

**THE
MONARCHY
AND
THAI
SOCIETY**

— ARNON NAMPHA —

The Monarchy and Thai Society

ARNON NAMPHA

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Introduction to the English Translation

Arnon Nampha: Lawyer-Poet-Wizard



Arnon Nampha is a 34-year-old lawyer, poet, and human rights defender. On 3 August 2020, he slipped on his black lawyer’s robe, wrapped a striped scarf around his neck and joined the Hogwarts-themed “Casting a Spell to Protect Democracy” protest at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. Like many youth-led protests for democracy in

Thailand in 2020, the pop culture tie-in lent a playful, festive air. As soon as Arnon took to the stage, channeling Harry Potter, the atmosphere became gravely serious. In plain and direct speech, and translated here into English, Arnon called for open discussion of the place of the monarchy in Thai society. Although absolute rule officially ended with a transformation to a constitutional monarchy on 24 June 1932, the monarchy has not always remained clearly under the constitution or outside politics. Without addressing an institution that exercises overarching influence on politics, economy and society – the monarchy — the emerging movement’s demands for democracy could not succeed. The silence around the monarchy, ensured through Article 112 of the Criminal Code, Thailand’s harsh *lèse majesté* law, both facilitates the institution’s influence and, by making it unquestionable, enhances its power.¹

This power was reflected in the simultaneous outcry by conservative royalists who called for Arnon’s arrest and the speed with which other activists took up and expanded his call for frank, transparent speech. A youth-led democracy movement had begun in January 2020, slowed down during the

¹ Article 112 stipulates that, “Whoever defames, insults or threatens the king, queen, heir-apparent or regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years.” On Article 112, see David Streckfuss, *Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse Majesté* (London: Routledge, 2010).

first wave of COVID-19 infections and then picked back up in June 2020. The protests began with the demand for General Prayuth Chan-ocha to resign as prime minister and a new general election to be held, a new constitution drafted, and for state officials to stop harassing and intimidating activists. General Prayuth was the head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the junta that carried out the 22 May 2014 coup, Thailand's 13th since 1932, and retained the position through a neither free nor fair election held in March 2019. The 2017 Constitution, whose author was handpicked by the NCPO and is the 20th since 1932, set up the conditions for this election and protected the power of the state and monarchy over the rights and liberties of the people. After Arnon's speech, an additional demand — reform of the monarchy — was added.

The next week, the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD), a new group based at Thammasat University, the historic center of student activism in Thailand, emerged and elaborated Arnon's call into a ten-point set of concrete demands for reform of the monarchy. Observers used the phrase "pierced through the ceiling" to describe the effect that Arnon's speech had on public discussion of the monarchy. Throughout the second half of 2020, the protests continued to grow in defiance of the fear of being accused of the crime of *lèse majesté* and the entire roof that limited speech about the monarchy was lifted, if not exploded altogether.

Beginning in August 2020, criminal charges began to be lodged against Arnon and other activists, including sedition and violation of laws pertaining to public assembly and public health. In late 2020, Article 112, largely dormant since 2017, was taken up in earnest by eager civilians and police who began to lodge accusations against activists. By late June 2021, 101 people were facing accusation of *lèse majesté*.² Arnon, as one of the leaders, has 12 pending cases, including one stemming from his 3 August speech as Harry Potter. On 9 February 2021, a prosecution order was issued in the first of his pending cases to reach the court and he was detained without bail in the Bangkok Remand Prison for four months. How the courts move forward with the charges against Arnon and other activists accused of insulting the monarchy through their peaceful expression and protest will profoundly shape the future of both the individual lives of those facing prison and the collective life of Thai society and politics. As Arnon raised on 3 August, and the events that have followed since then confirmed, the outcome is inseparable from the place and role of the Thai monarchy in the polity. The choice is between freedom and repression, and dictatorship and democra-

² Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, “สถิติผู้ถูกดำเนินคดีมาตรา 112 ‘หมิ่นประมาทกษัตริย์’ ปี 2563-64” [“Statistics of Prosecutions for Article 112 ‘Lèse Majesté’ Cases, 2020-2021”], 24 June 2021, <https://tlhr2014.com/archives/23983>.

cy. For Arnon, the struggle is the latest stage in his life as a lawyer and poet committed to justice and human rights.

