially Pridi, among those who brought about the 1932 *coup d'état*, but for all that they seem to be mutually exclusive. The Marshal's politics have in their time been far to the Right. Pridi, by contrast, has always been regarded as being away to the Left. About twelve years ago he was actually examined by a specially appointed Tribunal on a charge of promoting Communist ideas, but he was acquitted. The Marshal is in now, as I have said; the *coup* that brought him back on to the scene took place in November, 1947. Pridi left Siam as a result of it and has not yet returned there. Over the years, both men have moved towards the centre politically as they gained experience of administration. Incidentally, in 1937 both received from Great Britain honorary G.C.M.G.s.

Now a few words as to the economic structure of the country, and here I refer again to the broadcast by the leader of the Purchasing Mission now in this country. "Siam is not an industrial country, but essentially a supplier of foodstuffs and natural products which are of value to the outside world. Vast tracts of land are given over to the cultivation of rice, which forms the chief export; in the north are rich teak forests, whilst in the southern provinces high-grade tin ore is extensively mined, and rubber is being produced on an increasing scale." In that respect I would interpolate that the economy of Southern Siam is similar to that of Malaya. "The export of these commodities and of various lesser products of the land has given Siam for many years a favourable balance of trade, save for a brief intermission resulting from the war. In return for these exports we [the Siamese Government] have bought capital equipment for our railway and power stations, etc., textiles to clothe our people and the thousand and one things with which manufacturing countries can supply us. Over the years a substantial proportion of our overseas trade has been with the United Kingdom and with British Commonwealth territories, sometimes more, sometimes less than half of the total." That is a very significant proportion because it gives a fair idea of the mutual interests of Britain and Siam, about which I will speak later. The leader of the Purchasing Mission concluded this part of his broadcast by saying :

"Trade between us has always been on a basis of mutual advantage, for we each have what the other requires."

That puts the position briefly. I would add that British business has for a very long time played a most important part in Siam's economy, especially in tin-mining, teak extraction, and general import and export business.

As for the Siamese as a people, many of you may know them; indeed, I can see a few present who, to my knowledge, have been in Siam for some time, so I do not think I shall cause any dispute if I say that the Siamese as a people are very agreeable individuals. The key to their character is, I suppose, Buddhism. Siam is entirely a Buddhist country with a substratum of certain Animist beliefs below or parallel with the Buddhist religion. Their Buddhism is that of the Lesser Vehicle as practised in Ceylon and Burma. The Siamese have a good sense of humour; they are very easy to get on with and have excellent manners. They like mixing in Western society and there has long been a tradition of education abroad for bright boys and girls. These students earn Government scholarships, or are the children of well-to-do parents who can afford a foreign education. I am happy to say that Great Britain has had the majority of students who have gone abroad for their Western education. The numbers have varied from time to time, especially when, during the 1930s, times were hard financially and nearby cheaper places were sought, such as Japan and the Philippines. But now a good many Siamese are coming to our country again. I was told recently that soon there will be a full hundred students in England once more, which is satisfactory.

Siamese culture has its roots in India, but the language, which has five tones, probably came with the people when the Thai race to which they belong moved down the peninsula from South-West China many hundreds of years ago.

I will now refer to the months just prior to the end of the Japanese War. Two missions, one political and the other military, got out of Siam before the Japanese surrendered and were able to meet and discuss with S.A.C.S.E.A. (the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia) what part the Siamese underground movement should play in defeating the Japanese, and so forth. The missions had their talks and returned to Siam. In the event, the Japanese surrender came before the trigger was pulled for the Siamese underground movement to go into action. The surrender came, as you remember, rather more suddenly than had been anticipated. So the Siamese underground movement did not get to grips with the Japanese in any big way. As soon as the Japanese surrender was confirmed, arrangements had to be made for Allied troops to enter Siam. Siam had enormous prisoner-of-war camps in her territory, camps which the Japanese had set up along the line that they built from Siam into Burma. Those prisoners-of-war had to be released, helped and repatriated. It was a big task, as there were many thousands of them. Similarly, there were many tens of thousands of Japanese surrendered personnel all over Siam. They had to be collected and sent back to Japan, and that could not be done in a matter of weeks. It took a year or more, and even to this day occasionally one reads in the Bangkok Press that an ex-Japanese

sergeant, private, or lieutenant has been found living quietly in the remote provinces of Siam. Generally, if the news comes out it means that a Chinese has been done down, or thinks he has, by the character concerned, and so he gives him away. I cannot say that there are no Japanese left in Siam even at this moment. The troops used for this task belonged to S.A.C.S.E.A., under Admiral Mountbatten, and they were, for the most part, British troops. Very few Americans went into Siam with the regular forces. The British Force entered Siam towards the end of September, 1945.

