

What would end the violence in Bangkok?

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If the military backed Government of Abhisit Vejjajia dissolved parliament, announced fresh elections and ordered a cease fire, the violence would end immediately and the Red Shirts would all go home.

In democratic countries, when there is a crisis, dissolving parliament and calling elections is a normal way to defuse serious tension. In the 1970s British Prime Minister Edward Heath called elections when faced with a massive strike wave. In 1968 the French Government called elections in the face of a crisis. What could be more democratic than asking the people who they wanted to govern the country when there are serious divisions in society? The Abhisit's Government can only cling to power by shooting civilians, announcing a state of emergency in a quarter of the country and censoring the media and the internet. If the Government wants to claim legitimacy it should submit to the wishes of the people through a general election and prove that it has legitimacy.

The UDD (Red Shirt) leadership has called for an immediate cease fire and talks with the Government. This would also end the killing and violence. Yet Abhisit has refused. Instead he and the army generals have sent snipers and assassination squads into the centre of Bangkok to kill unarmed civilians in their so-called "live firing zone". Sixty-five people have been killed since April and nearly two thousand injured. Among the dead are paramedics, journalists and at least one ten year-old boy. The Government continues to lie about the military actions and continues to lie that the Red Shirts are "armed terrorists". Numerous media reports from the BBC, CNN and ABC show this not to be true.

One important reason why the Government will not end the violence is that they know that they would lose an election. They were never elected in the first place and are only in power because of the army and the judiciary that have repeatedly frustrated the democratic process since the 2006 coup. The Government, the Military, the Palace, the majority of the business class, the Judiciary and the top bureaucrats are the elites. For years they have used their extra-constitutional power to exploit and repress the majority of the population. They have shot down pro-democracy demonstrators in 1973, 1976, 1992, 2009 and now in 2010.

This is a class war. But only the naive believe that class war is a simple matter of rich against the poor. The Red Shirts represent workers and small farmers. They are the people who have created the wealth in Thailand, but they have not been able to enjoy the benefits. Thailand is a very unequal society. Their hopes were raised when millionaire Taksin Shinawat's Thai Rak Thai Government offered a universal health care scheme and pro-poor policies. They were inflamed when the elites stage a coup against this elected Government in 2006. Now they are standing firm and facing the armed might of the ruling class.

For the above reasons, the Red Shirt protest in the centre of Bangkok is legitimate, even if it disrupts the commercial life in expensive shopping centres and luxury hotels. Anyone who believes in Democracy and Social Justice should support them.

