

PROTESTS

## **Thailand's political turmoil continues**

Monday 9 December 2013, by [DW News](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2013).

**Thai Premier Yingluck Shinawatra has dissolved the nation's parliament and called for early elections. However, opponents have vowed to continue their protests demanding a new political order.**

Deafening whistles accompanied the news of the day. In the capital Bangkok, protesters flocked around the Government House from all directions. They don't seem to be satisfied with Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's decision to dissolve parliament and call for new elections as early as possible.

Although the vote is likely to be held as early as February, the demonstrators refuse to give in. They continue to wave the national flag, blow whistles and shout: "Down with the Yingluck government."

"We don't care about the dissolution of parliament and new elections," said a protester. "This is not a solution for us. Instead, we want the entire Shinawatra clan to disappear from Thailand." A fellow activist adds: "The whole government is corrupt and must go."

When confronted with the fact that the Yingluck government came to office in July 2011 by winning a majority of votes in democratically-held elections, the activist simply replied: "Yes, because they bought votes from the rural poor, and that's not a democracy."

However, Thailand-Expert Marco Bunte believes the buying of votes to be a legend. Gifts had been showered on the rural populace for the sake of winning votes, but studies have shown that farmers had freely exercised their right to vote and elected the representatives, whom they prefer, to the parliament. "The ruling power relations are the expression of the popular will, which means the majority of the rural population," Bunte told DW.

### **Demands for a 'people's council'**

When new elections take place, they claim, the current ruling party will once again win the vote allowing Yingluck to form a new government.

The protestors refuse to accept that they constitute a political minority, which is demanding the expulsion of a democratically elected government. They defiantly insist that the current protest movement represents "the will of the people."

Earlier, the leader of the protests, Suthep Thaugsuban, proclaimed December 9 as "D-Day." He said: "It will be the final battle. It will be do or die for us." Thaugsuban and his supporters declared that the dissolution of the current government will not be enough.

They accuse Yingluck of being a puppet of her brother, former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a coup by the military in 2006. They claim that have therefore set out to uproot the

entire “Thaksin regime”.

Meanwhile, protest leader Thaugsuban - who faces two arrest warrants for “insurrection” - has repeatedly said he wants a vaguely defined, unelected “people’s council” to run the country, instead of new elections. This council is expected to replace the current administration for an undisclosed period of time and draft a new constitution.

### **Opposition resigns**

In effect, this would mean the end of the principle of “one person, one vote,” which helped both Yingluck and previously, her brother Thaksin, to win elections with considerable support from voters living mainly in poor and rural areas of the Southeast Asian nation. The poor constitute a majority of the Thai electorate and had so far been neglected by other parties.

Shortly before “D-Day”, Yingluck had offered to hold a referendum to determine the political future of her government. As a condition, however, she demanded for the opposition to recognize and accept the result: “If protesters or a major political party do not accept that or do not accept the result of the election, it will just prolong the conflict,” the Thai PM was quoted by news agency AFP as saying.

But the opposition “Democratic Party” (DP) declared on December 8 that all its members of parliament would resign. DP, which is closely allied with the protesters, said that it had no choice but to pull out of the lower house, as Yingluck’s government lacked legitimacy.

Thailand’s main opposition party, which is primarily supported by traditional middle and upper classes of Bangkok, technocrats and the military, is aware that it has no chance of winning against the Thaksin camp at the ballot box.

### **‘Stop hijacking Thailand’**

While all eyes are focused on the protestors and the opposition, it remains to be seen how the government supporters, the so-called “red shirts” will react in the medium-term. During the ongoing protests, they have repeatedly requested Thaugsuban to “stop hijacking Thailand”. The “red shirts” are planning to organize rallies on December 10 in the city Ayutthaya, located around 80 kilometers north of Bangkok.

The ongoing political crisis in Thailand will continue despite the dissolution of parliament and the announcement to hold new elections. The conflict will eventually come to an end only when the conservative establishment gives up its claims to power. But that seems unlikely at the moment.

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