

Two faces of Thailand

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On the 19th September this year, the 3rd anniversary of the military coup that wrecked Thai Democracy, two demonstrations took place. They sum up the two faces of Thailand.

One demonstration, by tens of thousands of Red Shirts in Bangkok, was organised in order to continue the demand for full Democracy. It was a peaceful and friendly demonstration. Yet the military-backed Democrat Party government, headed by Abhisit Vejjajiva, declared a State of Emergency and lined up thousands of police and soldiers to deal with the demonstrators. Previously, back in April, Abhisit had urged soldiers to fire on the Red Shirts. Two people were subsequently killed and 70 injured by government soldiers.

The other demonstration was organised by PAD fascist thugs. The PAD are the Yellow Shirt royalists. The aim of this demonstration was to attack Cambodian villagers living and working at the ancient Kao Praharn temple inside Cambodia. Since last year the PAD have been trying to cause a war with Cambodia by whipping up extreme nationalism. The temple was built by the ancient Khmers and clearly belongs to Cambodia, both from a legal and historical point of view. On the 19th September the PAD went to the border armed, as usual, with guns, bombs and clubs. They attacked the police and then a group of local villagers who were opposed to them. Local villagers on both sides of the border have traditionally held joint religious ceremonies together at the temple on this day. This has not happened since the PAD forced the closure of the temple last year.

Teptai Senpong, personal spokesman for Prime Minister Abhisit, earlier stated that there was no reason to declare a State of Emergency in the border area, "as the PAD were defending Thai national interests". The present Foreign Minister is a PAD supporter who took part in the illegal occupation of the international airports last December. He is famed for being rude about the Cambodian government. Suriyasai Takasila, PAD spokesperson, said that the PAD leadership would not turn its back on Wira Somkwamkit, the PAD leader who headed the violent raid on the border. Naturally, the PAD riot and their extreme nationalism was supported by ASTV. The government will not prosecute the PAD and their leaders for their illegal violence. They never have. At the same time numerous Red Shirts are in jail or face prosecution.

Just like when the PAD took over the airports, they cared little for the impact on local people's employment and livelihood. They cared little if the sons of poor farmers, conscripted into the Thai army, were to die in any pointless shoot out with their brothers in the Cambodian army.

The progressive, peaceful and democratic face of Thai society is the Red Shirts. The violent, fascist and authoritarian face is the face of the Yellow Shirt conservative royalists who control the state, the Army, the Monarchy, the government and the media. The one thing they do not control is the hearts and minds of most Thai citizens.

Most Thais are waiting for the King to die. But that in itself will solve nothing, despite the fact that his son is universally hated and held in contempt. No real democracy can be built without dismissing the Generals, the Judges, the Privy Council, the Royal Family and the corrupt politicians. Will the Red Shirts be up to this People's Revolution? Can it be an overwhelming movement of

citizens in order to minimise bloodshed? These are the issues on many people's minds today.