

Thailand: Opposition parties file no-confidence motion against prime minister

Robert Campion
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Thailand's opposition parties in the National Assembly filed a censure motion against Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra of the Pheu Thai Party (PT) last Thursday. At the end of March, a debate will be held that could potentially oust Paetongtarn or even lead to the dissolution of the lower house of parliament. At present, the prime minister is expected to survive the no-confidence motion.

While 10 ministers in the government's cabinet were originally targeted, the opposition, led by the so-called "progressive" People's Party (PP) instead chose to focus solely on Paetongtarn, who took office last August. The People's Party was previously known as the Move Forward Party (MFP) before the latter was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in August as well.

Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, who leads the opposition bloc in parliament and is also head of the People's Party, stated, "We cannot trust the current government to govern the country because the prime minister lacks the qualifications, knowledge, and the will to resolve the people's problems. She has shown no responsibility as prime minister."

The debate is scheduled to begin March 24 and could last five days, though Pheu Thai is attempting to limit it to only two days. Other issues to be addressed include alleged failures in public administration and corrupt practices with large business conglomerates.

None of the parties in parliament is attempting to improve conditions for workers or protect the democratic rights of the population. All of them in their own way defend the capitalist system and are hostile to the working class, including the PP, which did not lift even a finger to fight the dissolution of its predecessor, the MFP.

The censure debate instead reflects divisions within the Thai ruling class. Serious concerns about the

economy exist, which has been struggling, a product of the crisis of world capitalism. According to the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) the economy grew 2.5 percent in 2024, the slowest in South East Asia. The economy is only expected to grow between 2.4 and 2.9 percent this year.

Last year, agriculture and manufacturing contracted 1 percent and 0.5 percent respectively. Thai workers are also struggling with the highest levels of household debt in the region, roughly 89 percent of GDP.

These concerns have only intensified since Trump came to power. Thailand is highly vulnerable to Trump's trade tariffs. It has the fifth largest trade surplus with the US, which has grown 343 percent since 2017. No doubt sections of the Thai ruling class feel Paetongtarn is incapable of maneuvering amid dramatically changing world politics and economy and will also be unable to contain social unrest as living conditions further decline for the working class.

Natthaphong also accused Paetongtarn of allowing her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, of leading her and being involved in the government administration. Thaksin was prime minister from 2001 to 2006 until he was driven from office in a military coup. His administration had cut across the interests of the military, the monarchy, and other conservative sections of the bourgeoisie. He is also the founder of Pheu Thai and its de facto leader, though he holds no official position in the party or government.

Thaksin spent 15 years in exile before Pheu Thai reached a backroom deal with the military to form a government in August 2023, which allowed Thaksin to return. An eight-year prison term for corruption was reduced to one year by Thailand's king, of which Thaksin only served six months in the comfort of a

hospital room. He remains a target of the military and its allies and currently faces charges of *lèse-majesté*.

Censure debates are not uncommon in Thai politics. Pheu Thai called four similar censure debates along with the MFP between 2020 and 2022 against the military regime. All of these were unsuccessful, but they served the opposition's purpose of promoting illusions that democratic issues could be resolved within the parliamentary system.

However, the People's Party is now openly aligning itself with the opposition Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), which supports the censure motion. The PPRP was the party of the military junta under General Prayut Chan-o-cha, who seized power in the 2014 coup and remained in power until 2023. Before the 2023 general election, he split from the PPRP to join the United Thai Nation Party (UTN).

The PPRP was removed from the ruling coalition after it cooperated with the antidemocratic efforts last year to successfully remove the first Pheu Thai prime minister Srettha Thavisin on trumped-up ethics charges. Significantly, the PP, the successor to the MFP, now finds itself in the league with the PPRP which played a central role in blocking the formation of an MFP-led government following the latter's victory in the 2023 general election.

The PP's posturing as "progressive" has nothing to do with defending the democratic and social rights of youth and workers. Rather it is aimed at suppressing unrest by directing hostility and anger over attacks on democratic rights and social conditions into the dead-end of parliamentary politics.

Based on current seats, the opposition does not have the numbers to pass the censure motion. Pheu Thai's coalition, comprised of nine parties including the right-wing Bhumjaithai Party (BJT, 71 seats) and United Thai Nation Party (36 seats), holds 322 seats out of 500.

Paetongtarn stated following a closed-door meeting of coalition party leaders last Tuesday, "We've discussed the censure debate in detail because we want this coalition to maintain its unity and stability. We will all help each other [in the debate] across all ministries."

However, the BJT is a right-wing party, which previously backed Prayut's military government. It has emerged as the standard bearer for the right-wing sections of the ruling class grouped around the military

and monarchy. It also played a key role in preventing the MFP from coming to power in 2023.

The BJT recently walked out of two sittings of parliament regarding PT-led discussions to amend the 2017 junta-imposed constitution. The walkouts on February 13 and 14 meant a lack of quorum, ending any discussion on the issue. It is therefore not out of the question that the BJT could lead a split of right-wing parties to remove Paetongtarn.



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