

Thailand: Prank or what? ‘free youth’ touting communism puzzles allies

Monday 28 December 2020, by [Khaosod](#) (Date first published: 15 December 2020).

BANGKOK — Sympathizers of the umbrella organization behind the ongoing pro-democracy protests are left bewildered on Tuesday by its public defense of communist ideologies.

Coming hot on the heels after [the controversial debut of its new logo](#) – which bears an uncanny resemblance to the hammer and sickle – the Free People group, formerly called Free Youth, made yet another wave on social media by proclaiming that “communism does not equal dictatorship.”

“When we think of communism, many people see it as a wicked ideology,” a statement released by Free People on Monday said. “They may think of authoritarian countries like China or North Korea, but the true meaning of communism is not the same as what the capitalist propaganda is showing. It’s the name for the economic democracy system which the despotic capitalists are afraid of.”

The same statement also said “the Blue Party does not equal democracy, likewise, communism does not dictatorship,” referring to the Democrat Party, which supports the government of PM Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Pro-establishment activist Warong Dechgitvigrom, who’s often [accused the opposition](#) of disloyalty to the monarchy, said the latest message made him wonder what goals the activists are really aiming for.

“I’m confused,” Warong said in an interview. “At first they said they wanted democracy, then they later revealed that they wanted to abolish monarchy and establish a republic, and now they are calling for communism.”

He added, “I’m truly baffled. I spent the whole night reading it over and over.”

But while hardline royalists like Warong are expected to oppose Free People’s activities in general, many staunch supporters of the movement are also dismayed by its flirting with communism.

Anti-government campaigner Sasiphat “Karn” Pongpraphapan, who’s attended many protests over the past months, challenged those behind the rebranding to come clear about it onstage.

“Do you want communism or not?” Sasiphat wrote online Tuesday. “Those low class intellectuals and cunt-face progressive academics who only brag on Facebook, I dare you to talk on a public stage. Don’t chicken out if you really believe in it.”

Free People co-founder Tattep “Ford” Ruangprapaikitseree has remained silent since the campaign ridden with communist rhetorics was launched under the name “Restart Thailand.” Several statements released by the group suggest it will merge the existing three demands into one, which is yet to be revealed.

Tattep could not be reached for comments as of publication time, but another key leader of the group said in a previous interview that the use of communist symbolism is purely coincidental.

Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, a pro-democracy leader who organizes a separate network of activists, distanced himself from the Free People's statement. Parit said his group, United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration, is not associated with Free People.

"It's their right to call for communism, but it's not what my group ... is calling for," Parit said in an interview. "When I broke the ceiling and made demands for monarchy reform, it's what the people want. Therefore, I'd like to ask those behind this campaign to see whether the people agree with it or not."

He said future protests will continue to pursue the three demands, which include PM Prayut's resignation, charter amendments, and monarchy reforms.

"I have no problem with the number of demands, but they must reflect what people want," Parit said. "We fight in our way, they can fight in their own way."

'China Isn't Communist'

Much of the nine-paragraph long manifesto published by Free People on Monday suggests that communism is an antidote to the horrors of capitalism.

"Many people are saying that only the fight against political tyrants is enough, but then why should we fight for democracy if our workplace is still under dictatorial control, oppressing capitalists, and poor working conditions? Laborers receive unfair wages and have no right to say anything."

The statement was also plastered over an image of a red rose – the internationally recognized symbol of socialist movements.

"It is true that communist revolutions in the 20th century failed, and when one mentions communism, many intellectuals attack it as a failed ideology – a ghost that's been [dead] long ago, or mutated into a dictatorship like China," it said. "We often attack China for its communism, even though China is in essence a capitalist superpower."

"Why don't we view capitalism as a failed system, like how we branded communism?" the post went on.

Wasana Wongsurawat, an expert on modern Chinese history at Chulalongkorn University, said it remains debatable whether communism is equal to communism, since the vocabulary used by the Free People is largely vague.

"Some countries are ruled by a single Communist Party, while some countries have the Communist Party elected to rule the country under the democratic system," Wasana said. "We have to see what they're talking about. Is it the party or the ideology?"

Warong, the hardline monarchist, said he agreed that the issue of inequality needs to be addressed, though he balked at the solutions presented by the Free People.

"The fight must be for the people," Warong said. "I'm okay with their calls for equality, but I don't believe that communism is a solution to the problem. You can see that 90 percent of the people on Facebook disagree with the post. They're real users and not part of the Information Operations."

Khaosod English

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Khaosod English

<https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2020/12/15/prank-or-what-free-youth-touting-communism-puzzles-allies/>