



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Thai students overthrow military Thanom regime, 1973

*Time period notes: Organizing action started in 1972, student uprising began on Oct 6 in 1973*

6 October

1973

to: 15 October

1973

**Country:** Thailand

**Location City/State/Province:** Bangkok

**Goals:**

Release of 12 student protesters from prison

Prime Minister Thanom's resignation

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 038. Marches
- 062. Student strike

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 062. Student strike

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 013. Deputations
- 168. Nonviolent raids
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT)

**Partners:**

Not known

**External allies:**

General population of Bangkok

**Involvement of social elites:**

King Phumiphon Adulyadet

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- NSCT

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- King Phumiphon Adulyadet

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

The king supported them the whole time, but directly intervened to stop the uprising by persuading Thanom to resign

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 1.5 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Thanom and the National Executive Council

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Students defended themselves with homemade bombs and wooden clubs after attacked by police. This response was not sanctioned by leadership

**Repressive Violence:**

Tear gas and machine gun shooting by the army and police

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

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Student activism in Thailand had grown during the 1960s as the number of students in university increased rapidly. In 1971, the Thanom Kittikachorn government launched a coup and restored authoritarian rule by disbanding the national legislature, terminating the 1968 constitution, and proclaiming martial law. On 15 December 1972, a new constitution was established that gave Prime Minister Thanom and his National Executive Council extensive power, but promised to return the country to democracy as soon as the communist threat was eliminated. However, this military regime held a relaxed attitude towards nonviolent protest and did not suppress student demonstrations.

In the summer of 1972, student leaders at nine state universities formed the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), with engineering student Thirayuth Boonmee as secretary-general. Boonmee accelerated their campaigns, increased coordination between university chapters, and raised membership to 100,000 by January 1973. In November 1972, NSCT had their first successful campaign, a boycott of Japanese goods. NSCT leaflets accused Japanese corporations in Thailand of evading taxes and bribing Thai customs officials. Their successful boycott received support from the Thai general population. The Thai government responded by issuing an executive decree imposing strict regulations on foreign corporations in Thailand, aimed at the 170 Japanese corporations in Thailand. Within a month, the Japanese government yielded. This successful anti-Japanese campaign gave student leaders confidence to protest against their own government's policies.

Student demonstrations expanded thereafter to target government corruption, economic justice, and American military presence. For example in December 1972, the government issued Decree No. 299, which made the Minister of Justice the head of the Judicial Committee instead of the President of the Supreme Court. Several hundred students immediately gathered at Thammasat University to oppose Decree No 299, had an overnight sit-in, and then marched to Chulalongkorn University. They received support from the Lawyer's Association of Thailand and the media. After an overnight sit-in by several thousand students at the Ministry of Justice, the government recalled the decree.

In June 1973, NSCT organized a string of rallies with thousands of student accusing the university administration of corruption and demanding resignation. These protests caused six universities to close for a whole day. Thanom accused a "third party" political organization of encouraging student protests. The King of Thailand, showed his support for the protestors by telling police to not use violence against students and providing tents and food on palace grounds.

Thereafter, students began drafting their own constitution. Throughout August and September, NSCT worked, quietly due to martial law, to have reputable public figures sign the new constitution.

On 6 October, the police arrested Thirayuth and ten other activists for having political gatherings of greater than five people. The next day they arrested a twelfth student. General Prapass of the National Executive Council claimed they were plotting with

communists to overthrow the government and denied them bail.

On 9 October, 2,000 students from Thammasat University held an anti-government rally and an all-night vigil to demand the release of the 12 arrested. The next day, more students from other universities in Bangkok joined the protests. By 11 October, the protest had grown to 50,000 students boycotting classes. On 13 October, the government agreed to release the protesters on bail, but the students demanded unconditional release. The number of protesters had grown to more than 400,000 including members of the general population, and they marched to the Democracy Monument to demand the release of the prisoners. The protest's objectives had escalated from the release of prisoners to demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn.

On 14 October, protesters marched to the royal palace to seek an audience with the king, and a representative of King Phumiphon Adulyadet asked them to disband. The police attempted to disperse the students, but the large crowd made it impossible.

At 6:30 am, police exploded tear gas bombs in front of the royal palace and became violent toward protestors. Students responded in riots with police in which 66 students were killed and 876 injured. The police brought in army troops and started shooting machine guns from tanks and helicopters. Some groups of protestors defended themselves by waving wooden clubs, throwing stones, and setting police booths on fire to obstruct police operations. Crowds ran for cover across the Chao Phya River to universities for shelter, and soldiers followed across the bridges and onto the campuses.

At 7:15 pm, the king appealed over national radio and television for the violence to stop, and also announced that Thanom had resigned the Prime Minister office. However, a band of engineering students, despite pleading from the leaders of NSCT, crossed the bridge pushing an empty bus as a shield and attempted to take over police headquarters. The students and police finally stopped fighting on 15 October when the radio announced that Thanom, Prapat and Colonel Naron (Thanom's son) had left Thailand. The king appointed Dr. Sanya Thammasak, a friend of the king and the popular rector of Thammasat University, to head the formation of a new government with a new Constitution and general elections in 6 months. NSCT worked to restore order by repeated appealing to the militant minorities of protestors to stop violence and assured the new prime minister of his right to arrest breakers of peace. The King, recognizing their peace efforts, offered the palace grounds as NSCT's temporary headquarters.

The draft for the new constitution was submitted to cabinet on 5 February 1974. In the aftermath of the uprising, NSCT suffered from major ideological differences among its leaders and broke up on 13 November 1973 into various, separate student organizations.

## Research Notes

### Sources:

Heinze, Ruth-Inge. "Ten Days in October--Students vs. the Military: An Account of the Student Uprising in Thailand." *Asian Survey* 14.6 (1974): 491-508.

Darling, Frank C. "Student protest and political change in Thailand." *Pacific Affairs* 47.1 (1974): 5-19.

### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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