

Democracy protests: With the people of Thailand, against the Prayut dictatorship

Sunday 18 October 2020, by [BOYLE Peter](#) (Date first published: 16 October 2020).

The growing wave of student-initiated democracy protests that have been sweeping Thailand since February are shaking the military coup-installed regime.



October 14 democracy protest in Bangkok. Photo: Green Left

Riot police and military were sent in before dawn on October 15, to violently disperse thousands of protesters who had camped overnight in front of Government House in the capital Bangkok after a mass march the previous evening.

Former general and current Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha has declared a state of emergency, which bans gatherings of more than five people and the “publication of news, other media, and electronic information that contains messages that could create fear or intentionally distort information, creating misunderstanding that will affect national security or peace and order”.

However, before the demonstrators were dispersed, human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa (who was later arrested) urged people to reassemble at 4pm at the Ratchaprasong intersection, a major shopping district in Bangkok and also the site of the brutal May 2010 military suppression of the Red Shirt pro-democracy uprising.

Green Left's source, who marched and stayed overnight in the street along with other democracy activists and took to the streets again, said they were all determined to regroup at Ratchaprasong, despite Prayut's declaration of a state of emergency.

“All the fear is gone,” she said, “and people are very angry that the police attacked our peaceful protest.”

She reported that at 4pm on October 15, the crowd at Ratchaprasong intersection was “70% young students who came straight from school”.

School students faced off against riot police in armour, backed up with water cannon. The crowd kept swelling to become the biggest protest by this democracy movement. The police stood by helplessly in the face of these numbers, their chief's threat to disperse the crowd by 6pm rendered hollow.

The democracy protesters planned to take to the streets again at 5pm on October 16.

The latest wave of democracy protests has united a new generation of activists with former Red Shirts and even some disaffected former activists from the Yellow Shirt movement, the popular name for the conservative movement that supports the military dictatorship. They are united around the call for the Prayut regime to resign, for democratic constitutional changes and reforms to put the monarchy under the rule of law, curb its privileges, and end the use of the draconian lese-majeste laws to silence dissent.

Police attacks on this latest protest began on the evening of October 13, when democracy activists arrived in Bangkok from the poor north-east of the country and set up makeshift shelters on street corners. Police tore down the shelters and arrested about 20 people.

The next morning, tens of thousands of democracy activists converged on Bangkok's Democracy Monument. Video footage provided to Green Left shows people gathering despite the intimidating presence of large numbers of men with military-style crew cuts and dressed in yellow T-shirts. The men had been transported in police vans into the city centre early in the morning to boost the pro-monarchy Yellow Shirt numbers.

Multiple reports confirm that by the afternoon of October 14, the democracy activists overwhelmingly outnumbered the Yellow Shirts, but protest organisers warned against falling for their provocations.

Lines of police stood between the protesters, who began marching from the Democracy Monument to Government House, and thousands of Yellow Shirts who stood on the footpath. There were a few instances recorded of Yellow Shirt thugs assaulting and abusing democracy activists.

When the sea of protesters, shouting "Prayut out!" and "Down with feudalism! Long live democracy!" reached Government House, they easily pushed through police lines.

A strange incident took place later that evening: A royal motorcade drove through a street near Government House that was full of democracy protesters. There was no violence, but many people raised their hands in the three-finger salute of the democracy movement as the limousine, carrying Queen Suthida Bajrasudhabimalalakshana, fourth wife of Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn, passed.

Protest organisers had gone to great lengths to avoid the routes notified for the royal motorcade to avoid any provocation, but the route was changed to go through the protest. When the state of emergency was announced the next morning, the brief delay of the royal motorcade (while police cleared the road) - was played up by the pro-regime mass media and cited as a reason for the decree.

But after the mass defiance at Ratchaprasong on October 15, it appears the regime's attempts to exploit the vestiges of support for the monarchy are failing.

Left-wing groups from around the Asia-Pacific region issued a joint statement of support on October 15, in response to the Thai democracy movement's call for international solidarity [1].

Peter Boyle

- Green Left Weekley. Issue 1285. October 16, 2020:
<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/people-thailand-against-prayut-dictatorship>

Thai democracy activists warn of military action against students



Photo: Peter Boyle

Thai democracy activists held a sombre commemoration of the 1976 Thammasat University massacre on October 10 on the steps of Sydney Town Hall.

The brutal massacre, carried out by the military and right-wing militia members against student activists, involved the murder of a large number of students and the detention of more than 3000.

This commemoration served as a warning about threats from the military regime in Thailand to violently suppress a resurgent student-led mass democracy movement planning its next major mobilisation on October 14.

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Footnotes

- [1] Available on ESSF (article), [art.](#)