

Protests continue as no-confidence vote against Thai prime minister fails

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Protests are continuing in Thailand, following a failed attempt to remove Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and nine of his ministers in a no-confidence parliamentary vote on Saturday. More than 1,000 demonstrators gathered in Bangkok Friday evening, and again on Saturday, to denounce the current government. The removal of Prayuth has been one of the key demands of the protest movement that began last year.

The no-confidence vote in the parliament had little chance of success, with Prayuth's ruling coalition backing the prime minister. Out of the 487 legislators, 272 expressed their support for Prayuth while the opposition could only garner 206, well short of the simple majority needed. This was the second such vote on Prayuth, with the first taking place in February last year. The current government came to office in July 2019, with Prayuth having initially seized power in a military coup in 2014.

The opposition coalition, largely comprising the Pheu Thai party and the smaller Move Forward Party (MFP), had accused Prayuth and his ministers of an inept response to the COVID-19 pandemic, misusing power to attack government critics online, mismanaging the economy, and using the monarchy to suppress criticisms of the government.

While the opposition grouping, at times, made vitriolic remarks about Prayuth's government during the four-day debate prior to Saturday's vote, its real aim was to falsely posture as genuine opponents of the prime minister. This is being done in order to convince the youth and student-led protest movement not to break with Pheu Thai or the MFP, both of which are hostile to the broader democratic demands of the protest movement.

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat stated, "The biggest fault of Prayuth is that he does not understand the principles of the constitutional monarchy. He used the monarchy to protect himself whenever he was criticized or opposed. This is an evil action, making him no longer qualified to

be prime minister."

Youth and students are supposed to believe that, if only Prayuth were gone, Thailand would become a beacon of freedom. In reality, the attacks on democratic rights, as well as the worsening social and economic conditions facing working people, are not simply the result of Prayuth's evil actions, but are the product of a failed social order—capitalism. The bourgeois opposition parties are hoping to neutralize the protest movement as it reemerges and turn the energy into support for electoral politics.

Pita's remarks have another significance. One of the major demands of the protest movement has been reform of the monarchy, in addition to Prayuth's resignation, the re-writing of Thailand's constitution, and an end to the persecution of government critics. By presenting the issue surrounding the monarchy as Prayuth's fault, Pita is essentially absolving the monarchy for its role in suppressing democratic rights in the country. The monarchy is, in fact, a key linchpin of the capitalist state and now, as previously, backs the suppression of opposition.

The protesters, including in demonstrations last week, are demanding revisions to Article 112 in Thailand's criminal code, which contains Thailand's draconian lèse majesté law, which is now being used to charge participants in last year's protests.

Given the chance, Pheu Thai and the MFP would allow the protesters' demands to die amid empty debates in parliament and phony campaign promises. Protesters should place no faith in these parties or their politicians. Both have deep ties to wealthy business families and consciously avoid any real discussion of the economic situation Thai workers and youth are dealing with, in order to prevent the protest movement from growing.

As in countries around the world, the Thai working class is faced with declining social and economic

conditions, which could lead to an explosion of anger. On February 15, Bangkok's Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council released a report showing that the country's GDP had shrunk by 6.1 percent last year—Thailand's worst annual economic performance since the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, when the economy shrunk by 7.6 percent. Thailand's economy is heavily dependent on tourism, which has taken a major hit during the pandemic.

Since December, Thailand has experienced an explosion of COVID-19 cases, with hundreds of new infections occurring in recent weeks. This has led to partial lockdowns, with next to no support from the government for those impacted. The maximum per person relief payment, in total, over the course of the pandemic has been a paltry 22,000 baht (\$US740).

One worker, a single mother, told the media, "I've lost more than half my income during this second outbreak. So I've taken on any jobs available...ironing clothes to packing boxes for people moving house."

Thailand's workers are not the only ones faced with this situation. According to an International Labour Organization report at the end of last year, 81 million jobs throughout the Asia-Pacific region were lost due to the pandemic. This is because of a total lack of planning and disregard for the needs of workers, as countries attempt to maximize profits for big business.

Thai workers and youth must turn to their class brothers and sisters throughout the region and internationally, who face the same assaults on their livelihoods and democratic rights. Democracy is incompatible with capitalism, which creates the extreme centralization of wealth in the hands of a few. Regardless of differences among themselves, all bourgeois parties protect the interests of the capitalist class. Thai workers and youth need to break from these parties and begin the struggle for socialism.



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