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Originally from Roi Et province in northeastern Thailand, when Arnon pierced through the ceiling of public silence about the monarchy on 3 August 2020, he was carrying on work that he began over a decade ago. Between March and May 2010, there was a sustained protest by tens of thousands of red shirt activists, named after the color of their shirts, who occupied Bangkok calling for new elections and a return to parliamentary democracy after a series of appointed governments following the 19 September 2006 coup.³ The government in power at the time, which was supported by yellow shirt activists, who were royalist-nationalist in contrast to the populist-democratic red shirts, carried out a sustained crackdown on the protest between 10 April and 19 May 2010 that resulted in at least 94 deaths and over 2000 injuries.⁴ Following the crackdown, many red shirt activists were prosecuted for a range of political

³ On the April-May 2010 protests in English, see Benjamin Tausig, *Bangkok is Ringing: Sound, Protest and Constraint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁴ People's Information Center for Those Affected By the Dispersal of Protests in April-May 2010 (PIC). *Truth for Justice: A Fact-finding Report on the April-May 2010 Crackdowns in Bangkok* (Bangkok: PIC 2017).

and national security crimes, and red shirt and other dissidents faced a wave of *lèse majesté* charges. In response, in early 2011, Arnon and two colleagues opened the Ratsadornprasong Law Institution (RLI), the name of which was a combination of the Khana Ratsadorn, the Thai name for the People's Party, who fomented the transformation from absolute to constitutional monarchy in June 1932, and Ratchaprasong, the name of the intersection where many of the killings during the April-May 2010 crackdown took place. Arnon and the RLI took on cases that other lawyers were unwilling to take on for reasons of difficulty, lack of resources and fear. Then, two days after the 22 May 2014 coup, he was part of the initial group of lawyers who founded Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), to defend those persecuted by the NCPO and to document the human rights abuses the junta perpetrated.

Alongside his work fighting for justice in the courts, Arnon writes poetry that documents and foregrounds voices and silences otherwise elided. His first book, *The People are Blind and Mute No Longer* (เหมือนบอดไปไพร่ฟ้ามาสดทาง), was published by Aan Press on the fifth anniversary of the 19 September 2006 coup, and was priced at 112 baht (4 USD) in reference to the repressive law. In one poem, the palpable resolution of a father who does not want to frighten his daughter by telling her he is in prison and so sends her letters as though he is working abroad, provides a devastating account of

the life of political prisoners. The inhumanity of the state crackdown on the Red Shirt protestors is felt in the narration of violence by a man who witnessed his wife's death during the protests. The administrative brutality of the ruling regime during the April-May 2010 protests is communicated through a list of government orders too base to be publicly issued. He became what he called a "poet by necessity," necessary because so many poets and writers then still supported the 2006 coup and the succeeding governments aligned with the military. He held out no hope for literary prizes or praise, but noted in the afterword to the collection that, "...what I wish is for my poems to be a record of one small corner of the peoples' struggle. I also want them to be a voice for the politics prisoners in the cells whose 'whispers' pass through my poems. Or, if I am to put it accurately, the poems collected in this book were written in the blood and tears of the people. They merely passed through my hands."