The next event in the history of Siam was that King Ananda, who had been living with his mother and younger brother in Switzerland and was then aged twenty, returned to Siam because the Siamese Government thought it timely that the king should visit his people. The Royal Family were flown back to Siam by R.A.F. aircraft. I had the honour of accompanying them as far as Rangoon. King Ananda returned to Siam early in December, 1945, and though not then crowned he took on his royal duties and became very popular generally. The only time he had previously been seen by his people as King was on a short winter visit in 1938, when he was still quite a small boy.

On January 1, 1946, Great Britain and Siam concluded what is known as the formal agreement terminating the state of war. Siam had declared war on Great Britain early in 1942. This, of course, had to be undone, whatever value one placed on the declaration of war in the circumstances in which it had been made. So the formal agreement of January 1, 1946, ended that state of war, and Great Britain and Siam re-entered into diplomatic relations. Our Legation was re-opened and the Siamese Legation in London started up again also. Our main concern at that time was food; one might say it is so now also, but then in South-East Asia it was an over-riding concern because the areas which did not grow enough rice in ordinary times for their own needs were far worse off as a result of the period of Japanese occupation than they had ever been; and the areas which did continue to grow rice had been unable to export it to any extent during those years, so that they cultivated much less rice. There was, all round, a very bleak prospect for many hungry people. Siam we look to for a considerable contribution because in pre-war years her economy generally produced well over one million tons surplus each year—sometimes as much as one and a half million tons. Burma used to produce a surplus about twice as large, and Indo-China about the same amount as Siam, so that you can say that, as a rough figure, six million tons of rice yearly had to be produced again in South-East Asia. Therefore, as I have said, rice was the principal consideration immediately after the war. Various means were tried in order to procure the rice that was needed; those methods met with some success but not as much as was hoped. It was known that there was plenty of rice in the country; it was difficult to get it out because the communications were much damaged by the war, partly by actual bombing and partly by inability to maintain the railways, etc. Therefore, one of the methods tried was that of bringing in as many consumer goods as possible to provide an incentive to people, who were hoarding or holding rice stocks throughout the country, to have something

to buy. There had been no new stocks of consumer goods for a long time in Siam and anyone with anything to sell was on a nice wicket.

With all this, there was no great political stability. Governments changed rather frequently. Nai Pridi, of whom I spoke earlier, went to the United States of America and to the United Kingdom, where he was made much of for his signal services during the war. But then on June 9, 1946, a Sunday, the news broke in Bangkok that the king was dead; young King Ananda was said to have been found that morning in his bedroom with a bullet hole in his head. This sad tragedy created a political skeleton in the Siamese cupboard which exists to this day. The Government then in power was Pridi's, and after a certain amount of consultation with the Royal Family a *communiqué* was issued stating that as a result of an accident the king's life had come to an end. That document was issued the same day as the king died.

King Ananda's younger brother, Prince Phumipon, succeeded him. He is the present king, and he left Siam to go to Switzerland about two months after the sad event. He has not returned to Siam since, and the late king remains in his royal urn in a chapel in the Grand Palace at Bangkok.

The immediate political result of what had happened was that many of his opponents made a case against Pridi, some saying that he actually caused King Ananda to be assassinated, others that followers of his for their own reasons had brought about the assassination. Either way, it is difficult to see what evidence or motive could be adduced. Every succeeding Government that has since come into power has started off by saying they would hold an inquiry into the cause of King Ananda's death. Commissions and committees have been empanelled. High police officers have filled up masses of papers and forms. A trial of two pages suspected of causing the King's death was finally opened in the Siamese Supreme Court last August. This trial is likely to go on for some time.

