

Free Somyot Prueksakasemsuk and all political prisoners in Thailand! Abolish the anti-democratic lese majeste law!

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Socialist Alliance (Australia) statement

Free Somyot Prueksakasemsuk and all political prisoners in Thailand!

Abolish the anti-democratic lese majeste law!

Democracy for Thailand!

January 24, 2013 - The Socialist Alliance of Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the January 23 sentencing of workers' rights and free speech advocate Somyot Prueksakasemsuk to a total of 11 years' jail under Thailand's draconian anti-democratic "lese majeste" law (Article 112 of the Criminal Code). Somyot and all political prisoners in Thailand should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Somyot was found "guilty" by the Bangkok Criminal Court on two counts of breaching lese majeste and one count of breaching the Printing Act. He has already been in detention since April 2011 following the publication of two satirical articles in a magazine he edited, which Thai authorities claim had insulted the monarchy. The verdict is a violation of international human rights law, in particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Thailand has ratified.

Thailand's lese majeste law prohibits any word or act that "defames, insults, or threatens the king, the queen, the heir-apparent, or the regent". However, rather than protecting the Thai royals' tender sensibilities, lese majeste is in reality a weapon wielded by the government to outlaw criticism of the Thai military and elites, who remain the true power behind the throne. It is particularly aimed at Thailand's labour and mass democracy movements (the "Red Shirts") and their allies.

There is growing opposition to lese majeste in Thailand. Many had hoped that the government of Yingluck Shinawatra - elected in July 2011 in a landslide with the support of millions of Red Shirt voters - would be sympathetic to the demands of the mass democracy movement and would reduce the influence of the coup-happy Thai military. However, it has increased the use of lese majeste and refused to consider the abolition or reform of the law. Lese majeste political prisoners like Somyot, Surachai Darnwatanatrakun and Daranee Charnchoengsilpakul (Da Torpedo) continue to languish in jail.

Red Shirt prisoners who were not charged with lese majeste, but merely jailed for taking part in street protests before Yingluck's election, are still locked up. As for the punishment of the politicians and military commanders who ordered the cold-blooded massacre of unarmed demonstrators in 2010, no significant progress has been made. Since her election, Yingluck has been seen in friendly poses with army chief General Prayut, who ordered troops to gun down protesters.

Socialist Alliance stands in solidarity with Thailand's people's movements to demand:

Free Somyot Prueksakasemsuk and all political prisoners in Thailand!

Abolish the anti-democratic lese majeste law!

Democracy for Thailand!