Like those he has spent more than a decade defending, Arnon has now become a prisoner locked up for his political expression. The first case against him in which a prosecution order has been issued is in relation to the #ReturnPowerToThePeople protest organized by the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration at Sanam Luang in Bangkok on 19 September 2020. There are a total of 21 defendants in the case; the 7 whose accusations include violation of Article 112, such as Arnon, were all ini-

tially denied bail. Beginning in mid-March, some of his co-defendants were released one-by-one on conditions of not insulting the monarchy and wearing an electronic monitoring device. Initially, Arnon, who was detained beginning on 9 February, was not granted bail because he refused to agree to the conditions. He was later released in early June after being part of a wave of prisoners who tested positive for COVID-19.⁵

Since being remanded, both additional accusations and accolades have traveled through the bars to Arnon. On 24 February, the police visited him in prison to inform him that violation of Article 112 was being added to the charges he already faced in relation to his 3 August speech as Harry Potter.⁶ He denied the charge and the police interrogated him for two days. They argued that he wanted to create hatred of the monarchy and create disorder and insubordination among the people. The po-

⁵ Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, “ศาลนัดไต่สวนคำร้องขอประกัน ‘ไมค์-อานนท’ 1 มิ.ย. นี้! แม้มีผู้ติดเชื้อโควิดในเรือนจำพิเศษกรุงเทพฯ ถึง 95% ด้านอานนท่ถูกคุมขังมาแล้วกว่า 3 เดือน” [“Court set to examine the petition for bail of Mike and Arnon on 1 June! With rates of infection of up to 95% in Bangkok Remand Prison, Arnon has been held for more than 3 months”], 21 May 2021, <https://tlhr2014.com/archives/29974>.

⁶ The initial charges were violation of Article 116 of the Criminal Code (sedition), Public Assembly Act, Emergency Decree, Controlling Public Advertisement by Sound Amplifier Act, and the Computer Crimes Act.

lice had recorded the speech and raised 19 specific points in the interrogation. In his response to their questions, he repeated his assertion in the speech itself: he spoke the facts and spoke in good faith. He gave the speech because university students were already talking, in cloaked and comparative terms about the monarchy, and were intimidated for doing so. If the institution of the monarchy and the people are open and listen carefully to one another, it will lead to peaceful, sustainable resolution of the problems in society.⁷

When this case, and other pending Article 112 cases that involve the criminalization of peaceful dissenting speech questioning the monarchy reach trial, a great deal will be at stake. If the accused assert that they were acting in good faith and that they were conveying facts, and the prosecution is unable to refute them, the court will be ruling on more than whether or not they are innocent or guilty of violation of Article 112. The court will have to decide who is permitted to utter facts out loud and if it is possible to dissent and act in good faith, or if good faith is only compatible with unquestioning loyalty.

⁷ Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, “เปิดคำให้การ ‘ทนายอนันท์’ คดีแฮรี่ พอตเตอร์ หลังถูกแจ้งเพิ่ม ม.112 ย้ำเจตนาปรารถนารักษาสถาบันกษัตริย์ อยู่อย่างสง่างาม” [“Testimony of ‘Lawyer Arnon’ in the Harry Potter case, after the charges were increased; Maintains that his intention is to retain the institution of the monarchy in a dignified manner”], 2 March 2021, <https://tlhr2014.com/archives/26414>.

On 18 May 2021, Arnon was awarded the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights by the May 18 Memorial Foundation in South Korea. In the prize announcement, the Foundation noted that, "As a result of his unrelenting activism, he has been arrested and indicted many times on charges of criminal offences In spite of facing risks of being reincarcerated if he does not stop his activities, he continues his fight for justice and human rights." Arnon has become one of those who still hold fast to freedom despite being imprisoned whom he wrote about after the April-May 2010 crackdown:

"Gritty gruel, dirty rice
Slivers of greens fried in rancid pork fat taste
grim
Tasteless oily squash soup
I learned the bitter taste of life

Cooped up the body ceases to feel
But the spirit of freedom cannot be locked up
Swear to unstintingly honor the sacrifice
Of our friends, the beloved masses,
perpetually"

Like the spirit of freedom that cannot be locked up, the light that now shines through the hole in the ceiling pierced by the lawyer-poet-wizard Arnon Nampha on 3 August 2010 and those who came after him cannot be dampened.

