

Thailand: The strange case of Surachai Sa-Darn

Tuesday 12 April 2011, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 27 February 2011).

Surachai Sa-Darn is the latest victim of Thailand's draconian and ridiculous lese majeste law. He should not be in prison for expressing his point of view. Nor should Da Torpido or Red Eagle and Jiranut, the Prachatai web manager, should not be facing charges for not removing other peoples' posts fast enough. There are hundreds of people who are in jail or suffering from Thailand's lese majeste law and there are hundreds of red shirts who are still in jail for demanding democracy. Meanwhile the Thai Prime Minister, various government ministers and the generals, all of whom ordered the killing of 90 un-armed prodemocracy redshirts, are not in jail.

Yet Surachai's case is not straight forward. He seems to be refusing bail in order to make a political point about lese majeste. All power to him. Yet, he was never part of the campaign to free Da Torpedo or Red Eagle. What is outrageous, however, is the claim by Surachai and Jakrapop, the self-styled Red Siam leaders, that the UDD leadership "did a deal" with the junta to swap their 8 jailed leaders with Surachai. Unfortunately Jim Taylor writing in New Mandala, seems to believe this nonsense [1]. The idea that 8 UDD leaders, representing a mass movement which runs into millions, could be "swapped" with Surachai who has a movement of no more than a couple of thousand, is ridiculous. But it is more than that. It is poisonous mis-information and should be condemned.

The UDD leaders who are now out on bail maintain that they want all red shirt prisoners released. They have not turned their backs on other prisoners. It is clear that they have been released on bail in order to pave the way for elections later this year. These elections will be "fixed" by the Democrat Party in various ways [2].

Unfortunately, Surachai is a charlatan. He wears a red star hat to give him revolutionary credibility from his days in the Communist Party. He has accused Tida from the UDD of not being a true revolutionary when she was once in the CPT. In 2008 he claimed that he was recruiting fighters for an armed uprising. This has now been conveniently forgotten. He refused to support the Red Shirt mass protests in May 2010 and openly criticised the protests and the UDD leadership in the mainstream press just at the time when the military were killing red shirt civilians. He is on record as saying that red shirts should not oppose any future military coup. In a recent radio interview in January 2011 he "explained" that the mass movement could never win and that redshirts needed to build an alliance with Taksin because Taksin had money and red shirts couldn't win without his money. He went on to state that Taksin wanted a "bourgeois revolution against Thai feudalism", which he said was like the English Revolution of 1640. He said that "the people" and Red Siam, however, wanted a "liberal democratic revolution" which he claimed was like the French Revolution of 1789 because it abolished the monarchy!

The UDD leadership have never claimed to be revolutionaries and they are careful for obvious reasons, to avoid calling for a republic. We must not forget that the junta tried to justify the 2010 killings by saying that the red shirts wanted a republic. Just because the UDD leaders are not revolutionaries does not mean that they are working for the junta or the King. Revolutionaries who want an end to the Thai dictatorship need to work with reformists and especially the mass movement in order to try to win it over to more radical demands.

Both Surachai and Chupong (who broadcasts via the USA) spend their time repeating over and over again that the King is all powerful and can order the military and the judiciary to do anything. Surachai maintains that Thailand is not under a military dictatorship but ruled by the king. Chupong comes from the Prasert Sapsuntorn tradition that broke away from the CPT to cooperate with the military in the cold war. His group uses left-wing words but has a history of supporting the Monarchy and of helping to break strikes. Neither Surachai nor Chupong criticise the military and nor do they see it as a threat to democracy. All they can say is that they hope that the King will “see reason” and grant Thais democracy, like the Monarchy in Bhutan (!) They have nothing to say about concrete demands which red shirts should be raising so as not to be trapped by the coming fixed election. Such demands would include root and branch reform of the military and judiciary, release of all political prisoners, demands that those who ordered the killings be punished and also demands to build a welfare state in order to bring about social justice. In short, Surachai and Chupong are charlatans playing at being revolutionaries. But, never the less, charlatans should not be jailed.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn

Footnotes

[1] <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2011/02/25/where-to-now-for-the-udd/>

[2] See on ESSF my article [Thailand: Steps To Cheat in the Election?](#)