

The 'Voter's Uprising' that is changing perceptions in Thailand

Junya Yimprasert, Thai Labour Campaign (Junya@thailabour.org)

FOREWORD - April 2009

This article was first distributed at a Consultation on 'Gender, Development and Decent Work: Building a Common Agenda', OECD Headquarters, Paris, 27th April 2009. Some errors in the initial draft have been corrected. A fully accurate account of the chaos and turmoil of the recent weeks, months and years in Thailand is not possible.

After the September 2006 military coup, that deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, we pointed-out that whatever the justifications used to legitimise the coup, the action of the military was as disloyal as always to the legitimate demands of the people, and we made a simple observation: ". . . if there is going to be anything resembling sustainable development in Thailand, the emphasis in Thai politics must be on making sure that the political demands of the new, urban classes are satisfied without further undermining the livelihoods and life-styles of the agrarian community upon which the future of Thailand depends."

Footnote to the April 2009 FOREWORD, May 2010.

In this article, written one year ago, we gave warning of atrocities to come. Almost exactly one year later they arrived in full force. Since the latest military crackdown began in Thailand on 10 April 2010 more than 80 people have died, almost all civilians, including medics and journalists, shot dead in the street by the Royal Thai Army, many with a single bullet to the head. About 2000 have been wounded - most by military gunfire.

Many people, journalists and the media in general are tending to trace the current state violence (April-May 2010) back to the people's uprising of 1973 and the military crackdown that followed in 1976, when 41 people were shot, most of them students. To better understand the background and causes of today's state atrocities it is necessary to trace the history of the suppression of democracy in Thailand - from the start of the movement for democracy in 1932.

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PART ONE

80 years of struggle for democracy

End of absolute monarchy 1932

At dawn on 24 June 1932, the tiny People's Party Khana Ratsadon carried-out a lightning and bloodless coup d'état that abruptly ended 150 years of absolute monarchy under the Chakri Dynasty, and attempted to open the way to democracy for Siam (Thailand), but the road has been and remains painful.

Khana Ratsadon consisted of an elite group of civilians, government officials, aristocrats and military officers. The coup was led by Pridi Phanomyong, a farmer's son, with Lieutenant Colonel Pibulsongkhram in charge of the military wing. Completely unknown to the people of Siam, within the space of a few hours Siam was changed from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. The new but military-dominated Government introduced a Charter which did at least aim at some kind of democracy. Khana Ratsadon came into power with the announcement of six primary tasks:

1. To maintain absolute national independence in all aspects, including political, judicial and economic...
2. To maintain national cohesion and security...
3. To promote economic well-being by creating full employment and by launching a national economic plan...
4. To guarantee equality for all...
5. To grant complete liberty and freedom to the people, provided that this does not contradict the afore-mentioned principles and...
6. To provide education for the people.

Royalist opposition to the coup was strong and the Permanent Constitution that was adopted in December 1932 returned some authority to the Monarchy, but in 1935 King Prajadhipok, tired of the power-play, decided to abdicate.

Thailand's first 'democratic' elections were held in 1933 - for half of the 156-seat so-called People's Assembly, the other half being appointed. This was the first time that women were given the right to vote and stand for election. (It took until 1949 for Thailand to actually elect a woman MP.)

The 1932 Constitution stated that sovereign power was held by the people of Siam (Thailand). In practice, after 78 years, such a state has yet to be seen.

Pridi v. Pibun

Pridi Phanomyong is none-the-less regarded as the founder of Thailand's still nascent democracy. Pridi was born in Ayutthaya in 1900 to a family of well-off rice farmers. He was an exceptionally bright student and completed law school studies in Thailand at the age of

19, and, with the help of a Thai government scholarship, also doctoral studies in law, economics and politics at the *Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris* in 1926.

In Paris, in February 1927, Pridi founded the Khana Ratsadon or People's Party with a group of seven Siamese students that included an officer called Plaek Khittasangkha (later Pibulsongkhram).

In the same year Pridi returned to Thailand and began a fast rise through the hierarchy, working assiduously for the six objectives of the Khana Ratsadon, and in 1934 he and others founded the University of Moral and Political Science, known today as Thammasat University.

Between 1933 and 1946 Pridi served as Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, as Regent and as Prime Minister. As Minister of Foreign Affairs (1935 - 38) he oversaw the signing of the treaties that revoked the extra-territorial rights of 12 countries, thus returning Thailand to (almost) complete independence for the first time since the Bowring Treaty with Great Britain in 1855.

Plaek Pibulsongkhram, known commonly as 'Pibun', was a graduate of the Royal Military Academy in Thailand. He was in France for advanced military tuition. After the 1932 coup he fashioned himself into the first of a long string of Thai generalissimos, functioning as Thailand's war-time Prime Minister from 1938 to 1944 and as an acting-Prime Minister or Dictator between 1948 and 1957.

In 1938, as Prime Minister, the strongly anti-Chinese Pibun, opposed by Pridi, changed the name of Siam to Thailand.

In December 1941, after allowing the Japanese to invade Thailand and seeing how easily they drove the British out of Malaysia, pro-Japan Pibun declared war on the Western Allies in January 1942.

The thoroughly anti-Japan Pridi refused to sign the declaration of war and was removed from Government. With Thailand's un-crowned king, Prince Ananda Mahidol, being schooled abroad, Pridi was made Regent, and as Regent he turned to building the underground Free Thai Movement (Seri Thai).

Pibun fell from favour as the world war came to an end. He was ousted by the Seri Thai movement and Pridi became Thailand's 7th Prime Minister in March 1946. It was at this time, in April 1946, that the, royalist-conservative Democrat Party was born - to oppose Pridi and the Seri Thai membership.

In September 1945 an exhausted Thailand was glad of a visit from their young King-to-be, who was studying law in Switzerland, and in May 1946 Thailand welcomed in Pridi's new Constitution which gave the country a fully-elected 176-member House of Representatives.

On 9 June 1946 young Mahidol (21) was found in bed in the Grand Palace in Bangkok with a bullet through his head. The Democrat Party launched into publicly accusing Pridi of

mater-minding the regicide. (The truth behind the death of the King has remained shrouded in mystery. The execution of two of the King's servants and a Senator in 1955, on grounds of complicity in suspected murder, satisfied nobody.)

Thailand descended into chaos and in November 1947 a powerful group of officers (that included two dictators-to-be Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn) staged a coup. Armoured vehicles were dispatched to storm Pridi's residence, but Pridi was already on his way to Singapore.

Pibun, raising himself to Field-Marshal, tore-up Pridi's 1946 Constitution and took-on the role of Prime Minister. To neutralise the House of Representatives he produced a Charter that gave the Monarch a Supreme State Council, a 100-member Senate and many other powers, including the right to declare martial law.

Pridi attempted a come-back and occupied the Grand Palace in February 1949, but after a few hours of heavy, street-fighting between Pridi's supporters, who included the Royal Thai Navy, and Pibun's military, this so-called Palace Rebellion was crushed. Four socialist MPs (ex-Cabinet ministers) and many other leaders were caught and executed without trial. Pridi himself fled to China, leaving behind his wife, Phoonsuk, and six children. He was well-received by Zhou Enlai.

In November 1952 Phoonsuk and her eldest son Pal were charged with offences against the internal and external security of the Kingdom. During 84 days in detention Phoonsuk slept on the floor of a small cell with two young daughters and never requested bail. When freed in February 1953 she went in search of her husband, who she knew was somewhere in China. In December 1953 she joined him with 2 of their six children. Pal joined them in 1957, after his release from prison. In China the family was well-provided for, but, to be able to better connect with the world and with Thailand, in 1969 the family moved to a small house in the Paris suburbs, where Pridi died peacefully in May 1983.

Pridi's passing-away was totally ignored by the Thai State. After years of Phoonsuk's work to clear the accusations against her husband, eventually, in 1999, the UNESCO General Conference added the name of Professor Dr. Pridi Phanomyong to the list of the world's Great Personalities. In 2005, on International Women's Day, Than Phuying Phoonsuk Phanomyong, President of the Pridi Phanomyong Foundation in Bangkok, received the 'Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award' for her peaceful courage in the face of grave personal hardship and political crises.

The Constitution introduced by Pibun's royalist drafting committee in 1949 turned the Supreme State Council (of his 1947 Charter) into the King's own Privy Council. It gave the King the sole right to appoint all members of the Senate and ruled that the House of Representatives required a 2/3 majority to over-rule a Royal Veto. Pibun also returned the Crown Estates and Crown Property Bureau to the King.

In short, even if Absolute Monarchy no longer existed in name, an autocratic, royalist-military model for maintaining control over the political life of the people of Thailand was cast, and has remained in place ever since.

Bhumibol Adulyadej, younger brother of the deceased Ananda Mahidol, was crowned King on 5 May 1950, at the age of 23.

During the years of Pibun's dictatorship, King Bhumibol remained a ceremonial figure, but as Pibun's power waned and social unrest grew, Pibun was challenged by the man who had defeated Pridi's coup - General Sarit Thanarat. In 1957 Pibun went to the King for support. The King asked him to resign. When Pibun refused, Sarit seized power in a US-backed, royalist-military coup. The King imposed martial law and declared Sarit 'Military Defender of the Capital'.

Pibun fled to Japan, where he died in 1964.

Coups, rebellions and popular revolts (incomplete):

- 1912 Palace Revolt (first movement for democracy)
- 1932 Coup d'État (end of absolute monarchy)
- 1933 Royalist coup (June)
Royalist coup ('Boworadet Rebellion', October)
- 1935 Rebellion of the Sergeants 1939 Songsuradet Rebellion (royalists)
- 1947 Military coup
- 1948 Army General Staff Plot (anti-Pridi)
- 1949 Palace Rebellion (Pridi's attempted come-back)
- 1951 Manhattan Rebellion (Navy rebellion, June)
Military coup ('Silent Coup', November)
- 1953-55 Peace Rebellion (uprising and crack-down)
- 1957 Military coup
- 1958 Military coup
- 1964 Air force Rebellion
- 1971 Military coup
- 1973 Uprising and student massacre (October)
- 1976 Military crack-down and massacre (October)
Military coup (October)
- 1977 Military Rebellion (March)
Military coup (October)
- 1981 Military rebellion (Young Turks)
- 1985 Military rebellion (Young Turks)
- 1991 Military coup
- 1992 Uprising, military crackdown and 'Bloody May' massacre

- 2006 Yellow-shirt mobilization (February)
- Military coup (September)
- 2009 'Voter's Uprising' (April)
- 2010 'Red Shirt Revolt' (March)
- Military crackdown and 'Red Massacre' (May)

Since 1932 the people of Thailand have had to face more than 20 attempted or successful military coups, 18 constitutions and 27 Prime Ministers - most of them military generals. In the 77 years since 1932 only one elected Prime Minister has managed to complete a full 4-year term of office (the now self-exiled, convicted, embattled Thaksin Shinawatra).

Cold War and the 'People's War'

In 1954 the Vietminh pushed the French out of Vietnam, and fear of communist insurgency took hold in Thailand.

The dictatorship of Field Marshal Sarit, and of those that followed him, concentrated on building-up and promoting the role of the monarchy - mainly to legitimise their oppression of the poor, and their personal corruption.

In this civil war, sometimes called the 'People's War', which raged on into the 1980ies, hundreds of thousands of poor people were mindlessly classified as 'communists' and a threat to monarchy. Thousands were imprisoned without trial, murdered or declared 'missing'.

The military re-introduced Palace ceremonies to the Affairs of State and used public money in billions to build royal projects and palaces all over the country, especially in the north-east, south and lower north e.g. in the Phupan Mountains (1975), in Songkla Province (1975) and in the Khaokao Mountains (1985) where they faced strong opposition from local populations

Sarit the monarchy-builder died in 1963 and received a royal cremation. His death revealed the depth of his personal corruption. With 50 or so retained mistresses the squabbles over his fortune exposed the existence of wealth in thousands of hectares of land, dozens of houses and hundreds of millions in cash.

Sarit was replaced immediately by General Thanom Kittikachorn, his long-time stand-in-dictator. In a public show against corruption, Thanom confiscated 600 million Baht from 'Sarit's estate' and returned it to Government use. He appointed himself Field-Marshal, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Admiral of the Fleet and Marshal of the Royal Thai Air Force etc., and continued Sarit's anti-communist, pro-American politics, thus ensuring himself massive US financial aid during the Vietnam War. Between 1950 and 1987 the USA provided the Royal Thai Army with more than 2 billion USD.

The growing communist insurgencies in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia coupled with demands to modernise Thai society placed Thailand under enormous new pressures. Huge amounts of foreign capital flowed into Thailand to support, initially, the build-up of military

infrastructure - to building air-force bases and the administrative centres and roads (e.g. the US-funded 'Friendship Road') that were required to tame and establish control over the provinces, also to building the dams and irrigation schemes required to launch the so-called Green Revolution and power export-oriented industrialisation. Between 1961 and 1989 forest cover was reduced from 53% to a mere 28%. During the same period the population doubled, from 26 million in 1960 to 54.5 million in 1990. The building of public hospitals, schools and universities to service the people directly did not really begin before the 1980ies.

The early 1960ies saw Thai society being exposed to the full onslaught of mainstream western culture - for the first time, especially to American GI culture - which branded Thailand a sex paradise. Traditionally the children of Thailand were born into home-grown corruption, but now bribery and money-lending became the country's universal lubricant. By the end of the Cold War years, which were dominated by US military bases, Thai militarism, extremes of greed and oppression, the Green Revolution and export-oriented industrialisation, money ruled all. Today approximately 50% of the cash-flow within Thailand passes through the hands of private money-lenders at 3 - 20% interest per month.

Millions of small farmers found themselves unable to cope with the Green Revolution's cash-crop imperatives and the rising cost-of-living. Millions left the land in search of money in the increasingly export-oriented industrial sprawl of Bangkok, or migrated to seek work overseas.

Extreme exploitation of Thailand's cheap labour force led inevitably to increasing industrial unrest. In 1972 the military junta (1971) introduced Decree 103 establishing Thailand's very first Minimum Wage. In 1973 there were 501 strikes. As the level of literacy began to rise, increasing numbers of young people became increasingly critical of the Vietnam War, of Thailand's deep involvement with US imperialism and the immensely corrupt, autocratic character of the Thai state. From the mid-60ies up to 1973, B52 bombers flying from Thai airfields were dropping thousands of tons of high-explosives on the people of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos - on a regular daily basis.

