

Thai PM in court on trumped-up charges

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Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra appeared before the Constitution Court yesterday, charged with “abuse of power” over her decision in 2011 to transfer National Security Council chief Thawil Pliensri from his post. She denied the accusation, brought by opposition senators, that she removed Thawil in order to promote a family member to the position. The court is set to hand down its verdict today, which could result in Yingluck and her cabinet being forced from office.

The trial is a blatantly anti-democratic attempt to carry out a judicial coup. In March the court ruled to annul the February election, which the ruling Pheu Thai clearly won, on the pretext that voting was disrupted in a handful of provinces by the anti-government People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC).

The PDRC has held protests over the past six months, mainly in Bangkok, calling for the government to be replaced by an unelected “people’s council”—in effect a dictatorship backed by the military. The PDRC has blockaded major intersections and government buildings and enlisted the support of senior public servants in order to destabilise the Yingluck government and create the conditions for it to be removed, either by the courts or by the military.

The opposition Democrat Party supports the PDRC’s campaign and boycotted the February election to help bring about a constitutional crisis.

The PDRC and Democrats, along with the courts, represent Thailand’s traditional elites—the monarchy, the military and the state bureaucracy—who supported the 2006 military coup against Yingluck’s billionaire brother Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin’s government cut across the interests of this layer by opening up the economy to more foreign investment, and by enacting limited social reforms, which won it a support base among the rural and urban poor.

The PDRC denounces the reforms, including cheaper health services and subsidies for rice farmers, as “vote

buying.” Its “people’s council” would scrap these measures and implement a program of austerity against the working people.

After Thaksin was ousted and fled the country to avoid being imprisoned, a pro-Thaksin government won the 2007 election. In 2008, however, the Constitution Court removed the government on trumped-up “corruption” allegations and installed the Democrats backed by the military—an operation it is now seeking to repeat.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission—which sympathises with the opposition—has also accused Yingluck of “neglecting her duty” by failing to prevent government losses linked to the rice scheme. It is set to announce a verdict as early as Thursday. If found guilty, Yingluck could be banned from politics and imprisoned.

The Democrats, Thailand’s oldest political party, postured as opponents of military rule during the early 1990s. In response to the deepening economic crisis, however, they have become open advocates for dictatorship.

Democrat leader Abhisit Vejjajiva last week held talks with Armed Forces Supreme Commander General Tanasak Patimaprakorn to outline his proposals for “reform.” Abhisit told the media that Tanasak “supports what I have been doing [and] wants to see all sides joining hands to ease the situation.”

Abhisit’s 10-point “road map,” which he claims represents a compromise, is virtually identical to the PDRC’s demands. It calls for the government to be replaced by a “neutral” administration, with elections postponed for at least six months, while the constitution is re-written and election rules changed to permanently exclude Pheu Thai’s “populist” policies.

The military clearly supports the PDRC and Democrats. Army Chief General Prayuth Chan-ocha has repeatedly refused to rule out leading a coup.

Thousands of soldiers have been stationed throughout the capital on the pretext of preventing clashes between pro- and anti-government protesters.

On May 2, the *Bangkok Post* cited “military sources” who said the army and intelligence agencies were closely monitoring leaders of the pro-government United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) in the country’s north, who are planning protest rallies if Yingluck is ousted by the court. The UDD’s leadership includes several Pheu Thai politicians.

Throughout the political crisis, the UDD leadership has been reluctant to mobilise the government’s supporters, the so-called Red Shirts, against the threat of dictatorship. It has avoided staging any protests in central Bangkok. Pheu Thai and UDD leaders have warned that hundreds of thousands of Red Shirts, drawn from the rural and urban poor, are prepared to travel to Bangkok to protest if Yingluck is removed. But no protest venues have been announced.

Pheu Thai and the UDD fear that they could be unable to control their own supporters. In 2010, thousands of Red Shirts protested in the capital against the military-backed Democrat government and began raising demands for social equality that went far beyond the UDD’s calls for fresh elections. A brutal army crackdown left 90 people dead and thousands injured.

Pheu Thai is a party of big business that is just as committed as its opponents to imposing the economic crisis on the working class, through the elimination of subsidies and other austerity measures. There is mounting pressure from local and foreign capitalists for Thailand’s political crisis to be resolved, if necessary via a coup, in order to proceed with this agenda.

The Ministry of Finance revealed on April 29 that the economy probably contracted in the first quarter of 2014. The government has been in caretaker mode since December, with limited powers to pass legislation and spend on infrastructure projects. Many foreign companies have delayed investments.

On May 5, the London-based *Financial Times* for the first time called for Yingluck to “stand down” in order to end the “perpetual political limbo.” The mouthpiece of global finance capital admitted that the courts were “partisan” and that the opposition’s methods were anti-democratic. Nevertheless, it urged Yingluck’s removal and the scrapping of “wasteful and inefficient” rice

subsidies, as demanded by the PDRC.

The Obama administration has not opposed the Constitution Court’s bogus case against Yingluck. Significantly, Abhisit announced his “road map” after meeting last month with US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel.

During his two-day visit to Bangkok, Russel refused to condemn the PDRC’s anti-democratic protests or the Constitution Court’s decision to annul the election. In an interview with Thai PBS, he urged both sides to “compromise,” adding that the “drop in GDP growth, in employment, in exports, is a troubling trend ... it affects Thailand’s trading partners like the United States.”

While Russel claimed that Washington would be “deeply troubled by a coup,” he refused to say whether the Obama administration would support the installation of a “neutral” administration and the postponement of elections. The US tacitly supported the 2006 coup and has close ties with Thailand’s military—a key ally in the US “pivot to Asia,” which is aimed at encircling and preparing for war against China.



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