On November 30, 1984 the military prosecutor, with the approval of the military court dropped the charges against social critic Sulak Sivaraksa and his 2 companions who were arrested on early August this year on the charge of less majesete which was related to the book “Unmasking Thai Society”. This, at least, can be seen as a harbinger that fundamental rights of people is respected.

Yet, there have been so many cases which citizen rights and freedom is violated by different means. Many unjust Acts have been strictly operated e.g. Anti-Communist Act, while people have to suffer from Laws which can be trickly interpreted e.g. Labour Law.

Moreover, brutal actions which threaten freedom of people, have taken place from time to time. Burning villagers' houses, killing 'EX-CPT' worker are clearly shown that no one can assure to protect people’s rights, their safety and personal security. Politically, at the same time, there have been continuously attempts to move some matters which leading to undemocratically changes since the last few months. These events, then, well reflected the stage of democracy in Thailand at present. They are also indicators that many actions must be immediately done for the sake of fundamental rights of people.
NEWS FROM THAILAND

Sulak Sivaraksa

Sulak's case dismissed:

The Bangkok Military Court with drew charges of lese majeste against well- known social critic Sulak Sivaraksa and 2 other accused in a special hearing on November 30, 1984.

Sulak and the two others, Kitti Sithichindachoke and Chitrakorn Tongkasemuk, were told in a close-door hearing which was held for only 10 minutes that the public prosecutor decided to drop all charges against them.

Director General of the Public Prosecution Department, Suchin Timsuwann, said the withdrawal of the case was made out of necessity. He would not elaborate, saying it was the government's confidential matter.

"We have sufficient evidence for the case and we do not withdraw it because the accused are innocent. We have to do so because of other reasons which cannot be disclosed," Suchin said.

State Railway workers' strike:

Due to union's demands the arbitration committee ordered the state Railway of Thailand (SRT) to pay about 14,000 upgraded workers new salaries based on their daily wages multiplied by 30 days or hourly wages by 240.

Despite of the above order, SRT didn't implement anything regarding the matter. After calling, in vain, Cabinet for attention, the SRT workers left their duty and gathered in a demonstration since Nov 8, 1984. As a result, according to the Cabinet's decision, Communication Minister Samak Soondaravej was a representative to negotiate with the union's representatives. Yet, because of Samak's bad manner, they couldn't make any compromise. After a while, a decision to nationwide paralyse railway routes was made at 7.25 pm. Nov 13, 1984.

A negotiation was then made on Nov 16, representatives from different organizations such as House Commission on Communications as a coordinator between the SRT and its union, Public Health Minister Marut Boonnak as chairman of arbitration committee, presented in the meeting.

The strike was called off after SRT agreed to discuss details of the new salary structure with the SRT labor leaders within 45 days. The amount of 36 M. baht was estimated to be lost during the strike.

Anyway, there was a threat to call another strike when Governor of SRT Banyong Saralam said that the SRT couldn't comply with the ruling of the government-appointed arbitration committee. Besides, SRT insisted that it couldn't afford cash to pay the salaries and instead proposed to pay the increments in the form of pension upon retirement.

Baht Devaluation:

In a surprise move, the government, on Nov 2, 1984 devalued the baht currency by 17.39% against the US Dollar in a bid to improve the country's trade and balance of payments position. Beginning on the 5th of November, the initial spot rate will be 27 baht for one US dollar, but the 2 currency will not be tied together anymore.

Finance Minister Sommai Hoontrakool, who was a key person of the devaluation told that the rising baht value has adverse effects on the country's economic. There were encouraging incentives for unusual import increase because foreign goods have become cheaper, leading to imbalance in Thailand's trade and balance of payments position. Thai products have become more expensive and more difficult to sell. Manufacturers export goods earned less revenue than they should have because the foreign currencies were not much in value when exchanged with Thai Baht.

These have affected domestic prices for commodities and farmers' income.

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The Bangkok Military Court withdrew charges of lese majeste against well-known social critic Sulak Sivaraksa and 2 other accused in a special hearing on November 30, 1984.

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It was the third time since mid-1981 for the government to devalue the baht. On May 12, the new exchanged rate was adjusted from 20 to 21 baht per one US dollar. The second devaluation on July 15, made the new exchange rate at 23 baht for one US dollar.

Many groups such as military and Chat Thai Opposition Party were dissatisfied with the devaluation. The country's top military leader Gen Arthit Kamlang-ek declared strong opposition to its decision to devalue the baht currency and demanded a Cabinet reshuffle and a reversal of its announcement so as to bring back to old baht parity rate. Yet, the premier steadfastly refused to bow to the demand and was apparently determined to face a showdown.

The open confrontation between the military and government leaders immediately plunged the country into a state of political tension and a period of high fluidity. But then, the prime minister managed to win loyalty from the military circle to a sizable extent and, as a result, the military was apparently torn apart.