A note on the translation: The 3 August 2020 speech was given during the “Casting a Spell to Protect Democracy,” protest organized by Mahanakorn for Democracy and Kasetsart University (KU) Daily at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. The Democracy Restoration Group transcribed the tape of the speech and it was published as both a small paper booklet and distributed as a free PDF.⁸ For this English-language translation, in addition to the footnotes in the original Thai-language version, footnotes (marked with *–trans.* at the end) and supplemental information in [] have been added to the text where necessary for an international audience that may be unfamiliar with Thai politics and history. Otherwise, the translation has hewn as close to the original as possible to retain the quality of speech.

⁸ The original Thai-language version can be downloaded here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LIU5NH1bzUn2xYx-hTROsZ0ICK6E_xq5D/view?fbclid=IwAR1aV9Lx72KAo8F-GEgdqL4VasBLnzGQgKG9rMpdTnqLubgcAtGC6eXi2CnE

The Monarchy and Thai Society

Arnon Nampha

Greetings to the brothers and sisters who have come out to protest today.

Before beginning, I must inform you that I was contacted by my younger brothers and sisters from Kasetsart University and Mahanakorn University to speak about only one topic. It is one that many people wish to hear about, but no one discusses or mentions directly.

Out of honor and respect for myself, and to honor and respect the brothers and sisters who have come to listen, and with the greatest honor and respect for the monarchy, it is of the utmost necessity that we speak about how the monarchy is involved in Thai politics today. We have shoved this problem under the carpet for many years, brothers and sisters. There is no mention of the actual problem, which means that the solutions miss the mark.

We have to accept the truth that part of the reason that the students and the people have risen up to protest today is because many wish to ask questions about our monarchy. They hold up signs at demonstrations about the person who is in Ger-

many and mention the person who flies back and forth. Such statements can allude to no one other than our monarch, brothers and sisters. But they are meaningless if we do not speak frankly and with reason and evidence in line with the principles of the rule of democracy with the king as head of state.

Brothers and sisters, at present we are facing a problem of the utmost importance. This problem is that our monarchy has grown more and more distant from democracy.

This process began after the 2014 coup. Prayuth Chan-ocha and his cohort that launched the coup ordered their jurists to draft a new constitution. The first was drafted by Bowornsak Uwan-no. The content of the constitution first drafted by Bowornsak was not substantially different from that of the 2007 Constitution. It turned out that the Thai ruling class did not accept it and the National Reform Assembly (NRA) dispensed with it.⁹ The NRA then handed the responsibility to the real, live wizard-jurist of Thailand, Meechai Ruchuphan. Meechai used his wizardry to design a constitution with a structure that was conducive to the expansion of the royal prerogative in a direction depart-

⁹ The National Reform Assembly (NRA) was one of the five bodies appointed by the junta in 2014. The draft constitution was not passed: there were 105 votes in support of the draft, 135 against it, and 7 abstentions.

ing from democracy. The farther, the better.

How did he design it?

1. He designed the second paragraph of Section 15 to create royal units as part of national governance, and for such units to be administered in line with the king's pleasure. Translated into common language, the statement that such units will be administered in line with the king's pleasure means that they will be run as the king wishes.¹⁰ The design of this law is in complete contravention to democracy. Subsequently, the draft was brought to a referendum through a messy process. The referendum itself lacked any semblance of democracy. Many of my friends were arrested and threatened.¹¹

¹⁰ Section 15 of the 2017 Constitution stipulates that: "The appointment and removal of officials of the Royal Household shall be at the King's pleasure. The organisation and personnel administration of the Royal Household shall be at the King's pleasure, as provided by Royal Decree."

¹¹ The 2016 Act on the Referendum of the Draft Constitution criminalized protest, dissemination of information and even comment on the draft not explicitly authorized by the junta. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights documented at least 212 people who faced prosecution for actions including distributing flyers, organizing seminars on the draft constitution, and tear up their own ballots in protest of the drafting and referendum process. See Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, "รัฐธรรมนูญใหม่ประกาศใช้ แต่ 'ผู้ต้องหาประชามติ' กว่า 104 ราย ยัง

2. But once it was passed through a referendum, the monarchy interfered in the promulgation of the constitution. The first time was when Prayuth Chan-ocha presented the constitution passed through the referendum to the king. The king ordered the amendment of the constitution on many key points. If the country was a democracy with the king as head of state, this could not occur because it was official interference with the promulgation of the constitution.

The amendment involved two significant points:

The first amendment regarded the situation of a national crisis. Meechai's constitution said to examine it in line with administrative custom and to establish a committee to examine [the situation] with the president of the Supreme Court, the president of the Administrative Court, the president of Parliament, and the opposition leader. Examination of national crises would be carried out by those institutions bound up with the people. But the king ordered amendment and for this point to be re-

ถูกดำเนินคดี” [“The new constitution has been promulgated, but more than 104 defendants in ‘referendum cases’ are still being prosecution”], 7 April 2017, <https://tlhr2014.com/archives/3924>. –trans.

moved. All that remained was for the examination to be in line with the custom of democracy with the king as head of state. This was the first amendment with definite impact on the key content of the constitution.

The second amendment was to make it such that the king does not need to appoint a regent to act in his stead when he is not in the country.¹² We have therefore seen our king go to live in Germany and Switzerland. He returns to Thailand infrequently. This is a fact that all of the brothers and sisters know. All of the soldiers and police know. But I believe that no one dares to say it. With the greatest respect for the monarchy, I think that this problem must be officially discussed in order to collectively find a solution.

Upon promulgation, the power of Meechai Ruchuphan's constitution was immediately displayed. The NLA, which had been appointed by that damn dictator Prayuth, colluded to pass many laws which expanded the monarchy's royal prerogative.

The first of these laws was the 2017 Royal

¹²Section 16 of the 2017 Constitution stipulates that: "Whenever the King is absent from the Kingdom or unable to perform His functions for any reason whatsoever, the King may appoint one person or several persons forming a council as Regent. In the case where a Regent is appointed, the President of the National Assembly shall countersign the Royal Command therefor."

Service Administrative Act. This law created the opportunity for units to be established directly by the king and to act according to the king's pleasure, but for the salaries of such units to be paid by the people.

An important law, the 2018 Royal Assets Structuring Act, was then drafted. An organization, the Crown Property Bureau, already existed to manage the assets of the king. There may have been problems and arguments over who looked after the assets of the crown and [personal] assets of the king. But the amendment of the constitution and the promulgation of this law in 2018 was an earth-shattering transformation of Thai politics.

Why?

Because after this, brothers and sisters, those assets which were national, public assets which we owned collectively, whether Sanam Luang or the palaces or the shares of stock of which we once shared ownership, became the property of the king and subject to management according to the king's pleasure.

This mattered but no one dared to talk about it. That is the reason why the younger brothers and sisters asked me to speak today. How is it important? When the People's Party transformed rule [from absolute to constitutional monarchy on 24 June 1932], they made a clear division of assets. The People's Party did not touch those which belonged to the king. But those which came from our

taxes before the transformation were given to the state to administer by the People's Party. It is important in that these assets, many of which we once used communally, are no longer as such. For example, children played and homeless people dwelled on Sanam Luang when it was not being used for royal ceremonies. We will not see such things anymore.

That alone was not enough. The transformation of the assets of the crown to be administered solely by the king caused another point of law to arise. When our king is residing in Germany, according to the terms set by the state of Bavaria in Germany, he may be required to pay tens of thousands of millions in baht in tax. To whom do those tens of thousands of millions of baht belong? It is the tax money of each and every one of us. This is a significant vulnerability of which the Prayuth government has never spoken.