Uprising and crackdown - October '73 & '76

In October 1973 public unrest reached a climax. Hundreds of thousands of students, workers, farmers and new middle-class intellectuals gathered to demonstrate on the streets of Bangkok - demanding an end to 10-years of despotic rule under Field Marshal Thanom.

On 14 October 1973, when tens of thousands, demonstrating at Democracy Monument against the arrest of 13 student leaders, began moving to the Palace to appeal to the King, they were assaulted by the army with hand-grenades and machine-guns, from the ground and from a helicopter - in which the son of Field Marshal Thanom (Lt-Colonel Narong Kittikachorn) is reported to have been manning the machine-gun. About one hundred students were murdered and several hundred wounded.

Faced by the largest public demonstration ever seen in Bangkok, the King was forced to step-out into the open. Thanom and some of his cronies were requested to leave the country

and the King appointed a new Prime Minister. In March 1976 10,000 students marched on the American Embassy demanding that the US Air Force leave Thailand completely.

The Thai military remained irked by constantly increasing public protest and the military-controlled media let it be known that killing 'communists' was okay - like 'making merit'. Political assassinations became commonplace.

On 6 October 1976, in the name of Nation, Religion and King, a large force of military and paramilitary thugs (New Force, Village Scouts, Red Gaur's etc.) moved in against students at Thammasat University protesting the return of Thanom, who, in the robes of a monk, had been welcomed back to Thailand by the Royal Family.

According to official figures, on campus and in the adjacent Royal Grounds of the Grand Palace, 41 students were shot, burnt alive or beaten to death in an orgy of violence, with over 700 wounded. Unofficial figures say many more.

Many of the students not imprisoned on that day fled to the ranks of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungle and villages, and hundreds of student leaders from universities all over Thailand followed them. They became known as the 'October People'.

Three decades of fearfully destructive civil war led eventually to the issuing of an Amnesty by General Prem Tinsulanonda in 1980. The CPT disappeared from the stage and many of the October People returned to political life - as university lecturers, human-rights activists, NGO leaders and entrepreneurs, to both the Democrat Party and eventually even Thaksin's TRT party. Thanom himself lived-out his life in luxury - and was given a royal cremation.

Prem's era

General Prem Tinsulanonda, Thailand's still living 'Master-of-military-coups' was Prime Minister from 1980-1988. Since 1998 he has been President of the King's Privy Council. About half of the 18-member Privy Council is comprised of Army Chiefs of Staff, the remainder former Chief Justices, Prime Ministers etc., all 18 are appointed by the King.

In 1991 Prem managed the military coup that kicked-out General Chatchai Chunchawan, one of the few PMs until then to have come from the body of elected MPs. The Coup resulted in months of mass protest against General Sujinda, the leader of the coup who assumed the Premiership. It was General Prem who steered the military operation that saw 48 protesters shot dead in the streets of Bangkok in May 1992, after which, in a procedure fashioned by Prem, the King stepped-in to mediate the uproar and appoint a new Prime Minister, a non-elect, elite industrialist.

For the tens of millions of people beaten-down by decades of military dictatorship, it required this Bloody May massacre to put a crack in the walls that had been built to limit their 'sovereign power'. It took another 5 years of struggle to establish to produce the first ever 'People's Constitution', drafted by an elected Constitution Drafting Committee (2 representatives from each province). The People's Constitution of 1997 stated that the Prime Minister must come from the body of elected MPs.

In 2001 Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party won a landslide victory elected and Thaksin became the first elected Prime Minister to complete a full 4-year term of office - in 2004.

Once again it was General Prem, as President of the King's Privy Council, who architected the military coup that ousted Thaksin in 2006 - to which end Prem went around preaching that military and civil service personnel are the 'Servants of the King' - not Thaksin.

Prem managed to kick-out at least four elected Prime Ministers - Chatchai in 1991, Thaksin in 2006, Samak in 2008 and Somchai in 2008. Immediately he had Abhisit in place in April 2009, he made a public address to explain what a good PM he will be.

'Pappa Prem', now 90, delights in playing middle-man between the monarchy and the Government and between the monarchy and the general public. What role he played in the May 2010 crackdown is not known, but there are many around him who do.

Rise and fall of Thaksin (1994 - 2006)

Thaksin Shinawatra (61), of Chinese descent, was born into a wealthy merchant family from Chiang Mai in North Thailand. He graduated from the Thai Police Cadet Academy in 1973 and studied criminal law in the USA. In the metropolitan police (Thailand) he reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel before moving openly into business in 1987. Within a few years he had managed to monopolise Thailand's telecommunication sector. Ambitious and enormously wealthy, he seems to have enjoyed being on the front-line. He entered politics in 1994 and succeeded, as stated, in becoming Thailand's first-ever elected PM to complete a 4-year term in office in 2004.

Thaksin did not appear strongly anti-royalist. He did his best to win the acceptance and support of the monarchy. His style and approach to governance was that of the corporate CEO, welcomed by some but alien and somewhat abhorrent to the upper hierarchy, which perceived him as a threat to their established order of power, which he was. He ran fast over, around and under the Establishment when partnership did not suite his purpose.

On the domestic front he managed a 'rural-poor populist strategy', which gave him his solid majority in the electorate. In 2001 he kick-started Thailand's first-ever universal health-care scheme: the '30 Baht Scheme'. He oversaw the implementation of a 'One Million Baht Village Fund' - a scheme that provided every village in Thailand with a one million cash bonus to be administered at will. He attempted to promote village productivity and assisted farmers in managing their debt burden. He introduced cheap loan programmes for low-income people to buy houses and even taxis. How much of all this was political opportunism and how much genuine concern is largely irrelevant. The down-trodden poor in the villages of Thailand yearned to be respectfully acknowledged. They were grateful and gave him their vote. He also promoted a vision of Thailand as the 'Kitchen of the World', not an especially flattering title, but one that did underscore the importance of the agricultural sector in Thailand's future.

However, his 'War on Drugs' he pursued in cooperation with the most reactionary elements

of the Establishment. The countryside was 'cleaned-up' for a while, but in that process some 2,500 people, innocent and otherwise, lost their lives, often brutally and mercilessly. This brought him many enemies, especially amongst the NGOs. Needless-to-say, the drug trade is flourishing again.

With regard to foreign policy, his over-enthusiasm for neo-liberal globalisation and the right he bestowed upon himself to negotiate and sign Free Trade Agreements with less than minimal or zero consultation with those affected, was also highly controversial. The immediate and long-term damage caused to the people of Thailand by Thaksin's megalomaniac manoeuvring on the global stage will take years to repair.

Also, without reserve, Thaksin channelled money to his own family. He was no more crooked than most other members of the high elite, he just out-manipulated them at their own game - in business and politics. In other words, in the mind of the Establishment, Thaksin had to be got rid of. He has only his own super-ego to blame for his downfall.

In the General Election of February 2005 Thaksin retained his Premiership when his TRT party won a second landslide victory with 67% of the vote (19 million), but in Thailand that means next to nothing. His best enemies had already decided he had to go.

PART TWO

3 years of the PAD's 'Yellow Shirt' chaos

Sonthi Limthongkul, a Bangkok media tycoon, was a Thaksin ally - declaring at one time that Thaksin was the best PM that Thailand had ever experienced. In mid-2005 he began accusing Thaksin of corruption and disloyalty to the Crown. When Thaksin shut-down his TV programme, Sonthi launched his own 24-hour Asia Satellite TV.

With ASTV increasingly effective as a tool for spreading negative gossip about Thaksin, Sonthi was able to ally the State Enterprise Labour Relation Confederation with members of the Democrat Party and a wide assortment of NGOs, celebrities, intellectuals and civil servants. In February 2006 Sonthi formed this assortment of mainly middle-class Bangkokians into a movement he called the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) - for the specific purpose of bringing-down Thaksin.

Since Thaksin was a legally elected Prime Minister with a huge electoral majority, the PAD had to conjure-up some 'new politics' to confuse the public, and began gargling pronouncements about the need to replace politicians who, in their view, were corrupted with appointed "good people". Appointed by who was left to imagination.

Refusing to acknowledge that 19 million people had voted for Thaksin, the Democrat Party boycotted the 2006 General Election. The PAD revelled in blaming all of Thailand's innumerable problems on Thaksin and openly slandered his voters, mainly small farmers, as illiterate morons too ignorant to participate in democracy.

The Democrat Party and the PAD let it be known that they wanted the King to join their attempt to oust Thaksin, but the King himself refused to participate. The PAD thus placed itself in an uncomfortable win-or-lose situation, and so, with slogans like 'Thaksin out no matter what', it turned to courting support from like-minded military.

A military coup was staged for September 2006, when Thaksin was in New York attending a meeting of the UN General Assembly. Despite the usual tanks-in-the-streets phenomenon, the military coup that deposed Thaksin turned out to be bloodless. Convicted in-absentia for violating Thailand's home-grown political ethics, Thaksin has not set foot in Thailand since.

In the immediate aftermath, the King approved the junta's proposal to appoint General Surayud, a member of his own Privy Council, as Prime Minister. Thus restoring, once again, Thailand's customary feudal order.

The 2006 military junta began as the 'Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy' but, a little too obvious, the name was soon changed to the Council for National Security.

Immediately after the coup, in which pretty Bangkokians were seen posing with flowers as chums of soldiers and tanks, the intelligentsia whose feathers Thaksin had ruffled came forward with their usual platitudes . . . 'The coup was wrong but we could do nothing about it. For the sake of the nation it is better for all to allow the Junta to arrange a new election.' etc.

The junta's first step was to throw out the hard-won People's Constitution of 1997.

The second step was to give General Surayud a list of tasks that included - forming a new Government, increasing (un-opposed) the military budget by 33%, writing a new Constitution, dissolving Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party (TRT) and arranging a General Election. The General Election was scheduled for December 2007. This was to be the third electoral contest between 'Thaksin's people' and the Democrat Party.

Accused by the Democrat Party of rigging the 2006 election, Thaksin saw his TRT Party dissolved by the Constitutional Court on 13 May 2007.

Of the 377 elected Members of Parliament in the TRT, 111 leading MPs were banned from politics for 5 years. Those not banned had just enough time for a re-mould before the election, and they stood for re-election as the People's Power Party (PPP).

With Thaksin in self-imposed exile and 111 of his leading MPs banned from politics, the way seemed clear for the Democrat Party. It campaigned vigorously with high hopes of victory and the eager support of the PAD.

But, alas alack, again 'Thaksin's people' won the day. The People's Power Party took 233 seats and the Democrat Party 164. (In 2007 the Thai Parliament had 480 seats).

Once again the PAD leadership refused to accept the election results and resumed their agitation: all traces of 'Thaksin cronyism' and his 'family business' must be wiped from the pure face of Thai politics.

Short on leaders, the PPP set up government under the large frame of Samak Suntornvej, best known for his interest in cooking.

By this time the PAD leaders were on the way to losing their cool altogether. They continued to attempt to clarify their 'new democracy model': 70% of MPs should be 'good people' appointed by 'good people', 30% elected! Their actions became increasingly wild and lawless.

In May 2008 yellow-clad PAD demonstrators laid siege to Government House. The Royal Thai Army and Royal Thai Police told Samak they were unable to clear the siege.

Reason, law and order began to disintegrate.

After 3 months of siege, on August 26, the yellow-shirt mob moved in to occupy Government House, where they remained until 2 December. For three months the PAD mob did whatever it could to harass the government, chasing Thailand's Cabinet around Bangkok.

The chiefs of the Army and Police suggested to Samak that he dissolve the Parliament, but this didn't suit anybody, not Samak, not the Democrat Party and not the PAD mob. The Democrat Party had no chance of winning an election, and the PAD knew it must stick with direct 'Samak out' agitation.

Samak was in no mind to give-in easily, but he enjoyed cooking and was the host of a TV cooking programme from which he received income. Thus the Democrats were able to accuse him of 'conflict of interest'. The Constitution Court ordered Samak to resign. His Deputy Prime Minister, Somchai Wongsawat, Thaksin's brother-in-law was nominated to the Premiership - which did nothing to please the PAD.

Since the PAD mob was occupying Government House, Somchai achieved the distinction of becoming the first PM in Thailand to have never seen the inside of Government House.

The PAD became increasingly provocative. At the start of October it attacked National Broadcasting TV, the Ministry of Finance and several other government buildings, cutting their water and electricity supplies. It seems that the State Enterprise Labour Relations Confederation, which controls all public services, had promised a General Strike, but in the event only some sectors responded.

On 7 October a mob of several thousand yellow-shirts moved to attack the Parliament House during a full session. What a fiasco.

Somchai ordered the Royal Thai Police to defend the Parliament. This they attempted to do, but found themselves in a sticky situation.

The PAD mob broke into Parliament House as the MPs fled the scene. Abhisit and the leaders of the Democrat Party were cheered out of the main entrance as heroes. Poor Prime Minister Somchai and company had to escape by climbing over a fence.

The PAD fought magnificently with ping-pong bombs, catapults, bricks and metal pipes,

stabbing at police with flagpoles and staves and attempting to run them over with pickup trucks.

Advancing through clouds of tear gas the PAD mob began to force the police into a retreat, and the police ended-up defending not the Parliament House but their own Bangkok Police Headquarters.

According to the Ministry of Public Health, 443 people were wounded. Five police received gunshot wounds, one of the PAD's paramilitary leaders (an ex-police lieutenant) died when the bombs he was carrying in his own car exploded outside the Parliament, and one front-line PAD woman was killed.

The PAD leadership had frequently indicated, on the side, that they had support in the Palace. That claim seemed validated when the Queen, a princess, members of the Privy Council and the military high command, and leaders of the Democrat Party, including Abhisit, showed-up for the cremation of the dead PAD woman. For the Thai public this was an 'eye-opening day'.

Even with his Cabinet in retreat in the north of Thailand, Somchai was proving a tougher-than-expected cookie and showed no signs of capitulation.

After watching in sober amazement and disgust as Thailand's great and powerful forces of law and order allowed the yellow-shirts and royalists to take the people's legally-elected Government hostage, occupy Government House and attack Parliament House, the anger felt in many sectors of the voting public began to reach boiling-point.

This anger became manifest in the formation the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), and on 2 September 2008 the PAD's yellow-shirts fought a street battle with the UDD's red-shirts in which 40 people were wounded and one red-shirt was beaten to death.

Increasingly desperate the PAD's actions became increasingly desperate.

