

No Tears for a Thug

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Don't cry for Samak Sundaravej

Samak Sundaravej, who died Tuesday of cancer in a Bangkok hospital, was always a right-wing politician who believed in the elite system. Samak, who served briefly as prime minister and minister of defense as well as the leader of the People's Power Party, never truly believed in democracy.

Once close to Queen Sirikit in the 1970s, he was on the side of dictatorship. His role in the 6th October 1976 bloodbath at Thammasat University and other areas in Bangkok was to urge various right-wing gangs such as the Village Scouts to attack students, workers, farmers and intellectuals who were liberals or socialists.

Samak claimed that the graduate volunteer program run by my father, Dr Puey Ungpakorn, was designed for political agitation among villagers. His mouthpiece was the tank corps radio station. After the massacre at Thammasat University and the military coup that followed, he became Minister of the Interior. He introduced tough censorship and had liberal and left-wing library books burnt in the streets.

His role in the 1970s is very similar to the roles of Sondi Limtongkul, whose ASTV television station has been transformed into the Thai version of Fox News, and Censorship Boss Satit Wongnongtuay today. Like Samak, they constantly tell lies and foment violence against their opponents, while destroying democracy.

In 1976 Samak lied that there were Vietnamese soldiers in Thammasat on 6th October as right-wing thugs massed to smash the students who were there only to protest the return of the former dictator Thanom Kittikachorn. Samak "knew" because he "saw" roasted dogs there. He also lied that there was a mass of weapons in the university.

Today the Democrats lie about former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and lie about a so-called conspiracy to crash the stock market on the part of the press, which was only legitimately reporting on the prolonged illness of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and use the lese majeste laws to circumscribe any kind of legitimate debate.

No one needs to pretend that Samak had changed his politics by the time he became elected Prime Minister, leading the People's Power Party. As Prime Minister he lied on CNN and Aljazeera about the Tak Bai state crimes, saying the 78 men who suffocated after being stacked like animals in a truck after being arrested at a Muslim rally in southern Thailand were only weak from fasting. He lied when he said that only 59 persons of 2,500 killed during the so-called war on drugs were shot by police and that the rest were murdered by their colleagues.

Nonetheless, Samak was illegitimately removed from office by the courts, the military and the conservative elites last year, for the "crime" of conducting a cooking program on TV, which was deemed a conflict of interest with his duties as prime minister.

Samak was never a "hero of Freedom and Democracy." Neither are Chalerm Yubamrung, the

interior minister, nor Panlop Pinmanee, a former deputy director of the Internal Security Operations Command who is widely suspected of perpetrating a grenade attack on a People's Alliance for Democracy rally at Sanam Luang recently which injured 12 people. The sooner Red Shirts distance themselves from these people, the more likely we are to be able to fight for real democracy.

But Samak's association with the People's Power Party and the Red Shirts does not make the millions of ordinary Red Shirts into reactionaries like the PAD Yellow Shirts or the Democrats. We remain a people's movement for freedom and democracy.

P.S.

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