All of us witnessed the subsequent problematic amendment of the constitution. All of us have talked about it. The students who are down below the stage have all talked about it. But many have turned a deaf ear to it. What problems arise when the king does not live in the country? At present, a Western incarnation of King Tabinshwehti is ridiculing our king in Germany by projecting lasers and having children shoot air guns.¹³ It is unseemly and

¹³ King Tabinshwehti was the king of Burma from 1530-1550

has arisen because the king is not in the country. It also includes the instance of ministers being unable to swear an oath of allegiance before being appointed. They had to wait for the king to return to the country first. Everyone is aware of this problem. All of the police know but no one dares to discuss it. Everyone who came to the demonstration on 18 July 2020 who held up posters about this knows.¹⁴ But no one talks about it.

Today, therefore, Harry Potter has to talk about it.

It is not only that laws been been promulgated that have caused the monarchy to move outside democracy. Do you remember, brothers and sisters, when the election was held in 2019? The elected government proposed another law: the 2019 Royal Decree on the Partial Transfer of Forces and Budget of the Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Armed

CE and led the first (1547-1549) in a series of wars between Burma and Siam (the predecessor of present-day Thailand) that continued until the mid-1800s. In June 2017, two German teenagers shot air guns at Rama 10 on a bike path in Munich. In early 2020, activists used laser lights to project questions about the monarchy on to the exterior walls of a hotel where Rama 10's entourage was staying in Germany.—*trans.*

¹⁴On 18 July 2020, Free Youth held a protest at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. Both Arnon and Panupong Jadnok were later arrested for their participation in the protest.—*trans.*

Forces Headquarters, Ministry of Defence to the Royal Security Command, a Royal Unit. The 1st and 11th Infantry Regiments were transferred for the monarchy to supervise according to the king's pleasure.

This is significant. No democracy exists in which the king is given the power to supervise such a large number of soldiers. Not a one. Doing so is risky. It risks transforming a monarchy that exists within a democracy into an absolutist regime.

We are lucky in our unluckiness in that there was one daring political party which stood up and raised this issue in parliament. Allow me to mention his name. At the time, he was a member of parliament for the Future Forward Party and said that they did not endorse the promulgation of a royal decree transferring military forces to be under the monarchy.

That person is named Piyabutr Saengkanokkul. He was the first and only member of parliament in decades of Thai history who dared to stand up and raise this issue in parliament. He discussed the troubling nature of this transfer because it was accomplished through royal decree, rather than allowing a wide-ranging debate in parliament. In addition, placing many military units under the monarchy risked leading to a change in the form of governance. As fate had it, talking about this issue

led to the dissolution of the Future Forward Party.¹⁵

Today, we are a democracy with the king as head of state. But the monarchy exercises royal prerogative in excess of that permitted in a democracy. With respect for the monarchy, there is no way to solve this problem without talking about it.

This kind of discussion is not the toppling of the monarchy. But it is talking about it so that the monarchy will exist in Thai society in a manner that is correct and legitimate for a democracy with the king as head of state. All of the students who came out to protest after the new year are aware of this. All of the students who hold up posters with messages containing a double meaning that mention the individual I have already discussed are aware of this. From now on, there must be discussion of this in public. Each of us must demand that members of parliament discuss this in parliament as our representatives.

Do not leave it to those on the margins to have to talk about the monarchy and then face threats and harassment all alone. Do not leave it to the political exiles to talk about the monarchy and

¹⁵ On 21 February 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled to dissolve the Future Forward Party and cited as a reason that a loan of \$6 million USD that Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, the party's leader, was a donation and therefore illegal. The party was disbanded and its leadership, including Thanathorn and Piyabutr, were banned from holding political office for ten years.—*trans.*

then be brutally murdered and disappeared. From now on, this is not going to happen anymore. From now on, no one who comes out to talk about the monarchy will be accused of being crazy or insane and scooped up and put in the hospital even though they spoke the truth. Brothers and sisters, this is not going to happen any more.

This is merely the opening scene of the transformation of the monarchy's royal prerogative that poses a problem to democracy. It is the promulgation of law by a parliament of dictatorship. The next is that our monarchy has remained silent in excess of necessity and allowed people to progress by referencing the monarchy over and over again in order to damage those who think differently about politics.

