

Thousands of “Yellow-Shirt” middle-class royalists are demonstrating in Thailand, but the key remains the army

Tuesday 26 November 2013, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 24 November 2013).

The disastrous and disgraceful amnesty bill, put forward by Yingluk's Pua Thai government in early November stirred up a hornet's nest of “Yellow-Shirt” buzzing. Thousands of middle-class royalists, led by the notorious Democrat Party have been demonstrating in an attempt to get rid of the Government and all of Taksin's influence. They were very upset that the amnesty bill would have allowed Taksin to return. These are the people who called for and supported the 2006 military coup against Taksin's democratically elected government. These are also the people who supported the bloody crack-down on Red Shirt protesters in 2010. Democrat Party strongman Sutep, addressing a crowd of supporters and called for the “restoration of full monarchy rule”.

Those who ordered the cold-blooded murder in 2010, the military generals and the democrat politicians, would also have been given amnesty by Pua Thai. But only progressive Red Shirts were concerned about letting state killers off the hook once again. Only progressive Red Shirts were concerned that the amnesty did not cover political prisoners like Somyot, who are in jail for *lèse majesté*. Recently, Pua Thai ICT Minister “for Censorship”, Anudit Nakornrup, again threatened those expressing political views on the internet with *lèse majesté*. He boasted that he had shut down 90,000 webpages. The courts have also ruled that anyone criticising the present royal dynasty or any previous kings dating back 200 years can be guilty of *lèse majesté*!

The Democrats are in a weak position. They and the yellow shirts have never been able to do anything without the army. Yet the army is not about to overthrow the Yingluk government right now. A deal between Taksin and the military was struck in 2011. There are grey areas not covered by the deal and the army cannot control what the “yellows” say and do, hence the fun and games around the amnesty bill. The question is what more would the military gain from a coup? They already have an agreement that they will not be prosecuted for staging coups or gross human rights abuses. The generals are still in control of the army and their lucrative cash-cows like the media and state enterprises. What excuse would they give for a coup and how would they manage to govern in the face of large scale popular opposition?

Pua Thai and the mainstream UDD leadership of the Red Shirts continually shout “coup!” just like the little shepherd boy who shouted “Wolf!” This is enough to pull most Red Shirts into line behind the government, despite their distaste for the amnesty bill.

Last week Pua Thai led a parliamentary vote to amend the 2007 military constitution so that all senators would be elected instead of half being appointed. Previously the 1997 constitution had stipulated that all senators must be elected. This was the constitution which the military ripped up after the 2006 coup. Despite winning support from a majority in parliament, the military-appointed Constitutional Court ruled that parliament could not amend the constitution and that it was “more democratic” to have half the senators appointed by the elites. Pua Thai MPs have vowed to ignore the court, but the conservatives may yet wreck this amendment if they can pressurise the king to refuse to sign it into law.

The usual bunch of “commentators” continues to push the idea that the real power behind Thai politics is the “semi-feudal” King. A recent example is Marc Saxer, director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Thailand office. He claims that the feudalists have set restrictions on Taksin’s political power. The truth is that King Pumipon of Thailand is a weak and characterless monarch who has spent his useless and privileged life in a bubble, surrounded by fawning, grovelling, toadies who claim that he is a “god”. Yet he is merely the willing tool of the military. During the late 1950s and early 1960s Pumipon was used by Thailand’s corrupt and despotic ruler, Field Marshall Sarit Tanarat, to build a strong coalition between the military and the monarchists. But the use of the monarchy to prop-up the elites is not a “feudal” phenomenon. It has been used continuously by the modern capitalist classes all over the world since the mid-17th century. In the 1980s and 1990s Thai capitalists like Taksin also used the monarchy and Taksin is keen to maintain the *lèse majesté* law because it protects the entire elite class. Taksin is a royalist. He is also a capitalist and so is Pumipon. Pumipon controls a huge web of corporations. The last vestiges of feudalism were cleared away in the late 19th century.

The weak and cowardly old king in his seaside palace at Hua Hin just doesn’t want to be involved in the current chaos and he will only move if ordered to do so by the army. When he dies nothing will really change unless the power of the army and the elites is cut down to size. It is they who use the monarchy and they will just use his son like they used his father.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn
