

## **New Divisions emerge in Thai Politics**

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**Six months after the election of Yingluk's Peua Thai government, new, clear, divisions are emerging between progressive pro-democracy forces and those who believe in keeping Thailand in the dark ages of repression.**

Despite Red Shirt fears that the Military and the reactionaries would frustrate the democratic elections and prevent Peua Thai from forming a government, it has long become clear that the Military and Peua Thai had an agreement to preserve the status quo. With hindsight the elections can be seen as a process to demobilise the Red Shirts, maintain the power of the Military and prevent anyone from the Military or the previous administration from being prosecuted for killing up to 90 unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators in 2010. Lèse majesté prisoners have been sold down the river and abandoned in Thailand's notoriously cruel jails. Corrupt, odious government Ministers like Chalerm Yubamrung have been increasing the level of lèse majesté repression and former UDD Red Shirt leaders like Natawut Saikua have joined the government as loyal ministers. Those Red Shirt UDD leaders outside parliament are trying to keep a tight leash of the movement to prevent any mobilisations and hoping that the Red Shirts will just dissolve. Meanwhile they cry wolf from time to time about a possible coup d'état, just to keep Red Shirts in check and prevent them from criticising the Government. But there will not be any coup d'état because Peua Thai and the UDD have joined the ranks of the conservative elites and their supporters.

The only tangible thing that Peua Thai or the UDD have achieved for the Red Shirts over the last 6 months has been to transfer those Red Shirt prisoners who are NOT charged with lèse majesté to a "political prison". These political prisoners haven't even been released.

This is why the formation of the Nitirat Group, with the aims of reforming the Constitution to delete all the laws brought in by the military junta after the 2006 coup d'état, is so significant. They also aim to bring back significant progressive elements of past Constitutions immediately following the 1932 revolution against the absolute monarchy. In addition to this progressive group of law academics, there is also the Committee to Campaign for the Reform of Lèse Majesté. These groups are now attracting mass followings among Red Shirts, students and intellectuals.

The importance of the "Nitirat Movement", if we can call it that, is seen by the vicious response from the Military, the conservatives and the Peua Thai Government. Chalerm Yubamrung has asked the police Special Branch to investigate them, various generals have threatened a coup if they make headway in reforming the Constitution and lèse majesté. Reactionary elements who look more and more like the "fascists" from the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1976 have been burning effigies of the Nitirat leaders and Yingluk has criticised those who want to "bring the King into politics"! The ageing and weak King has always supported the Military and repression and never once defended a democratic Constitution. Added to this is the fact that the Monarchy and lèse majesté have always served the interests of the Military.

So the new lines have been drawn in Thailand's continuing political crisis. On the side for freedom and democracy are the Nitirat group, the Committee to Campaign for the Reform of Lèse Majesté

and masses of Red Shirts and non-Red Shirt progressives who support them. Over on the other side are those who support keeping Thailand in the dark ages of repression, who approve of using lèse majesté, preventing freedom of speech and defending a system riddled with political and economic inequalities. This side are made up of Peua Thai, the UDD leaders, the Military and the conservatives.

If we are ever to abolish lèse majesté or have a truly democratic Constitution, the Nitirat Movements must move out of the seminar rooms and start to organise a mass movement on the streets, in the communities and among the trade union movement.

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