Siam was admitted to the United Nations; her legations in London and Washington were raised to embassies, and the Americans and ourselves did the same, of course, in Bangkok. China, which had never been represented officially in Siam before the war, had sent a special mission to Bangkok soon after the end of the war, the result of which was that diplomatic relations between China and Siam were opened for the first time. Before the war the Siamese had always resisted or by-passed any suggestion by the Chinese that they should have diplomatic representation in Bangkok, because in view of the immense Chinese population in the country the Siamese feared an *imperium in imperio* if they allowed the Chinese a separate national existence. The Chinese, not having declared war on Siam and having taken a rather easy-going attitude towards the Siamese, came along afterwards and said, virtually: We have been pretty decent to you during the war; you cannot now deny us a treaty. Which, of course, the Siamese could not do, and so a Chinese Embassy was the first one to start in Bangkok. It was, indeed, the first embassy at all except for the Japanese before the war, and, curiously enough, the Chinese occupied the same premises as the Japanese had used.

Comparatively shortly after the establishment of fairly normal con-

ditions at the end of the war, Siam returned to France those territories in Indo-China which she had been awarded by the Japanese as a result of the 1940-41 Incident, as they called it, with Indo-China. This was a difficult political decision for the Prime Minister of the time to make, because Siam has long had very strong feelings about the territories concerned. It was because the French had taken them from the Siamese originally that the Siamese had gone to war about them in 1940 and 1941. They got them back with the help of Japanese arbitration, and now, after the recent war, they have returned them once more to France.

In the two and a half years I spent in Siam since the end of the war, starting in April, 1946, and ending in October, 1948, business generally was slowly but surely restored in a great many respects. More goods came into the country after a while; in some ways prosperity had never really departed, for there were many people who had made large money during the war by one means and another, and the Bangkok market seemed in the early months after the end of the war to contain almost anything one wanted—at a price. Later, things became more normal; the rate of exchange was about six times what it had been before the war; that is to say, the pound was worth in actual currency nearly six times as much as pre-war, though, of course, not in buying power. Siam also renewed her contacts with the outside world. Services missions travelled through Britain, the United States of America, and the countries of Europe and elsewhere, in order to study new methods and to enquire about the purchase of new equipment, arms and so on. There were also technical missions to various parts of the world, consisting of engineers, people connected with railways, telecommunications, and all kinds of special subjects. They went to see how other peoples were progressing after the war and to catch up with the inventions and developments which had taken place during the war period. Bangkok became again a great air centre. It has a large airfield situated about fifteen miles outside the city with runways for large aircraft. It is a very convenient crossroads for air services going to various parts of the East: to Singapore and southwards to Australia, up to India and across Indo-China and on towards Hongkong and Shanghai and Japan.

Now I should speak of another item of which you will have read in the Press quite recently, certainly as much as of the economic mission, namely, the Communist outbreaks in Malaya. As I said earlier, Siam has a very large Chinese population. Quite an appreciable part of that population may be, in fact certainly is, Communist. With the troubles in Malaya Siam feels that she is on the border of trouble herself. So far there has been no Communist outbreak in Siam, but Siam is concerned because she has a long common frontier with Malaya, most of which is jungle and very difficult to guard. When our authorities in Malaya make a drive on Communist pockets the Communists just nip into the jungle and over into Siam until things have quieted down in their region, and then they return and start more trouble. Only a few days ago (January, 1949) a conference was held in Southern Siam at Songhkla, also called Singora, the administrative centre for Southern Siam. The conference was between the Siamese military and police authorities and their opposite numbers from Malaya, and I am told

