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Thailand

# Why the Lese Majeste law in Thailand is an abomination

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**The lese majeste law in Thailand represents a gross attack on the freedom of speech, freedom of expression and academic freedom. It is a fundamental attack on Democracy carried out by the Military, the Palace and the elites. The practical impact is that Thailand has struggled for years to achieve a fully developed democracy, a free press and internationally accepted academic standards in our universities.**

Today, Da Torpido, Red Eagle, Surachai Darnwattanan-nusorn (Sa-Darn) and many others are in prison in Thailand for merely expressing their beliefs in a peaceful way. In recent days arrest warrants have been issued for 5 more people and the police have a list of 30 more people who face arrest. [ <http://thaipoliticalprisoners.wordpress.com>]. Lese majeste prisoners are denied bail. The royalist judges claim that the offense is “too serious” and “a threat to national security”. Thai dictatorships have used the excuse that their opponents were seeking to “overthrow the Monarchy” in order to kill unarmed demonstrators in 1976 and 2010. Jail terms for lese majeste are draconian. Da is in prison for 18 years and prison conditions are appalling. Chiranuch Premchaiporn, the web manager of the independent Prachatai newspaper faces 50 years in prison for not removing other peoples’ web-posts. A student faces lese majeste charges for not standing up for the King’s anthem in the cinema and the Military-backed Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva tells lies about how he is committed to reforming the law. Abhisit and the army generals also tell lies about the deliberate state-ordered killings of unarmed protesters in May 2010.

In my particular case, my own university gave my anti-coup book to the police special branch, which resulted in a lese majeste prosecution against me. Imagine the impact on my fellow academics. This climate of fear creates poor quality academic work which avoids all important controversial issues and debates. This appalling tradition of educational mediocrity starts at primary school and works its way right to the top of the educational system. Students are encouraged to learn subjects parrot-fashion and write descriptive, one-sided essays. Academics refuse to engage in any debate, do not read work by those who do not agree with them and regard any academic arguments as personal attacks.

Professor Amara Ponsapich and the Thai National Human Rights Commission have disgraced themselves by remaining silent on lese majeste. At the same time they have defended the “right” of fascist PAD members to cause a war with Cambodia. Recently Amara warned the pro-democracy Red Shirts not to cause “trouble” with their protests. No such warning was ever given to the royalist mobs. NGO senator Rosana Tositakul told Red Shirt MPs to stop whining about the 90 deaths last year and to concentrate on the problems of inflation. Amnesty International has followed in the same path by defending the use of lese majeste. Academic hold seminars about why the lese majeste law “needs to be reformed”. But it cannot be reformed. It has to be abolished.

The Thai Monarchy is said to be “universally loved by all Thais”. This may have been the case in some periods of history, but it is no longer true. Many millions have turned against the Monarchy for appearing to condone the 2006 military coup and for saying nothing about the 90 deaths last year. This openly expressed hatred of the Monarchy is despite the climate of fear created by the lese majeste law, along side a manic promotion of the Monarchy. The King is said to be a genius in all fields. All statements by the Monarch are repeated as though they are the ultimate wisdom and he is referred to as “our father”. Photographs are circulated to “prove” that the King actually tied his own shoe-laces!! Many have made comparisons with North Korea. Now they are comparing Thailand to the Middle-Eastern dictatorships. Recently the head of the army claimed that Thailand was “nothing like Egypt”. If he really believed that, then why did he bother to make the public statement in the first place?

Another example of “Monarchy Mania” is the idea of “Sufficiency Economics”. Once the Monarch gave his blessing to the “Sufficiency Economy”, we were all supposed to accept it and praise it without question. The Sufficiency

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Economy is really a reactionary political ideology that teaches people to be happy with their present circumstances and to ignore the need for income redistribution. Luckily, this aspect of brain-washing has not worked very well in Thai society, for a society which cannot openly discuss economic and political policies will remain backward and under-developed. But the mere criticism of the Sufficiency Economy is enough to attract charges of lese majeste.

What is the aim of all this attempt at enforced idiocy among the population? It is a continuous attempt to keep the vast majority of Thai people in their place. We are encouraged to believe that the King is all powerful, when in fact he is a spineless willing tool of the Military. The Thai population are encouraged to believe that we live under an "ancient system of Monarchy", a cross between a Sakdina, Absolute and Constitutional Monarchy system. People have to crawl on the ground in front of the King. But the true beneficiaries of this are the Military, the civilian conservative bureaucrats and the Democrat Party who are now in government.

The Military often claim that they are the "defenders of the Constitutional Monarchy", yet the Thai Military has a long history of making un-constitutional coups. These are often "legitimised" by claiming to protect the Monarchy. The 19th September 2006 coup is a good example. The Military sought to legitimise themselves by referring to the Monarch. The lese majeste Law is thus used as a tool by the military to defend coups. The promotion of an image that the Monarchy is all powerful (an un-constitutional image), is part of this self-legitimation by the military and other forces who are now in government. Les majeste cases have multiplied since the Democrats were manÅ"uvred into government by the army in December 2008. It is now a central weapon to be used against all those who criticised the 2006 coup or those who oppose this military-installed government.

It is now an undeniable fact that this brain-washing campaign is falling apart. And it is falling apart at the very moment when the King is getting old and may soon die because he is so frail. If the King were ever loved and respected, the same cannot be said about his son. We know from Wikileaks that even the elites think the prince is a liability. The Military, the right-wing PAD protestors who closed the airports and the Democrat Party, have dragged the Monarchy into politics by claiming that the 2006 coup and violent actions by the PAD were supported or even directed by the Monarchy. It is now common to hear ordinary Thais complain that "the iguana and his wife" ordered the May 2010 killings. Royal legitimacy is all that the conservative authoritarians have and they are panicking because it is all unravelling. They have brought this on themselves.

We must not forget the plight of those jailed and killed on the pretext of defending the Monarchy. We must wage an international and national political campaign to defend democratic rights in Thailand and for the abolition of the lese majeste law. Without abolishing this law, we cannot have democracy in Thailand and without overthrowing the dictatorship we cannot abolish lese majeste.