

# Thailand's Military Coup

Three brief years of freely elected government in Thailand, brought about by a student revolt against military rule, have now come to a sad end. The return of former strongman Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, followed by a bloody crackdown on student protests, provided the pretext the military sought, evidently since January, to terminate Thailand's first wobbly experiment in democracy. Southeast Asia and the world are poorer for it.

The announcement that a new Cabinet will take office in two weeks, headed by an appointed civilian Prime Minister, Thanin Kraivichien, a life-long bureaucrat who is now a Supreme Court Justice, is an improvement over the initial prospects for direct rule by the military junta that seized power last week. But even if Mr. Thanin should head a predominantly civilian government with some backing from King Phumiphol Aduldet, who seems to have intervened for rapid civilianization of the new regime, it will still be an appointed, not an elected, government and one under substantial military control.

The irony is that the ousted government of Prime Minister Seni Pramoj, who appears to be in protective custody, was dominated by his conservative Democratic Party, the country's largest, but was also heavily dependent on a coalition with military-backed political parties. The Cabinet was full of ex-generals, and the military viewpoint prevailed on many issues.

Those who have paid the highest price for the abortive leap toward free elections, civil liberties and self-government are the students, of whom about 40 have been killed, hundreds wounded and about 3,000 arrested in the counterrevolution. But all those everywhere on the globe who love freedom are diminished by the political tide that has installed military or other dictatorships now in almost every Asian country except Japan.

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