On 25 November the PAD mob descended, free-style, on Bangkok's ultra-modern international airport - a successful Thaksin project. With strong indications that the Palace was supporting the PAD, the Police and the Army did no more than shuffle their feet as PAD mobs advanced on Thailand's main airports.

The PAD faced no opposition in occupying and completely shutting-down both of Bangkok's international airports and three other airports, including Phuket. Their actions stranded more than 80 aircraft and 300 000 tourists, and stopped all international flights in and out of Thailand, and most domestic flights, for over a week.

On 26 November the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army proposed that it was time for Somchai to dissolve his cabinet and for the PAD stop demonstrating.

Nobody agreed with the Commander-in-Chief, and so, once again, on 2 December, the Constitutional Court was called-in to save the day by ordering the People's Power Party

(PPP) and the two main parties of Somchai's governing coalition to dissolve.

On 3 December 2008 the PAD mob ended their occupation of the airports and Government House.

Within two weeks the leader of the Democrat Party, Abhisit Vejjajiva MP, an active supporter of the PAD, finally acquired the Thai Premiership from an exhausted, bullied and depleted Parliament.

Abhisit immediately rewarded the main supporter of the PAD with the portfolio of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a man who, a few days before, while visiting the occupiers of Thailand's main airport, had publicly thanked them for 'good food and good music'.

The small fact that the Kingdom of Thailand proved incapable of protecting one of the largest and most important international aviation hubs in South-East against a rag-tag mob of civilians raises a barrage of questions.

In the street fighting between May and December 2008 about 800 people were wounded and 8 people died.

More than 160 legal cases have been filed against the PAD, but, to date (May 2010) not one PAD leader or supporter has been held to account or charged for any offence in connection with the occupation and closing-down of Thailand's international airports, or the occupation of Government House, or the attack on the Parliament House, or for any of the deaths that occurred etc.

Frustration boils over

After nearly 80 years of enduring non-stop Palace intrigues, gross administrative and political corruption, endless military coups and violent suppression of protest, it is obvious to most outsiders that Thailand's failure to establish proper democratic procedure is a direct result of the monarchist establishment's misuse of its carefully accumulated instruments of power. As each crisis of governance emerges, these instruments are used to execute whatever is required to ensure that the majority of Thai people cannot participate effectively in determining the future of their country.

When the UDD called for mass-mobilization a red wave of protest rose over the landscape.

The people came onto the streets demanding . .

- re-instatement of their hard-won People's Constitution (1997);
- a General Election to bring back electoral justice;
- termination of the non-stop interference of the King's Privy Council in the struggle of the Thai people for their democratic rights.

Once again on 26 March 2009 people began to assemble outside Government House, but this time they were clad in red shirts. By 8 April half a million protestors representing a wide

spectrum of grass-root civil organizations were making their presence felt through peaceful assemblies, not only in Bangkok but also in about 40 of Thailand's 77 provincial capitals. In Bangkok the number of protesters on the streets reached around 300.000, the largest number since the 1973 uprising.

As usual, during times of direct confrontation between the Thai people and their patrons, in April 2009 Thailand's own hamstrung media failed to provide the public with accurate reportage of the scale of the uprising, or the ferocity of the military crackdown that followed. As usual, in the people's hour of crisis, the Thai media studiously side-stepped the real reasons why hundreds of thousands of people, representing tens of millions of rural, urban and industrial workers, were demonstrating, thereby functioning to exacerbate the overall crisis and deepen and perpetuate social divisions.

ASEAN Summit violence

The eager-beaver Abhisit Government had planned an ASEAN Summit for 10 - 13 April in the east coast resort of Pattaya. Anti-Abhisit demonstrators went to Pattaya to deliver a statement to the ASEAN Secretary General - to underline the fact that Abhisit had no mandate from the people to represent Thailand.

The Statement was delivered to the ASEAN Secretary General in the Pattaya Hotel on 10 April, by about 2 000 people. However, some Abhisit aides had, foolishly, already given the green light to paramilitary royalist forces to disrupt the demonstration. As the protesters withdrew from the hotel they were attacked by about 500 thugs with 'Protect the Monarchy' across their shirts.

Thousands of people from Bangkok and Pattaya moved rapidly to support the anti-Abhisit protest in Pattaya. On the morning of 11 April several thousand descended on the Pattaya Hotel. The Summit was cancelled. Abhisit, his international image and authority badly stung, fled the scene in a Blackhawk helicopter, vowing to restore law-and-order and declaring the red-shirts the "enemies of the nation".

To this point in time the somewhat divided Police and Army (both with red and yellow factions) had kept themselves out of the play in Pattaya, but some units did respond to Abhisit's call for help. The leader of the protesters in Pattaya was arrested by police in the early hours of 12 April and then handed to the Army.

After the arrest of the Pattaya protest leader, a former TRT MP, the confrontation between the Government and the protesters passed out of all control.

The Battle for D-Station

On 12 April Abhisit declared a state-of-emergency in and around Bangkok. Orders were issued for demonstrators to be cleared from outside Government House within 4 days, and to cut all UDD means of communication, especially their on-line satellite TV, the so-called Democracy Station, 'D-station' or DTV, that had been set-up in January (2009) to counter the PAD's ASTV.

It was essential for responsible UDD leaders to be able to maintain communications with the huge demonstrations at Government House, with their millions of supporters all across Thailand e.g. in the provincial capitals of Chiang Mai, Udon Thani and Khon Kaen, with the Thai public in general, as well as with the international community. In other words their DTV had to be defended.

In the afternoon of 12 April army units with tanks and armoured vehicles started to appear on the streets in different parts of Bangkok, moving in on Government House where red-shirts had set-up roadblocks. Exactly who gave the orders to bring in the military remains, as usual, unclear. The movement of the troops appears to have been somewhat un-coordinated, some units displaying more resolve than others, with some covering the name of their units to avoid being identified.

Violent confrontation broke out at Din Daeng, an important inter-section just north of Government House, with the military resorting to the use of tear gas and live ammunition.

Several hundred UDD red-shirts moved to defend their 'D-station' as a 500-strong column of regular soldiers, commandos with automatic weapons and a humvee mounting a 50mm machine gun advanced to take control of the ThaiCom building in north Bangkok transmitting for DTV.

In the still dark hours of the morning of 13 April a wide area around Government House was turned into a war zone, with chaotic fighting between red-shirts, army units, paramilitary gangs and also local residents that formed gangs mainly to defend local people and property. The battles raged out-of-control for several hours. From Din Daeng violence spread to other parts of the city and many innocent people became caught-up in the ruckus.

Withdrawal

Din Daeng fell to the army at around 07.30, Victory Monument at around 12.30. With army units, tanks and machine-guns closing in on Government House and with red-shirt numbers dwindling, the UDD leaders surrendered on the morning of 14 April, to avoid further bloodshed. They were arrested and taken to different army camps, charged for a variety of crimes and released on bail for sums in the region of 12,000 Euro.

Amidst the familiar lies, cover-ups and exaggerations, accurate casualty figures take time to emerge, in Thailand often months, years or never. Two people died and at least 100 people were wounded, some by gunfire. About 20 soldiers were wounded. Some reports say more than 50 people are missing. During crackdowns in Thailand, the military usually take care to remove dead civilians from the battlefield.

Exactly who was responsible for what will never be acknowledged, but the people ask - and the ASEAN and the International Community must ask - why tanks and heavy infantry keep appearing on the streets of Bangkok, and why nobody is held responsible for the bloodshed.

