

Thai Government Gets Away with Murder

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A state court rules the government was justified in the massacre of scores in southern Thailand in 2004

The use of force to disperse and then capture unarmed demonstrators at Takbai in Southern Thailand on October 25, 2004 was a state crime. The protesters were tied up and thrown onto the backs of army lorries, with people lying on top of one another 6-7 deep. They were then transported in the hot sun for hours to an army camp. The 78 people who died, along with the others who were shot, were deliberately murdered by the Thai state.

The government of the time, the army and the police were responsible for this crime. Yet the courts in Thailand have concluded that no officials "did anything wrong". On May 29, a court in Songkhla ruled that officials were carrying out their duties and had "compelling reasons" to transport more than 1,000 demonstrators from the mosque to the military base in Pattani, used their judgment to deal with the situation and "did their best based on the situation."

Thailand has a history of state crimes: 14th October 1973 when dozens of people were killed in Bangkok in street battles between government troops and demonstrators; 6th October 1976 when students were massacred at Thammasat University; 1991 and 1992, when Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon overthrew the government and protests resulted, with the eventual loss of life of hundreds of protesters, Takbai 2004, the "War on Drugs" in which police murdered thousands of alleged "drug dealers" without bothering to prove they had anything to do with drugs; and the latest killings in Bangkok in April 2009.

These were all killings of unarmed civilians by Thai state security forces with the agreement of the government and the ruling elites. The Krue Sa mosque massacre in April 2004, where youths were executed in cold blood, is another terrible example. No official has ever been punished for these crimes and this sets a precedent for further abuses in the future.

The court ruling over Takbai is not surprising. The Thai judiciary is neither just nor independent. There is no rule of law, only double standards. The Royalist Yellow Shirts who used violence and committed crimes to overthrow legally constituted governments remain unpunished, but pro-democracy Red Shirts are being prosecuted

In Thailand it is okay for the state to kill citizens, but people who criticize the ruling order go to jail.

The state officials, army and judiciary hide behind a raft of ant-democratic laws: lese majeste, contempt of court, national security and internet censorship laws. The present Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, is happy to tell lie after lie about the use of the law and that the government "upholds freedom of speech and democracy". He is confident in his lies because all the mainstream media is under government and royalist control.

For the Red Shirt movement, Takbai, Krue-Sa and the War on Drugs pose a challenge. We must admit the truth that these crimes took place under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra. We must

not have double standards. Red Shirts must use reasoned argument to build a democratic Thailand. In the future, any Red Shirt government must respect human rights.

But state crimes under Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai government do not justify the 2006 military coup, the selective use of the courts, the illegal maneuvering of the Democrats into power or the anti-democratic violence of the Yellow Shirts of the People's Alliance for Democracy. The Democrats, the army and all the royalists have blood on their hands too. They must be swept away in order to build a democratic society. Such a society will not come easily. The royalists, including the army, hold extra-constitutional power. Therefore elections and small constitutional changes will not be enough.

We must build the Red Shirt movement into a strong people's movement from below to oppose the authoritarian elites. It will take time, but the old order seems to be on its last legs. Their unquestioning loyalty to a hereditary monarchy and their support for military coups lacks all democratic legitimacy. Some royal advisors have praised the last Russian tsar and the PAD wants to adopt a North Korean economic model.. These are signs of intellectual decay. It is time for a change in Thailand

P.S.

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