it had very successful results. The Siamese have gone back to Bangkok with an agreement in their pocket on nine points which I believe will be made public shortly. I have not yet heard what they are. They will obviously be aimed at co-ordinating police action on both sides of the border so that when the British on their side drive a bunch of Communists into the jungle over the border, the Siamese will be informed where they are and will take action against them. But that is a joint Siamese-British trouble; the Siamese have potential trouble within their own frontiers. Even if only five per cent. of the three million or so Chinese in Siam are Communists, if they decide to make trouble they can make plenty, and the relationship of the recently opened Soviet Legation in Bangkok to these activities, though it is not plain yet, might later become quite clear. The Soviet opened their Legation—the first Soviet Legation and the first Russian representation in Siam for a long time—about a year and a half ago. You will probably have heard somewhat startling accounts as to the size of its staff; generally, the number given in the Press was 200. I do not know who invented that number in the first instance or why it continued to gain credence, but in fact up to the time I left Siam in 1948 there were about six Soviet diplomats in the official list. I asked to-day if they had increased a good deal recently and I was told that they had not. The Soviet custom is to take all families and all staffs of every kind needed, so that if there are six diplomats and their six wives and an average of two children per family, and several cooks and two or three chauffeurs, a number of gardeners, clerks, archivists and so on, you can soon get a handsome total like thirty-eight, which is, I believe, now the actual total.

Another new mission in Siam is that of the Burmese. They have opened an embassy now that they are an independent power and the Siamese have done likewise in Rangoon; India started with a Consulate and now has a Legation. So far Pakistan is not separately represented.

In conclusion, I will say a word or two more about rice, because Siam's main contribution to a large part of the world nowadays is rice. The leader of the Purchasing Mission said a few days ago: "We have succeeded in the last eleven months in exporting over 700,000 tons of rice, a great part of which has gone to Malaya, Singapore, India, and Hongkong." He went on to say that they could probably do better when they improved their railways. For the next year he says that "On a conservative estimate we should have at least 850,000 tons available . . . for this season's crop shows every sign of being excellent."

As a final word on the conference I mentioned as having recently taken place at Singora to discuss co-operation over Communist matters, I would add that Mr. Malcolm Macdonald, the Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in South-East Asia, paid a visit to Bangkok just before Christmas, 1948. I am told the visit was in every way very successful; he got on well with the Prime Minister, Field-Marshal Pibul Songgram, who, whatever his political history, always produces a very good personal impression. I will not say that is solely a Siamese characteristic, but the Siamese have it in a marked degree.

## DISCUSSION

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: What has happened to the railway between Siam and Burma, which was built, largely, by the blood and sweat of British prisoners-of-war?

Mr. ADAMS: The railway as far as the Burmese border has been purchased by the Siamese Government. It was not an entirely economic purchase because most of the railway cannot be used, but they have acquired what there was of it and they may, I think, use just a short stretch soon—*i.e.*, at the Bangkok end.

General Sir JOHN SHEA: May I ask what relation Bira, the racing motorist who was in England, is to the present King of Siam?

The LECTURER: I cannot give the exact relationship because the Royal Family of Siam, as you may have heard, numbers many many hundreds. It is safe to say that he is a cousin. What degree of cousin and how many times removed, I would not like to say.

Colonel ROUTH: How far did the Kra Peninsula Canal progress?

The LECTURER: I can say, with complete confidence, that it got nowhere. The Kra Peninsula Canal question has been ventilated, so to speak, on many occasions. It started about the middle of last century and at least one Commission went to look into the possibility of making it. I seem to remember that a Commander Loftus of the Royal Navy produced a report on it, and my recollection is that it was found to be a most uneconomic proposition. That did not prevent many people in the mid-30s using the Kra Peninsula Canal bogy as something to frighten us with over the Japanese, though I could not see why. The sailing time round the Peninsula via Singapore is not so very long.

Mr. JARDINE: May I ask whether the lecturer considers that in Siam there is any idea which is likely to be strong enough to withstand the infiltration of Communist ideology? I do not mean the arrest of such Communists as there may be, but something of a more permanent nature, and whether any action has been taken about that?

The LECTURER: Communist ideology is not, I think, at all compatible with the ordinary Siamese outlook. The Chinese, as we know, have got their form of Communism. It may or may not be strict doctrinaire Marxism or Stalinism. The Siamese on the other hand are very property-conscious. They have always lived easily in a rich and fertile country. I do not think that the urge for the sharing of everybody's property lies with them at all. I do not think you need fear a strong hold on Siamese imagination from that point of view; only a political hold might be established on realist grounds. That I do not anticipate for a time, anyway.

Lieut.-General MARTIN: What is the strength of numbers of the Siamese Forces if they should be involved in drives and co-operation with us on the frontier or, indeed, in any operation of their own in case of more widespread trouble?

The LECTURER: I cannot at the moment give the figures for the Siamese Armed Forces, but I have been told only to-day that we have agreed to make equipment, and I suppose arms, available for five battalions of



Siamese troops, which is the size of the force immediately to be used on the border for the job to which I referred earlier.

Mr. LINDT: Are the Siamese a fairly uniform race or are they, like the Burmese, a central body of Siamese surrounded partly by tribal races like the Shans and the Burmese? Burma is surrounded by all sorts of other people. Is there the same situation in Siam or are the Siamese a more or less uniform race?

The LECTURER: I should say there is the same situation in Siam as in Burma, but it is not, perhaps, as marked in Siam. The northern areas, which I do not personally know, contain many tribes of different kinds, probably some that would be found in the Shan States and in the adjacent territories, but there is quite a large Thai element throughout Siam.

Mr. LINDT: That big lower rectangle of the country is more or less solidly Thai?

The LECTURER: Generally speaking, that is so.

General Sir JOHN SHEA: Is the Siamese a worker or is he, like the Burman, totally averse to any form of work?

The LECTURER: I would not describe the Siamese as a worker, but I would not go to the length of saying he is totally averse to work because the Siamese get enthusiasms and go very hard at whatever they are interested in. The peasants do not have to work awfully hard to keep contentedly alive, and most of them do not reckon it is worth doing more than they absolutely must.

A LADY: Is the name of the country Siam or Thailand?

The LECTURER: Siam is the name. Thailand was used at the request of the Siamese Government shortly before the war; there was not any particularly good reason for it, but the Government at the time decided that it was a more suitable name to call the country in foreign languages. The name of the country *in Siamese* has never been affected by the change. We used to call it Siam and have done so for a long time. The Siamese Government said they would be grateful if foreign countries would address them in their own language as Thailand, but that was all washed out again when a change of Government occurred after the war and Siam is once again the name. *The Times*, I was surprised to see, recently called it Thailand.

Colonel ROUTH: How is the teak trade getting on now that Burma is already closed down?

The LECTURER: There is at least one person in this room who could give a more correct answer than I to that question. The main British teak firms are working again. They managed to get back many of the logs which they had had at the beginning of the war and which had been dispersed. I do not know the proportion. At any rate some of the firms are working again. There are several companies: the Bombay Trading Corporation, Anglo-Thai, and the Borneo Company.

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: Would it be in order if the Anglo-Thai Company were to return to the original name, Anglo-Siamese, under present conditions?

The LECTURER: They could, but they have established the other name and there is no major objection to it. It is not so tiresome a word as

Thailand, and "Thai" has the justification of being the name of the race from which the Siamese sprang.

Brigadier McLEAN: What nationality were the prisoners-of-war in Siam?

The LECTURER: Usually British, Australian, and Dutch; there were a few Americans because there were airmen who baled out and were captured in Thailand; not very many.

Sir DASHWOOD STRETTELL: For what reason is the railway completely useless? The Japanese used it, did they not?

The LECTURER: It was only built as a strategic railway. Those who were unfortunate enough to have to build the line did their best not to make it a particularly good railway, and I should have thought a couple of seasons of neglect would wash out any value it had. The Siamese railway authorities had it surveyed right up to the borders and their Minister of Communications, about two years ago, lost his life on it because the carriage or locomotive in which he was travelling crashed through a defective bridge into a ravine.

Mr. LINDT: Is it not a fact that the bridges and culverts are largely timbered?

The LECTURER: Yes, sir.

Mr. LINDT: That is the answer, of course.

General Sir JOHN SHEA: Has there ever been any opportunity of judging whether the Siamese is a fighting man or not?

The LECTURER: The Burmese used to have an opportunity of judging about two hundred years ago; apparently they thought the Siamese were, because they had some quite serious battles with them over the number of white elephants they should have, and so on. In recent years it has been difficult to decide whether the Siamese are good fighting men. I believe those who served in the Forces against them, for the main part, did not have a very high opinion of their fighting capabilities.

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks, moved by the Chairman.