SUMMATION

Beneath the marketed image of Thailand, tens of millions of poor Thai are being actively, cruelly and artfully prevented from realising their potential as citizens of the 21st century.

It is not famine, poverty or even money that is bringing the poor onto the streets in hundreds of thousands, nor a great love of Thaksin the business tycoon - although he has played a significant role with his spurious 'phone-ins' urging revolution.

The 'surrender' of the people's leaders in April 2009 marks not the end but the beginning of a new phase in the struggle of the poor to remove the corrupt hierarchy that blocks their road to equal rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace.

As eventually people will do everywhere, the people of Thailand are rising in protest because they can no longer abide the autocratic double-standards of their patrons and administrators.

The PAD leaders that occupied Government House, attacked Parliament House and occupied Thailand's international airports all sit smug either within or under the protection of a royalist Government.

What is the source of the air of impunity transmitted by politicians like Abhisit?

April 2009 was sickeningly familiar, but this is no longer 2006, no longer 1992 and no longer 1976. After 80 years of struggle, Thailand's new generation pro-democracy activists are determined to stand their ground, and the autocrats will find it harder and harder to paint their atrocities with yellow and gold.

PART THREE

The spectre of civil war?

Besides the shooting of just a dozen or so people and a few hundred wounded here and there, what did three years of PAD-inspired, Palace-supported, political chaos produce?

The September 2006 military coup had several objectives: to destroy the 1997 People's Constitution, to weaken the power of elected Government, buck the status of the military and strengthen the power of bureaucracy in the name of the monarchy.

The recent years of political chaos have brought a raft of ugly, new legislation. For example, in very loosely defined 'emergency situations', Section 17 of the Emergency Decree of 2005 (introduced by Thaksin and in constant use) exempts, high-ranking persons, state officials and police from civil, criminal or disciplinary liability provided that their actions are 'performed in good faith, non-discriminatory and not unreasonable in the circumstances'. In other words this decree is in direct contravention of Thailand's international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Thailand's archaic *Lès Majesté* laws (*laesa maiestas* 'injury to majesty') are being

increasingly abused, and the Democrat Party is attempting to raise the penalty for alleged disrespect for monarchy from 3 - 15 years to 5 - 20 years imprisonment.

There is growing a miserable sickness around Lès Majesté as people are encouraged by the powers that be to sneak information to the authorities about whom they think is being disrespectful or not respectful enough - a debilitating sickness that can wipe the last honest sparkle from the Thai smile.

With regard to international trade, after ousting Thaksin the military junta (Council for National Security) jumped straight into his shoes, adopting exactly the same autocratic approach to negotiating Free Trade Agreements. In April 2007 General Surayud signed a far-reaching, wide-ranging FTA with Japan that was already in force by November.

Immediately Abhisit came to power he launched into some phoney 'stimulus package'. Forgetting 23 million informal sector workers - the small farmers, self-employed and unemployed, he distributed 2000 Baht (40 euro) to 8 million employed people, and then announced his intention to borrow 23 billion dollars, from whoever he could.

The 2006 military coup and last 3 years of chaos have been thoroughly successful in increasing distrust of the state machinery, and of the monarchy, and in deepening the divide between rich and poor.

On the positive side the chaos served to shake-up the grass-root sectors and more enlightened sectors of the middle-class. Thailand is experiencing a new wave of farmers, factory workers, students, academics and grass-root movements that are determined to resist being bottled-up as pawns, fodder and bell-boys for the benefit of Thailand's image, own greedy elite and multi-national corporations.

New wave fighters for democracy

During the 19 September Coup in 2006, Nuamtong Praiwan, a 60 year-old taxi-driver and life-long human rights activist, rammed his taxi into a military tank. He survived the impact but decided to complete his protest by hanging himself on 31 October 2006. His decision sent a shock-wave through Thailand's grass-root communities, and a warning to Thailand's increasingly self-indulgent middle-class that the 'un-educated' know and care about the meaning of democracy.

The name of Nuamtong has been raised again and again in the anti-dictatorship movement. Bangkok has over 100,000 taxi-drivers. On 8 April 2009 taxi-drivers came in large numbers to assist the red-shirt protest outside Government House. On 9 April many took action to jam the streets of Bangkok. On 10 April several hundred taxis were engaged in transporting people from Bangkok to the protest against Abhisit's ASEAN Summit in Pattaya. When the Army brought tanks onto the streets of Bangkok on 12 April, taxi-drivers risked their taxis and their lives to block the tanks and protect the people.

New wave cyber army

When all media channels were cut or tightly censored in the 1992 Bloody May uprising, it

was telephones and fax machines that mobilised people and kept them informed. In April 2009 it was the people's cyber army that kept information flowing.

Calling for the Government to crush the red-shirts, the chat boards of conservative reactionaries showed their concern for the image of Thailand in relation to economic stability, foreign investment and tourism.

With Abhisit doing all possible to control the media, the cyber chat boards supporting the people's protest played an important role in countering the absurd accusation that the red-shirts were wreaking havoc with Thailand's fragile 'stability'.

With little or no space in Thailand's mainstream media for airing their thoughts and feelings, the new wave of people's representatives in cyber space are working hard to by-pass censorship, and inform and warn their sisters and brothers of the dangers they face and why.

Through cyber space the irony of the military crack-down in April is identified as a clone of the 1976 crack-down - 33 years ago. Through cyber space the absurdity of needing mass demonstrations in the 21st century to oppose institutions of monarchy is discussed and analysed. Through cyber space people across the nation are being brought closer to discussion about why, when it comes to welfare and services, civil servants, academics and white collar workers receive preferential treatment.

How come the poor are accused of being a threat to 'stability'?

The regular citizenry needs little help to understand that it is not they who have sent Thailand into recession, and it is not they who are the reason why Abhisit is now begging for 23 billion USD.

The poor know that it will be they who suffer in the struggle to pay-back Abhisit's loans - the debts of the elite. The Thai know only too well that the wealth, privileges and splendour of the high echelons of Thai society are entirely dependent on the schemes the ruling elite maintain to limit the participation of the tens of millions of poor people in genuine, democratic procedure.

After the 'surrender' of the red-shirt leaders in April, the chat boards became a rare source of comfort, a space where poor people could share their fear and frustration at being confronted with yet another military crack-down.

The cyber army plays an important role in helping to track and inform on the health and whereabouts of arrested leaders, and in the search for the dead and missing. In countering government-controlled misinformation the chat-boards throw up important questions. What kind of government blocks discussion on real issues and permits statements like 'red-shirts are not Thai, not human and should be shot on sight'? How come the monarchy, army, police and the whole academic community do not actively condemn such incitement?

The poor are becoming increasingly conversant with understanding that, in term of

sustainable development, the 'stability' they are being accused of disrupting is a false construct.

In speaking to the UDD crowd in April 2009, a leader of the Farmer's Network said . . .
"Farmers have been classified as illiterate fools when it comes to democracy, but we have always participated in the people's demonstrations against dictatorship - in 1973, 1976, 1992 and 2006. We were never strong enough, but if the military crack-down on demonstrations this time, the farmers will block every road to Bangkok."

The anger of poor, working women was in evidence throughout the April uprising. Women took a leading role in the action at the ASEAN Summit in Pattaya. After Abhisit declared a 'state-of-emergency' in Bangkok it was women who found and chased him. It was women who commandeered public buses to block the roads against military tanks. In our struggle for democracy the stories of these bold working women will be cherished.

Love or fear of monarchy?

Thai people are educated to love their monarchy unconditionally and unquestionably, indeed their Constitution says they must. The problem is that the people face the 21st Century not the 19th Century. The Thai have no other option than to question the repetitiveness of military crackdowns on the legitimate interests of the majority of the population.

As citizens of a world that has identified and agreed to stand-up for universal human rights, modern-day Thai are duty-bound to question the use of *Lès Majesté* which, with origins in Ancient Rome, has always been a tool for bolstering hierarchical power (<http://lmwatcheng.blogspot.com/>). All phenomena can be connected, but the connection between *Lès Majesté* and love is tenuous at best and, in today's world, nothing less than highly suspect.

Some observers avoid confrontation with the increasingly odorous application of Thailand's *Lès Majesté* laws: they will fade with time they say. That's for sure.

In the meantime, in passive and active form, Thailand's *Lès Majesté* laws continue to protect not just the almost absolute power of the monarchy, but the vast capital wealth and business interests of the wealthiest landlord in the world: the Crown Property Bureau, one the corporations that benefitted most from the expansion of Bangkok.

Largely silenced by fear of *Lès Majesté*, the Thai media is not able to represent the majority of the people of Thailand. Consciously or not, it tends to aggravate rather than mediate the growing divide between the interests of the rural community and those of the new, urban middle-class.

Construction of the Land of Smiles - of the images of paradise that are marketed abroad - has relied heavily on *Lès Majesté* laws. Smile or be jailed.

If in the 21st century the spectre of civil war rises over the horizon of a country that is endowed with all the natural resources that any society could ever hope for, there must be real reasons.

All analysis of Thailand's domestic crisis places the monarchy at the epicentre of all socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural debate. That is to say the Palace and Privy Council face real problems - not because of the poor people, but because of what they do.

Thailand needs a Royal House and the Thai want to love their King and Queen, and so can it be, when the Royal House recognises that it must make way for democracy. Life will become much easier for the Royal Household when it does.

In our world of today, governance by military junta is an anathema, an ugly phenomenon symbolising a retarded social order.

Are the ASEAN peoples going to permit their future prospects to be over-ruled by resurgent state militarism? Surely not.

Together for democracy

Nobody wants a yellow-red confrontation to drag Thailand any further into the mud, let alone to civil war.

Thailand's rural communities and urban poor are just saying that . . . 'We've had enough of seeing our lives and dignity degraded. We are no longer prepared to vote for the interests and wellbeing of the elite and urban middle-class. Why should we?'

Too many Bangkokian academics and journalists have become accustomed to imagining that their own voices are the only voices that matter.

Why should the rural people tolerate double-standards cooked in Bangkok - by Abhisit and his so-called Democrat Party? Because this party knows it cannot win at the ballot box? Why should the small farmers, the rural blood of Thailand, and their children who slave in export-oriented Free Trade Zones, allow themselves to be manipulated out of existence in the name of 'stability'? Who's stability? What stability? The rural blood of Thailand is Thailand. Without healthy, productive, joyous rural communities Thailand is nothing: an empty, yellow soap-box.

We all need to protect ourselves from the excesses of the neo-liberal capitalist agenda, which by definition places economic growth above social welfare and is, beneath all propaganda about freedom and democracy, too frequently just waiting to party with privy councils and wink at military juntas.

The increasing manifestation of recessive traits in the neo-liberal global economy are spurring people across the planet to re-assess the politics of liberation - bottom-up, no less in Thailand, but the struggle of the people's anti-dictatorship movement in Thailand has been poorly recognised and is in need of greater global solidarity. The Royal Thai Army needs to be sanctioned by the International Community.

The domestic situation in Thailand is important. The success or failure of democracy in Thailand has great significance for the whole Indo-China Peninsula, for not just tens but hundreds of millions of poor and displaced persons.

In the current economic climate nobody can know what the future will bring, nevertheless, in the name of human rights, justice and sustainable development, challenging unjust 'comparative advantage' and the pyramids of capitalism is the sanctioned order of the day.

Thaksin Shinawatra as a crook and autocrat was responsible for his own downfall, but he led the rural poor to understand that they are important in their own right. He will be remembered in Thai history as an actor that broke the long out-dated stranglehold of the Cold War anti-communist establishment.

The current phase of struggle of the rural peoples of Thailand is extremely important, not just because they form the majority of the population, but because the future of the economy of the planet is all about food security and investment in organic productivity.

What happens in Thailand with respect to rural cultures and traditions and to the hugely valuable knowledge of Thailand's small farmers and fisher-folk has significant impact on what happens to cultural and biological diversity across the whole Indo-China Peninsula, and thus also, as one of the most bio-diverse and productive areas of the planet, on the future of all humankind.

For Thailand's sake, and the future of the Thai monarchy, it is absolutely necessary for the rural communities - the workers, the women and men of the land that are the true guardians of this great 'garden of the world', to stand their ground.

The red-shirts in Thailand, who have fought so many bloody battles against the Royal Thai Army over the past 70-80 years, need the recognition, support and solidarity of worker and small farmer movements all around the world.

The villages of Thailand still have honest working women and working men. New leaders will rise to throw-off the webs of royal intrigue and the slag of americanization that bedevill the development of Thai society. New leaders will rise to re-establish the dignity of the people in the light of common struggle to build healthy local, regional and global economies on sound, sustainable, egalitarian foundations.

The days of compromising the fundamental principles of human rights in order to serve 'Nation, Religion and King', fabricated concepts of 'stability' and false concepts of development have passed.

The common aim of all self-respecting Thai has to be the open, honest strengthening of fully-participatory, parliamentary democracy.

Thailand's privileged civil-servants and new-rich, urban middle-classes need to understand that they face a choice: share the profits of progress with the farmers and workers upon whose strength the quality of their lives depends, or face a civil war which cannot be won.

Closing words

Democracy is not a 'western invention'. In some form or other democracy has existed and

been practiced throughout human history, whenever and wherever people experience life without dictatorship. There is no escape from democracy in the 21st century.

Democracy belongs to the natural process of the evolution of human consciousness. As a viable alternative to dictatorship it evolves and emerges through and as a result of people having to face population growth, increased literacy, diminishing non-renewable resources, increasing economic risk and the general, common-sense demand for peace and the establishment of social, egalitarian civilization.

In a world where all are becoming literate, in contact with each other and looking at the future with common concern and interest, a 'Parliament of the People' cannot be evaded or avoided.

The symbolic Head of State, the Faith of the land and the Forces of law and order have nothing to fear from a 'Parliament of the People', if they have the moral courage and wisdom to respect the decisions of the majority.

For more than 70 years parliamentary democracy in Thailand has been hopping around in circles, feet and arms tied, bowing and scraping up and down in some kind of a pathetic and all too frequent tragic, bloody dance with the generals.

Thai people cannot be stopped from cutting the thongs that prevent them from growing-up into the 21st Century. Recent images of civilian red-necks in yellow-shirts taking control of tanks in the streets only point to the fact that, in the world today, rank and file soldiers are rightfully loathe to act against civilians.

