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Move Forward Party's Dissolution and the Persistence of Progressive Thai Politics

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For those who have been following Thai politics for the past few decades—a period marked by the "evil cycle"¹ — the dissolution of the Move Forward Party² (MFP) comes as little surprise. Citing their promise to amend the royal defamation law, section 112 of the criminal code, the Constitutional Court dissolved the party that won the popular mandate in May 2023. Former leader Pita Limjaroenrat and several other executive members of MFP have also been banned from participating in politics for ten years. Again, this is a huge setback for the progressive-oriented Thais who hope for meaningful progress in the country's democracy.

Although the ruling by the court may incite resentment among the millions of loyal supporters of the MFP and could trigger another round of demonstrations and political unrest in Thailand, the short-term implications could be limited. During the press conference at the headquarters of MFP following the announcement of the verdict, Sirikanya Tansakun, the former deputy leader of the Move Forward Party (MFP), declared that the surviving members of parliament will form a new

¹ EAF Editors, "Breaking out of the 'Evil Cycle' in Thai Politics," East Asia Forum, May 1, 2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/05/01/breaking-out-of-the-evil-cycle-in-thai-politics/>.

² Al Jazeera, "Thai Constitutional Court Dissolves Election-Winning Move Forward Party," Al Jazeera, August 7, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/7/thai-constitutional-court-dissolves-progressive-move-forward-party>.

party collectively on August 9th to which the information regarding the new party's leader will be made public that day.³

It is important to note that Sirikanya is regarded as a front-running candidate for the new party's leadership position.⁴ According to Sirikanya, approximately 100,000 people are currently members of the MFP, who urged everyone to switch to the new party. Some MPs might be tempted by lucrative offers made by rival parties, as had happened during the dissolution of the MFP's predecessor, the Future Forward party. However, last year's national election saw the defecting MPs lose, which their supporters may have taken as payback for their betrayal.⁵ For this reason, the remaining members of MFP may need to think twice before joining a rival party.

Although unlikely, the successor to the Move Forward Party might be tempted to consider moderating its left-leaning stance on monarchy reform. However, doing so would result in a breach of faith among its young and progressive voters, potentially fueling frustration and political apathy. This may result in a political landscape where opposition parties are effectively neutered, unable to challenge the status quo, or advocate for substantial change.

Abandoning the progressive agendas that have defined the Move Forward Party since its inception as Future Forward would be a grave strategic error. These principles—from ending conscription to advocating for marriage equality and constitutional reform—are not merely policy positions but the very bedrock of the party's identity and the source of its popular support. To discard these values would betray the aspirations of millions of Thai citizens who have rallied behind the party's vision for a more equitable and democratic Thailand.

Despite facing numerous obstacles in forming a government, the party's recent electoral success demonstrates that these progressive ideals resonate deeply with a significant portion of the

³ Thai Enquirer. "X.com." X (formerly Twitter). Thai Enquirer, August 7, 2024. <https://x.com/ThaiEnquirer/status/1821156031273300427>.

⁴ Bangkok Post Reporters. "Little-Known Party 'Set to Admit Move Forward MPs.'" <https://www.bangkokpost.com>. Bangkok Post, August 2024, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2839798/little-known-party-set-to-admit-move-forward-mps>.

⁵ Ken Mathis Lohatepanont. "Move Forward Party Dissolved: What's next for Thai Politics? - Thai Enquirer Current Affairs." Thai Enquirer, August 7, 2024, <https://www.thaienquirer.com/52736/move-forward-party-dissolved-whats-next-for-thai-politics>

electorate. Moreover, compromising on these core values to appease the establishment would alienate the party's base and set a dangerous precedent, suggesting that meaningful political change can be thwarted through legal maneuvering rather than democratic processes. The Move Forward Party's strength lies in its unwavering commitment to progressive reform; to abandon this would be to lose its reason for existence and, ultimately, its relevance in Thai politics.

The dissolution of the Move Forward Party and the strict limits placed on political discourse in Thailand signal a continuation of the Establishment's dominance in Thai politics. This development will likely have far-reaching implications, potentially stifling meaningful democratic progress and reform. Any party perceived as a threat to the Establishment may suffer the same consequences, and the cycle may continue. The monarchy's supremacy in Thai politics is the definitive lesson from this event, with any attempt to breach the barrier surrounding royal discourse decisively silenced. As such, Thailand's democracy may remain limited, with power concentrated in traditional institutions and elites, and the struggle for reforms by the progressives will likely continue in the foreseeable future. The long-term stability of such a system is questionable, as it fails to address underlying societal tensions and demands for more representative governance.

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