

# **A Carnival of Reaction paralyses the Thai political process**

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The term “Carnival of Reaction” was first used by the Irish Marxist James Connolly when referring to the defeat of socialist politics in Ireland and the rise of reactionary Catholicism and reactionary Protestantism either side of the partition border.

Thailand’s political crisis after the September 2006 coup and the December 2007 elections is also becoming a carnival of reaction. On the one hand we see the deterioration of Thai Rak Thai from a modernizing capitalist party with pro-poor policies, but a dreadful human rights record, into the Peoples Power Party, headed by ultra Right-wing Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej. His cabinet is staffed with gangsters and sleazy politicians.

On the other hand, we see the so-called Peoples Alliance for Democracy (PAD), which organized large demonstrations in 2005 and 2006 to oust Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The movement started as a coalition between Peoples Movement leaders and the right-wing royalist businessman Sonti Limtongkul.

This movement was never particularly progressive in its demands, but it has now degenerated into a proto-fascist organization. First they called for the king to sack Thaksin and appoint a new prime minister back in 2006. Then they supported and welcomed the military coup. They supported the idea of appointed senators, rather than elections for the upper house. They backed, and continue to defend, the military’s anti-democratic constitution.

Now they are raising the ultra right-wing slogans of “Nation, Religion and King” while playing fascist nationalist songs from the 1970s. In late June they started a row to try and whip up crude nationalist sentiment over the Khmer temple Preah Vihear. This hill-top temple was built by the Khmer (Cambodians) at the time of Ankor. It now sits on the modern border between Thailand and Cambodia.

In the 1960s the site was claimed by the Thai military regime, but the World Court ruled against the Thai government. The present ridiculous row arises because the Cambodian and Thai governments want it designated a World Heritage site. The PAD. scream that this is a “loss of Thai sovereignty”. This idiotic accusation is without foundation. The temple was clearly built by the Khmer, not the Thais, who were under-developed at the time. The site has officially been in Cambodian territory for 45 years. Nevertheless national chauvinists do not care about mere facts.

The reason the PAD felt the need to use demagogic nationalist politics was because they have tried all means to get rid of Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai party which was transformed after the coup into the Peoples Power Party. Repeated demonstrations, a coup, a court-inspired dissolution of Thai Rak Thai and a military constitution have all failed to dent the electorate’s support for the parties. That is why the PAD have now suggested that parliamentary elections be scrapped for 70 percent of MPs. The poor obviously “cannot be trusted with the vote”.

The opposition Democrat Party under the twin leadership of young, Oxford educated, Abhisit

Vejjajiva and Korn Chatikavanij, also favors authoritarian means. Its extreme neo-liberal policies are not popular with the poor who are the majority of the population. They supported the 2006 coup and the PAD and want though Internet censorship on alternative news websites like Prachatai. Recently they spent much time in their parliamentary debate attacking the government for “selling Thailand’s sovereignty” down the river over Preah Vihear. The adoption of infantile chauvinism comes from having nothing of substance to say.

The mainstream English language and Thai language press are no better. The Bangkok Post and the Nation actually take the issue of Preah Vihear seriously without question. In the carnival of reaction, intellectual faculties have been surgically removed from some people’s brains.

How did it get to this stage? One important reason is the lack of independence among peoples’ organizations, NGO networks and social movements. This lack of political independence stems from a refusal to take political theory and party building seriously.

The concentration on single issues and political lobbying means that the people’s movement has sought one white knight after another, rather than building a party of the left.

In 2006, before the coup, we in The Peoples Coalition Party (and Left Turn newspaper) were constantly frustrated by the large anti-government demonstrations organized by the PAD. For years we had opposed the Thaksin government on the grounds of gross human rights abuses and privatization. Yet the PAD demands were thoroughly reactionary. We could not join them, yet we were far too small to influence the thousands that did. When the military staged a coup in September that year, we immediately came out publicly against it.

Since then we have tried to work with many in the Peoples Movement in opposing authoritarian measures. We have also played a significant part in highlighting the rightward drift of the PAD so that today, many social movements and networks have declared themselves against any new coup and have pulled out of the PAD. We are busy building an independent class position in the movement, which rejects the PAD and the government. Hopefully we can be part of ending this carnival of reaction.

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**P.S.**

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