The people of Thailand are tired of divisive authority, of seeing and hearing oppressed fractions of the population beaten-down and crushed whenever and wherever they attempt to make themselves heard. Thailand as a society is tired of seeing legitimate human interests, whether those of the small farmers or the Muslims, or the hill tribes or the millions of Thai sweat-shop workers, or millions of Burmese migrant workers, seconded to preservation of the image of a glittery, hegemonic hierarchy.

There will be no peace or stability or maturity of mind and spirit in Thailand until the institutions of the monarchy withdraw from politics and terminate their abuse of status, power and wealth. The military generals that created Thailand's post-war monarchy, with billions of US dollars, failed miserably to balance the two main, perfectly compatible requests of the Thai people - to have a Monarch they can love and to have a just, healthy, democratic order.

The violent confrontations and the extremes of behaviour seen in Thailand today are threatening to tear the country apart. A protracted, underground civil war in Thailand would destabilise the whole region.

By constantly appealing to the monarchy in times of civil unrest, Thai academia has been shirking their duty to uphold the rights of the tens of millions of Thai who are the backbone of the nation, not to mention their responsibility to expose the cruelty of the repetitive crackdowns and scenes of civilian bloodshed in the streets.

What kind of 'Thai-ness' is this that we practice now: this repetitive, ritualistic granting of permission to sacrifice a few dozen people. On the pretext that it avoids a greater body-count - that it might pollute the Thai image on the world stage. For what are the people dying?

Is this the Thai-ness with which we want to identify, with which we want to be identified? Is this what Thailand calls democracy?

Who is responsible for the on-going oppression of the hopes of the poor for recognition and justice? Is it neo-colonialism, the big-bad-outside-world, some secret, mystical force? Could it be that the Thai people themselves are also responsible for their own suffering?

The sorry custom of allowing the state bureaucracy, at every level, to exploit the monarchy for the purpose of legitimising suppression and oppression of poor people must be radically reversed - through the establishment of full parliamentary democracy. This is the only way and means that Thai people have of preventing themselves from becoming a failed state - a joke on the global stage,

The Abhisit Government has *no democratic legitimacy*.

Thailand needs a General Election now, but Abhisit knows he cannot win. He will delay a General Election for as long as possible, in order to be able to take maximum advantage of state-controlled media and fully engage all the weapons that the State has accumulated, during decades of corrupt power-building, to subvert the sovereign power of the people.

Abhisit and his band of neo-liberal supporters are 'banking' on wishful thinking that time is on their side - that resistance to their collective hypocrisy will fade!

Under the Abhisit Government the whole Thai electorate is being forced, once again, to suffer the spectacle of gross, governmental corruption and murderous State violence.

It is Thailand's increasingly alienated masses not their rotten Government that needs the support of the International Community, the global unions and civil rights activists around the world. Probably many of these also need to correct whatever image they may have acquired of Thailand as a dazzling paradise, and take more notice of the ground-level realities, and, also, the relation between the ground-level reality in Thailand and the political stability and welfare of the whole region.

The ASEAN has failed the people of Burma and cannot afford a repeat of such incompetence in Thailand.

With the Thai monarchy at the centre of a potentially massive, violent furore, it is to be hoped that Thailand's Royal Household will see the light of day, and use their influence to instruct their Privy Council to revise itself, support and permit a free and fair General Election, as soon as possible, and a People's Constitution - before the yellow-red civil war, which their Privy Council has been fostering, makes the situation impossible for all.

In the 21st century economic stability resides on the other side of a door called universal

human rights, and Abhisit's cabinet cannot, as the Thai say, 'cover the sky with their hands'.

The people will not retreat, the red-shirts will not turn yellow and the world will not stop watching Thailand's super-rich monarchy and its bevy of generals in the Privy Council.

The Thai want to love their King, and may continue to do so if the generals would be the gracious gentlemen they would like to be, and let the people get on with the work of building democratic institutions, and let the Royal Household get on with the Royal Household's work of setting a true example - in honesty, humility, tolerance, compassion and self-sufficiency, for which military assistance is not required.

Brief comment on the recent 'Red Massacre', May 2010

In the above text, in April 2009, we wrote: "Nobody wants a yellow-red confrontation in Bangkok to drag Thailand any further into the mud, let alone to civil war." One year later, Thailand is in deed on the very edge of civil war, above and underground.

Abhisit had no democratic legitimacy when he became Prime Minister in December 2008. During 16 months in office he failed completely to mend the divisions in his society. His murderous, military crackdown in April 2010 was a criminal action of the worst kind.

Those responsible for the murder of more than 80 civilians must be identified and brought to justice.

Thailand has no way forward except through Abhisit's resignation, through the bringing to justice of all responsible for the recent massacre, and through the instigation of a free and fair General Election that, under the circumstances, probably does need to be monitored by independent, outside observers.

A list of links to some of the sites describing and dealing with the recent bloody events and the current situation in Thailand is appended to this article.

For the people of the USA

The role of the institutions of army in the suppression of basic freedoms in Thailand is obvious to all, but what are the behind-doors dealings and influences of the US Pacific Command on the Royal Thai Army. To what extent is the Royal Thai Army an instrument of American foreign policy? Is President Obama aware of what's really going on – on the impact of what's really going on in Thailand on the people of Thailand, on the course of democracy in Thailand, and of the impact that can have on the course of democracy throughout South-East Asia? Surely not.

The history of what is really going-on in Thailand has always been closely linked with an above-all US policy to contain the influence of China in South-East Asia.

The recent massacre on the streets of Bangkok was not in the interests of the USA.

The ASEAN, in which the USA plays a highly significant role through the US-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership agreement, must condemn the Abhisit Government and the Royal Thai Army for their choice of action in April - May this year.

The International Community must support the ASEAN in taking definite, affirmative action to ensure that no ASEAN country is able to resort to the means of oppression used by the current Thai Government.

The USA must break cleanly with the classic Cold War policy of corrupting the course of democracy by supporting oppressive military regimes. The USA must step-out finally and firmly in words, deeds and actions that support human rights and full participatory democracy in Thailand and Burma and throughout South-East Asia.

Embossed on a US silver dollar from 1906, found in Burma, are the words: 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free.'

With Barak Obama, the USA has the best chance it has had yet to leave double-standards behind and place itself unequivocally on the side of justice and human rights - especially now in Thailand.

The children of Thailand are born into a system of bribery and corruption that affects their education, physical and spiritual health, and social and political life at every level and stage. This means that, as a democratic nation, Thailand could fail. There are minority groups who will struggle to sustain a state of masters and slaves, but surely the majority of the Thai have better and much more interesting ideas. Clearing Thai-ness of insufferable exploitation, humiliation and double-standards, clearing Thailand of the 'patron-client' syndrome, can only be achieved through solidarity with the bottom-up processes and the struggle for JUSTICE.

Author's note

In April 2009 it was difficult to start writing about matters which people in Thailand don't dare talk about, but in writing I began to feel a strong sense of release. I wrote what I wanted to write and now I can share feelings that I have been longing to share for years - with 60 million other people in Thailand, especially with working women and with all our young, new wave democracy fighters.

I thank Richard Thompson Coon for much assistance with the writing of this article.

Some links to internet sources on the April - May 2010 crackdown:

<http://opinion.inquirer.net/viewpoints/columns/view/20100526-272123/The-Battle-for-Thailand>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Prime_Ministers_of_Thailand
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aleFDhfDvfw>
<http://www.vaitor.com/?p=1640>
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