The first person I am going to talk about, who has pulled the monarchy in to support himself is named Prayuth Chan-ocha. Brothers and sisters, do you recall that the constitution stipulates that before a person is to become prime minister, he must take an oath in front of the king? He must pledge that he will be loyal to the monarchy and rule faithfully, and, importantly, protect and act in accordance with the Thai constitution. But Prayuth Chan-ocha intentionally did not pledge in front of our king that he would protect and act in accordance with the Thai constitution.¹⁶

¹⁶ Section 161 of the 2017 Constitution stipulates that: "Be-

What is this meaning of this, brothers and sisters? What it means, brothers and sisters, is that Prayuth Chan-ocha did not give his word that he would not once again tear up the constitution. Prayuth Chan-ocha did not give his word that he would act in accordance with the constitution. But the monarchy still allows Prayuth to refer to them over and over again.

That alone is not enough. I do not believe that the monarchy, which has military units who serve as an intelligence wing, a wing that looks after social networks, are not aware of the how people like Major General Rienthong Nanna use the monarchy to smash us.¹⁷ I do not believe that

fore taking office, a Minister must make a solemn declaration before the King in the following words: 'I, (name of the declarer), do solemnly declare that I will be loyal to the King and will faithfully perform my duties in the interests of the country and of the people. I will also uphold and observe the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand in every respect.'" But on 16 July 2019, Prayuth Chan-ocha, the prime minister, led the cabinet in swearing the oaths of allegiance. Prayuth concluded by stating "I will faithfully perform my duties in the interests of the country and of the people." But he missed the sentence of "I will also uphold and observe the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand in every respect."

¹⁷ Major General Rienthong Nanna is a retired army officer and physician who established an organization, the Rubbish Collection Organization, in 2013. The group carries out witch-hunts against critics of the monarchy, including publicly outing them and filing criminal charges of lèse majesté

he does not know. But that the monarchy and the Bureau of the Royal Household do nothing even though they know that there are individuals who refer to the monarchy and then come down to smash the people. This makes us unable to resist asking, really, what does the monarchy think about us? If my voice reaches the monarchy and the Bureau of the Royal Household, allow me to call on him to express a neutral political stance. Deal with Major General Rienthong and do not let him hurt the people, don't let him threaten us anymore.

In addition, this country still distorts many other important issues. The monarchy has been twisted so that it is the institution of a particular group of individuals, not an institution of all Thai people in the country. This particular group has claimed that the actions of those who call for the removal of Prayuth Chan-ocha are equivalent to the toppling of the monarchy. This is not the case. Calling for the removal of Prayuth is calling for the removal of Prayuth. The amendment of the constitution is the amendment of the constitution. Saying that the removal of Prayuth is the equivalent of topping the monarchy is an exaggeration.

That group of individuals must cease doing so before those in the country come face to face with violence. Additionally, each and every one of us must try to talk about this genuine problem

against them.--*trans.*

openly and in public. Starting tomorrow and from now on, if I am invited to speak but those who invite me ask me to contort myself and not talk about the monarchy, I will not do it. I will only go up on stage when given the chance to speak the truth. And I maintain, on my manly honor and my human dignity, that I speak with respect and sincerity. If I lie, even a little bit, let me expire within three, seven days, brothers and sisters.

The next point is that in addition to the expansion of the royal prerogative by the monarchy in excess of that permitted by the system, the dictatorship of Prayuth Chan-ocha has referred to the monarchy in order to undemocratically govern this country. Part of this is the enactment of the National Budget Act that allocates funds to the monarchy without examination of the monarchy's expenditures, brothers and sisters.

