

Thailand: Steps To Cheat in the Election?

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According to Thai Prime Minister Abhisit, there will be a General Election in Thailand in 2011. Whether we can believe him is another matter because Abhisit is an incurable liar. However, according to the rules that the present military-backed regime say that they abide by, there must be an election this year. The election could be postponed on “national security” grounds or the military might stage another coup. Both these options are not the preferred ones of the regime. Winning an election is the preferred option because it would give the regime legitimacy. Postponing an election solves nothing in the long term and another coup, putting soldiers in the front seat, would be stupid. Never the less, Thai generals are not the cleverest people in the World. They might allow their arrogance to cloud their judgement.

But how to win an election when the majority of the population is against you? We know the majority of the population supports the Red Shirts and used to support Thai Rak Thai (TRT) because of the results of a series of elections which were overturned by the military and the courts. So they have to cheat. But cheating like Ben Ali or Mubarak, getting 95% of the vote, is not on the cards. It would be too obvious. This is why the regime has been chipping away at the Red Shirt party. They banned TRT politicians from politics, used the courts to dissolve TRT and then Palang Prachachon, and stuffed the Electoral Commission with those who favour the dictatorship. The latter will be important in tipping the balance of seats after a future election. If Peua Thai win a majority, this can be eroded by giving out some red or yellow cards to disqualify them. In 2008 the army bullied and bribed Newin Chitichorn to change sides. Now they will be hoping that the odious gangster politician Chalerm Yubamrung will do the same. Slight changes to the Constitution in the field of “party list” MPs will help the Democrats gain at the expense of small parties, who might demand too much to support the Democrats. But such changes may help Peua Thai too. The fact that the media is totally in the hands of the regime and that there is draconian censorship will also help. So will the fact that some prominent and very popular Red Shirt leaders are in prison after the bloody crack-down against unarmed Red Shirts in April and May 2010.

In addition to this the Democrat Party is lobbying for a change in the Constitution and election law which would allow the party with most “party list” MPs to form a government, even if it didn’t have the most MPs in parliament. Thai MPs are chosen from both constituencies and party lists. They also want so-called non-party “independents” to be able to stand for election. This would help to allow pro-junta royalists to slip into parliament by pretending to be “non-partisan”. Finally, they also want to remove the fundamental right of MPs to call for a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister. These are all measures which would help the Democrat Party cheat its way to victory in an alliance with small corrupt parties.

Peua Thai party is not helping either. It is a shadow of TRT and has no new policies to win the hearts and minds of the people. It could be proposing a Welfare State with taxation on the rich and/or root and branch reform of the military and the justice system. It should campaign to bring to justice the state officials and army generals responsible for the murder of nearly 90 unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators. Instead it merely relies on the past popularity of TRT and doesn’t appear to want to change anything.

The election will not solve the crisis of democracy in Thailand, but it will be fought over in order to

gain legitimacy. This fact is being debated within the pro-democracy Red Shirt movement. Clearer and more decisive demands need to be adopted by this giant social movement and the relationship between Peua Thai and the Red Shirts should be openly debated. More radical Red Shirt parties are needed.

There is one scenario where a military coup might not be such a stupid response. That would be the death of the weak, old and spineless King Pumipon. He has been the rubber stamp for the military's undemocratic actions for nearly 60 years and the military and all those associated with the regime fear his approaching death. When he dies they might organise a coup, declare a state of emergency and install a "Government of National Unity". Such actions should be resisted by all those who believe in freedom and democracy. The majority of Thais are now sick and tired of the military and the monarchy. They want an end to the "ancient regime". They will have to struggle to achieve this. But Tunisia and Egypt show that everything is possible.

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