

Thailand: Activists Defend Hammer-Sickle Logo Slammed By Pm Prayut

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BANGKOK — Pro-democracy campaigners on Tuesday rally behind a new logo unveiled by their umbrella organization that unsettled allies and critics alike for their alleged communist symbolism.



The logo for [“Restart Thailand,”](#) or RT, was launched on Monday night by the Free People group, featuring what many perceived to be a hammer and a sickle on a red background. Although activists interviewed for this story insist the campaign had no link to socialist ideologies, it drew immediate rebukes from pro-establishment figures, including PM Prayut Chan-o-cha himself.

Speaking to reporters at Government House on Tuesday, the premier said he will order officials to investigate whether the logo violates any laws. He also warned that any move toward republicanism will have no chance of succeeding.

“I have no comment because Thailand is not a republic. It’s impossible,” Gen. Prayut said.

The emblem is part of a new campaign debuted by the Free People organization on their social media platforms, along with slogans that proclaim “laborers built the land, not the monarchs” and “we are all oppressed workers.”

“This is a new movement where nothing will be the same,” the announcement said. “We will awaken the consciousness of the oppressed workers. No matter if you’re students, office workers, plainclothes officers, farmers, or civil servants, we’re all workers who are oppressed.”

Little else is known about their goal or tactic. In a series of online posts, the group said it will merge the existing three demands – PM Prayut’s resignation, charter amendments, and monarchy reforms – into one, which is yet to be spelled out.

Jutatip Sirikhan, one of the student leaders of the Free People movement, would not say in an interview what their undeclared goal would entail.

“It’s not just a new group, it’s a movement,” she said. “I can’t tell what’s coming next, but the movement is meant to inspire people.”

In one of the posts published by the Free People, the group pledged that its activities will be even

more decentralized and their efforts more relentless than ever before.

“The RT movement shall have no leaders, no stages, no guards, no mobile toilets, no negotiations, and no bargaining!” it said. “Please join Restart Thailand to build a society where everyone is equal.”

Hello Lenin?

For many, the campaign’s undertone revived the ghosts of socialist movements throughout Thailand’s Cold War era, when the Communist Party of Thailand waged guerilla warfare in rural areas in a bid to establish a communist regime alongside its neighbors in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos.

While the fires of their “Liberation War” died along ago – the government pardoned all communist fighters, many of them students, upon its victory in 1980 – discussion about communism remains a taboo in Thailand due to its ideological hostility to the monarchy.



A file photo of guerilla militants loyal to the Communist Party of Thailand.

Many critics of the student-led protests seized on the new logo to confirm their suspicions that the movement is seeking to overthrow the Royal Family – an allegation repeatedly denied by the student activists.

“They are hungry to turn the existing democracy into a communist regime, in which everything belongs to the state, and misleading themselves into thinking that’s a democracy,” wrote [Plew Seengun](#), a columnist for the conservative Thai Post newspaper.

“The more they study, the more stupid like buffaloes they’ve become,” Plew Seengun continued. “I really want to know what schools have instilled in them the knowledge they profess to know. Who are your teachers, you long-horned youths?”

Top: A Facebook post by Free People says the current struggles are those of “the 99 percent” against “the 1 percent of oppressors.”

Speaking in an interview, political science academic Sarinee Achavanuntakul suspected the logo and the language adopted by Free People could be yet another so-called “[gaeng](#),” or deception tactic preferred by the pro-democracy activists, in order to anger and provoke the establishment.

“I believe they want the logo to go viral,” she said. “It’s their style and they want people to discuss and define what RT stands for. I’m sure they’re aware that this is what’s going to happen.”

However, Sarinee cautioned that the use of symbolism associated with communism could backfire badly, since it could render the movement vulnerable to more attacks from the pro-establishment faction.

“We have to admit that communism has a bad reputation in Thai society,” the expert said. “This can lead to a serious misinterpretation.”

It’s Just a Symbol, Bro

Some longtime supporters of the Free People group, who have been organizing street protests since July, have also distanced themselves from the controversial rebranding.

"The image of hammer and sickle should not be adopted as a symbol, since you will be labelled as communists," Redshirt activist Anurak "Ford" Jeantawanich wrote online. "Adults should help warn them about this."

Shortly after the logo was published, protest volunteer guard leader Piyarat Chongthep posted that he is not related to the Free People movement in any way, and that he is not involved in the group's tactics or activities, though he maintained he bore no ill feelings toward his peers.

"I am actually not interested in the hammer and sickle issue," Piyarat wrote. "Whoever wants to interpret is as leaning toward Marxism or whatever, they are free to do so. But if anyone knows me well, they would know I've never been into Marxism."



Pro-democracy activists confront a police blockage during their march to the Government House, prime minister's office during a protest march in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2020.

AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

But Jutatip, one of the leaders behind Free People, insisted the logo is nothing more than an attempt to start a conversation about what different people believe in.

"The new logo has no meaning," Jutatip said. "We want people to interpret and discuss it whichever way they want. You can say it represents communism, but that's what democracy is. It allows people to express their opinion freely."

One of the activists who often appeared onstage in protests organized by Free People also said the image of hammer and sickle do not necessarily portray Marxist-Leninist ideologies.

"I don't believe it's related to communism," Panupong "Mike" Jadnok said. "The hammer symbolizes laborers and the sickle for farmers. Each group has their own campaign and character, but in the end, they all demand democracy and human rights."



Pro-democracy activities raise a three-fingers, symbol of resistance salute during a protest at Democracy Monument in Bangkok, Thailand, Sunday, Aug. 16, 2020.

AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe

Another pro-democracy campaigner, Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, said the new campaign could attract more supporters among the blue collars of Bangkok. He noted that the movement has been predominantly run by students and the urban middle class so far.

"It's not communism," Somyot said. "It's the symbol for the struggle of laborers and farmers. I believe they want to bring these groups onboard."

Both Panupong and Somyot reported themselves to the police on Tuesday to hear charges of royal defamation. They face up to 15 years in prison per count if convicted. A total of 23 people were **charged with the crime**, also known as lese majeste, as of publication time.

Tappanai Boonbandit

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