

Press Statement by Associate Professor Giles Ji Ungpakorn Regarding Lese Majeste charges

Tuesday 13 January 2009, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 13 January 2008).

As you know, I have been summonsed to Pathumwan police station for questioning at 10.00 am on Tuesday 20th January 2009. I have been accused of Lese Majeste. The charge arises from my book “A Coup for the Rich”, published in 2007. Those found guilty of Lese Majeste face a heavy prison sentence.

The Lese Majeste Law in Thailand does not allow for the proper functioning of a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy, since it restricts freedom of speech and expression and does not allow for public accountability and transparency of the institution of the Monarchy. The Thai population are encouraged to believe that we live under an “ancient system of Monarchy”, a cross between a Sakdina, Absolute and Constitutional Monarchy system.

The use of the Lese Majeste Law in Thailand is an attempt to prevent any discussion about one of the most important institutions. It attempts to prevent critical thought and encourage a system of “learning by rote” among the population. For example, once the Monarch has given his blessing to the “Sufficiency Economy”, we are all supposed to accept it and praise it without question. Luckily, this type of brain-washing does not work very well in Thai society, for a society which cannot openly discuss economic and political policies will remain backward and under-developed.

The Military often claim that they are the “defenders of the Constitutional Monarchy”, yet the Thai Military has a long history of making un-constitutional coups. These are often “legitimised” by claiming to protect the Monarchy. The 19th September 2006 coup is a good example. Rather than defending the Monarchy as such, the military sought to legitimise themselves by referring to the Monarch. The Lese Majeste Law is thus used as a tool by the military, and other authoritarian elites, in order to protect their interests instead of preserving the Constitutional Monarchy. The promotion of an image that the Monarchy is all powerful (an un-constitutional image), is part of this self-legitimation by the military and other forces.

Constitutional Monarchs in most democratic countries enjoy stability while being subjected to public scrutiny. Therefore we must conclude that the Thai Lese Majeste Laws are not in place in order to bring stability to the institution, but serve another purpose.

Those who charge me with Lese Majeste are doing so because I have shown a principled and unyielding opposition to military coups and dictatorships. Many other activists are facing similar charges for the same reason. We must not forget their plight. We must wage an international and national political campaign to defend democratic rights in Thailand and for the abolition of the Lese Majeste law.

My book “A Coup for the Rich”

I wrote and published this book a few months after the 19th September 2006 military coup. The book

was an attempt to write an academic analysis of the Thai political crisis from a pro-democracy point of view. While constantly criticising the Thaksin government's gross abuses of Human Rights, I argued that the coup was totally unjustified. I argued that those who supported the coup: the military, the PAD, disgruntled businessmen, neo-liberals and conservative civil servants, were united in their contempt for the poor. They have no faith in democracy because they believe that the poor do not deserve the right to vote. They also hate Thaksin's party because it could win elections, while they could not.

Another important theme in my book is the questioning of the perceived "fact" that the crisis was a result of a dispute between the Monarchy and Thaksin. It is this argument of mine that may have enraged the military most of all, since they wished to use Royal legitimacy for their coup. I also attempted to stimulate a discussion about whether a Constitutional Monarchy should defend the Constitution and Democracy. In another section of the book I tried to paint an historical account of the Monarchy and to argue that it is now a modern institution, not a feudal one.

I have now sold all 1000 copies of "A Coup for the Rich", but it is available to download from my blog <http://wdpress.blog.co.uk/> and from the International Socialist Tendency website in the U.K. Just after publication, the book was withdrawn from sale by Chulalongkorn University bookshop and later by Thammasart University bookshop.

I reject totally the accusation that I have committed any crime by writing and publishing this book. I am prepared to fight any Lese Majeste charges in order to defend academic freedom, the freedom of expression and democracy in Thailand.

Since this accusation was filed by a Special Branch officer, the present Democrat Party Government should be questioned about its role in this and many other cases. The new Prime Minister has stated that he wants to see a firm crackdown on les majesty and many recent cases have been filed by the police.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn

13 January 2009

What you can do

1. Write a letter of protest/concern to Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Government House, Bangkok, Thailand. Fax number +66(0)29727751
2. Write a letter of protest/concern to the Ambassador, The Royal Thai Embassy, in your country.
3. Demand that Amnesty International take up all Les Majesty cases in Thailand.
4. Demand the abolition of the les majesty law.