This is an important issue. Every organization that uses funds from the national budget must be audited and must be able to be criticized. But this is not an issue for this government. Funds have been apportioned in many areas in excess of necessity. For example, the Ministry of Commerce has promoted the fashion clothing of Sirivannavari. The national budget has been used to promote the personal brand of a princess.¹⁸ This is this govern-

¹⁸ Sirivannavari is a fashion label run by Rama 10's daughter of the same name. --*trans.*

ment's excessive sucking up to the monarchy. This would not happen if we had an elected government.

The next point is the parliamentary provision of a more than 5,000,000,000 baht [153.8 million USD] budget allocation for air travel in the National Budget Act. We have seen the problems that arise where our monarchy is abroad for long stretches. Within a democracy, parliament is able to hold a debate and advise the king to return to the country. But such things do not arise in Thailand. Many tens of thousands of millions of baht have been squandered without any oversight.

This does not include the budget of the local organizations that constructed roadway arches to glorify the monarchy to the tune of tens of millions. Whether people are going to be loyal to the monarchy or are going to believe in the monarchy has nothing to do with the roadway arches, but rests on the actions of each royal. Therefore, this toadying excessive allocation of the national budget to construct such arches, when we are facing COVID-19 and impoverished people have nothing to eat, must stop from this point forward. They should not exist. If they do, only as necessary and in concert with the country's economic state.

I speak today out of great concern for the country. I speak about the problems that have arisen from the expansion of the monarchy's royal prerogative as a citizen. I do not have any other

intention, brothers and sisters. I am not just blathering on either: I have proposals to address the problems.

After this, if we amend the constitution, have an election, and have a parliament with representatives who are on the side of democracy, the sections of the constitution that pertain to the monarchy must be revised. The king must be in Thailand in order to be the revered idol of those of us in the country, rather than going to live in Germany. In cases in which he does go, a regent must be appointed to act in his stead in Thailand so as to not leave the country king-less. The king should be in the country as befits a democracy with the king as head of state. This must be addressed.

The next matter that must be addressed is amendment of the law that has allowed the assets which are the public property of the country, which belong to us, to be transferred to the monarchy. This has taken place via the 2018 Royal Assets Structuring Act. These assets must be pulled back to be ours once again. The law must be revised so that the assets which belong to the public, whether Sanam Luang, or Wat Phra Kaew, are returned to belong to us, the people, brothers and sisters.

If this is left unaddressed, brothers and sisters, it is unavoidable that there will one day be a violent clash between two groups and two ideologies. One day, if we choose a political party that favors democracy, they must dive in and amend this

law. If they do not do so, a battle will ensue. For sure. Each one of us must work together to vote for the party that has a policy to revise the constitution to really and truly bring the monarchy under it. We must vote for the party that has a policy to return public assets to the people. Choose that party, brothers and sisters. Do not choose parties with policies to expand and expand the royal prerogative, who squander the national budget and who do not pay attention to the economic conditions of the people. We will starve to death, but they expend and lavish money upon the monarchy to the tune of tens of thousands of millions. Do not choose them. People like this need to be taught a lesson.

Finally, thank you to the brothers and sisters who have come to listen and participate in the Harry Potter-themed activism today. If anything happens because I spoke the truth, whether I am threatened, or prosecuted, or killed, I do not regret it. Today I have spoken the truth. And this truth will be with every one of you, brothers and sisters. We are going to haunt the dictators until real, actual democracy belongs to each and every one of us.

Next, representatives of the students are going to read a declaration. They are going to affirm their group's principles and share the stance that the students from Kasetsart University and Mahanakorn University have adopted in organizing today's event. Brothers and sisters, if there is an-

other protest, if anyone is going to talk about the problem that has been pushed under the carpet, I ask everyone to talk about it responsibly. I ask everyone to talk about it frankly. And I ask everyone to talk about this problem with respect and a sense of their own humanity, brothers and sisters. Don't just castigate the monarchy. Provide facts. Present ways of solving the problems. Be straightforward. I believe that everyone is ready to listen and solve the problems now. We have to collectively resolve the problem of the monarchy before there is a crisis of faith in the country and before the belief in the monarchy declines further.