

Thailand's judicial coup

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The judicial ousting of the Thai prime minister this week is a sharp warning to workers of the turn to anti-democratic methods of rule by the ruling classes, not only in Thailand, but internationally.

In a nakedly political decision on Wednesday, the Constitutional Court ordered the removal of Yingluck Shinawatra on the spurious grounds that she had replaced a national security adviser with one of her own supporters. While acknowledging that the prime minister had acted within her powers, the court declared that by appointing a relative she had violated “moral principle.”

The Constitutional Court ruling is the latest step in a six-month campaign of anti-government protests, legal chicanery and veiled threats of army intervention to oust the elected Pheu Thai government. The stated aim of the opposition Democrat Party and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), which has led the protests, is the establishment of an unelected “people's council” to run the country. Not content with Yingluck's removal, the PDRC and its backers have already made clear that the entire government has to go.

The ousting of Thailand's elected prime minister on a trumped-up charge has not been opposed by the Obama administration or any of its allies in the region. Just as Washington is prosecuting its interests in Ukraine via openly fascist organisations, so in Thailand it is tacitly lining up with the military, monarchists and the extreme right wing.

This week's judicial coup follows eight years of political infighting within Thai ruling circles that began with the military's ousting of Yingluck's brother, Thaksin Shinawatra, as prime minister in 2006. Bangkok's traditional elites—the monarchy, the army and state bureaucracy including the courts—helped install Thaksin, a telecom billionaire, in 2001, but turned against him when his economic policies and populist concessions to the urban and rural poor cut

across their interests.

In 2008, the Constitutional Court removed two elected pro-Thaksin prime ministers—the first for accepting payment for appearing on a TV cooking show, and the second on trumped-up charges of electoral fraud. The installation of a military-backed Democrat government provoked widespread popular opposition. “Red Shirt” protests were violently suppressed by the military in 2010, with more than 90 demonstrators killed.

The current campaign to bring down the Pheu Thai government has erupted as the country's economic outlook has dramatically worsened. Exports have slumped, foreign investment has fallen off and estimates for first quarter growth are negative. The Bangkok business and political elite, as well as the middle classes that largely comprise the PDRC protests, have made clear that they will not tolerate the government's very limited hand-outs to working people. Indeed the PDRC's right-wing demagogues brand any concessions, whether guaranteed rice prices for farmers or low cost health care, as inadmissible “vote buying” and “corruption.”

The Pheu Thai government does not represent the interests of the working class and rural masses. Prior to her summary dismissal, Yingluck repeatedly pledged to business leaders that she would implement their demands for austerity. Moreover, the government deliberately demobilised its “Red Shirt” supporters, fearing that the urban and rural poor would begin to voice their own class demands, as they began to do in 2010. That only encouraged the campaign to replace the government with a “people's committee”—a military-backed junta in all but name.

What is taking place confirms one of the essential propositions of Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: the organic inability of any section of the bourgeoisie in countries of a belated capitalist

development such as Thailand to meet the democratic aspirations and pressing social needs of the masses. The history of Thailand in the twentieth century has involved a succession of military coups aimed at suppressing popular discontent. The threadbare character of the much-vaunted Thai democracy that emerged in the late 1980s is underscored by the fact that the Democrat Party, which previously postured as an opponent of military rule, now functions as its political agent.

The turn to openly anti-democratic forms of rule in Thailand comes amid the worst breakdown of capitalism since the 1930s, an austerity drive to impose its burdens on the working class, and mounting geopolitical tensions. The US “pivot,” aimed at subordinating and militarily encircling China, is drawing every country throughout Asia into the maelstrom of militarism and war preparations.

Publicly, the Obama administration has not condemned the naked moves by the right-wing opposition to oust Thailand’s elected government, instead mouthing platitudes about the need for compromise between the two sides. Behind the scenes, White House officials are collaborating closely with the Thai military, which Washington regards as a key ally in its war preparations against China. During the Vietnam War, 80 percent of US bombing raids against North Vietnam took off from air bases in Thailand.

What is taking place in Thailand is just the sharpest expression of political processes that are underway throughout the region. The so-called Asian democracies that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in countries such as South Korea and Indonesia were little more than window dressing for what had been US-backed dictatorships. US imperialism cut its erstwhile political allies loose because their crony capitalism had become an obstacle to American corporate interests.

Now the democratic mask is being stripped off. In South Korea, President Park Geun-hye, daughter of US-backed dictator Park Chung-hee, is reviving her father’s methods of the anti-communist witch-hunt to suppress political opponents and striking workers. In Indonesia, the upcoming presidential elections will be dominated by Suharto-era generals and political parties. As the ruling classes line up with the US war drive against China and prepare for class war against working people at home, they are dispensing with the trappings

of democracy.

As Trotsky explained in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, the working class is the only social force capable of defending basic democratic rights as part of the political fight for its own independent class interests.

At present, Thai workers have either been largely sidelined or subordinated to Pheu Thai and its allied “Red Shirt” organisation—a situation that holds great dangers. It is only through a political struggle against all factions of the ruling class that the independent strength of the working class can be mobilised and the rural poor won to its side. That fight also necessitates a turn to workers not only in other oppressed countries but in the major imperialist centres, in the US in particular, in a unified struggle for a socialist and internationalist perspective to abolish capitalism—the root cause of war and social inequality.

Above all, new revolutionary leaderships of the working class must be built in Thailand and throughout Asia as sections of the world Trotskyist movement—the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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