

Red Shirt Protests to end soon. What has been achieved?

Tuesday 11 May 2010, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 10 April 2010).

Red Shirt protests in Bangkok, which started in mid-March are about to be wound up. The leaders have accepted a compromise with the military-backed Abhisit government. Elections will not be held immediately, but on 14th November. Earlier Abihist had indicated an election in February 2011 at the earliest.

It is unclear whether the blanket censorship will be lifted. One clear demand that the Red Shirt leaders are expecting is that the Red Shirt TV channel (People Channel TV) will be allowed back on air. It is unclear whether websites like Prachatai will be unblocked. Another demand is that the law be applied equally to all. The Government claims that tomorrow the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister will "surrender" to the police regarding charges of murdering citizens back on 10th April. But it is unclear whether any real charges will be filed against them.

Nothing has been said about the political prisoners, both those in jail for lese majeste and those in jail for blocking roads during the recent protest.

What have the Red Shirts achieved?

1. The Red Shirts have shown that they are a genuine mass movement for Democracy made up of ordinary working people in rural and urban areas. They have shown that the crisis is about CLASS. They have shown that the Red Shirts are a grass roots movement which will not disappear easily.
2. The Red Shirts have exposed the real and bloody nature of the military-backed Government which can only stay in power through repression and blanket censorship.
3. The struggle of the Red Shirts has turned ordinary people into leaders; into internet and media experts who can get around censorship in order to spread their message. In the process of struggle they have thrown off the myths and mind fetters about the Monarchy. As a result, the Monarchy appears to be in terminal crisis. If this is really so, it will seriously weaken the power of the army.
4. They have stood up to the army and shown that it is not a simple matter to just shoot down pro-democracy demonstrators. In the process they have caused splits in the police force and lower ranks of the army.
5. They have forced the Government to speed up elections.

But this is a compromise. It is not the end of the shady dictatorship of the army and the elites which stands behind the present Government. It will disappoint many.

However, it is difficult to see how the Red Shirts could have fought on at this present stage without new strategies.

The important question is how they will organise and fight in the future. If the Red Shirts are to strengthen themselves they have to organise among the trade unions in order to win strike action.

They have to make serious efforts to build networks among army recruits and they have to develop a clear political platform for Puea Thai Party in order to win the hearts and minds of ordinary workers and farmers. They should advocate a Welfare State, improved benefits for workers, a real peace process for the South, genuine reform of the media and the justice system. They must stand against censorship and repressive laws. No one can just leave these matters in the hands of the leadership. Red Shirt local groups need to elect representatives who can be part of a progressive grass roots leadership in order to lead the struggle forward. Women should make up a significant proportion of this leadership.

Only these things would make a difference between a shoddy compromise and a real step forward to Freedom, Democracy and Social Justice.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn
