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**The role of trade unions in the political development in
Thailand: 1958–1986**

Vanno, Vichote, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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A

THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE POLITICAL
DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND: 1958-1986

by

VICHOTE VANNO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1991

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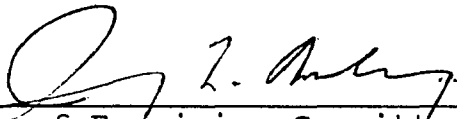
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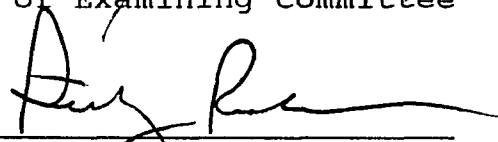
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Abstract

THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THAILAND: 1958-1986

by

VICHOTE VANNO

Advisor: Professor Irving L. Markovitz

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This dissertation documents and analyzes the emergence of labor unions in Thailand as an extrabureaucratic force. While the principal focus of the study is on the period 1958 to 1986, a brief analysis of labor in Thailand from the late nineteenth century to 1958 places the period of principal focus in historical perspective. Socio-economic and, especially, political developments are analyzed to show the context in which labor unions emerged.

Following the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, a bureaucratic polity replaced the traditional monarchical rule. Bureaucracy and especially the military became the center of decision making and political controversy. When contestants for power within the restricted circle of bureaucrats and the military sought support and a base of legitimacy outside the bureaucratic-military realm, labor became a principal target, usually

serving the function of a client for a powerful contestant or contestants within the bureaucracy. In return, labor received protection or, possibly, more favorable government policy.

Rapid and substantial economic development fueled corresponding changes in the social and political system of Thailand. Changes in traditional attitudes of elites and masses and a steady democratization since 1973 were the most important of these changes. A rapid increase in the urban labor force and its organizations developed within this atmosphere, and labor began to act autonomously, as an extrabureaucratic force.

Labor's emergence as an extrabureaucratic force is documented in a number of case studies of labor action in pursuit of certain goals. They range from the most immediate "bread-and-butter" (such as wages, hours and working conditions) to broader issues of public policy (such as social security law, and minimum wages) to a number of less concrete goals relating to participation in military coup d'etat, elections and constitutional changes.

What stands out in virtually all the case studies was labor's autonomy in identifying its goals, determining a course of action and acting on its own initiative. Even when labor acted in conjunction with bureaucratic or military elites, it acted on its own initiative, as an ally rather than a client.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed without the sacrifice and support of many people. Regrettably, space allows that only a few of those who helped can be acknowledged here.

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I also would like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Benjamin Rivlin, Professor Marshall Berman and Professor Philip Oldenburg, who kindly read and made valuable suggestions during the defence. Their thoughtfulness and warmth will always be remembered.

My Professor, from the New School for Social Research, where I earned M.A., Professor C. Neale Ronning gave of his time to edit my writing throughout the long difficult process of writing in a foreign language. He had worked closely with me at the New School, and now he is not only my

Professor but also a good friend of me and my family.

Without a friend like Dr. Benedetto Fontana, who helped me prepare for the Second or Comprehensive examination, I would not have reached the dissertation stage of my work.

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While writing my dissertation in the United States, far away from home, my good friends, Surachit and Boriboon Suwansiri, kindly provided room and board as well as moral support and other needs so that I could concentrate most of my time in writing.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BRC	Bureaucratic Reform Committee
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CSC	Capital Security Command
CLU	Central Labor Union (1947-1952)
CUT	Central Union of Thailand (1944-1957)
DoL	Department of Labor
FBFWT	Federation of Bangking and Financing Workers of Thailand
FFWUT	Federation of Free Workers Union of Thailand (1957-1957)
FEWT	Federation of Electricity Workers of Thailand
FIST	Federation of Independent Student of Thailand
FLUT	Federation of Labor Unions of Thailand (an informal federation established in 1974 and later developed to be the Labor Congress of Thailand)
FWAT	Free Worker Association of Thailand (1949-1957)
GTUA	General Trade Union Association (1946-1947)
GSELUT	Group of State Enterprise labor Unions of Thailand
ISOC	Internal Security Operation Committee
JPPSCC	Joint Public/Private Sector Consultative Committee
LCCT	Labor Coordinating Center of Thailand (a progressive informal federation, 1974-1976)
LCT	Labor Congress of Thailand (1978-)
NARC	National Army Revolutionary Council
NCLD	National Council for Labor Development
NCTL	National Council of Thai Labor (1979-)
NEC	National Executive Council (Military government under the leadership of Thanom Kittikhachorn 1971-1973)
NFLUC	National Free Labor Union Congress (1978-)
NSCT	National Student Center of Thailand
SELURG	State Enterprise Labor Unions Relations Group (1982-)
SRT	State Railways of Thailand
TNFTU	Thai National Federation of Trade Unions (1957-1957)
TNTUC	Thai National Trade Union Congress (1950-1957)
TTUC	Thailand Trade Union Congress (1983-)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Between 1958-1986, Thailand experienced two major types of political system: one was the "bureaucratic polity" (defined and discussed below) and the other was the more democratic form of government characterized by the functioning of an elected parliament, the existence of political parties competing in elections, the relative free association of labor and other group, and the free expression of ideas. Within the later, the more democratic form, there have been periods of greater and lesser degree of democracy for example in a "semi-democratic period" where democratic system has not been fully implemented, an elected House of Representatives and an appointed Senate are the result. These different governments obviously affected the role and activities of trade unions in the politics of Thailand. Nevertheless, the labor movement survived and it has become increasingly clear that labor and trade unions pursue their own interests, and play an important role as an extrabureaucratic force in the more democratic form of government.

The Purposes and Major Contribution of this Study

There are two main purposes of this study. First to

assess the effectiveness and autonomy of labor organizations as an interest group in the transition to democracy (defined and discussed below). We will look at the way in which the process of political transition has influenced the workers' movement. Thai labor movements did not have a significant role in the process of transition to democratization as in the labor movements in South Korea in early 1980s¹ in Spain after the death of General Franco,² and in countries of Latin America.³ Thus, the objective of this study is to discuss in some detail the special relationship between the labor movement, and trade unions in particular, in the process of consolidation of democracy and the effects which the process has on labor and trade union movements.

The second purpose of this study is to offer a theoretical alternative to the dominant paradigm to explain

¹See more detail in Eun-Sung Chung, "Labor Movement in South Korea: Its Role in The Democratization Process," A Paper presented at The World Conference of Korea Political Studies, Seoul, 25-27 July 1989.

²For a comprehensive work on labor movement in the process of transition to democracy in Spain see, Robert M. Fishman "Working Class Organization and Political Change: The Labor Movement and the Transition to Democracy in Spain" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985).

³Valenzuela studied the role of labor movements in the process of transition to democracy in some of the countries in Latin American, and he found that workers there were also mobilized and became a crucial part of the process. He also found that the mobilization of workers must be followed by restraint if the country wanted to sustain or consolidate democracy. See, J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Labor Movements in Transitions to Democracy: A Framework for Analysis," Comparative Politics (July 1989), pp. 445-472.

the Thai political system. The 'bureaucratic polity'⁴ model used in explaining Thai politics is now inadequate and misleading for an understanding of contemporary Thai politics. The evidence presented here will show that the Thai political system has developed beyond the so-called 'bureaucratic polity'--the model developed by Riggs in the early 1960s. This study shows that the Thailand political system has since the mid-1970s incorporated the democratic elements that have been resulted in the constitution of a new system of government. Hence, the process of moving from a 'bureaucratic polity' toward the present form of government can be seen as a process of democratization.

The major contribution of this study would be first, to demonstrate that the trade union and labor movement is an extrabureaucratic force that has its own interests to pursue in the politics of Thailand. Later chapters will show that the labor movement now acts autonomously, in its own interests, under its own initiative, and sometimes in the interest of a wider community with whom certain public policy objectives are shared. Earlier studies on Thai labor and/or labor movements in particular come to different conclusions. These other studies contend that labor

⁴The model developed by Riggs in early 1960s to describe Thai political system. It had been a dominant model used by both Thai and Western scholars to study Thai politics until late 1970s. See Fred W. Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity (Honolulu: East-West Center Press), 1966.

organizations have been mobilized into politics in order to serve the interests of other groups or political elites rather than their own. This study will show that the Thai labor movement has also moved beyond this stage of development. This is also the first comprehensive study to focus specifically on the relationship between the labor movement and the democratization process in Thailand. In contrast to studies in other countries, this study will show that the labor movement was more dependent on the process of democratization than it was an independent force that caused democratization in Thailand. However, the development of a labor movement by itself also serves as an indicator of the degree of success in Thai democratic development.

The Organization

To examine the extent and nature of the Thai trade unions as an extrabureaucratic force in the Thai political system, we have organized this study as follows: Chapter I is an introduction to the theoretical framework. Chapter II is the analysis of the development of the Thai political system and the associated socioeconomic changes which in turn provide the atmosphere for trade unions to develop into a new social force in the political system of Thailand. Chapter III traces the history of trade union roles in politics in order to give readers the scenario of how trade unions have become a countervailing force. Chapter four

explains the function of labor organization and labor leaders. Chapter five will examine the role of trade unions in various strikes in order to show the autonomy of trade unions in pursuit of their member's interests. As we shall see, most strikes were caused by economic problems, yet the strike had a great impact on the politics of the country. Chapter six will analyze the role of trade unions in issues that not only had a direct effect on their members' interests but on those of other lower class as well. By the end of that chapter, the reader should be able to see that trade unions have already emerged as an interest group in politics, since the selected cases in the chapter deal with trade unions' role in the policy making process. The existence of trade unions as an 'extrabureaucratic force' should be evident as well. Chapter seven analyzes the roles of trade union in various political events in the so-called 'Semi-democratic period (1977-1988). The issues in the cases analyzed in that chapter were not directly of interest to unions' members or workers as a whole, but trade union leaders became involved in them. The analyses of various cases in that chapter again demonstrate that trade unions were in fact acting as an autonomous political group in the present Thai political context. Chapter eight is the conclusion to the study.

The Data

A wide variety of data were consulted in developing the study-- primary and secondary sources, theses and dissertations, pamphlet materials, newspapers and magazines (both general and union), informal interviews, quantitative data (published and unpublished), government publications. Since works on labor are few and even fewer on the labor movement and politics, most of data used for analysis in this study are primary. Some of data are not generally available at all, for example, the background of labor leaders. However, I was lucky enough to be allowed to get information on the background of labor leaders which is available only at the Division of Labor Relation, Department of Labor. This information is considered confidential. Therefore, background of labor leaders that I show in Chapter four, though incomplete, is original and significant for those who concerned with labor problems in Thailand.

Over a year was spent on developing the topic and several months were spent in the field in Thailand talking to union leaders, observing labor organizations, associating with the rank and file in some of their organizations, observing their activities in various political issues and consulting general periodicals and union journals. Systemic interviews through formal questionnaires were used in order to get information not so much dealing with attitudes as with actual political activities.

Trade Unions and Development

Trade unions have increasingly grown in number since 1972. Records collected by the Department of Labor (DoL) indicated that in 1972 there were 11 unions and 14 years later the number was 470.⁵ That means the average increase in the number of unions was about 25-26 unions per year. Unfortunately there have been few records on the number of members in each of the unions; only the number of trade unions are systematically recorded by the DoL. Thus the extent of union membership is not easily available or not available at all. There was only one report, one in 1984, on the total number of organized workers. That report showed that the number of organized employees was 212,343 compared to a total number of 1,629,115 workers, organized and unorganized, in establishments where unions were established. The percentage of organized workers then was 13.03 per cent. This percentage was specially high in unions in the public sector. In that sector, union membership was about 57.53 per cent.⁶

Trade unions have not only grown in term of numbers but in terms of political influence and actors as well. Since 1972, after the Announcement of the National Executive Council No. 103 that allowed the association of workers,

⁵Department of Labor, Ministry of Interior.

⁶Prasong Rananand, Effective Approaches to the Prevention and Settlement of Labor Disputes (Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1985), p.7.

trade unions have been voicing their demands within the political system and their demands have been heard by the system. The Labor Relations Law of 1975 which provided for the existence of trade union and organization of trade unions, and the establishment of various tripartite committees are examples of their success.

Among Thai trade unions, the state enterprise labor unions have been the strongest ones. These unions have effectively led the labor movement in Thai politics.⁷ Their leaders have been the ones who have promoted the organization of workers up to the national level. There are now 4 national organizations. They are the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT), the Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC), the National Congress of Thai Labor (NCTL), and the National Free Union Congress (NFUC). These national-level organizations of labor, to some extent, have earned acceptance as the representatives of labor. The state enterprise unions have not seen themselves as a part of the state. Instead they have viewed themselves as employees, and the state as the employer. When there are conflicts between the workers and the state, the state enterprise union leaders have sided with the workers. These unions also can be classified as 'extrabureaucratic forces' since ideologically they work to promote the interests of their

⁷See Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn, "The Rise of Labor Movement in Thailand: An Analysis of Public Enterprise Workers," Asian Review 2 (1988), pp. 63-65.

own members and seek support from the whole of labor by leading and helping them to confront employers and the state when their interests are threatened. However, these groups (state enterprise unions) have not been immune to state intervention. Since unions in various state enterprises are formed by employees who are employed by the state, they are also subjected to various government rules and regulations. From the legal perspective, they can be tightly restrained by the state because the state apparatus can exercise those rules and regulations to contain the unions' activities. However, these unions still have more room now than earlier for involvement in politics, as the political system has become more open, as popular participation in various forms, such as, free election, freedom of expression has increased, the elected government now would not use the law in a strict sense as a means to solve labor conflicts or labor unrest. If it did, unions could resort to the many forms of political pressure analyzed in the following chapters of this study.

Literature on the Role of Trade Unions

Comparative studies contend that the role of trade unions in the transition to democracy has been crucial in Latin American countries, Spain, Korea, and the Philippines.⁸ By contrast, this study will show that the

⁸Samuel J. Valenzuela, op. cit., p. 445.

role of Thai trade unions in the transition to democracy in Thailand was not crucial. Yet, in the process of democratization, trade unions did gain strength and "autonomy".

Most recent studies on Thai political development that have touched upon the role of the labor movement in the politics of Thailand agree that the role of trade unions and the labor movement in Thai politics has increased.⁹ Military leaders and political elites now have to take into account the political power of trade unions. Yet, these studies portray the role of trade unions and the labor movement as one where they are still used or mobilized by political elites outside trade unions.¹⁰ Also most of the studies on Thai political development reach similar conclusions concerning the changes that have taken place in the system: there has been an increase of interest groups involved in the politics of the country. Yet they have little to say about whether or not the trade unions now play a role as an extra-bureaucratic force, particularly as an

⁹Some of the works are: John L.S. Girling, Thailand : Society and Politics (Ithaca London: Cornell University Press), 1981, and Ross Prizzia, Thailand in Transition: The Role of Oppositional Forces (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press), 1985.

¹⁰Pornpilai Lertvicha, "Political Forces in Thailand," Asian Survey 1 (1987), pp. 58-66. The author sees labor movement and trade union as one of a political force in Thailand. However, for a variety of reasons such force has been considered as being mobilized by other classes not the sole benefit of the working class.

autonomous force. Some of them, like Girling(1986), Ramsay(1987), Chai-anan (1989), Prizzia (1984), Pisan and Guyot (1986), and Pisan (1988) who deal with political changes and development in Thailand, mentioned very little about the role of trade union and workers in Thai politics. Nevertheless, basically they saw trade unions as having an increasingly important role in politics. Their roles, they assert, will eventually contribute to the consolidation and institutionalization of democracy in Thailand. This implies that labor unions would have supportive role in democratization process of Thai politics.

Most of the studies on workers in Thailand have been concerned with either labor relations, where they discuss labor legislation and its administration, or on employment and the growth of the labor force. Consequently works on Thai labor concentrated on the causes of strikes and the impact of strikes and labor unrest upon the investment climate of the country. In both cases, labor was assumed to be only the "object" of industrialization. There are a few works which recognize that labor was the object of structural politico-economic factors--such as the works by Mabry (1979) and Phiraphol (1978). In short, there is still a lack of comprehensive works that deal with the role of trade unions as an autonomous political group, or as an extrabureaucratic force in the Thai polity. We must, however, review some of these works, if only as a point of

departure.

Mabry's study concentrated on labor relations and the development of labor institutions in Thailand. He found that trade unions and workers' institutions have been institutionalized in the country to the extent that it will not be easy for any government to outlaw them.¹¹ However, Mabry's interest was not to examine trade unions as an extrabureaucratic force as we will be doing here.

Later, in 1985, Mabry and his associate Kundhol found that the government of Thailand has always given priority to economic development and has seen strikes or any kind of labor movement as a threat to development and the economy as well as to the security of the country. Hence the workers' organization, in the view of the state elites, must be kept in a position where they will be unable to cause any trouble for the state. Thus, they contend, trade unions have been weak and have been controlled or manipulated by the state. They wrote;

Still the government has an idealized concept of what it feels the role of organized labor ought to be-- a force for economic development and nation building-- rather than what it actually is--a means of effectively representing employee interests and concerns. In the industrial sector where the workers' primary voice is the union, the existence of such a government attitude

¹¹Bevars D. Mabry. The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand. Data Paper No. 112 (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1979). Also Somkiat Wantana, Wiwattanakarn Chonchan Raeng-ngan Tai: Kaow-krong Prawatisat Raeng-ngan Krob Song Roi Pi [Evolution of the Thai Working Class: Two Hundred Years of Labor History] (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1982).

results in a national labor relations policy that is oriented toward establishing a weak labor movement.¹²

Hewison reached similar conclusion when he studied the relation of state and capitalist accumulation in Thailand. He found that the state has to take strong measures towards workers and the working class because the state gives priority to the capitalist accumulation. He wrote;

Within the general context of the concern with providing the conditions for accumulation, the state has consistently taken the side of capital in its disputes with labor, and has severely curtailed the rights of workers to organize themselves. This is, of course, one of the major tasks of the capitalist state; to support the interests of capital against those of the working class.¹³

Hewison's argument is similar to those of theorists who dealt with the role of the state and capitalist development in Latin American countries. Among them are, Kenneth Paul Erickson (1977) Peter Evans (1979) and Alfred Stepan (1978). These theorists agree upon the role of state in providing conditions necessary to the accumulation process of capital. Viewed from this standpoint, trade unions and labor movements are dominated and mobilized by state and hence repressive policies are the consequences. This study, in contrast, will show that quite a different concept has now

¹²Bevars D. Mabry and Kundhol Srisermbhok, "Labor Relations Under Martial Law; The Thailand Experience," Asian Survey Vol.XXV, No. 6, (June 1985), p. 636.

¹³Kevin J. Hewison, "The Development of Capital, Public Policy and the Role of the State in Thailand," (Ph.D. diss., Murdoch University, Australia, 1983).

emerged within the Thai labor movement: labor can and should define its own interests and act on its own initiatives.

Among works on labor which are to some extent more related to the purpose and findings of this study is that of Phiraphol, who found that the government of Thailand had consistently employed repressive policies towards the working class. It is relevant to this study because it analyzed governments' policies and roles toward labor movement during 1932-1978. The study contends that trade unions are subjected to the will and control of the state and government.¹⁴ Our study finds that the trade union movement is gaining in strength and autonomy. The very contrast serves to emphasize a central point in the argument of this dissertation. Unions are no longer dominated by the state.

Another study carried out by Arnold Wehmhoerner in the early 1980s confirmed Mabry's early findings on the institutionalization of trade unions and their political movements. Wehmhoerner also insisted that the trade union movement has become strong and the strength that it has developed up to today "makes it unlikely that Thai government would ever be able to push the country back to a

¹⁴See Phiraphol Tritasavit. "Labor Policy and Practices in Thailand: A Study of Government Policy On Labor Relations, 1932-1976," (Ph.D. diss., New York University 1978).

state where there would be no trade unions."¹⁵ Furthermore, he was very optimistic about the role of trade unions in the future politics of Thailand, and asserted that most trade unions are organizationally strong autonomous political entities, that the military-dominated political system must be opened and must take into account the demands of these groups. Hence, according to Wehmhoerner's point of view, it could be assumed that he saw trade unions as an extrabureaucratic force.

A Laothamatas and Guyot study¹⁶ also characterized the trade unions and labor movement as one of the extrabureaucratic forces that have emerged due to the rapid socioeconomic changes that have taken place in Thailand in the past three decades. Unions are effective and are gaining their autonomy in politics. However, they did not give a full picture of trade unions as an extrabureaucratic force. Their main objective was to show that new forces are now sharing political power with the military and other sectors of the state bureaucracy. As a result, the semi-democratic government was established. Nevertheless, the military and civil servants are still the dominant group in the politics

¹⁵Arnold Wehmhoerner, "Trade Unionism in Thailand--A New Dimension in a Modernizing Society," Journal of Contemporary Asia 13:4 (1984), p.494.

¹⁶Anek Laothamatas and James F. Guyot, "The Structure of The Field of Extrabureaucratic Forces," A paper presented at a panel on The Study of Thai Politics at the Annual Meeting of The Association for Asian Studies, Boston, April 10-12, 1987.

of the country, even though power is shared with a parliamentary regime which in theory, is supreme. This study will try to show the full extent of these developments by tracing the evolution of the union movement throughout the crucial period selected for our study.

Scope of Study

Given the lack of general works on the Thai trade-union movement and the short history of trade union existence in the country, this study will limit itself to a concentration on the relations and activities between the state or government and trade unions that show the quality of trade unions as an extra-bureaucratic force. We do not intend to analyze the general or overall role of a specific union or any group of unions in politics but to assess their roles in general in order to see to what extent trade unions are extrabureaucratic forces. The study will analyze the role of unions, federations, and labor organizations at national level (labor councils) in politics. We will focus on strikes that had an impact on the politics of the country in different periods of time and in different places, the role of unions in the policy making process, and their roles in various political issues or events. The development of trade unions throughout Thailand and especially of the trade union organizations at the national level will be emphasized in order to show readers that the roles of trade unions are

becoming institutionalized in Thai politics.

The basic conclusions of the study are that the unions, in the process of consolidation of democracy, although being restrained by law in many aspects, do gain strength and to some extent "autonomy." They can do so in part because of their organizational strength and the ability of labor leaders to articulate demands and utilize the atmosphere of a democratic form of government that provides an opportunity for trade unions to play their role in politics.

Analysis of the roles of trade unions in various political strikes, the roles of trade union in policy making process and the roles of trade unions in various political issues and events will be done in order to assess the autonomy of trade unions. Trade union "autonomy" means the ability of a trade union to pursue its own interests and preferences. It is also a relative quality since this study will assess the interaction between state or government and trade unions. In another sense, the autonomy of trade unions in their relationship to government means the ability to initiate, modify, and reverse public policy for their own interests. For Huntington, "the autonomy of political institutions is measured by the extent to which they have their own interests and values distinguishable from those of other institutions and social forces."¹⁷ Our preliminary

¹⁷Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 20.

study finds that their roles have been increasingly independent and their own interests are the force behind their activities.

To examine these basic issues, the scope of the study is limited in time period, type of unions, and type of data. The time period covered by this study is 1958-1986, with specific attention to a period of transition to democracy (1977-1986). During the period covered, there were three different types of political system in the country. Each of these three different types of government conditioned the trade unions's roles and performance in the politics of Thailand.

The type of union is limited to workers' (manual and clerical) organizations, in non-agricultural industries, designed to further their members' interest through political and economic means. Thus, the study also included the state or public enterprise labor unions since, as we shall see, they are the strongest union and have played a leading role in the labor movement in Thailand. Legally these unions are linked to the state structure and function, but their roles can be understood only from a class perspective.¹⁸ That is to say, even though they are linked to the state, they still feel that they are employees with

¹⁸Pisan Suriyamongkol, Institutionalization of Democratic Political Process in Thailand: A Three-Pronged Democratic Polity (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988), p.3.

interests different from, and frequently opposed to the state. The study treats, in detail, both trade unions and other groups of worker's organizations.

The study does not includes farm workers since they live in remote areas and there are few such organizations. Some farm workers unions might have had a significant role in politics of the country at a particular time, such as unions in the sugar cane industry when they moved to protest the government's policies concerning issues related to sugar. However, because of the short period of the movement and the lack of data on this matter, this study will not include this type of union. Furthermore, the farm workers' union did not have much relations and contact with industrial workers, hence their role in politics has been insignificant when compared to the whole movement of labor in the country.

The study also limits itself with respect to location of trade union as well. The unions studied are concentrated in the Greater Bangkok area, which comprises the Bangkok Metropolitan area and provinces around it. These provinces are within the range of 50 kilometers from Bangkok. There are reasons for concentrating on unions within this area: because they have been active in politics and they are close to the center of political power, which is centered in Bangkok. The center of trade union activity is also in the capital city.

Thai trade unions and workers' organizations, as in other countries, have developed within a specific national political context. We have referred to a "bureaucratic polity" and a "transition to democracy" in our discussion thus far. We must now turn to a brief discussion of these terms. They will be further elaborated in the more detailed discussion in chapter two.

Transition to Democracy: A Theoretical Framework.

According to Valenzuela;

redemocratizations are often fostered by the development of a characteristic split within the ruling circles of the authoritarian regime between sectors that have been labeled 'hard-liners' and 'soft-liners.' The transition results as the latter gain the upper hand over their hard-line opponents and initiate a political opening that eventually expands until a fully democratized regime is achieved.¹⁹

Transitions may also progress through a series of phases, from a crisis of the authoritarian regime, to its liberalization, to the creation of a harsh form of democracy, to finally the democratic regime itself.²⁰

Rustow, in his theory of democratic transition, divided the process into four different phases:²¹ 1) "national

¹⁹J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Labor Movements in Transition to Democracy: A Framework for Analysis" Comparative Politics, (July 1989), p. 445.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Unless indicated, the details in different phases of transition to democracy are drawn from, Dankwart Rustow, "Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,"

unity" as precondition. The "national unity" was the necessary precondition for the process of transition to democracy to begin. The phase is achieved when the physical identity of the country is not in doubt.

2) "preparatory phase." The process of democratization itself is set off by a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle, usually involving rival or even antagonistic social and economic groups. A country must have its own way of attaining democracy since, for Rustow, "a country is likely to attain democracy not by copying the constitutional laws or parliamentary practices of some previous democracy, but rather by honestly facing up to its particular conflicts and by devising or adapting effective procedures for their accommodation".

3) "decision phase" in which political rivals realize the "existence of diversity in unity" and reach a decision to coexist. Since democracy is likely to stem from a large variety of mixed motives, conflicts will still occur. A genuine compromise, which is the character of democracy, will seem to be second-best to all major parties involved. The most important thing is that what matters at the decision stage is not what values the leaders hold dear in the abstract, but what concrete steps they are willing to

take.²²

4) "habituation phase" At this stage politicians and citizens learn from the successful resolution of some issues to place their faith in the new rules which are rooted in a democratic system and to apply them to new issues. Experience with democratic techniques and competitive recruitment confirms politicians in their democratic practices and beliefs, and the population at large becomes fitted into the new structure by the forging of effective links of party organization that connect political elites with the mass electorate.²³

In Korea, Chung finds a similarity of phases relevant to those of Rustow. They can be arranged in separate phases as follows: (1) decline of legitimacy, (2) conflict within the ruling bloc, (3) emergence of democratic force as an alternative, (4) transfer of power, and (5) consolidation of democracy. Chung contends that the first three stages, which can be included in Rustow's preparatory phase, are mutually related and do not necessarily occur in that time sequence.²⁴

Then Chung offers details of the different phases to

²²Geoffrey Pridham, "Comparative Perspectives on the New Mediterranean Democracies: A Model of Regime Transition?" in Geoffrey Pridham, ed., The New Mediterranean Democracies: Regime Transition in Spain, Greece and Portugal (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd. 1984), p. 25.

²³Ibid., p. 25.

²⁴Eun-Sung Chung, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

describe the transition to democracy in Korea. The phase which will concern us in this study is the fifth one --the consolidating of democracy. This is a complex and lengthy process.²⁵ Thai trade unions have played a supportive role in the process of consolidation of democracy, even though they did not play a substantial role in bringing down the preceding military authoritarian regime. Thus the Korean experience of democratization has been more or less the same as that of the Thai's counterpart. That is to say, after the new democratic regime was established, the new government had to cope with various social issues, formulate public policies, and implements them. The new government's first task was to reach a certain level of equilibrium since more groups become involved in the politics of the country, and trade unions are among them.

Transition to Democracy: The Democratization Process in Thailand

Military authoritarian regimes have been the form of government in Thailand during most of its modern history. That pattern of government was initiated with the fall of the absolute monarchy in 1932, a pattern of rule by military governments or elected government which relied heavily on the support of the military. Retired or serving bureaucrats

²⁵Ibid., p. 8.

--civilian or military, served as prime ministers and cabinet ministers in both types of government. The pattern ended only with the overthrow of the longest ruling military regime in 1973. In order to explain and better portray the predominance of the bureaucracy in Thai politics, Wilson and, particularly, Riggs developed a useful model-- the "bureaucratic polity."²⁶ In his pioneering work, Riggs makes a crucial point about politics of Thailand: "Power in Thailand is located in the 'bureaucratic polity'--the armed forces, police, and civil administration-- rather than in political parties operating under parliamentary rules." As he elaborates:

The failure of formal political institutions to achieve control over the bureaucracy has not meant the elimination of "politics" and the achievement of an "administrative state." Rather, it has meant that the arena of politics, the focus of rivalry, and the struggles for power, wealth or other public values have moved within the bureaucracy itself.²⁷

According to Riggs (writing in 1966), the Thai polity is, in a sense, neither a traditional nor modern system. Unlike a traditional political system, it has developed a wide range of differentiated bureaucratic structures. Yet, unlike a modern political system, it has failed to create an extrabureaucratic mechanism to impose accountability on the

²⁶See David Wilson, Politics in Thailand (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962) and Fred Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of A Bureaucratic Polity (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966).

²⁷Fred Riggs, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

bureaucracy.²⁸ The concept of the 'bureaucratic polity' is that "basic decisions are made within the bureaucracy--the armed forces, police, and civil administration--rather than by extrabureaucratic forces in society, such as charismatic leaders, political parties, interest groups or mass movements."²⁹ After overthrowing the absolute monarchy, the Thai military and civilian bureaucratic elites became the wielders of political power themselves. There were no competitive parties and interest groups along the line of a Western pluralist democratic system. Political and bureaucratic power was fused, because most premiers and cabinet ministers of most governments came from the ranks of military or because of the support they had from the army. The parliamentary and the parties, whenever they existed, were too weak to exert any meaningful influence, let alone control the bureaucratic-dominated government in a constitutional manner.

In the Riggs model, political competition was limited to the bureaucracy³⁰ itself, due to the fact that there was

²⁸Ibid., pp.373-378.

²⁹John L. S. Girling, The Bureaucratic Polity in Modernizing Societies: Similarities, Differences, and Prospects in the ASEAN Region (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), p. 1.

³⁰Bureaucracy according to Riggs, "refer only to the formal hierarchy of government officials, speaking of all other bureaucracies, whether of corporations, trade union, churches, or political parties, as "non-bureaucratic" or as "non-governmental bureaucracies". See Fred W. Riggs "Bureaucrats and Political Development: A Paradoxical View,"

no guiding force outside the bureaucracy capable of checking and balancing the bureaucratic actions. Riggs also suggests that the differentiation or the development within the bureaucracy has advanced rapidly, while outside the bureaucracy such changes have occurred at a much slower pace. Therefore, in early 1960s, when Riggs made his study of Thai politics, the extrabureaucratic forces had not developed and the bureaucracy was still free to act as it pleased. Based on this assumption, political development in Thailand, according to Riggs, is defined by the extent to which the bureaucracy is brought under the control of extrabureaucratic political institutions.³¹ Such control later leads to the democratization process of the country, which we will discuss briefly later in this chapter.

A number of factors account for the weakness of extrabureaucratic forces (during the heyday of the "bureaucratic polity") -- dependence on the state, the passivity of Thai citizens and the rudimentary stage of organization among interest groups. Even what one might expect to have been the strongest of these extrabureaucratic forces -- organized business, supposedly the strongest because of its economic control -- was no exception to the

in Joseph LaPalombara, ed., Bureaucracy and Political Development (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 1962, p. 122.

³¹Fred Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of A Bureaucratic Polity, pp. 131, 197.

generalization. Business was in the hands of ethnic Chinese during the "bureaucratic polity" period, and they could claim no rights in the politics of Thailand. Beyond their legal status, they were poorly educated and sometimes the victims of harassment by nationalistic governments. They chose to keep a low political profile and acted only defensively, in covert and particularistic ways. To the extent that they were able to exert any influence, it was chiefly in the implementation rather than the formulation of policy. In order to do this, they sometimes offered outright bribe to bureaucrats or military officers who were in power. They also created patron client ties with military and bureaucratic leaders, principally by offering them stock in their companies, at no cost, and inviting them to serve on their executive boards. Out of sixteen commercial banks in Thailand, as late as 1972, twelve had military or political leaders on their boards of directors.³²

On the one hand, Chinese businesses were an important source of wealth and economic power for high ranking bureaucrats and military officers. On the other hand, business sought protection from the latter. The result of such relations meant that Chinese business was unlikely to challenge the dominant place of bureaucracy in Thai politics. Neher summarized the relationship between the

³²Akira Suehiro, Capital Accumulation And Industrial Development In Thailand (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), p. 40.

military-bureaucratic complex and other potential forces within the Thai political system as follows;

Since 1932, the kingdom has been governed by senior ministers and military generals. In the last 52 years, civilian rule has been experienced for only 8 years; in the other 44 years, military leaders have held the major position of power: Prime Minister, minister of defense, and minister of interior. More than half of all Cabinet officers since 1932 have at the same time been military officers... The military's dominance also stems from the fact that few forces challenge its authority. Short-lived political parties tend to be single-candidate oriented. Business groups are controlled by ethnic Chinese and hence are outside the central positions of power. The citizenry is largely rural, isolated and passive in terms of national issues. The royal family is "above politics," and civilian bureaucrats and politicians have developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the military. In short, the military has filled the vacuum formed by the absence of extrabureaucratic forces.³³

For Neher, even until late 1984, Thai politics at the national level has always been conducted among a small group within traditional government structures. "For the most part, Thailand is a bureaucratic polity--that is, a society in which the arena of politics lies within the bureaucracy - -and there are only a few influential extrabureaucratic institutions."³⁴

However, rapid socio-economic development in the last three decades, increasingly patterned on a free-market, capitalist system, has resulted in the rise of some

³³Clark D. Neher, "Political Forces in Thailand," Current History 83 (No. 497, December 1984), p. 419.

³⁴Ibid.

assertive non-bureaucratic forces. College students led a popular uprising which led to the toppling of the military regime in 1973. This was followed by years of political instability. Between 1973 and 1977, the country experienced first a popular but unstable democratic government and then an unpopular repressive one. Yet, since 1977 the Thai polity has achieved a new stability. Since then, governments have come to power by free competitive elections. Thus, the regime may be said to be a compromise between the military and the elected parliament. It is a weak parliament, however, since three or more parties have been needed to form a coalition government, and their leaders have been unable to decide who among themselves should serve as prime minister. Moreover, necessary but to some extent less than before, the support of the armed forces has been indispensable for a stable government. Consequently, the ruling parties have chosen to invite retired respectable generals to serve as the premier and as ministers of key portfolios, such as Defense, Interior, Finance, and Foreign Affairs. In addition, the government has to take special heed of the military, as it is still the single most powerful institution of the country.

In fact, the student-led popular uprising which overthrew the military regime in 1973 and the installation of a democratic form of government were a first step in the transition to democracy in Thailand. The country had in the

past tried to adopt a democratic form of government in the period between the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 until Field Marshall Sarit came to power through military coup d'etat in 1958. But Sarit, followed by his associate Thanom, put the country under military rule for 15 years, with a short period of a democratic form of government during 1972-1973. Therefore, when again Thailand adopted a democratic form of government, it could be seen as redemocratization process as well.

Immediately after the overthrow of the military regime by the popular uprising in 1973, the king appointed an interim caretaker government to draft a new constitution and prepare for a general election. One year later a general election was held, and since then, with only a short interruption of an unpopular repressive regime during 1976-77, governments in Thailand have come to power through comparatively free competitive general elections. However, later parts of this study will show that the military continues to play a significant role in politics within the new form of government. Thus, we emphasize that The regime is now a compromise between the military and the elected parliament.

The end of military regime in 1973 and the establishment of a democratic form of government can be seen as a transition to democracy similar to those which occurred in countries in Latin America, Korea and the Philippines,

since in those countries it was a transition from authoritarianism as well. That is to say, from military dictatorship to democracy.

The persistence of the recent democratic form of government, at least in the present period, according to Girling, has been the result of the inability of the military and bureaucracy to monopolize political power. Extrabureaucratic groups were generated by the development of manufacturing, commercial and service sectors of the economy, which produced demands for a sharing of political power. The military and civilian bureaucratic leaders cannot ignore the demands of these new forces. For Girling, the old bureaucratic polity model of Riggs is not adequate for an understanding of the present Thai political system. He mentions changes that have taken place in the country which in turn affected the Thai polity as follows:

But the traditional consensus based on paternalism has been disrupted by the magnitude of contemporary social and economic change. The result of expansion of bureaucratic tasks and the demand for professional expertise have introduced new attitudes within the bureaucracy. Above all, the development of manufacturing and commercial and service sectors have created 'extra-bureaucratic' forces in Thai society which no longer accept without question their subordinate role. The evident tension is a result of traditional values that still persist, and pervade the attitudes and activities of government, although the conditions that gave rise to them have long since passed.³⁵

³⁵John L.S. Girling, Thailand : Society and Politics, p.31.

This study, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, will analyze the emergence, the evolution and the impact of one of the "extrabureaucratic" force mentioned by Girling: labor and the trade union movement.

In conclusion, this study holds that due to socioeconomic change in Thailand, the economy has become more liberalized, the labor unions and their movement have increased their significance in politics. Even though the state, particularly the bureaucracy, still wants to exercise a certain control over labor through a legal framework. At the same time, the liberalization of the Thai political system gave more political freedom and opportunity for the labor unions to defend their interests, even through political campaigns. Because of socioeconomic and political changes (democratization) in Thailand, labor gradually becomes independent and serves as an extrabureaucratic force in Thai politics. Hence this study will address the process of the labor movement in the process of Thai democratization. Then, it will argue that the labor movement plays a supportive role in order to institutionalization of democracy in Thailand.

CHAPTER TWO
THE BUREAUCRATIC POLITY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THAILAND

This chapter describes the developments in the Thai political system which have moved away from a 'bureaucratic polity' toward a system that is more a democratic one. The general background of the political system of Thailand since 1958 until 1987 will be described as a constant move out of the old 'bureaucratic polity' model toward a more pluralist democratic system. Three types of regime can be classified within the period. The first one (1958-1973) is the regime of military dictatorship which was also the hey-day of the 'bureaucratic polity.' The 'Democratic regime' (1973-1976) brought Thailand closest to a fully popular democracy. Finally, the 'Semi-Democratic regime' (1977-1986) placed a number of restrictions on popular democracy but did not return to the military-bureaucratic regime of 1958-1973. These political development periods also reflect socio-economic development of Thailand as well. Socio-economic development helped to gradually generate extrabureaucratic forces in Thai society. As a consequence, these extra-bureaucratic forces including the labor unions became active in politics and helped to move the Thai system away from a bureaucratic polity and towards a democratic polity. In this

process, the labor unions have gained strength and autonomy. We begin a more detailed examination of Thai political history.

From Absolute Monarchy to Bureaucratic Polity

This section provides a general background of the history of Thai politics from the end of the absolute monarchy on the June 24, 1932 until the end of the Pibun regime in 1958. The significance of this period was the emergence of the bureaucracy as a new wielder of political power after absolute monarchical rule was abolished. Political power which was once in the hand of the absolute monarch was smoothly transferred to the bureaucrats. The king was persuaded to become a constitutional monarch. This conveniently maintained the symbols of royal authority at the service of bureaucratic authority. According to Girling, "in Thailand the bureaucracy was the inheritor of royal authority; the 'change in the system of government' in 1932 simply meant the continuation of the bureaucratic system under its own leaders--senior military officers and civilian officials--rather than under kings and princes."¹ As a consequence, the political struggle for power, after the end of the absolute monarch, became the struggle of factions

¹John L. Girling, The Bureaucratic Polity in Modernizing Societies (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), p. 12.

within the bureaucracy.² In this period the political elites also tried to adopt at least the forms of democratic government. However, the parliament was the creature of the leading military and civilian bureaucrat-politicians--the "promoters" of the 1932 coup. It had limited power with only a partly elected membership and had no political parties in it.³ The "promoters" of the 1932 coup emphasized the formalities of democratic processes rather than democratic principles. The National Assembly and general elections served as a source of legitimacy. However, in reality, the National Assembly did not act independently from the Executive, namely, the Executive still controlled the majority of the Assembly. Furthermore, the Executive was heavily dominated by the bureaucrats, especially the military. The military coup had been a significant means of assuming power by military. Hence, the National Assembly tended to be subservient to the bureaucracy which was in turn influenced by the military. As a consequence, political competition was concentrated among the top elites of the bureaucracy especially the military. However, political elites, both the military leaders and high ranks civil servants, needed a parliament and a constitution in order to legitimize their exercise of power. For that purpose a general election was arranged after the successful military

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid.

coup. Therefore, from 1932 to 1958 the forms of democratic rule were implemented in Thailand. This experience was totally abandoned when General Sarit Thanarat led a military coup d'etat in October 1958. He abolished parliament and ruled the country by martial law. His style of rule was followed by his associate and successor General Thanom during most of his regime, until it was overthrown by a student-led popular uprising in October 1973.

We turn now to a more detailed discussion of the 1932-1958 period, beginning with the 1932 revolution which ushered it in. The "People's Party" comprised of middle ranks of military officers, civil servants and some Western educated Thais, staged a revolution on June 24, 1932 to end monarchy. The goal of the "People's party" was to establish a constitutional monarchy. However, an ideal constitutionalism was not implemented due to the fact that the 1932 Revolution could not change the power structure of Thai traditional society. For our purposes, a "traditional society" may be defined as one in which: (1) social practices are revered and honored primarily because they are old and long-established; (2) using Max Weber's terminology, the means and consequences of achieving certain ends are judged with regard to long-established traditions; and (3) an aristocratic class or group is regarded as the rightful interpreter or maker of the rules governing society. Organized interest groups which are the essence of pluralist

democracy did not exist. A bureaucracy which had existed under the monarchy was the best organized and strongest institution, along side the military, to move more actively into political power which had been dominated by the absolute monarch. Such environment thus opened the opportunity for the bureaucracy which was the strongest group in society to take political power within their hands. Riggs asserted that following the 1932 Revolution the goal of the "People's Party" was "to place commoner officials in the cockpit of power and to organize a polity that would rule on behalf of the bureaucracy."⁴ This means that political power would belong to the common Thais rather than the Monarch, the princes or the aristocrats. The bureaucracy was intended to serve as a moving force of Thai politics, particularly in administration. Consequently, it should be no surprise, then, that "since 1932 the bureaucratic elites have been the prime movers in political institutional arrangements under different constitutions. Because of periodic changes in the rules of the game, the scope of political participation, and the extent to which civil and political liberties are guaranteed have varied according to

⁴Fred W. Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), p. 312.

the nature of the regime."⁵

That Thai society was not ready to implement democracy as a system of government was a matter of concern to foreign advisors, King Rama VI, and senior princes. Some of their concerns were:

There was no middle class in Siam [Siam was the name of Thailand before it was changed by the Pibun government]. The Siamese peasants took little or no interest in public affairs. Most of the electorate were uneducated; hence to set up a parliament with real power without an educated electorate to control it would only invite trouble and corruption...Not only was a real democracy very unlikely to succeed in Siam, it might even be harmful to the interests of the people. The parliament would be entirely dominated by the Chinese. (And) the great bulk of the people of Siam were as yet not trained in political or economic thought. As for the students who returned from Britain, Europe, and the United States, their idea of democracy was half-baked, and their Western ideas were often superficial and misunderstood.⁶

Later events would demonstrate the wisdom of this comment on the inception of Thai democracy. However, the warning was not well taken among Western educated Thais of that time.

In the period of the 1932 revolution there were not yet other societal institutions organized separately and independently from the bureaucracy. Furthermore, the new regime did not try to institutionalize democracy in Thailand by encouraging the formation of other political groups. On

⁵Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi-Democracy" in Democracy in Developing Country: Asia ed. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), p. 307.

⁶Ibid., pp. 306-307.

the contrary,

[W]hat was institutionalized, instead, was the political role of the bureaucratic elites. The new leadership relied upon the bureaucracy to play a leading role in educating and mobilizing the mass to participate in elections as well as to learn about democracy through the symbol of constitution.⁷

That happened because after the end of absolute monarchy, a political vacuum emerged, and not only the civil bureaucrats but also the military bureaucrats wished to move into that vacuum. Without historical roots, democracy lacked legitimacy in Thai society, and popular commitment to defend democracy was weak. Logically, it provided the military with more opportunity to seize the political power by force. In other words, military coups were a consequence of the fact that the overthrow of the absolute monarchy created a power vacuum which no other legitimate political institution could through a transfer of legitimacy from the absolute monarch. The military and civil-servants successfully took over the political power into their hands.⁸

However, the country adopted the 1932 Constitution as the rule of the game. It also should be noted that from 1932 to 1945 the only formal political institution in Thailand was a unicameral legislature composed of two categories of members--half elected and half appointed. The People's Party

⁷Ibid., p. 308.

⁸Likhit Dhiravegin, Political Attitudes of the Bureaucratic Elite and Modernization in Thailand (Bangkok: Thai Wattana, 1973), p. 16.

who made the June 1932 Revolution did not find it necessary to transform itself into a political party since its leading members and supporters were already appointed members of the National Assembly. Political parties in Thailand, therefore, emerged as late as 1946 and were only recognized as legal entities in 1955.

The 1932 Constitution provided considerable stability for the regime, as evidenced by the fact that factional rivalry and competition for power among the military did not result in the abolishment of either the constitution or the parliament. It was not until Sarit came to power in 1958 that both the constitution and parliament were abolished and the country was placed under martial law.

The National assembly during 1932 to 1945 was, the center of a formalistic constitutionalism which was utilized by cliques in the People's Party. Since half of the assembly members were mainly military and civilian officers, the legislative process became an extended arm of, and provided an additional function for, the bureaucracy. From the beginning of constitutional rule, the role of the elected members of parliament was oriented toward internal legislative activities rather than to act as a major policy making institution based on popular participation and competition for major positions of government power. Therefore, the electoral process in Thailand, which began as early as 1933, did not lead to the recruitment of political

leadership at the top. It was only a tool to legitimize the political system and process in which competition for power was not linked with the electorate but with the factions in the military and civilian bureaucrats.⁹

The military-bureaucratic elites within the "People's Party," the only political grouping in the society, were not truly united. Factionalism between the junior and senior military officers was evident soon after the June 1932 Revolution. Only six years later, the junior military officers led by Pibun successfully took over power from the senior group.¹⁰ The military bureaucrats rapidly increased their power in relative to the civil bureaucrats, especially after their leader Luang Pibun became Defense Minister in late 1934 and prime minister in 1938. The domination of the military over the civilian bureaucrats was also due to the fact that the latter did not develop itself into a broad based political party, its power and influence gradually declined while that of the military increased.¹¹

The elites in the People's Party, and later Pibun's style of rule did not in any way affect the formal existence of the constitution; instead they made use of it in many ways. For example; the constitution and constitutional

⁹Chai-Anan, op. cit., p. 308.

¹⁰David Elliot, Thailand: Origins of Military Rule (London: Zed Press Ltd., 1978), pp, 86-87.

¹¹Chai-anan, op. cit., p. 308.

symbols were utilized to distinguish between ancien and the new regime; the mobilization of the National Assembly to pass bills that gave more power to the government; in 1942 the government under Pibun amended the constitution to extend the tenure of the parliament for two years, and in 1944 the tenure was extended for another two years. The utility of the constitution as a symbol of legitimacy protected the regime and helped legitimize factional rivalry and competition for power among the military and civil bureaucrats. Nevertheless, the constitution and the parliament were relatively stable. Although there were eight cabinets in a period of six years (1932-1938), there were only two prime ministers, compared with the much more turbulent period three decades later (1969-1979) when there were ten cabinets with six prime ministers under four constitutions.¹²

Constitutional rule between 1932-1946, was largely a reflection of bureaucratic supremacy, especially the military. In this period, the governments did not seriously educate and encourage people at large to participate in politics. At the same time, political parties were not legally allowed to engage in politics and voting method in the first election was indirect.¹³ Political participation

¹²Ibid., p. 309.

¹³Each village elected its representatives; the village representatives chose those of the districts, who in turn chose the representatives of the province.

was an elite-mobilized action in which officials of the Interior Ministry at the village and district levels played a significant role, a pattern not dissimilar to that existing in contemporary Thai politics. Hence early universal suffrage in Thailand did not lead to meaningful political participation or the emergence of political organizations as a precondition for democracy. Moreover, universal suffrage was something given to the people by the state, to people not familiar with the principles and the process of the new electoral system. Consequently, the bureaucrats could mobilize the election and then dominate the National Assembly. With little grass roots understanding or support of constitutional rule, an authoritarian military rule under Field Marshal Pibun was not difficult to accomplish.

An important feature of the new military rule was a number of military officers who became cabinets members. During Pibun's regime from 1938 to 1944 there were seven cabinets with an average of 51 percent of military officers in the cabinet council.¹⁴ That was only the beginning. Pibun, in his later years in power, replaced constitutional rule after he had consolidated political power within his faction and introduced ultra-nationalistic policies that greatly effected civil liberty. However, there was no challenge to the government's policies as being

¹⁴Chai-Anan, op. cit., p. 309.

unconstitutional, either by the parliament or by the press. This reflected the weakness of democratic principle and the inherently autocratic traits in Thai society, which were utilized to a great extent by Pibun and his principal political advisers.

The National Assembly began to play a prominent role in the political system immediately following the end of World War II, Pibun's resigned from premiership in July 1945 and a constitutional government was installed. Now the assembly became an institution for recruiting leadership of the country. Political parties were allowed to function in early 1946. A new constitution was drafted and replace the 1932 Constitution in May 1946. The new constitution was an attempt by the temporary civilian coalition of Pridi and Khuang to establish new institutional arrangements in order to minimize the power of the military. It provided for a bicameral legislature: the House of Representative, to be elected directly, and the Senate to be elected indirectly by the House. At the first election of the Senate, most of the candidates were the appointed members of the former National Assembly who were Pridi's supporters.

Immediately after the end of the World War II, cleavages within the "People's Party" were divided into three factions, namely the military faction under Pibun, the civil faction under Pridi, and the traditionalist faction

under Khuang and Seni.¹⁵

At first Pridi's group which represented the civilian interregnum won the race but was replaced by Pibun through a military coup in November 1947. The government under the leadership of Pridi could be seen as the one which was comparatively more democratic: a form of government which came to power through free and competitive elections. However, the system was highly unstable. Change of cabinets and government were frequent. Within approximately 2 years there were eight cabinets and five different prime ministers. Some important factors which contributed to that instability were; the economic hardship as the result of the war; the competition among civilian politicians; charges of corruption; finally, the mysterious death of King Ananda which triggered the military coup in November 1947. These factors shook the civilian government under Luang Thamrong Navasawat. Pibun once again launched a successful military coup and assumed premiership. His return to power resulted in the demise of the dominant role of the National Assembly.

After the November 1947 military coup. Pibun initiated an economic development policy which led him and his followers to become involved with various business groups (see below). They built up their economic power base by setting up their own business firms, took control over state

¹⁵David Wilson, Politics in Thailand (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 22.

enterprises and government joint venture companies, and earned free shares from the Chinese companies. These economic power bases made the military bureaucrats and their civilian associates far stronger than any other group in the country. Hence, they were the sole political group dominating Thai politics in this period. In other words, Pibun successfully consolidated political and economic power for the first time in Thai history.

However, this active involvement in business ventures resulted in the division of the group into two competing cliques--popularly known as the "Rajakru," under the leadership of Police General Phao Sriyanond, and "Sisao Devas" clique, under the leadership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. Each controlled more than thirty companies in banking and finance, industry, and commerce. This split between the police chief Phao, and army chief Sarit, was seen as an attempt by Pibun to maintain his power by manipulating and balancing off these two factions. He was unsuccessful, however, and Sarit led a coup that ousted both Pibun and Phao. This coup mainly prompted by a succession conflict. There was no significant change in the political system.

In conclusion, one may describe this 1932-1958 period as a period of struggle for national power in Thailand. The struggle was limited within the realm of the bureaucracy where the military exercised leadership and utilized the

system of constitutionalism in order to provide legitimacy for the system. The National Assembly acted more or less as an extended arm of the executive, which was dominated by the bureaucrats. As a consequence, political parties and other political organizations could not function as an extrabureaucratic force. Due to the weakness of the extrabureaucratic groups, the bureaucracy could simply move into the power vacuum left by the demise of the absolute monarchy. The politics of Thailand then was characterized by Riggs as a 'bureaucratic polity.'

The 'Bureaucratic Polity' Period: 1958 to October 1973.

Sarit's rule (1958-1963) was characterized as a dictatorship, as benevolent despotism, and as military rule. However, as a noted scholar of this period observed, Sarit's coup of October 20, 1958 marked the beginning of a new political order which endured until at least the early 1970s. It was argued that what Sarit did, in effect, was to overthrow a whole political system inherited from 1932, and to create one which could be termed more "Thai" in character.¹⁶ To be specific, Sarit had integrated Thai value, i.e. patron-client value, into his political conduct which emphasized more on the moral obligation of the leader upon his subordinates and the people. This social value was

¹⁶Thak Chaleomtiarana, "Thailand": The Politics of Despotic Paternalism (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1979), p. 140-141.

not significant since the 1932 Revolution until Sarit came to power.

Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat led a successful military coup d'etat in October 1958 and ruled the country by military dictatorship until he died in 1963. Field Marshal Thanom Kittikhachorn followed Sarit's footsteps until his regime was overthrown by a Student led Popular Uprising on 14-16 October 1973. During this period of 15 years Thailand was under military rule. Politics was really in the hands of military and its junior civil servants. No extrabureaucratic force had emerged or attempted to counter the power of military led bureaucracy. The only exception was the outlaw Communist Party of Thailand. The party chose the Maoist way of struggle and fought the government by arms in rural area.

Clark Neher described the politics of Thailand since the end of absolute monarchy by June 1932 Revolution as follow; "Since 1932, the kingdom has been governed by senior ministers and military generals. In the last 52 years, civilian rule has been experienced for only 8 years; in the other 44 years, military leaders have held the major position of power: Prime Minister, minister of defense, and minister of interior. More than half of all Cabinet officers since 1932 have at the same time been military officers."¹⁷

¹⁷Clark D. Neher, "Political Forces in Thailand," Current History 83:497 (December 1984), p. 8.

The composition of the formal center of power -- the cabinet or the council of ministry -- illustrates the supremacy of the military. Of all cabinet ministers between 1932 and 1958, nearly three-quarters had occupied posts in the civil service or had previous military careers. Only a very small fraction of the ministers (13 out of more than 200) were clearly non-bureaucrats. The pattern continued until 1874. In that period, 141 bureaucrats (including 38 military officers) held cabinet posts while there were only four non-bureaucrats. Army officers had a virtual monopoly on the key post of prime minister, minister of interior and minister of defence. While civilian held the post of prime minister less than nine of forty-eight years, army leaders held the post for some thirty nine of those years. When army officers held the post of prime minister, they usually also held the defense portfolio. Pibun, Sarit and Thanom held both posts for fifteen, five and eight-year terms, respectively. The ministry of defense has invariably been a military officer, even under civilian prime ministers. Only in the brief period from 1975 to 1976, the democratic period, did non-bureaucrats (35) outnumber officials (23) in the cabinet of council of ministry.¹⁸ The Table below shows the occupational distribution of Thai cabinets during 1963-1973 under Sarit and Thanom regime. As we will clearly seen that the bureaucrats had dominated the cabinet post in the

¹⁸Girling, Thailand: Society and Politics, pp. 128-29.

"bureaucratic polity" period.

Table 1.
Occupational Distribution of Thai Cabinets, 1963-1988

Head of government	Period Year in office	Total	(1) Bureau- crat or others	(2) Business men	Percent	
					(1)	(2)
Sarit	2-5-1963 to 12-8-1963	14	14	0	100	0
Thanom I.	12-9-1963 to 3-11-1968	18	17	1	94.4	5.6
Thanom II	3-7-1968 to 11-17-1971	25	24	1	96.0	4.0
Thanom III	12-18-1972 to 10-14-1973	28	25	3	89.3	10.7

Source: Pisan Suriyamongkol, Institutionalization of Democratic Political Process in Thailand Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988, p. 39.

The preeminent political force in Thailand since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy has been the military. Few extrabureaucratic forces challenge its authority, and the military has been successful in crushing all potential opponents. The Bowaradej rebellion of June 1933 was crushed by Pibun and the army. That eliminated potential opposition from the palace. Fear of communism was also evident, as indicated by the sharp response to Pridi's 1933 economic plan. The fear became the dominant concern in the late 1940s and by the 1970s all opposition, including the workers movement, was labelled communist; it was isolated and defeated.

When political parties were allowed to function, they did so only under the domination of military leaders. This was evident during 1969-1971, for example when Thanom, Praphat, Krit, and other top generals controlled the government's United Thai People's Party. Control over the press has also been evident.

Ethnic Chinese, who controlled business groups were outside the central positions of power. Whatever chance Chinese businessmen might have had for unilateral growth of politically relevant economic power was preempted by the fact that the military elite has participated actively in Chinese enterprises over the past two decades, hence co-opting another potential competitor.

For years, the students were also co-opted into at least tacit support of the military regime. For their future, they hoped for opportunities to serve in the bureaucracy which was believed to be the most prestigious career. The largely rural citizenry was isolated and passive in terms of national issues. The labor movement was weak and unorganized under martial law.¹⁹

Finally, the military government could easily subdue the insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT); it was not, therefore, a serious challenge. David Morell and

¹⁹David Morell and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publisher, Inc., 1981), p. 57.

Chai-anan summarized the domination of military in the politics of Thailand in their own words;

In summary, since the usual sources of political organization--a politicized public, a dominant monarchy, an independent civil bureaucracy, effective political parties, politically influential business and labor communities, a powerful press, a concerned religious institution, or endearingly activist students--have been either nonexistent or weak in Thailand, the military has continued to be the only organized segment of society willing and able to occupy chief positions of authority.²⁰

Neher also asserts that the Thai political system during this period was limited to activities within the bureaucracy; extrabureaucratic organizations did not participate in the political decision making process. That is to say, policies have been made within bureaucratic organizations. Organizations other than the bureaucracy play a subordinate role in Thai politics.

The Thai situation could not fit within the Western model of political system. The categories designed for the Western political system seemed of little consequence although there were counterparts in the Thai case. In the Thai system, there were few inputs and little feedback. Indeed, the political system itself seemed to be the totality of politics: a small, politicized elite dominated the political mass of the population. Politics amounted to little more than competition among powerful cliques of politicians and bureaucrats aiming for the highest offices.

²⁰Ibid.

This is well illustrated in Wilson's conclusion, where he observes that "the ideal of popular sovereignty and representative government failed to take life, and politics was without moral focus. The government - ruling in an ambiguous moral position - has become a kind of bureaucratized anarchy. The various departments of the government seek to expand their activities and compete for the resources of the state."²¹

The bureaucratic polity was derived from various factors. One of them was that the bureaucracy was the most organized and strongest group at the time they took power from the absolute monarch in June 1932 Revolution. Secondly, common Thai citizens believed that ruling was the duty of the upper classes and bureaucrats were in that category. This belief was partly reinforced because of religious and cultural traditions. Thirdly, bureaucracy had been the best way for career advancement, hence it recruited the best men into its system. These circumstances helped to strengthening bureaucratic power in the country so that no other groups from outside could challenge its supremacy. Fourthly, the industrialization process and the socioeconomic level of the country was in an early stage, society was not so differentiated. Largely the economy of Thailand depended on agricultural products, and more than 80 per cent of people were in the agriculture sector. These

²¹David A. Wilson, op. cit., p. 278.

people were also passive in politics, and it was most unlikely that they would challenge bureaucratic domination. Interest groups functioning as extrabureaucratic forces emerged later. These new groups asserted their considerable political power in Thai political system later, a matter that we will discuss in more detail in connection with socioeconomic change later in this chapter. Finally, the business class created by capitalist development in the country held economic power but was very late to insert their political power, through political parties. This was so because the class was not made up of indigenous citizens. Hence, the Marxist perspective which would expect that the class which held economic power would play a determining role in politics was not true in Thailand at least in the 'bureaucratic polity' period.

The alien status of Overseas-Chinese businessmen who held economic power but stayed out of politics had contributed to the durability of the bureaucratic polity in Thailand. Most of the local entrepreneurs in Thailand have been ethnic Chinese. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, according to Laothamatas calculation, ethnic Chinese accounted for 70 percent of both "large" and "small" business owners or managers in Bangkok.²² The Chinese did

²²Anek Laothamatas, "Business Associations in Thailand: A New Pattern of State-Business Intermediation in a Democratizing Polity." (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1989), p. 7.

not form a class and challenge the power of bureaucracy. When they were once oppressed by the Thai state during Pibun's nationalism,²³ they sought protection from bureaucrats rather than challenging them. Thai authorities could treat Chinese-businessmen at whim and no one knew when his particular kind of business might be reserved for Thai or subjected to strict control, when the lease of his shop or title to his business property might be challenged, or when his business might be inspected by revenue officials, or raided by the police.²⁴

The bureaucracy in turn has not tried to, and probably has not have capable of, exercising broad control in economic matters. "Leading Thai bureaucrats, whether military or civilian, have shown neither the will nor the ability to "take over" the economy; on the other hand, they cannot simply rely on market forces or harmony of interests (private sector-public sector, rural-urban, Thai-Chinese) to provide them with necessary sustenent."²⁵ Ethnic Chinese who controlled economic power did not form organizations to

²³John S. Girling, The Bureaucratic Polity in Modernizing Societies: Similarities, Differences, and Prospects in the ASEAN Region Occasional Paper No. 64, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: Maruzen Asia Pte. Ltd., 1981), p. 29.

²⁴Skinner, Leadership and Power, p. 191. quote in Girling Thailand, p. 79.

²⁵John L. S. Girling, The Bureaucratic Polity in Modernizing Societies: Similarities, Differences, and Prospects in the ASEAN Region, p. 7.

represent their interests in the politics of the country. These entrepreneurs were brought into convenient partnerships and patron-client relationship was established between men in state function and business men. Apart from their lack of citizenship rights the overseas-Chinese were poorly educated and occasionally harassed by nationalistic-minded governments. Business in Thailand chose to keep a low political profile.

They affected policy only defensively in a covert, particularistic fashion, and their effect was felt chiefly in the implementation, not the formulation of government policies. The prevailing forms of business influence were the outright giving of bribes or the creation of patron-client tied with bureaucratic leaders, principally by inviting these people to join their executive boards or to hold stock on their companies at no cost. As late as 1972, twelve of sixteen commercial banks in Thailand, for example, still had military or political leaders on their boards of directors.²⁶

By so doing the Chinese benefitted from the official protection and connections of their military patrons, which opened up further business opportunities through access to licenses, contracts and credit, while the officers derived their share of the proceeds.²⁷

The relationship referred to in the previous paragraph provided a fertile soil for bureaucratic polity to take root in. The military and leading civil servants enjoyed wealth

²⁶Akira Suehiro. Capital Accumulation and Industrial Development in Thailand (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1985), p. 40 of section 5.

²⁷Girling, op. cit., p. 29.

by providing protection for the Chinese business. Moreover, since the latter were not indigenous Thai, they had no legitimate claim to political power. Therefore, it was in their interest to perform the function of client for leading military and civil servants. Since the business group which is supposed to be the strongest interest group, did not form itself as an organization, the bureaucracy then enjoyed the monopoly of political power.

The fact that there is no countervailing indigenous bourgeoisie in Thailand, and that the Chinese, for all their economic power, cannot dominate the polity but have had to reach an accommodation with it, confirms Max Weber's view of the "patrimonial" state. The introduction of a money economy, he points out, rather than weakening bureaucratic traditionalism, in effect strengthened it. "This was because the money economy, associated with prebends (an office-holder's prerogative to receive yields from state property or other public income) created special profit opportunities for the dominant stratum." It "rendered paramount their own interest," Weber goes on, "in preserving those economic conditions so decisive for their own profit."²⁸

During the heyday of the 'bureaucratic polity' under Sarit Thanarat from 1958 until 1963, political parties were outlawed, elected parliaments were banned, trade unions were

²⁸Max Weber, "The Feudal and Prebendal State," The Religion of China (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 61.

proscribed, and outspoken critics of the government were jailed. This dominance by the state apparatus was greatly facilitated by the weakness of groups and classes outside the state. Thailand was an overwhelmingly rural society in the 1950s, yet there were no organizations to represent the farmers politically, and the political passivity of the rural population meant that there would be no challenge to bureaucratic dominance. As noted, the bureaucracy also dominated the relatively small business community. Thailand's largely Chinese business community was able to survive, Riggs suggests, "only by continually buying protection from the Thai elite." "Individual businessmen would be permitted by influential officials to carry on their activities, provided they contributed financially to the private income of their protectors and patrons in the government."²⁹ This system did not prevent individual business families from becoming wealthy, but business people as a group did not have a great deal of influence, and individual businessmen were very vulnerable to capricious decisions by the bureaucracy.³⁰

The lack of any significant challenge from extrabureaucratic forces, the military bureaucrats

²⁹Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity, p. 251.

³⁰Ansil Ramsay and Wiwat Mungkandi, ed., Thailand-U.S. Relations: Changing Political, Strategic, and Economic Factors (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1988), p. 17.

successfully monopolized the political power of the country. The result of such domination was that politics of Thailand took a form of military dictatorship with very little chance of a representative form of government where the government came to power through free and competitive general election. The political system during the 'bureaucratic period' was closed and the politics of the country could be understood by looking at the struggle of various cliques within the bureaucracy itself. However, such characteristic of the Thai polity has been changed. Military and bureaucrats have no longer been the sole political power since the military dictatorship was overthrown by student led uprising in October 1973. As a result of military retreat, Thailand had experience a full but short time democratic rule in the period so-called "democratic period 1973-1976" which now we turn to.

Democratic Period: October 1973- October 1976

During this period there was a set back or retreat of 'bureaucratic polity,' since the military rule was terminated by a Student Revolution on October 14-16, 1973. The students with popular support demonstrated against the long established military government in October 1973. This popular uprising forced the military leaders to leave the country. Consequently, an interim civilian government under Sanya Dhammasakdi, a former Chief Justice, was installed in

order to draft a new constitution and carried out a general election. Logically, the period of Sanya government, political freedom was highly observed. It was the golden time for extrabureaucratic forces to come to play. Democratic governments had been experienced throughout the period. For workers the period was the starting point for the development of autonomous groups in the politics of the country. Workers were restrained again when there was a brief return of a military-backed civilian dictatorship under Thanin (1976-1977). However, experiences had given them confidence in their own strength and they continued their development as an autonomous entity and as an extrabureaucratic force.

As described in the preceding period that military dictatorship under the leadership of Thanom Kittikhachorn ruled the country in such a way that the political system did not open enough for newly created groups and forces such as business groups, urban middle class, trade union and labor movement, and the student movement which created by the rapid change of socio-economy that have taken place in the past three decades. However, these groups were not active in politics in the "bureaucratic polity" period. Only the students actively campaigned against the dictatorship government. They formed the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) in 1968 and three years later this center became more active in political activities. They constantly

denounced the military rule and asked for democracy. Their activities were wide supported by various groups, the press, and people all walk of lives. When the center rally a massive demonstration in early October 1973, the military dictatorship under the leadership of Thanom's clique was overthrown. The incident was well known as the "Student Revolution on October 14-16, 1973."

The Student Revolution on October 14-16, 1973 ended the nearly two decades of military rule in Thailand. Military and civil-servants and hence bureaucratic polity was gradually replaced. The military was set back and was humiliated. A power vacuum resulted after the long time monopoly of political power by the military came to an end. The politics of the country was then opened to groups outside the bureaucratic realm. The abrupt opening of the political arena after almost two decades of an authoritarian rule opened opportunity for various groups to come into politics: hundreds of students, peasant, and worker in politics. The political atmosphere was notable for greater freedom of political activities and greater freedom of expression than in the earlier period. But this also brought problems. Thai society and economy which had been subjected to almost two decades of martial law and dictatorial rule yielded their evil fruits in the form of a wide range of

problems."³¹ During the three years after 1973 there were 1,333 strikes and 322 demonstrations.³²

By 1974 the pattern of political compliance and the achievement of consensus between established client-patron factions had changed. In the period from 1974-1976, mobilization, confrontation and pressure group politics became the pattern in the highly volatile political climate of Thailand. Labor unions, farmers and students confronted business interests, government officials and landowners as they expressed their grievances and made demands. The government was constantly criticized, and by 1975 leading student activists clearly rejected the Western-type democratic process of government. Disillusioned by the slow process of change, they rejected it as a means to achieve the social reforms deemed necessary for Thai society. There were indications that students aspired to a new ideology which would serve as a guide to solve problems of Thai society. They began distributing socialist ideology especially the Maoist line of ideology. The underlying motive was their disappointment with the ongoing parliamentary democracy and inertia and inefficiency of the

³¹Pornpirom Iamtham, "The Student-Led Democratic Movement after the 14 October 1973 Incident and Its Relations with the Communist Party of Thailand" Asian Review 1 (1987), p. 8.

³²Chai-anan Samudavanija and Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Thailand," in The Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia ed., Zakaria Ahmad and Harold Crouch, (Singapore, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 89.

sakdina-type bureaucracy. The new ideology discovered by these enthusiastic students was socialism which, in essence, proposed that the aim in life was to serve the suffering mass.³³ Thailand was beset by a multitude of problems -- conflict, violence, leftist ideology, and social and political polarization. Then came the fall of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to the communists. To make matters worse, a proliferation of political parties made the infant Thai democracy all the more unstable. In the 1975 election, 42 parties contested and 22 won seats in the House. No party had majority votes and coalition government was formed. With instability and confrontation, the weak and faction-ridden civilian government lost control of the situation in the crisis of October 1976, following Field Marshal Thanom's return to Bangkok. It was only a matter of time until the military again intervened -- on October 6, 1976.³⁴

For Girling, the impact of the October Revolution was felt in four main areas. First, the army, mainstay of the old system, had suffered a severe psychological shock, which inhibited it for a time from directly intervening in politics. The second effect flowed from the first. As a result of the "power vacuum" after October 1973, political

³³Pornpirom Iamtham, op. cit., p. 11.

³⁴ Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Democracy in Thailand: A Case of a Stable Semi-Democratic Regime," (Paper prepared for the Conference on the Comparative Study of Democracy in Developing Nations, Stanford University, Stanford, California, December 19-21, 1985), p. 18.

parties, generally of conservative tendencies, began to play an important part in the political process. Third, new forms of economic power had emerged, reflecting the more complex and differentiated development of the Thai economy. Finally, there was both organized and spontaneous activity by formerly "submerged" groups: students, labor unions, and, for the first time, independent peasant associations.³⁵

Workers, on their part, set up labor unions and became active in defending their interests and in politics. Industrial disputes and strikes were frequent. There were 399 of them during October-December 1973; and during January-December 1974 there occurred 477 industrial disputes and 357 strikes.³⁶

A further significant change during the democratic period was the growing importance of business elites in politics, not just in the traditional informal, personal, patron-client relationship between generals or officials and selected Chinese businessmen, but in a more direct, formal, and specific manner. Bankers, industrialists in private or government-sponsored enterprises, and traders have always been called upon to provide "subsidies" for politicians and to finance party operations. But after 1973 business men both in Bangkok and the provinces were taking their place as of right in party politics. Given the traditional Thai

³⁵Girling, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³⁶ Pornpirom Iamtham, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

disregard for business as an inferior or alien activity in contrast to service in the bureaucracy or owning land, participation by businessmen in politics denoted a clear change of attitude.³⁷

Semi-Democratic Period: 1977-1987.

The period shows the process of institutionalization of democratic rule in the country due to the military has to compromise with new emergence of extrabureaucratic force. It has been true that the military and civil-servants as a part of 'bureaucratic polity' are still the dominant ones among groups in Thai politics. However, such a domination does not take the form as it did during the heyday of 'bureaucratic period.' Military can not easily exclude new emergence extrabureaucratic forces, created by socioeconomic development that have taken place in the past two decades, from sharing political power in the national level of the country. On the other hand, those new forces have not been strong enough to take the power within their hands and keep bureaucracy in check. No part can exclude each other out of politics of Thailand is the recent situation.

At present time, Thai political system could be assumed as a "restricted democracy model" since it is not yet acquire fully democratic system as practices in countries in Western Europe and North America. A restricted democracy, is

³⁷Girling, op. cit., p. 197-98.

"a regime which has competitive, formally democratic elections, but in which the power apparatus retains the capacity to intervene to correct an undesirable state of affairs"³⁸ Such democracies emerge in countries where "the expansion of the state has preceded the dominance of industrial capitalism," and as a consequence the bourgeoisie or business class has been weak, and the working class is often both small and subject to substantial manipulation. Formal competitive elections can be held because they are a useful means legitimization and "the ruling power bloc does not believe the political inclusion of the masses in formal competitive elections is a serious threat to its domination. In the worst case, the ruling bloc has the power to reverse the outcome of the democratic competition."³⁹ What is critical for the continued functioning of restricted democracy is a rapid enough rate of economic growth to ensure the maintenance of "capitalist accumulation" and moderate income gains for the urban middle class and working class.⁴⁰

In the Thai case the "semi-democratic" regime would mean a democratic form of government which allow a great deal of influence in the government by bureaucracy

³⁸Hyug Baeg Im, "The Rise of Bureaucratic Authoritarianism in South Korea," World Politics 39:2 (January, 1987), p. 238.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p 237.

especially from the military. The influences of the latter could assumed forms of either legal or practices, or both. For example, the 1977 Constitution allowed bureaucrats to hold political office simultaneously. However, by the same Constitution, after it had been put in effect for 4 years, the bureaucrat is not allow to assume political post unless he/she resigns from the bureaucracy.

The Constitution allows the appointed Senate a right to vote equal to members of the 'House of Representatives' on important issues and agenda such as vote of no-confidence and budgetary issues, is another example of semi-democratic form of government in Thailand since the Senates were dominated by military and civil servant's elites, etc.⁴¹ General Prem Tinsulanonda in his time in power of about 8 years had exploited this practice by appointing his men to the National Assembly. Hence, his government "semi-democratic government" did not have to depend on the sole support of political parties. We turn now to the period in more detail.

The "semi-democratic period" starts from the end of military-backed civilian dictatorship under the leader of Thanin Kraivixian who was in power during October 1976 to October 1977. His government ruled the country with strong and rigid conservative ideology. No compromise with other

⁴¹ See Roger Kershaw, "Thailand's Return to Limited Democracy" Asian Affairs x (old series vol 66) (October 1979), pp.304-313.

kind of ideas had been made under this government. Such a rigid policy was not appropriate to Thai socio-economic process that it has been changed to a stage that various groups also need to participate in politics of the country. A group of military led by Admiral Sa-ngad Chaloryoo made a coup and put General Kriangsakdi Chomanand in power with a promise that the new government will arrange for general election within one year.

Kriangsakdi kept his promise. A general election was arranged and Kriangsakdi also managed to come back to the Premiership again. However, because of a rapid inflation and the hopelessness of managing the increasing oil price his rule collapsed. Interestingly enough, instead of dissolving the Parliament and arranged another general election, Kriangsakdi chose to resign. General Prem Tinsulanonda the man who Kriangsakdi brought from the Commander of Second Army from the Northeast part of Thailand, assumed the post.

Prem had been in power for 8 years with the democratic form of government. That was the longest that democratic government ever existed in Thai history. Prem's governments had weathered so many problems, so much so that they were quite exceptional cases that the government had not been toppled down by military coup. Indeed, his government had survived two military attempts. Furthermore, during his regime, there was a world recession which Thailand was also hard hit by it. Various middle business enterprises

collapsed, unemployment increased. plus the soaring of inflation. Yet his government still held the power with tough policy in money spending. The result was that the economy of the country had grown up while neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines had their economic growth equal to zero or some even minus.

The survival of Prem's governments led to various explanations of his government by various scholars on Thai politics. As mentioned earlier the explanation could be classified into two groups; 'bureaucratic polity' and 'bourgeois polity.'

Prem's governments did open some room for groups outside bureaucracy to participate in politics, especially the business groups. For example, not only the percentage of businessmen directly involved in politics in term of number of Cabinets and Member of Parliament and Senate, the government set up a Joint Public/ Private Sector Consultative Committee (JPPSCC) chaired by Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda. The Committee meets regularly on a monthly basis.⁴² Theoretically, it is supposed to give advice to the government on the country's economic problems, however, it is also understood as a formal channel so business' interests can be directly conveyed to the decision-making bodies. Tripartite committees on labor

⁴² "4th Anniversary of The Joint Public Private Sector Consultative Committee (JPPSCC)," The Nation, 2 February 1985, p. 5.

problem were also established during his government. The Labor Court which provides labor to participate in judging industrial disputes is one of them. However, labor's role in politics were less than they were in the 'democratic period.' It was basically because during the 1973-1976 'democratic period,' the labor movement was associated with so-called the "left wing" movement which was politically labelled as the communists. After the government succeeded in addressing the communist insurgency problem, the left wing movement became unpopular. Thus, the labor movement had to be more cautious in their political activities. Without question, it was clear that the role of trade unions in politics took a conservative line, they were not even active in politics during Prem's regime. Ideologically, radicals labor leaders who were accepted in the 'Democratic period' had not played important role in labor movement. Some of these phenomena led to the conclusion of scholars who believed in 'bureaucratic polity' model that the Thai polity was still basically bureaucratic yet better response to various new emerging forces and the co-optation and mobilization of these groups have been the main policies of elites in bureaucratic polity, namely, high ranking in military and its junior partner--the civil servant.

Although new forces have emerged as a result of socio-economic changes in the past two decades, they have been under close surveillance by the bureaucratic elites. "The

privileged organized groups such as the Bankers' Association, the Association of Industries, and the Chamber of Commerce have been given access to decision-making process in economic spheres, but their participation is of a consultative nature rather than of an equal partner in exercising power of decision-making. Likewise, labor unions have also been given a limited consultative role in labor relations, while the bureaucracy still firmly maintains its control over farmers' groups through the Ministries of Interior and Agriculture."⁴³

There were several evident factors to support that recent Thai polity still has, to a greater extent, the essence of 'bureaucratic polity' in it. For example, General Prem Tinsulanonda came to power without joining any political party. He was not an elected Member of Parliament. His support came from military and bureaucracy and King's institution. All five of Prem's governments were coalition governments. The coalition parties asked him to be the Prime Minister. Furthermore, three Ministers who held portfolios in important Ministries such as Defense, Interior, Finance were men of Prem and they had not been elected MP or members of political parties. Prem's position in the government was strong. He was not only supported by the strongest groups in Thai politics--the military but he also had tacit support

⁴³ Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Democracy in Thailand: A Case of a Stable Semi-Democratic Regime," p. 54.

from the monarchy. Another kind of evidence shows that the politics was still bureaucratic polity was that there was no political party leaders of any coalition government dare to assume Premiership. They had to yield to General Prem and asked him to assume the highest executive post.⁴⁴

We may conclude that the extrabureaucratic forces were not strong enough to assume political power by themselves. When political parties, which were considered one of the strongest extrabureaucratic forces, dare not to assume power by themselves, it indicates that the power of bureaucracy in politics was dominant. Prem, the image and the hope of the bureaucracy was the most suitable person to fill such a position. Nevertheless, the military could not completely exclude the other newly emerged extrabureaucratic forces as it did during the hey day of the 'bureaucratic polity' period.

The fact that the military could not do so was the point of departure of those who believed that Thailand has move away from the bureaucratic polity. The military could not assume power as it did in the early 1950s to 1973 because the strength of extrabureaucratic forces has developed to the point that the military and civil-servants had to let them share political power.

According to Pisan and Guyot, the military was put at

⁴⁴Clark D. Neher, "Political Forces in Thailand" Current History 83: 497 (December 1984), p. 420.

bay and the chance to intervene in politics will be less as time passes. That is to say the longer the military stay away from politics the more difficult it becomes for them to intervene. Increasingly extrabureaucratic forces have come to play in Thai politics. They contend, however, that the military retains the greatest potential power of all political groups.

However, under the current constitutional framework it has been led into democratic political practice and through several crises the military has learned when and how to give and to take. At the same time other political forces have had the courage and skills to challenge the military. These developments are encouraging signs that point to a more secure and open political process.⁴⁵

Pisan is very optimistic concerning the political development of the Thai political system. In his latest book he explained the potential for the institutionalization of democratic form of government as the result of rapid socio-economic changes that have taken place in the last three decades. Various groups emerged as economic growth occurred and they are now inserting their demands into the system. Furthermore, he also pointed out that an important reason behind the durable democratic form of government has been the role of the present King of Thailand who has worked for the development of the Thai political system. Without the

⁴⁵Pisan Suriyamongkol and James F. Guyot, The Bureaucratic Polity at Bay Public Administration Study No.51 (The National Institution of Development Administration, Bangkok, 1986), p.75.

monarchy's role in politics the democratic form of government would not survive long. The intervention of king in dissolving the military coup attempt on 30 April 1980 is one example. If the monarchy had not done so Prem's government and the democratic form of government would not last that long.⁴⁶

Pisan also studied other cases where military was held in check. One of them was the case of General Arthit, the Supreme Commander, the Army Commander-in-Chief, and the Director of Bangkok Security Command. He spoke out against the devaluation of Thai currency and pressured the government to revive the policy and put the baht back to its old value. His attempt put great pressure on the government and a coup was expected. However, his attempt was counteracted, he was down-graded, and the government went on to implement the policy.⁴⁷

The present Thai regime is a rather durable parliamentary democratic one. However, as mentioned earlier, it is not like the parliamentary systems of the Great Britain and other Western European and North American countries. There is still a great deal of influence of bureaucratic forces, especially the military, in the politics of the country. Prem's governments which was the longest parliamentary system that ever existed in Thailand

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 64-67.

was known to have been supported by military. He even said in public that his premiership has been supported by military. By March, 1981, of the 40 Cabinet members, 18 were nonpartisan technocrats without a political base. The new government was more conservative, reflecting pressure from the military to decelerate reformist policies."⁴⁸ "Prem did not join a political party nor was he a candidate for the National Assembly. He was chosen Prime Minister largely because he was acceptable both to the military and to liberal and conservative politicians. After the elections in 1986 he resigned, then "bowed" to the entreaties of party leaders who viewed him as the only hope for a stable regime. Although Prem retained his positions as Prime Minister and defense minister, he allocated the other portfolios in accordance with the parties' strength in Parliament."⁴⁹

Up to this points, this study has argued that Thailand has been moving away from the bureaucratic polity. However, there is no consensus among scholars of Thai politics whether the recent Thai political system is still a 'bureaucratic polity.' Some seem to take a modified position as represented by the works of Wilson, Riggs, Neher, Chai-anan. Girling, Pisan and Guyot, and Prizzia on the other hand see the polity as having been changed and believe that

⁴⁸Clark D. Neher, "Political Forces in Thailand," pp. 419-420.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 420.

certain element of democracy is growing well in the political process.

Chai-anan, a famous Thai scholar, still argues that the present democratic regime in Thailand is basically a 'bureaucratic polity' that has adjusted itself to respond better to the growing extrabureaucratic demands. In his view, extrabureaucratic groups are weak and divided and are usually coopted and/or mobilized by the state bureaucracy. The military has acquired the ability to dominate Thai politics without the need to establish an explicit military government.⁵⁰ Important public policies are made within the realm of bureaucrats, and the Parliamentary Assembly performs the function of a rubber stamp. Viewed in this light the working class is hardly autonomous from the state, and the bureaucratic polity could be a proper model to use to study the political role of working class vis-a-vis the state.

Girling takes a different stance and argues that socio-economic development in Thailand has created civil society, which is a new force that will seek to have its demands met through the political system and in turn will bring about the institutionalization of a democratic form of government. The persistence of the democratic form of government, at

⁵⁰See Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Democracy in Thailand: A Case Study of a Stable Semi-Democratic Regime," Paper prepared at the Conference on the Comparative Study of Democracy in Developing Nations, Stanford University, 1985.

least in the present period, according to Girling, has been the result of the inability of the military and bureaucracy to monopolize political power. Extrabureaucratic groups generated by the development of manufacturing, commercial, and service sectors of the economy have demanded a share of political power. The military and civilian bureaucratic leaders cannot ignore the demands of these new forces. Hence the military and civil bureaucracy are no longer the sole repository of political power. The emergence of new forces, i.e. urban opinion, political parties, business groups and reform-minded officers, has led to a certain diffusion of power. This is the situation that developed since the 1960s up to early 1970s⁵¹ For Girling the old bureaucratic polity model of Riggs is not adequate to lead to an understanding of the present Thai political system.

Ansil Ramsay observed in 1985 that political participation in decision-making in Thailand had recently extended to "bourgeois-middle class groups," especially the business elite who began to play a major role in Thai Cabinets and in economic decision-making. Other groups from middle class backgrounds, such as leading academics and technocrats, also have increased access to decision

⁵¹John L. S. Girling, The Bureaucratic Polity in Modernizing Societies, p. 26.

making.⁵² Thus his position is different from that of Chai-anan. The latter believed that non-bureaucratic groups had not entered politics independently. These new groups or political forces were coming to play in politics only in the arena of games which the military and bureaucracy left open for them. General Prem Tinsulanonda had been in power for 8 years without entering into any coalition with political parties and he even considered himself as non-politician. Chai-anan saw this outcome as a result of the domination of bureaucracy in politics and hence he explained that the new forces were only allowed to share some political power in the context of the 'bureaucratic polity.' Thus, in his view, the system of the country has not been changed into a 'bourgeois polity' as some scholars tried to see it. Chai-Anan's position is that it is too early to conclude that the bureaucratic polity has already evolved into a "bourgeois polity." One obstacle to this development is the reluctance of these emerging middle class elements to be politically independent. Even political parties have to make a compromise with the bureaucratic and military power elites as seen in the support of four parties for General Prem who does not belong to any party and does not consider himself a politician. It seemed to Chai-anan that the most significant political change in the relationship between bureaucratic

⁵² Ansil Ramsay, "Thailand Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," Paper presented at the Third U.S.-ASEAN Conference, Chiangmai, Thailand, January 7-11, 1985, p. 4.

and non-bureaucratic groups is that in the 1980s the latter had found a workable partnership with the former through the leadership of a former army general who has an interest in maintaining a semi-democratic system.⁵³

Under the regime of General Prem the labor movement and trade unions was not so openly active as it was in the 'democratic period.' Strikes, which is the effective means of workers to win their battles with government, decreased significantly when compared to the former period. Pressures put on government by trade unions and workers were less effective. General Prem did not pay much attention to labor's problems and let the problems be solved through bureaucratic means, by Department of Labor in the Ministry of Interior.

Trade unions activities were pretty much conducted through channels opened by the government and labor's political activities were limited. That is to say, the government emphasized the 5 tripartite committees to deal with labor problems: the Committee on Minimum Wages, the Labor Advisory Board, the Committee on Working Conditions, the Labor Court, and the Committee on National Labor Development.⁵⁴ These committees were designed more for the purpose of government control of workers than for the

⁵³ Chai-Anan, "Democracy in Thailand," pp.48-50.

⁵⁴ Bevars D. Mabry and Kundhol Srisermbpok, "Labor Relations Under Martial Law: The Thailand Experience," Asian Survey Vol.XXV, No.6, (June 1985), p. 622.

benefit of workers. We will deal with these committees in more detail in a later chapter.

Nevertheless, these committees provided channels for workers to have their demands met. Most Thai laborers as most Thais in general, have attitudes which accept strong government administration, and they preferred to work within the system. Tripartite committees in the Thai context are the tools of government, intended to weaken and control labor strength in politics. It was one of the strategies of government to shape the role of labor in politics.

Labor leaders face a dilemma of resorting to a strike, a threat to strike or working through channels provided by government. Historically, strikes were very effective means by which labor could put pressure on government and to have their demands met. When other formal channels, such as various tripartite committees, were opened for solving labors' problems, labor leaders could not simply resort to strikes. Resort to such a method, without taking into consideration the political environment and social context, could jeopardize their action and their goal. Strikes, then, were risky, and labors' problems have been increasingly channeled through tripartite organizations. The result was that the strength of the labor movement declined.

Other factors also contributed to a weakened labor movement; among them, the economic recession in the country which was the result of the world recession in the early

1980s. Since unemployment was very high and employment opportunity was low, workers did not dare to create any problems, since doing so would mean the loss of jobs. Furthermore, the unfriendly attitudes of employers who try to destroy and stop the development of labor strength, made it more difficult for trade union to become a politically strong group in this period

Nevertheless, there have been opportunities for trade unions to insert their demands into the politics of the country. In the "semi-democratic period," as we will show in later chapters. trade unions have learned how to marshall their power within the democratic system, and at the same time they gained strength and "autonomy" in comparison to those of trade movement in 1950s.

In chapter one it was pointed out that trade union has emerged as an extrabureaucratic force because of the rapid socio-economic changes which have taken place during the past three decades. Hence, in the next section, the impact of socio-economic changes on Thai politics shall be addressed.

State, capitalist economic development and regime changes.

The state-led economic development policy will be described here, since it was central to capitalist development in Thailand in the early period of modern economic development. Later the government under the

leadership of Sarit altered the Pibun policy of state-led capital development to emphasized private enterprise. Finally, the change of regime will be portrayed as a consequence of economic changes that have taken place in the past three decades and particularly in the last two. Such regime changes opened opportunities for trade union and other extrabureaucratic forces to participate in the politics of the country. In short, this section will sketch out a brief history of socio-economic changes which have taken place in Thailand first under the state initiative, then a change to a free enterprise policy and, finally, political changes which in large part have been the result of the socio-economic changes, especially the changes that have taken place in the past two decades. We now turn to a discussion in more detail.

Traditionally, state initiated and led economic development was seen as "natural," since the Thais were familiar with initiation of policies from above. From 1932 to 1937, before Marshall P. Pibunsongkram (Pibun) took power, there were very few state enterprises to undertake industrial production. After Pibun assumed power in 1938, nationalist economic policy was vigorously implemented and practiced, thus tremendously increasing the extent of state intervention in the economy. State policy under Pibun (1938-1957) was characterized as state capitalism since the state itself invested in various industries through public

enterprises. During the period from 1938 to 1957, economic nationalism persistently dominated Thai political economy so much so that it is generally characterized as the period of state capitalism. In the early 1950s, the state expanded its role in the manufacturing sector by establishing state enterprises in several industries -- textiles, paper, glass, sugar, gunny-bags, tobacco, and many others.⁵⁵ A great number of state enterprises are still active and they are and have been the enterprises that produced the best organized and strongest trade unions in the country. The roles of these particular trade unions in politics must be understood if one wants to understand the role of trade unions generally in politics of Thailand. We will come back to deal with state enterprise unions later in the chapter.

State enterprises also served as sources of wealth and power for the ruling clique. Pibun appointed his friends and clients to executive boards of various state enterprises, something that also helped to consolidate his power. He could use these economic bases to build power bases. He sponsored and supported labor organizations as his political base. We will discuss his role in the labor movement in more detail in the following chapter.

When General Sarit came to power through a military coup in 1958, the state-led capitalist development policy

⁵⁵James C. Ingram, Economic Change in Thailand, 1950-1970 new ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 229.

was terminated. Sarit, who believed in the value of technocrats in government, adopted the World Bank's advice to implement a policy of free enterprise in Thailand. State policy during his time and in fact until the present has been to encourage foreign investment as the main engine of capital accumulation. Private enterprise was fostered by both foreign and local capital and as a replacement for state capitalism. Sarit focused his policy on social infrastructure facilities--power, transportation, and communication. The state would not compete with private enterprises, and he reassured them that the 150 state-owned enterprises would be dismantled to stimulate the private sector. The state even sold some enterprises to private ownership. Sarit concentrated his policy on industry promotion, encouragement, and some minority financing. He also enunciated a policy of non competition.⁵⁶ For example, in the first six-year plan the statement was made that "the state is not to engage in new enterprises in competition with private business." In the second plan the policy was

...to restrict the establishment of new state enterprises except where public interest dictates, as in the field of public utilities, of social welfare, and of national security. The policy will be to avoid competition with the private sector and where such competition currently exists consideration will be given to the transfer by sale or lease of the state

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 231-32.

enterprise to the private sector.⁵⁷

Private enterprises were encouraged. The government gave priority to economic growth and hence gave little attention to social and distribution problems. Wages were kept very low and the government did not tolerate any labor unrest. Sarit ruled the country under martial law. No group of more than 5 persons was allowed to discuss political matters. There was no labor relations law or practice that protected the rights of workers. Most labor problems were seen as security problems and hence they were handled by police. Labor organization of any kind was not allowed to function. No minimum wage was guaranteed. No established industrial relations were practiced and workers were mostly subjected to the will of employers. Labor continued to be suppressed throughout the Thanom's regime, until the end of the military regime in October 1973.

The period since Sarit took over power in 1958 until the end of Thanom's regime in October 1973 could be characterized as the heyday of 'bureaucratic polity.' Sarit rushed the country into the process of capitalist economic development which resulted in the rapid expansion and differentiation of the county's economy. Private enterprises and foreign investment were encouraged. Economic growth was

⁵⁷The First National Economic Development Plan, 1961-66; The Second National Economic and Social Development Plan, 1967-71 (Bangkok: National Economic and Social Development Board, n.d.), p. 115.

very high, with the average of more than 11 % a year during the first two national economic and social development plans. The state also had to develop its functions to promote and cope with the rapid development. For example, during the years 1959-1963 the following new agencies of government were created: the Budget Bureau (BB), the Board of Investment (BoI), the National Economic Development Board (NESDB), the Ministry of National Development, and the Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand (IFCT). In the name of efficiency, a number of other government ministries and agencies were also reorganized, such as the Ministry of Industries.⁵⁸

Through the process of economic development the structure of the state has been differentiated. The state has also had to adapt in order to govern the society. Because there have not been other groups to counter the supremacy of the state bureaucracy, it functions as a class in itself and exploits its dominant position. Alavi also found that in Pakistan, another country where a bourgeoisie class has not yet developed as class, the state bureaucracy itself can be seen as a class that exploits the others.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Grit Permtanjit, "Political Economy of Dependent Capitalist Development: Study on the Limitation of the Capacity of the State to rationalize in Thailand," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania 1981), p. 120.

⁵⁹Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh." New Left Review 74 (July-August 1972): 59-81.

The bureaucratic state of Thailand during the Sarit and Thanom regimes would fit to such category, since the bureaucrats --especially high ranking military and civil servants had control of state functions and used them for their own interests. This is not to say that those who were in power and sought their own interests saw themselves as a class. But it shows that the authority and personal were fused. Bureaucrats could exploit such fusion of power for their privates gain and because they did so, the state bureaucracy may be considered as a class exploiting other classes in Alavi's sense. Hence, It was also in the interests of those at the head of the state institutions as well as those in the middle and lowers ranks to expand bureaucratic functions. The result was that bureaucratic institutions outgrew other political institutions and hence, at the time, dominated society. Bureaucratic polity was the outcome of such a development. Political power was concentrated in the hands of a few top military and civil-servants in the early 1960s until the mid-1970s without any serious challenge from groups outside the bureaucracy. That was the political system of Thailand during the heyday of "bureaucratic polity."

Leading bureaucrats could acquired wealth through acting as a patron to Chinese entrepreneurs who sought protection from high ranking officers. They then could use their wealth as a source of advancing their political power

or in their struggle with rival cliques. Since there were very few and weak extrabureaucratic groups, the bureaucracy could dominate the politics of the country for a long period of time. The political system was not opened for groups outside bureaucracy.

During Sarit's and most of Thanom's governments, capitalist economic development was emphasized, hence the role of trade union and workers movements were suppressed. Until October 1973, trade unions did not become involve in the political system of the country. Their role in politics emerged much later in Thai history--only after late 1970s. Capitalist economic development itself leads to differentiation of various political groups, and trade unions are among them. They continue gaining more of a role in politics in various ways. Trade unions have more to say as the result of the development of the country.

The on-going policy for capitalist development of the last two decades provided excellent ground for various extra-bureaucratic groups to grow and gain strength in politics. As a result of this development Thai socio-economic relations have been fundamentally changed. It resulted in the rise of some assertive non-bureaucratic forces: political parties, business groups, urban opinion, professionals, intellectuals, and urban working class and trade unions. These extra-bureaucratic forces now have more to say in the politics of the country. The political system

also assumed a new form and democratic processes tended to be institutionalized, though restricted. The traditional 'bureaucratic polity' model of Riggs became increasingly inadequate as a model to explain the present Thai polity, since the Thai political system now has to admit new emerging groups demanding participation in politics.

These new groups are called "social forces" by Girling, and he saw the new social forces "striving to develop their autonomy" as the result of socio-economic changes which in turn led to the beginnings of structural changes. Girling described the situation in Thailand this way; businesses have begun to engage in interest group politics and major businessmen are no longer described as "pariah entrepreneurs," but as pragmatic partners of bureaucrats.⁶⁰ The civilian and military bureaucracies have begun to move toward greater professionalism and technocratic outlooks, trade unions have become organized and actively engaged in protecting and advancing their members' interests, and there is greater popular awareness of their roles in politics.⁶¹ These new forces, then, try to exercise their political power within the political system and to some degree have acquired their ability to force the old champion of political power--the military and its junior partner, the civil servants--to recognize and/or accept their power. The

⁶⁰Girling, Thailand: Society and Politics p. 73.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 121.

present restricted-democratic form of government has been the outcome of this process.

This new pattern within the political system is therefore, only a recent phenomenon, while the bureaucratic polity has long been in existence and remains as a prominent feature of Thai politics today.

Groups have been created by the process of massive economic changes that have taken place in Thailand for at least two decades. The consistency of economic growth led to differentiation of various groups that later are trying to insert their demands into the political system. The Thai political system has been pressed to adopt new structures that would open the way for other groups outside the bureaucracy to share in the exercise of political power. The force behind the new dimension is socio-economic changes.

Recent Thai socio-economic development has had a profound impact on the political process. Over the last several decades Thailand has experienced" 1) high economic growth rates (averaging 7 percent a year), 2) a rapid diversification of the basically agricultural economy, with industry contributing 29.8 per cent of the GDP at current market prices by 1985 as shown in Table 2 below, and 3) an increase in literate and better-educated citizens. For example, student enrollment in higher education increased more than thirteen times, from 55,315 persons in 1970 to 752,771 persons in 1982. All together, that segment which

Daniel Bell has characterized as the "knowledge class," the professional, technical, managerial and administrative occupations, grew six-fold in the last twenty-five years to encompass some six per cent of the total labor force.⁶² The changes then had an impact on the political system in Thailand and as a result, a democratic form of government has emerged.

Table 2
Sectoral Distribution of Production at
Current Market Prices
(as per cent of GDP)

	1970-79	1980	1982	1985
<u>Agriculture</u>	<u>29.6</u>	<u>25.4</u>	<u>22.3</u>	<u>17.5</u>
Crops	21.6	19.0	16.5	12.7
Other	8.0	6.4	5.8	4.8
<u>Industry</u>	<u>25.7</u>	<u>28.4</u>	<u>28.0</u>	<u>29.8</u>
Mining & quarrying	1.8	2.1	1.7	2.8
Manufacturing	17.9	19.6	19.5	19.8
Construction	4.8	5.8	5.1	5.1
Electricity, water supply	1.2	0.9	1.7	2.1
<u>Services</u>	<u>44.7</u>	<u>46.2</u>	<u>49.7</u>	<u>52.7</u>
<u>Total CDP</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Source: World Bank, Thailand: Growth and Stability; A Challenge for the Sixth Plan Period V. 2 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1986) Report No. 6036-TH, p. 4, quoted in Pisan Suriyamongkol, Institutionalization of Democratic Political Processes in Thailand: A Three-Pronged Democratic Polity (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988), p. 20.

⁶² Pisan Suriyamongkol, Institutionalization of Democratic Political Process in Thailand: A Three-Pronged Democratic Polity, pp. 19-20.

Conclusion

The main theme in our discussion of the political system in Thailand has centered around the concept of 'bureaucratic polity.' The differences between the "bureaucratic polity" and the more "democratic polity" have been in the degree of pluralistic character of the polity which, in turn, has been the result of the change in socio-economic structure of the country. All observers agree upon the increasing role of groups that have emerged from the changes and that these groups have been increasingly vocal in their demands for participation in the political system.

Under such conditions, trade unions as organizations of workers have been among those trying to increase their participation in the politics of the country. Their political role has not been limited only to strikes and the threat of strikes or a threat of using violent means. They have also experimented with new ways and methods. We will see evidence of this in the role of labor in the formation of policies which have not been the concern of labor, the role of labor in general elections, in military coup d'etat etc. These activities and others have signified a big step forward in the role of labor and trade unions in the politics of Thailand. The following chapter will explore the emergence and development of trade unions in politics in different periods. That emergence and development has in many ways been shaped by the character of regimes.

CHAPTER THREE
HISTORY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
TRADE UNIONS: AN OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a general background of the history of the development of Thai labor movements and organizations. It will emphasize the emergence of trade unions as an interest group which, as noted in Chapter 1, are functioning as an extrabureaucratic force in Thailand. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part offers a narrative history of the labor movement and organization from the early part of the 19th century until the present time. This is an attempt to show the development of trade unions throughout the period and their emergence as an autonomous force, independent of state control. The increasing number of unions and the complexity of labor organizations have facilitated the autonomy of trade unions and their emergence as an extrabureaucratic force. The second part of the chapter deals with the government's role in establishing and regulating unions. This study contends that trade unions have developed considerable power to bargain with the government, for a number of reasons which will become evident in the course of our discussion.

The Labor Movement and Organizations up to 1932.

The early Thai labor movement was dominated by Overseas-Chinese workers who were imported into the country to meet the need of labor for Thai governments' economic development policies. The main reason for the government's policy of allowing a great number of overseas-Chinese labor into the country was that the Thais were reluctant to enter into the wage market. They preferred instead to work freely on farms and fertile land that was unoccupied and available to them for cultivation. In the early 1900s, therefore, Thailand's urban labor force was comprised primarily of immigrant Chinese. In the mid-1920s the annual number of legal Chinese immigrants still averaged about 10,000.¹ These immigrant Chinese workers were enough to fill the need for labor demands, since prior to World War II the industrial labor force remained very small, only a little more than 2 percent of the total work force. Over 83 percent of the Thai labor force was engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry.² In 1900 the Thai population was about 7.3 million, distributed throughout the country. In this tropical climate, good for agriculture, with a size approximately that of Texas, almost every region had a

¹Virginia Thompson, Thailand: The New Siam (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 608. Quoted in David Morell, and Chai-anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand : Reform, Reaction, Revolution. (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, Inc., 1981), p. 181.

²Ibid.

surplus of fertile land.³ Furthermore, the Thais preferred working on the land and remained free to sell their labor power in the market. They joined the work force only after they were forced to do so by later economic hardship. Therefore, until as late as 1950, it was estimated that the Chinese constituted as much as 75 percent of all urban labor or wage earners who worked mainly in the non-agricultural sector.⁴

Since the original working class in Thailand was made up of immigrant overseas Chinese, the first labor organization was influenced by Chinese forms of organization. It is worth noting here that due the lack of a colonial experience in Thailand which has never been colonized, there was a corresponding lack of influence of the Western concept of trade unions in the early period. Consequently Thai trade union developed very late when compare to neighboring countries like Singapore and the Philippines.⁵ Therefore, the overseas Chinese workers were the main source of influence upon workers organizations in those days. The overseas Chinese workers brought with them two types of organizations; the guilds and the secret

³James Ingram, Economic Change in Thailand: 1850-1970 (Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 55.

⁴G. W. Skinner, Chinese Society in Thailand (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 120.

⁵For a comprehensive of labor movement in the Philippines see Elias T. Ramos, Philippine Labor Movement (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1976).

societies. The former was open and legally organized under the law governing general association with a view to providing mutual assistance for employees of the same occupation. It did not have modern trade union characteristics that we are familiar with.⁶ The other type of organizations, the secret societies organized along dialect speech lines to include masters and journeymen, were not recognized by law. As a practical matter, Thai authority allowed the secret societies to exist and operate for the purpose of maintaining order within the Chinese community as long as they did not pose a threat to Thai authority.⁷ However, the secret societies played an important role in leading and supporting workers strikes during the turn of this century. "Although the secret societies were not true labor organizations, their power enabled them to provide striking members a measure of freedom from scab labor, hence, a better opportunity to win their disputes."⁸ Strikes by port labor were not uncommon, and one in 1889 for higher wages lasted several days. In the tight labor market existing around the turn of the century, strikes and

⁶Nongyao Reecharoen, "The Problem of Union Recognition in Singapore," in International Labor Organization A Survey of the Current Situation in ASEAN: The Problem of Union Recognition. (Bangkok: Published under the auspices of the Joint ILO/UNDP/ ASEAN Program of Industrial Relations for Development, 1988), p.89.

⁷Skinner, Chinese Society, p. 140.

⁸Virginia Thompson, Labor Problems in Southeast Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1947, p. 238.

boycotts were often used to extract higher wages from employers. And of course such strike were supported by the secret societies since the guilds were in fact a part of the secret societies.

Some of the early twentieth century strikes were caused by labor discontent and economic conflicts. For example, in February 1917 a strike was called by the Chinese workmen of Makasan Railway Workshop because one of their colleagues was badly treated and unfairly dismissed by a western foreman.⁹ And in February 1922, seventy-nine Chinese coolies refused to work overtime on Saturday and went on protest by wholly leaving the job.¹⁰ There were politically oriented strikes by Chinese workers as well. The Chinese dock laborers in August 1905 refused to load American goods for a few days. And in July 1910 the Chinese coolies working in rice and saw-mills stopped working in order to join a strike by all the Chinese businesses in Bangkok. Both strikes were politically motivated. The 1905 incident was in retaliation against the American government which continued to exclude Chinese from entering the United State. In an 1894 treaty with the U.S., China had agreed to the exclusion of Chinese laborers from the U.S. for ten years. When that period expired, however, the U.S. Congress unilaterally extended

⁹N.A. Khamanakhom, R.VI No. 5/7 vol. 1. Quoted in Kanchada Poonpanich "The Beginning of Labor Movement in Thailand (1900-1930)" Asian Review 2 (1988), p. 28.

¹⁰Siam Rassadon March 1-7, 1922.

the exclusion. The 1910 strike was a protest against the Thai government's policy of increasing the Chinese head tax.¹¹ That protest was the first case of political demands being placed upon the Thai government by workers.

Unfortunately the workers were overseas-Chinese, not Thai citizens, and in the eyes of Thai authorities, they lacked a legitimate claim to such action.

The increase of the Chinese head tax on Chinese workers signaled the end of the encouragement of immigration for Chinese. Immigration of Chinese labors to Thailand was now limited and Thai authorities also moved more aggressively to control Chinese activities. The secret societies were prohibited by the Secret Societies Act of 1897. Since then the role of Chinese workers was curbed and at the same time the Thais entered more into the wage labor force. They later formed organizations which began to develop into trade unions in the modern sense. That is to say, organization did not have the sole purpose of association for mutual help among members. Organizations also began to bargain with employers for better wages and working conditions.

The first ethnic Thai trade union with many of the characteristics noted above was established in 1897 by Tramway workers. The Tramway Workers Association was formed in the Siam Electric Company, with a membership of 300 Thai

¹¹Kanchada Poonpanich, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

workers.¹² That this first union was established in the public utility sector should be no surprise, since before World War II the major sources of wage employment were the civil service, armed forces, railways, and electric utility. The organization went on strike in 1900 in response to rising prices and low wages, which were then a severe problem in Bangkok. The strike was truly economic in essence. Its objectives were the improvement of specific working conditions and there was no evidence of political factors.¹³ The strike was limited to workers in the tramway plant and there were no outsiders involved or who tried to make use of the strike for other objectives. We should keep in mind also that from before the turn of the century until June 1932, Thailand was ruled under an absolute monarchy. Society was not well differentiated and the country had just begun its industrial development. Organized interest groups and other political forces did not yet exist. The strike of the Tramway workers, then, was purely limited to interaction between employer and employees, hence there were no broader political factors in either cause or effect.

¹²Supachai Manutphaibun, Botbat khong rataban kab kotmai raengngan nai kan pattana rabob utsahakam sampan [The Role of the Government and Labor Legislation in the Development of Thailand's Industrial Relations System] (Bangkok: n.a., 1976), p. 6.

¹³Bevars D. Mabry, Development of Labor Institution in Thailand (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1979), pp. 28-32.

In December 1922 and January 1923, the Tramway workers made the other strikes which assumed the character of modern industrial strikes, and, like the strike in 1900, the strikes were significant for two reasons. First, they signified the beginning of a trade union movement in which workers were organized into formal autonomous association. Furthermore, this association had a definite direction and had long term goals for the benefit of their members. They did not assume the traditional attitude of resignation, and they did not immediately seek the help of a patron in the bureaucracy or the military. Instead, they decided to stand up for their rights and act in their own behalf. Second, the reasons for the strikes and demands of the strikes were concretely and openly stated, and the strike provided members with active participation in the act of expressing their dissatisfaction. They used their bargaining power to negotiate on the specific grievances put forth in their statement of demands.¹⁴

Since the strikers could not get all the demands filed in their complaints, they did, however, seek help from authority. They went to Chao Praya Yommarat, Minister of the Interior, who then acted as a mediator, and a compromise between the workers and the company was reached. The former agreed to return to work while the latter promised to reconsider the demands of the strikers and to write up new

¹⁴Kanchada, op. cit., pp. 28-31.

regulations under the inspection of Chao Praya Yommarat.¹⁵ This was an example of the tradition of seeking help from authority and men in higher ranks which has been practiced by workers and trade unions until the present. Some scholars of the Thai labor movement have seen this as an indication that trade unions and workers were mobilized or acted as clients of those in power. But, as will be seen, this study finds that when behaving in such a manner workers are not necessarily acting solely for the interests of men in power but for their own members' interests as well. This has been the case especially in more recent times. It will become more evident as our discussion progresses.

It is worth noting here that there was evidence that the decision to strike was not solely the result of ideas from within the Trameay Workers Association. The essence of action as a method of obtaining improved economic conditions was an idea introduced to the workers by intellectuals and journalists in particular. It is understandable that due to the lack of a history of collective action in the country and the lack of education on the part of workers, the idea of organization then did not originate with the workers. Tramway workers had contacted a journalist of the Bangkok Kanmuang [Bangkok Politics]--a newspaper of the time that initiated and supported labor movement--before they called

¹⁵Ibid.

the strike on 31 December 1922.¹⁶ Thawat Rithidase,¹⁷ who was an intellectual journalist and his close friends who sympathized with the worsening condition of workers in those days, organized Khana Kammakorn [The Labor Group] at the end of January 1923. At that time the organization provided basic nutrients for the development of the labor movement in three ways. It aroused, public interest in labor problems, through Thawat's writing in Bangkok Kanmuang, supplied the workers with the new ideas how to acquire basic insurance of subsistence and educated them about the need for organization and solidarity.¹⁸ The most important contribution of the Kana Kamakorn to the labor movement in Thailand in that period and the period after 1932 was the building up of an infrastructure for the labor movement. Their leader training, ideological preparation and their stimulation of public moral support for labor, were crucial factors which laid the foundation for the development of the

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 38-39.

¹⁷Thawat Rithidase (1894-1950), an intellectual journalist that had devoted all his idea and works for the betterness of workers in early history of Thai labor movement. He not only use Bangkok Kanmuang a newspapers to initiate ideas and support labor movement but also gave advice and involved in labor movements. He believed in democratic government and against the absolute rule of monarchy. See also Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn, Prawat karn toh soo khong kammakorn thai [History of the Struggle of Thai Workers] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1986), pp. 126-136.

¹⁸Kanchada, op. cit., pp. 42-45.

labor movement after 1932.¹⁹

Under the absolute monarchy, the government played a very minor role in labor affairs. Apart from controlling the conscription of labor, the government had almost no involvement in the use of hired laborers. One of the reasons for the government's minor role in labor matters was the fact that the majority of workers in those days were overseas Chinese.²⁰ The government's role in labor matters developed only slowly. In 1917, as a relief measure, it provided public employment to unemployed migrant Laotian farm workers in the Central Plains. The government saw strikes and labor unrest as security problems, not as industrial relations. It dealt on an ad hoc basis with each of the few strikes most of which occurred because of alleged unfair treatment. The strike in the Bangkok dockyard of the Royal Thai Navy in 1921 by an informal Chinese association of workers was one that arose from unfair treatment. Control was imposed over strike activities of informal organizations in 1927, when the Penal Code was extended to apply to strikes. The police were made responsible for dealing with them and resolving such disputes. Two years later an unsuccessful effort was made to establish a Labor Bureau to

¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

²⁰Thanet Arpornsuwan "The System of Thai Labor in the Past: From the Early Ratanakosin (Bangkok) Period to World War II" in The Trade Union Movement in Thailand ed., Arnold Wehmhoerner and Suebsaeng Promboon (Bangkok: Friedreich Ebert Stiftung, 1978), pp. 18-19.

deal with rising labor problems, and it was not until 1932 that an Employment Service Section was established to register the many private employment agencies that had developed in Bangkok.²¹

From the June 24, 1932 Revolution to the October 1958 Revolution.

As described in Chapter Two, after the end of the absolute monarchy with the June 24, 1932 Revolution, Thai bureaucrats, especially the elites in the military and civil servants, dominated the political system in what Riggs described as a 'bureaucratic polity.' But the bureaucracy and the military elites were not monolithic institutions. There were power struggle within each of them, among individuals and factions, and each sought allies outside the bureaucracy and the military in order to enhance their power. The struggle for power within the bureaucracy brought the labor movement into the controversies. Patron-client relations between political leaders and labor leaders were established. This was made easier by the fact that union leaders of the time were usually not from the rank and file of union membership. They were outsiders, government elites, assigned by the government to head labor organizations. During this period (1933-1956) the role of

²¹Bevar D. Mabry The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 39.

trade unions and workers was given a great deal more attention by men in government than in any later government.²² In the late 1940s, workers were free to act in their own interests. However, it was in this period, that patron-client linkage between men in power and labor leaders became very clear. The client had to perform functions that pleased the patron while the patron would help and protect the client. Through such a relationship, workers' demands were heard and supported. In short, we may say that the role of trade unions and the labor movement in this period reflected the needs of political elites to use labor organizations and the movement as their political bases.

Immediately after the end of the absolute monarchy, the government gave more attention to labor problems. The new government under the leadership of the 'People's Party' issued the following statement on labor and industry:

...on laborers the government has arranged for the registration of unemployed laborers in order to find out the number of unemployed and to be able to call on these laborers when needed. As a next step the government will establish the pre-condition that in any concession, a number of Thai laborers must be employed. The government will also try to hire as many Siamese (Thai) laborers as possible....Besides, the government is preparing to set up factories for which there has been a demand. We guarantee that the government will adhere to this statement.²³

²²Mr. Prasert Sapsunthorn, personal interview, September 30, 1988.

²³Prasert Patamasukhon, sisibsong pi ratasapa tai [Thai Parliament in 42 Years] (Bangkok: Ratakij Seri Group, 1973), p. 50.

The concern of government with the unemployment problem indicated that more Thai laborers had entered into the labor market. The statement also showed the intention of the government to deal with labor problems. However, the government's attempt to implement this policy was not very successful. Only a few thousand laborers registered.

Since the 'People's Party' had promised that economic problems would be given the utmost attention, its first step was to issue the Employment Act and the Local Employment Act in 1932. The government also pursued a policy of "economic nationalism." The policy was designed to replace Chinese workers with Thais. In 1933 the government passed a law stipulating that at least 50 percent of laborers in rice mills had to be Thai. It was followed by the Cabinet's introduction of a law to reserve certain occupations for Thai people. According to the law, a certain number of Thai workers had to be employed by contractors who won contracts to construct buildings and roads for the government. The exact number was to be decided case by case. Usually, at least 50 per cent of the workers had to be Thai. In the same year, a fishery rights bill was passed to prohibit fishing boats with alien crewmen from operating in Thai territorial waters.²⁴ In spite of these measures, the majority of worker

²⁴Phichit Chongsathitwatana "The Thai Labor Movement from 1945 to October 14, 1973," in The Trade Union Movement in Thailand ed., Arnold Wehmhoerner and Suebsaeng Promboon (Bangkok: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1978), p. 23.

was still Chinese.

Strikes from 1932 until World War II were for higher wages and salary in order to cope with inflation. Thus we characterize them as economic in essence. Striking rickshaw pullers asked for a lower rental rate in 1932. That same year, Chinese women dye factory workers also carried out a successful strike, protesting a cut in their daily wages. The discharge of fellow workers brought on the Tramway Workers Association strike against the Siam Electric Company. In 1934 a walkout by Chinese rice-mill workers protested the discontinuation of their customary year-end bonus. In Chinese employer-employee relations the bonus was an implicit deferred form of regular compensation. The government was asked to take over the mills, and the rice-mill workers appealed to the Tramway Workers Association for support. Eventually, this became the first case of a workers strike which led to violence. It should be pointed out here that strike in Thailand after the 1932 Revolution were not normally violent by European or American standard. But the angered government subsequently deported seven Chinese workers who were alleged to be the strike organizers.²⁵

A series of strikes by mostly Chinese workers led the government to issue the 1939 Thai Workers Act which required at least 50 percent of Thai nationals to be employed in rice

²⁵Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, pp. 39-40.

milling and 75 percent in mining. Taxi drivers and seamen were restricted exclusively to Thai nationals. However, the law initially was unenforceable since there was a shortage of Thais willing to enter such employment. The indirect impact of the law was to induce Chinese to adopt Thai citizenship.²⁶

There were other indications that the increasing number of Thai workers, although a small minority of wage workers, were becoming involved in the national politics of the country. The most significant indication was that some thirteen labor candidates ran for office in the National Assembly election in 1937. However, there is no clear evidence whether Thai workers formed a political party and filed candidates, whether the thirteen candidates were members of a political party, or whether they ran for the office independently.²⁷ What matters to this study is that it showed their attempts to participate in national politics. Furthermore, early in the following year they showed their ability to initiate policy by introducing a bill in the National Assembly to regulate wages, hours, and child labor. Although it was defeated, a committee was established to study the problem.

In the more liberal climate following World War II, the

²⁶W. G. Skinner, Chinese Society in Thailand (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 220.

²⁷Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 41.

labor movement began to grow more rapidly and became more active. The liberal Pridi Banomyong proposed social and political objectives that were more favorable to the labor movement. In 1944, during the War, Pridi had already formed a labor organization--the Bangkok Federation of Trade Union with its main purpose to work in accordance with the Free Thai Movement against Japanese occupation of Thailand. The organization in large part consisted of Chinese workers, and after the war, in 1946, it developed into a General Trade Union Association (GTUA). This organization acted as a conciliator of labor disputes involving Thai and Chinese workers on the one hand, but it was believed to be a political base for Prime Minister Pridi and his clique. The original members were workers in printing, tricycle drivers, transports workers, and bus drivers.²⁸

In January 1947 the more liberal government of Admiral Luang Thamrong Navasawat²⁹ formally recognized the GTUA as the Saha Achiwa Kammakorn. Known by its English name as the Central Labor Union (CLU), it was normally led by Thai political figures of a liberal bent. It claimed 7500 members and fifty-one branch offices.³⁰ It had a membership of both

²⁸Ibid., pp. 42-43.

²⁹Luang Thamrong Navasawat, the Prime Minister during 1946-1947.

³⁰J. Kambhu, "Labor Pains Intensify," Bangkok Post Economic Review: 1973. Quoted in Morell and Chai-anan, p. 182.

Chinese and Thai workers. Initially, Thais made up the larger share of the membership of the CLU, but by 1948 Chinese were in a majority. Theoretically designed to provide social welfare and recreation for its members, the organization was not supposed to engage in political matters. In reality, however, the CLU had very good relations with, and acted as a power base for, the government. In 1949 the CLU, came under control of members who had socialist beliefs and were loyal to Mao Tse-tung. Such domination led the organization to affiliate with the communist dominated World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and in November 1949 it sent a delegation to the World Federation Conference held in Peking.³¹ Because it was too close to the Communist camp and it was a popular base for the Pridi and Thamrong cliques which opposed Pibun's clique, the CUL later was little by little eliminated by the new government under the leadership of Pibun after he came to power through a military coup in November 1947.

After the November 1947 coup, the CLU was not immediately outlawed by the Pibun government, but the latter was not happy with the existence of CLU, and it refused to register it as a legal organization.³² In 1952, the CLU was

³¹Skinner, op., cit., pp. 322-23. He estimated a membership of 50,000 in CLU in 1950.

³²Mr. Prasert Sapsunthorn, personal interview, September 30, 1988. He is a Communist defector who has influence in labor movement in Thailand during those day until present.

deemed to be subversive; it was disbanded and its leaders arrested under the Anti-Communist Act. The act became the most important tool of Thai government to suppress the working class since then, especially during periods of military rule.

When Pibun returned to power for the second time through the military-led November 1947 coup, he again brought with him a nationalist policy and his restrictive anti-Chinese policy. Under his government, both Chinese schools and worker associations in Bangkok were raided and some of their leaders were arrested. His policy was vigorously anti-communist as well as anti-Chinese.³³ To counter communist influence in the labor movement and to build up his own urban power base, Pibun lent political patronage to several non-communist labor unions. In May 1948, he sponsored a Thai workers association named the Thai Labor Union. Its membership was exclusively Thai, consisting primarily of government railroad and harbor workers. The organization's membership also included shop workers, tricycle rickshaw operators, some agricultural workers, and many self-employed. The association affiliated with the International Conference of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in 1950, and in 1951 it was reorganized and renamed the Thai National Trade Union Conference (TNTUC). It claimed sixty affiliated associations and up to 50,000 members, all Thai

³³Skinner, Chinese Society, p. 325.

citizens.³⁴ This association was established as a political base for Pibun. He and his government were the main source of financial support to the association since membership dues were not seriously collected and were seldom paid by its members. The TNTUC did not seek to be independent of the government. It was a weak organization and did not really represent the interests of its members. The offices of the labor association were supplied by the government and their chief activity was to administer subsidized government welfare programs. Few strikes were promoted by the association.³⁵

In 1950, in order to keep a firm grip on the labor movement, Pibun sent two of his closest aides to organize and run the Thai Union Congress: Chai Virotsiri, secretary-general of the cabinet, and Sang Pattanothai, the government's wartime spokesman. The government, under the leadership of Pibun, also subsidized the TUC with some \$ 10,000 per year.³⁶

The Pibun government (1947-1957) had two purposes in sending its representatives or its men to organize and lead

³⁴Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 44.

³⁵Shurcliff Alice, Labor in Thailand, (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Foreign Labor Information, June 1959), p. 20. Quoted in Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 44.

³⁶Workers Coordinating Center of Thailand, Karn toh soo khong kammakorn Tai [The Struggle of the Thai Workers] (Bangkok: Thai Kasem Press, 1972), p. 57.

labor associations: to use the organizations as political bases; and to counter the influence of communism and leftist labor leaders.³⁷ This was the high period of the Cold War and similar reaction could be seen in many parts of the world where U.S. influence was strong.

The government sponsored several labor associations from 1949 to 1956. For example, the Tricycle Drivers' Federation was set up in 1950 under the chairmanship of Lt. Gen. Khun Plodporapak, an outsider of the federation and a protege of Pibun.³⁸ In 1951 the Federation of Women Laborers was established under the patronage of Pibun's wife. And in 1954 the Free Worker Association of Thailand (FWAT) was created under the patronage of Police General Phao Sriyanond. The later was also minister of interior, and police chief, and secretary-general of the government's Seri Manangkasila Party. These labor organizations allegedly received money and other fringe benefits from the national budget via the Public Welfare Department in the Ministry of

³⁷Damrih Ruangsuwan and Jaroon Lasa, Khabuan karn kammakorn nai pratet tai kab karn tor soo kleuanwai lae pattanakarn khong rang ngan [The Thai Labor Movement: Its Struggle and Development] (Bangkok: Santitham Publishers, 1986), pp. 60-64.

³⁸Lt. General Plodporapak was then the Deputy Ministry of Interior and the leader of Thammathipat Political Party. See Sungsidh Piriyarungsun, Prawat Karn tor soo khong kammakorn tai [History of the Struggle of Thai Workers] (Bangkok: Institute of Social Research, Chulalongkorn University), 1987, pp. 227-30.

Interior.³⁹ The associations were organized mainly as political bases of support for its promoter, especially in the time of general elections as was the case in the elections held in 1955 and 1957.

It is appropriate to call attention here to something pointed out in the previous chapter; governments, following the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932 until Sarit Thanarat took power through a military coup in 1958, adopted some of the forms of democracy, along the line of that of the Great Britain. Hence, restricted general elections were held in order to legitimized the governments or to strengthen the political position of ruling elites. The 1955 and 1957 general elections were held because the Prime Minister Pibun needed to broaden his support from the masses. His support from bureaucracy and especially from the military was eroded as they shifted their loyalty to the new pole--to General Sarit Thanarat who was the Army Commander-in-Chief from 1955 to 1957. It is worth noting here that the army has been the most powerful among military branches and it was the most important instrument to stage a successful military coup d'etat. This was different from Vietnam in mid 1960s, where the Air force was the most powerful branch. Pibun felt the need to consolidate his power through a general election, and in 1955 he legalized the political

³⁹Denpong Pollakorn, Sahapap raeng ngan [Trade Unions] (Bangkok: Thai Kasem Press, 1972), pp. 59-61.

parties.

During the years 1955-1958 the political climate was favorable to the labor movement, since the country was in the era of experimentation with democracy. The Labor Party was formed from three large affiliates of the TNTUC: (1) The Tricycle Drivers Union; (2) the Transport Workers Union; and the (3) Federation of Women Workers. By late 1956, the Labor Party had gained control of TNTUC, and thereafter the organization moved politically to the left.⁴⁰

Seymour Martin Lipset has pointed out that "legitimacy involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society."⁴¹ The same may be said of those who hold power-- they must maintain the belief that they are the most appropriate ones for the society. By tradition and cultural conditioning the Monarchy and those who held power under it were once regarded as the most appropriate for Thai society. Now, parliamentary elections and other demonstrations of public support are necessary to replace, or at least supplement, the traditional foundations of legitimacy. Politicians in search of legitimacy and support were organizing labor as their political base. Labor did get some benefits from such an atmosphere. For example,

⁴⁰Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 45.

⁴¹Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), p.64.

the Pibun government declared May 1 as Labor Day. Furthermore, the government enacted a Labor Law in November 1956 (to become effective on January 1, 1957) which was favorable to labor interests. The comprehensive law was to apply to firms with ten or more employees.⁴²

Comprehensive regulations for labor relations were established by the law. It also established work standards for women and children, and it regulated wages and hours.⁴³ More important, the law allowed workers to organize and to bargain collectively with employers. Nevertheless, there were quite a number of restriction imposed on labor

⁴²Vijit Sangtong, Labor Administration in Thailand 1978. (Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1978), p. 10.

⁴³Mabry summarized the law as follows: "It provided a normal working week of 48 hours, a daily rest period and a full one-day holiday every week, annual vacations of six days for those employed continuously for not less than a full year, and thirty days sick leave per year. Women were to work a maximum eight-hour day, were not to undertake night work, and if under eighteen years of age, were not to be employed in hotels, places where liquor was sold, or in night clubs or dance halls. For expectant mothers, a two-month leave of absence was prescribed. Children were not to be employed under twelve years of age, and between twelve and fourteen were to be employed only on light work in family establishments. For all workers, overtime pay at time-and-a-half for work over the normal forty-eight-hour working week was prescribed, and double pay where the worker was employed on a full holiday. Wages were to be paid in Thai currency, and payments in kind were forbidden. After six months' service, an employee was entitled to thirty days' pay if he were dismissed without due notice, except in the case of gross misconduct. For injuries, diseases or death during and arising out of the course of employment, the employer was liable, and had to pay compensation and treatment expenses. Registers of employees were to be kept and to be made available to the Labor Inspectors," "Industrial Peace Through Law," Investor (September 1969), p. 719. Quoted in Mabry, op. cit., p. 48.

organization. For example, the government could deny a union's certification if its activities were deemed to be against the public interest or were non-peaceful. Government employers or supervisors of firms were excluded from membership. This was in a sense a limitation on the quality of membership of a union. No alien was permitted to form a union. Furthermore, there were measures of control imposed on unions such as:

Unions were required to register and to submit annual reports of their activities; they were enjoined from engaging in political activities; they could be sued and their leaders were subject to criminal penalties for illegal coercion or extortion. However, the right to strike was recognized only after a dispute settlement procedure had been utilized. The law listed a number of employer labor practices that were declared unfair, not unlike those in the National Labor Relations Act of the United States. Both the closed shop and union shop were prohibited.⁴⁴

Thai workers, with little experience in labor relations, found the procedures required by the law too complicated to understand and apply. Traditionally, Thai workers preferred to resort to a strike and then talk rather than talk and then strike. Thus, the cooling off period of twenty seven days before a strike was considered legal was a long time to wait. In practical terms the law was not feasible for the solution of labor disputes. Mabry agreed that the law was unlikely to solve labor disputes. He wrote;

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 46.

The major flaw, however, in these and subsequent dispute settlement procedures was that they placed restrictions on the scheduling of strikes, without providing any alternative procedure whereby workers' dissatisfactions could be expressed or resolved. Workable grievance procedures are uncommon, and although companies were required by law to establish formal grievance procedures, little or no use was made of them. The consequence has been that these and later formal dispute settlement procedures have been ignored, partly because the Labor Relations Committee developed the reputation of being pro-management in the cases with which it dealt.⁴⁵

What benefitted the workers most was the fact that the law provided them with a legal right to organized as a labor union. In 1957 there were some 136 unions with a membership of about 25,000, and the number increased to 154 by November 1958. The size of unions varied from 40 to 400 members.⁴⁶

It is important to emphasize again that in the period before 1957 many unions were organized and sponsored by politicians, and their leadership was limited in each case to a few individuals inexperienced in collective bargaining or grievance administration. These unions were mobilized in time of political need by those who had organized and supported them. The result was that there were twenty-two strikes in the year 1957 when there was a general election. Such strikes involved more workers and averaged almost twice the duration of strikes in earlier years. Many of these strikes were designed to support their patron.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁶Mabry, op.cit., p. 47.

⁴⁷Denpong Palakorn, Sahapap ragen ngan, p. 77.

Officially, they were about economics, but they were known as movements with political goals.

In 1957 the Pibun government established a new trade union called the Thai National Federation of Trade Unions (TNFTU). The new federation claimed seventeen affiliates and depicted itself to workers as an alternative to the "leftist" TNTUC. One of the reasons the government sponsored this new federation was because the TNTUC, which had been sponsored by the government before, came to be dominated by the left and became a political rival of the incumbent leaders of the government. The Pibun government's plan to hold a general election was the reason why the federation was established in 1957.⁴⁸

In early 1958 a new name for the Free Workmen's Association was adopted with the hope of revitalizing the political fortunes of the organization: the Federation of Free Workers Union of Thailand (FFWUT). A short period before the end of Pibun's government there were three federations: The FFWUT, under government sponsorship and the TNFTU, under the control of the government's rival.⁴⁹ The organizations were not originally initiated for the interests of workers but workers were organized by political

⁴⁸Mabry, op. cit., p. 47.

⁴⁹ Col. Chanchai Ramagomut, "Raeng ngan kab panha kan nud yud ngan nai pratet tai," [Labor and Strike Problems in Thailand] (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn university, 1976), pp. 16-20.

elites of the time to serve their needs for popular bases in political struggles. Workers by themselves were patronized, used, or mobilized by political elites.

Workers did, however, gain from their relationship with the elites who organized them as a base of political support. Some of them were protected by politicians and did not have to fear of employers when they went on a strike for higher wages or better working conditions. One example was the taxi drivers who were protected from police harassment. And because the federations were not exclusively workers federations--there were some associations of self-employed affiliated with the federations--they, too, were protected by their patron. Due to the restriction of the Labor Code, it was difficult for workers alone to organize on their own initiative. Labor relations functions remained a hazardous pursuit for a union leader. He was subject to employer retribution, against which the Labor Code in practice provided him little protection. Workers lacked an understanding of what a union could do for them. The reluctance of Thais to challenge authority made collective bargaining an alien and unproductive procedure; hence, there were few union victories or accomplishments to bind the workers to a continuing organization and for which they were willing to make unusual sacrifices. Their leaders were inexperienced in grievance administration. The main engine that moved the union movement in this period, then, was the

political elites of those days. The political elites could do so quite easily, and they had a base on which to build, since there were already a good many labor organizations in the form of welfare or beneficial societies. They simply took advantage of the opportunity to obtain formal status under the registration provisions of the Labor Code. Workers welcomed the initiative of elites when they began organize a union or federation because the workers and informal organizations needed them as their patrons. This coincidence of purpose made the job of elites that much easier.⁵⁰

Labor Movements in the Dark Age: October 1958 to October 1973.

This period of fifteen years has been described as the era of military dictatorship. As described in the previous chapter, Sarit the leader of the "Revolutionary Party," came to power through a military coup, abolished the previous Constitution and put the country under martial law. Political power was concentrated in military and civil-servants. 'Bureaucratic polity' was the character of this period. Sarit as a Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister held all political power within his hands. He could say that "I alone take responsibility" for the fate of the country. Marshal Sarit brought more paternalistic practices into Thai politics and made it "more Thai." He did not follow

⁵⁰Mabry, op., cit, p. 48.

the footsteps of the "People's Party" leaders who carried out revolution to end the absolute monarchy in June, 1932 and tried to plant democratic rule in the country. As we shall, see his rule damaged the still weak labor movements.

Trade unions were prohibited when the "Revolutionary Party" repealed the Labor Code of 1957. The reason given by the "Revolutionary Party" was that the existence of trade unions generated labor dissension, which nullified the normal cooperative spirit that should exist between workers and their employers. Moreover, trade unions were alleged to have been involved in politics as pawns of politicians, some of whom were communist. Sarit not only banned trade unions, but also jailed twenty-four of their leaders, fifteen of whom were affiliated with TNFTU.⁵¹ These leaders were released only after the death of Sarit in 1963.

There were two main explanations for Sarit's suppression of trade unions and the labor movement, apart from his government's accusation of trade unions as a source of agitation and disruption to normal relation between employer and employee. First, the Sarit government gave priority to free capitalist economic development, which was opposed to the "state capitalist" policy imposed by the Pibun government (1947-1957). Investment from abroad was emphasized. To be attractive to foreign investment, workers must be kept in line and wages must be kept at a minimum

⁵¹Col. Chanchai Ramagomut, op., cit. pp. 23-24.

rate. Workers were told to sacrifice their labor power for the economic growth of the country, the benefits of which would in turn "trickle down" to them. In other words, this government was pro-employer. Secondly, the rule of Sarit was in the period of the "Cold War" between capitalist and communist camps. The Vietnam War materialized out of such conflict between the two ideologies. There was a concern by both Thai elites and the United States that Thailand would be the next domino if Vietnam would fall to the communist camp. There was also concern among Thai ruling elites to rush the country into capitalist development and this policy was strongly encouraged and supported by the United States. The communist paranoia also affected the labor movement, since any movement was perceived by the government as being mobilized, conducted, supported, infiltrated or contaminated by communist movements. Such a situation was harmful to any workers' movement.

During Sarit's time it was easy to abolish the Labor Code of 1957 without fearing retribution from workers, since labor organizations were weak and had been organized by outsiders, especially politicians now out of power. The organizations alone did not have the power or know how to bargain and deal with the government. The majority of the wage labor force was still Chinese. Since Chinese comprised between 60 and 70 percent of the labor force, it was unlikely that they would make any claim on the government.

Furthermore, workers of peasant origin could always return to the farm and those members who were Thai Buddhists were culturally preconditioned to be non-involvement in the affairs of others. To put this in perspective, we might note that there is quite a different situation today, when labors has enough power to prevent any government from trying to abolish the union.

Although labor activity was minimal, there were some strikes even in the period of Sarit's rule. But workers did not participate in any kind of political activities such as supporting a political party in a general election. Nor were they involved in the policy making process, and the government did not pay any real attention to solving labor disputes. After the Labor Code of 1957 was abolished, labor disputes were mediated by a variety of government offices which had little understanding of, and no expertise in, matters pertaining to labor relations. For example, disputes were referred to provincial governors, to provincial welfare officers, to district officers, but most frequently to the police. Only in 1962 did the government upgrade the Division of Labor in the Ministry of Interior to bureau status. Since then, labor disputes have been referred to this division and later, in October 1965, the bureau was raised to department status. This department, however, was seen by worker activists and labor leaders as an instrument of control, designed by the government and usually siding with employers

except during the 'Democratic period' (1973-1976).

In February 1962 the General Assembly passed the Labor Dispute Settlement Act, which outlined a complicated procedure that had to be followed before a strike was legalized. It was reported that even many Labor Department officials did not understand the procedure. For employees and employers, especially employees, the problem of understanding was even more serious. It should be no surprise, then, that legal action was seldom taken against either employers or employees who made mistakes during the strike: both parties were often at fault. A strike, according to Thai culture and practices was the only means of expressing of labor discontent; it was the only reasonable way for aggrieved workers to seek quick redress.⁵² It is not surprising, then, that only 25 strikes were reported in 1970, 27 in 1971 and 34 in 1972.

The Thai government under Thanom, who succeeded Sarit, shows a more positive attitudes toward the labor movement. The government was pressured by both the domestic and the international situation so that it had to change its policy and its stance toward the labor movement. Labor unrest at home was increasing because of inappropriate and inadequate measures for alleviating worker job dissatisfactions, while abroad the ILO was under pressure to censure Thailand for suppressing labor organizations. Thai leaders changed their

⁵²Mabry, op. cit. pp. 49-51.

course with respect to labor policy. Announcement no. 103, (1972) of the National Executive Council (NEC) allowed workers to form organizations which by law were not be called trade unions but "worker associations" instead. The latter term has a very different meaning within the Thai context. The former implies a more radical organization, one more difficult for employers and their supporters to accept than the latter term. Announcement no, 103 also repealed the 1965 Labor Dispute Settlement Procedure Act and substituted a similar procedure.⁵³ Under the 1972 procedure legal strikes could be delayed for a period up to 105 days, which very few legal strikes practiced.

Strikes during the early 1970s were caused by various factors, but most were the result of economic demands, such as wages, working conditions, terms of employment and other fringe benefits. Most of the strikes were wildcat strike and ended quickly. They had little impact on the politics of the country and received little attention from the public. We call attention to only one important strike by workers in the Steel Workers Company, which was very organized and was the longest one up until that date. The strike occurred on May 18, and ended on June 16, 1973. Management fired workers who filed grievance for compensation, and that was the principal factor that led to the strike. We call attention

⁵³Arnold Wehmhorner, "Trade Unionism in Thailand-- A New Dimension in Modernizing Society," Journal of Contemporary Asia 13:4 (1983), p. 483.

to this case because the strike united fifteen of the existing worker associations behind the steel workers, and it received widespread publicity and appeals for ILO mediation. This event indicated a significant development of the labor movement in Thailand in terms of the ability of workers to mobilize support not only from their own kind but from organizations outside the labor movement.

It is not uncommon for workers to ask for help from other persons: journalists, intellectuals, university lecturers, or organizations such as student organizations, a political party, other workers' organization. In the early days of the labor movement, rice mill workers asked for help from the Tramway Workers Association. The latter itself, when their turn had come, before making a strike on December 31, 1922, contacted and consulted with an intellectual journalist of the Bangkok Kanmuang, a newspaper that fought against injustice in society campaigned for the welfare of workers. After the military government was overthrown by the October 1973 revolution, workers were escorted by students to ask for their rights. During the 'democratic period' which followed, workers showed their ability to organize and fought for their own interests. They were not organized or mobilized by some political elites solely for the interests of those who came to organize them. Much of their activities were designed for their members' interests. From the account we can see that the 'bureaucratic polity' was being

challenged by the new trade union organizations. They were becoming autonomous and acting in their own interest.

Labor Movement from October 1973 Revolution to 1986.

In the first part of the 13-year period, the political atmosphere was that of a democratic form of government and popular politics. This was followed by a short interruption by a military-backed civilian dictatorship. In the final part of the period, the so-called restricted democratic form of government prevailed, and political power was shared among bureaucracy, parliament, political parties and other extrabureaucratic forces. Labor unions benefitted from the existence of both the first and the last form of government. The labor union as an organization of workers became institutionalized. We now turn to the activities and development of trade unions within this period.

During the 'Democratic Period,' between October 1973 and October 1976, workers were very active in asserting and having their demands met. Strikes, all of them spontaneous or wildcat, were effective weapons used by workers to win their contests with employers. The government also had to take their demands into account and mostly followed workers' demands and proposals. Laws favoring labor's interests were promulgated. Trade unions for the first time expressed themselves clearly as an extrabureaucratic force that could initiate or reverse policy in favor of their own interests.

The 'Democratic period' could be seen as a golden age for the labor movement. Over three hundred work stoppages occurred in November and December of 1973 alone, three-fourths of them in December.⁵⁴

The total number of strikes and work stoppage was 501 in 1973. The numbers were still greater in the following years: there were 357, 241 and 133 in 1974, 1975, and 1976 respectively (see Table 3) The number of strikes would have been even larger than it was if the military had not stepped in to end the 'democratic period.'

Table 3 below shows that the 'Democratic period' was characterized not only by the high number of strikes but also by the high number of workers involved and mandays lost. This was different from the period of 1981 to 1984, when the number of strikes was low, and the number of workers involved was comparatively low as well. In the 1982-84 period, however, the mandays lost were high. This is an indication that were short in duration strikes in the democratic period, and that they lasted longer in the later period.

Strikes occurred in the 'Democratic period' not only because of a political climate that favored the workers, but also because of economic problems. Declining real wages, the

⁵⁴Frank Lobard, "Labor Unrest: The Pendulum Swings," Business in Thailand, 5: 1 (January 1974), pp. 7-12.

Table 3

Work Stoppages for Whole Kingdom, 1856-1987

Year	Number of Labor Dispute to Work Stopage	Workers Involved	Man days Lost
1956	12	66	3,673
1957	21	203	12,947
1958	4	8,458	4,202
1959	11	846	8,060
1960	2	3	64
1961	2	68	93
1962	3	81	63
1963	4	118	159
1964	6	300	539
1965	17	3,753	6,566
1966	17	5,413	18,476
1967	2	470	470
1968	14	1,867	3,217
1969	18	5,345	23,593
1970	25	2,888	6,004
1971	27	5,153	12,646
1972	34	7,803	19,903
1973	501	117,887	296,887
1974	357	105,883	507,607.5
1975	241	94,747	772,946
1976	133	65,342	495,619.5
1977	7	4,868	12,331
1978	21	6,842	8,600
1979	64	16,203	33,837
1980	18	3,230	5,356
1981	54	22,008	173,396
1982	22	7,061	116,795
1983	28	10,532	54,537
1984	17	6,722	185,113.5
1985	4	648	13,078.5
1986	6	5,191	157,858
1987	4	1,092	15,484

Source: Labor Study and Planning Division and Labor Relation Division, Department of Labor.

Arab oil embargo, and a roaring inflation rate produced a wave of strikes and demonstrations that far surpassed any that had occurred heretofore in modern Thai history. It is worth noting here that such strikes and demonstrations originated at the grassroots level, occurring in response to every conceivable complaint. This was in contrast with the 1957-58 period, when communists or political elites were initially responsible for the unrest.

In terms of the influence of unions on public policy that favors their interests, it could be said that in the 'Democratic period' unions were successful in pushing their demands through the political system until those demands were met by government policies. The Labor Relation Act 1975 (LRA 1875) was a case in point. The law was drafted in September 1974 amid labor unrest, with the purpose of speeding up the dispute mediation procedure. It was also intended to permit workers to join associations in the same trade, across provincial boundaries. The bill reduced the "cooling off" period from fifty to eight days. National associations were permitted, and workers could form inter-provincial organizations. Leaders of associations were to be given thirty days of paid leave annually by their employers to attend to union business.

Furthermore, the law also allowed associations to merge, opening the way for the formation of a national federation. This opened another opportunity for workers to

organized themselves as a political group and play a wider role in the politics of the country.

When the law was first enacted, workers did not immediately go to register with the Department of Labor, since they had some caution about the role of the government. They started to organize an informal body, a national federation called the Federation of Labor Unions of Thailand (FLUT). It was the first federation since 1958. This federation was under the leadership of Paisan Thawatchainand--an economic unionist who believed unions should concentrate on economic issues such as wages, benefits and working conditions. About the same time, a Labor Coordinating Center of Thailand (LCCT), composed of some of the more activist leaders and radical students, apparently with Marxist-Socialist leanings, was established. The LCCT was active during the 'Democratic Period,' but it dropped out of the scene after the military coup of 1976.⁵⁵

In January 1975 the FLUT successfully opposed attempts to raise support prices for rice, which would have increased the cost of living of industrial workers and low income populace. The success was one example of the ability of trade unions to perform as an extrabureaucratic force, since it could reverse policy and make it favorable to its members. In May 1976, FLUT was reorganized into the Labor Council of Thailand (LCT) and a constitution was drafted

⁵⁵Mabry, op. cit., p. 62.

with an initial membership of 101 unions. By July 1976 affiliation had increased to 120 unions, or 80 percent of the registered unions in Thailand. Labor activists believed that unions were more united and union influence on the politics of the country and the bargaining power of the council was at a peak. Later they saw the emergence of the three other national labor councils as an unhealthy sign for the unity of the labor movement, since competition among these 4 national level labor organization would be unavoidable and fragmentation of the labor movement would be the result. They--the labor activists--were quite correct, because the 4 labor councils have engaged in struggle for the leadership of workers since then.⁵⁶ However, the three national level labor organizations had not been established during the 'Democratic Period.' They all were established after the country returned to limited democracy from 1977 until 1987. We will have more to say about these organization later in this chapter.

Unfortunately, the 'Democratic Period' lasted only three years. The military, supported by right wing conservative elites, stepped in on October 6, 1976 with the massacre at Thammasat University and restored a military-backed civilian dictatorship under Prime Minister Thanin

⁵⁶Interview with various labor leaders during March - October 1988. Some of them were, Mr.Thanong Po-an, the President of the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT) and Mr. Art Sri-art, the President of National Congress of Thai Labor (NCTL).

Krivixian. Popular politics and hence worker participation in politics was then suppressed. But the government did not abolish trade unions; instead, it restricted their activities. No strikes were permitted; union meetings were prohibited unless authorized and supervised by the police department. Activity within the labor movement, then, was minimal, due to an unfavorable political situation. As a result, 22 unions withdrew their registers, and only 2 unions sought to register with the DoL.⁵⁷ However, the rigid right wing government under the leadership of Thanin lasted only one year, after which a group of military called the National Army Revolutionary Council (NARC) staged a military coup to overthrow Thanin's government. Kriangsakdi Chomanand was made the Prime Minister and one year later he restored elected government.

The labor movement and trade unions again became more active in politics during Kriangsakdi's (1977-1980) and most of the time of Prem's government (1980-1986). The two governments were a restricted or semi-democratic form of government, where groups outside bureaucracy were allowed to participate in the politics of the country.

Trade unions have emerged as an extrabureaucratic force and have been involved in various political activities. As an extrabureaucratic group, trade unions have employed

⁵⁷Department of Labor, satithi raeng ngan 2531 [Year Book of Labor Statistics 1983] (Bangkok: Department of Labor 1983), p. 91.

various means to express their interests and demands and to have them met. They sometimes used strikes to have their demands met; sometimes they have engaged in lobbying policy makers. They participated in general elections by supporting a particular political party or candidate or even by union leaders themselves running as candidates for election to the Parliament; sometimes their leaders participated in military coups. These activities will be described in more detail in later chapters.

Government's Role in Establishing and Regulating Unions:

A Recapitulation and Summary

Thai governments have been actively supporting free capitalist development since the late 1950s. To accomplish capital accumulation, Thai governments have believed and acted on the assumption that it was necessary to keep the labor movement in a position where it would cause the least problems. Various means of controls have been imposed to keep labor in check. Laws and regulations are used as the major means of control. Permission for labor unions to function came very late when compared to Singapore and the Philippines. Throughout the period covered in this chapter (1958-86), our study finds the Thai governments have done more harm than good to the labor and union movement in the country. However, other factors have worked in favor of labor. Socioeconomic changes that have taken place in the

last three decades resulted in the eroding of the 'bureaucratic polity' dominated by military and civil servants and the democratic form of government has been installed since 1977. These changes have opened opportunities for trade unions to organize and promote working class interests in general and the interests of union membership in particular. The role of trade unions in politics, as political groups, has been increasingly accepted and government policy toward trade unions has been more friendly. The suppressive policies imposed by the Sarit and the Thanom governments are no longer suitable for dealing with today's labor problems. In order to put this in perspective it will be appropriate to go back for a brief history of the role of Thai governments in establishing and regulating trade unions.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, labor organizations in early Thai labor history were influenced by Chinese organizations, organized along the line of surname, and Chinese secret organizations introduced by overseas Chinese workers who were allowed to immigrate to Thailand to meet the demands of labor by the Thai government's policy of economic development. This experience was different from that of other countries in Southeast Asia which had experienced colonial rule. Without being colonized by any colonial power, Thai labor history was not influenced by the trade unionist ideas of countries in Western Europe. Trade

unionism in the Western sense, then, was alien to Thailand.

Thai governments also did not pay much attention to labor problems in early history, since the majority of workers were not indigenous Thais. What concerned them most about workers was the problem of security, to keep the immigrant overseas Chinese workers in line. The unlawful Chinese secret organizations were tolerated because the governments benefitted from their early operations. Those organizations' main concerns were to maintain order in the immigrant Chinese communities.

Since the majority of urban labor forces were dominated by the overseas Chinese until the mid-1940s, and the Thais entered the labor force late, workers associations in those days did not acquire a legitimate claim to participate in the politics of the country.

Only after World War II were workers in Thailand allowed to form trade unions. An increasing number of dependent workers were by that time working in the newly established factories, and more sectors of the public service were taken over by the government which helped create more dependent employees. But the most important factor was the return of the liberal leader Pridi Banomyong: The political climate that prevailed under his government did not obstruct the setting up of trade unions.⁵⁸ The government even abolished the Anti-communist Act to ensure

⁵⁸Arnold Wehmhorner, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

free political expression.⁵⁹

From 1944 to 1956 there were two national organizations of workers actively involved in politics, acting as bases for the political interests of elites. The CUT was under patronage of Pridi and his clique; the TNTUC was supported by Pibun. The former faded away two years after Pibun took power in 1947. That left the TNTUC as the national labor organization, under the control of Pibun. Its leaders were Pibun's clients and the organization was used by Pibun to further his political goals. But Pibun's organization was in turn abolished when Sarit Thanarat came to power through a military coup d'etat in 1958.⁶⁰

Sarit abolished the 1956 Labor Act and proclaimed the Revolutionary Party Order No. 19 on October 31, 1958. Under this new law, all unions were banned, under the claim that they were 'obstacles to economic development' and 'gateways for communism to enter Thailand.' His government vigorously suppressed the right of workers: labor leaders were put in jail without trial, ten labor leaders who had visited the People's Republic of China were arrested and one of them

⁵⁹One of the reason of the government to abolish the Anti-communist Act was because it was seeking to obtain support from the Soviet Union upon her entering to the United Nations. For details see David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand, p.182.

⁶⁰Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Prime Minister, 1958-1963.

remained in jail for seven years.⁶¹ In 1965, the government promulgated an 'Industrial Disputes Procedure Act' in order to bring strikes and industrial disputes into a legal framework. But this law was without any effect on labor relations since trade unions were still illegal and strikes were banned.⁶² Under Sarit's regime the labor movement had received a serious setback.

When Sarit died in 1963, Thanom Kittikachorn succeeded him but policies toward workers were not changed until early 1972. Announcement No. 103 of 16 March 1972 was promulgated by the Thanom government in order to revive labor relations. Worker associations were legalized, although the term 'trade union' was not allowed to be used. In Thai language the workers' organizations were explicitly called 'Workers Associations' not 'Trade unions. The former name was more acceptable since in Thai words the name of the latter was associate with the communist movement and was unacceptable in the Thai political context of the time. The law also limited worker organizations to the plant level since it prescribed that trade unions could not join unions of other provinces or unions from establishments having different conditions of work. In practice this meant that the unions were restricted to the company level. Due to the hostile

⁶¹David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

⁶²Arnold Wehmhorner, *op.cit.*, p. 483.

position of employers toward trade unions and the fact that the law did not provide the necessary protection for those leaders who wanted to register in the DoL, there were only 14 associations registered on the eve of the fall of the Thanom regime. However, the Act also introduced labor protection measures, which are still in force today. These measures dealt with working time, hours of rest, annual leave, payment for overtime, sick leave, work of women and children, as well as safety and health in the work place.⁶³

Following the Thanom government, the Thai labor movement was very active in the period of 'open politics' or the 'democratic period 1973-1976.' Wildcat strikes or simultaneous strikes were the means used by workers to have their demands met. Workers became aware of their strength and their roles in politics as an interest group. One measure of their success was the Labor Relation Act 1975, which was promulgated by the Sanya Dhammasakdi government. Under this law the strikes and lockouts were permitted, the cooling off period was reduced from 50 to 8 days, the employer was required to reply to workers' demands within 48 hours instead of 21 days, the setting up of national trade union organization was permitted, and elected trade union leaders were able to take paid leave for trade union activities.

⁶³Notification of the Ministry of Interior of 16 April 1972.

The labor movement was again interrupted by the coup of 6 October 1976, when the military junta declared a ban on strikes and lock-outs, however, it did not uphold the LRA of 1975 as the country was once more pushed back under military rule. This time the military did not assume the Prime Minister post but put a right-wing lawyer, and a member of Privy Council, Thanin Kraivixian in it. The government under Thanin pursued a very conservative policy and suppressed all kinds of liberal movements, especially the communist movement. Liberal students and labor leaders could not live safely or follow a normal life because of the threat from the government. Many of them, therefore, went to the jungle and joined the Communist Party of Thailand to fight a guerilla war with the government. Therdphum Jaidee, the radical labor leader during the 'democratic period,' was one of them who went to the jungle and he only left the Communist Party of Thailand and returned to live a normal life in 1981 after the general Amnesty Act was promulgated.

The growth and activities of trade unions were brought to a near standstill since, in addition to the prohibition of strikes and lock-outs, the government imposed police supervision of union activities, surveillance of unions by secret agents, arrests of union leaders under martial law, and the transfer of top civil servants of the DoL. New and young organizations like trade unions in Thailand could not withstand such a suppressive atmosphere, hence, they chose

to keep a low profile.

The Thanin government did not stay in power long because its conservative policies were too rigid to be implemented in the country. Kriangsakdi Chomanand replaced Thanin as Prime Minister following a military coup d'etat in 1977. His government's labor policy was moderate and trade union growth continued. General Prem Tinsulanond, who succeeded General Kriangsakdi, also followed the latter's policy toward workers and trade union activities. Finally, in January 27, 1981, his government legalized strikes and lock-outs. Various tripartite committees were established to handle labor disputes and industrial relations during Prem's eight years in power. At the end of his office, in late 1987, there were more than 500 trade unions registered with the DoL.

Throughout the period analysed, the structure of labor organization and trade unions was in a process of change and development. We now turn to a discussion of the structure of the unions, including the legal framework within which the structure developed and the leadership that has influenced and been influenced by the structures and the legal framework.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP OF LABOR ORGANIZATIONS
AND TRADE UNIONS

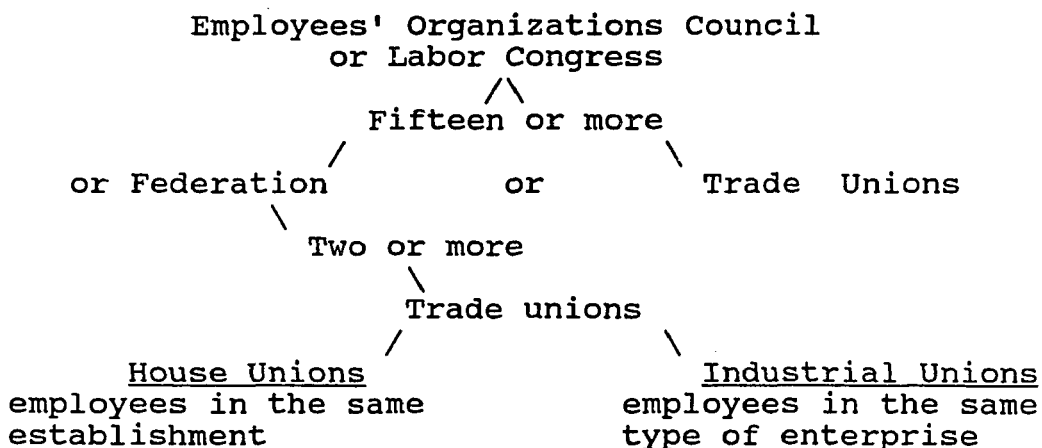
An understanding of the structure and leadership of trade unions will help us to understand their role in the realm of collective bargaining for wages, benefits and working conditions as well as their role within the Thai political system. As a starting point, we will need to look at the legal framework within which they operate.

The Legal Foundations

According to the Labor Relation Act 1975 (LRA 1975), unions--the first level of workers' organization--can be formed with as few as ten registered employees. Most unions are small, especially in the private sector. Nine out of ten of the largest unions belong to public enterprise. Officially in Thailand, trade unions are classified into two types- public and private enterprise union. The latter includes multinational corporations, joint-venture investment between foreign and domestic, and domestic private enterprise unions. Of the two types, the public enterprise unions have been the strongest and the most active in politics. The function of unions as provided by the LRA 1975, can be summarized by the following chart.

Chart 1

Structure and composition of Employees' Organizations



Source. Prasong Ranananand, Effective Approaches to the Prevention and Settlement of Labor Disputes, (Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1985), p. 4.

Unions can be formed either by a minimum of ten employees working in the same establishment or in the same type of enterprise. At a particular establishment, more than one union can be formed if at least ten employees agree to set up another union and register with the Department of Labor (DoL). A good many of trade unions in Thailand since early 1980 have been established through this means. Some have been used as a base for the interests of labor leaders. In 1986, there were as many as 20 unions within the Bangkok

Metropolitan Busses Authority.¹ This, on the one hand, creates many small unions and has fragmented and weakened unions, making them susceptible to be mobilized or used by leaders or political elites outside the unions for the latter's interests. On the other hand, it creates a pluralistic character in the labor movement, where no one or no center of power can control and dominate the contemporary labor movement. This pluralistic characters is the foundation of the institutionalization and autonomy of labor movement in Thailand.

The LRA 1975 requires that unions be governed by an executive board elected by the membership, and that each labor organization must have a constitution and set of bylaws defining membership rights and privileges. Qualifications of membership and how unions are organized are regulated by the law. Union leaders must be insiders. This is different from what has been practiced in most of the other Asian countries, such as the Philippines,² where many union leaders use the union as a base for the advancement of non-political interests. Most Thai trade unions have a strong participatory character; this is probably due to the fact that unionism is still a young

¹Mr. Sopone Yompanya, personal interview, August 16, 1988. He was an Executive Committee of the National Council of Thai Labor responsible for labor education.

²See Elias T. Ramos, Philippine Labor Movement (Quezon City: New Day Publishers), 1976.

movement and leaders are still union based so that they are very close to their members.

Demographic Features of the Thai Labor Movement

At the end of 1987, there were 514 trade unions registered with the DoL, of which 273 were located in the Bangkok Metropolis and 241 were in the provinces. There were 116 public enterprise trade unions, of which 99 were located in the Bangkok Metropolis, and there were 398 private enterprise trade unions, of which 224 were located in the provinces (see Table 4). There were 15 federations--a second higher level of labor organization-- with 14 located in the Greater Bangkok area. And there were 4 labor councils--the national level of labor organization-- all located in Bangkok. The constantly growing number of trade unions registered with the DoL indicates the usefulness of the organization for workers.

More than half of the trade unions are located in provinces around and in the industrial area of the Greater Bangkok,³ which is reflective of the centralization and concentration of industry in a country of peripheral capitalism. Thai trade unions are mainly company-based, but the concentration of industries in the Greater Bangkok makes possible the organization of workers into bigger

³The Greater Bangkok area includes Bangkok metropolitan and provinces surrounding Bangkok, such as Samut Prakarn, Pathumthani, Nonthaburi, Samut Sakhorn, and Nakorn Pathom.

organizations, for example federations--the second level of worker's organization-- and, finally, peak organizations-- the labor council or congress, at the national level, even though the trade union movement is young and new to Thai society.

Table 4

Number of Labor Organization in Whole Kingdom, 1987

Labor Organization	Bangkok Metropolis	Regions	Total
Labor Union	273	241	514
Public Enterprise Labor Unions	99	17	116
Private Enterprise Labor Unions	174	224	398
Labor Union Federations	4	11	15
Labor Unions Councils*	4	-	4
Employer Associations	15	1	16
Employer Associations Fed.	1	-	1
Employer Councils	1	-	1

(Data as of December 20, 1987)

Source: Labor Studies and Planning Division, Department of Labor.

Joining into larger labor organizations such as federations, or labor councils at the national level, has been practiced in the country whenever workers are allowed to organize. That was the case with Saha Achiwa or the Central Union of Thailand (CUT), which formed in the time of Pridi in 1944. Later, in a similar fashion, Pibun formed The National Trade Union Congress (TNTUC). The same practice

occurred when the NEC Announcement 103 allowed workers to organize, even though the government still obstructed affiliation. Co-ordination bodies were also formed, notably the International Metalworkers Federation-Thai Council (IMF-TC). In Spring 1983, nine labor federations were registered with the DoL. Most of them were established between 1979 and 1981, partly influenced by increasing support of the International Trade Secretariats.⁴ It is important to note here that these newly registered federations were initiated and formed by workers themselves. They were not formed by men from military or civil servant elites who were outside the unions. Another significant difference between labor organizations of the past and the more recent ones was that the latter have been more concerned with autonomy and the interests of the workers, while the former were organized to support the elites in politics.

In 1975, an informal body of labor organization at the national level was formed. There were sixty-five associations affiliated to form the Federation of Labor Unions of Thailand (FLUT). It was the first workers federation ever to form since 1958. FLUT was led by a prominent unionism leader-- the late Paisan Thawatchainand. The federation successfully mobilized more than 50,000 into the street to oppose attempts of the Kukrit government to

⁴Arnold Wehmhoerner, *op.cit.*, p. 486.

raise the prices of the 5 % rice.⁵ Such policy if implemented would have directly increased the cost of living of industrial workers.⁶ The federation action demonstrated the ability of unions to reverse government policy for their own interests. Details of this incident will be discussed in Chapter Five.

In May 1976, FLUT was reorganized into the Labor Council of Thailand (LCT) and a constitution was drafted with an initial membership of 101 unions. By July 1976 membership had increased to 120 unions, or about 80 percent of the registered unions at the time. In that year the labor movement was unified and the LCT was the peak organization of workers. It was the most representative spokesman of Thai workers as a whole. The LCT sought to register with the DoL in 1976 and it would have been continuously registered since then had the process not been interrupted by the rightist government of Thanin Kraivixian (1976-77). However, it was able to register with the DoL in 1979, under the Kriangsakdi government. In the same year, LCT joined the ICFTU and was able to increase the number of affiliated unions to 110 in 1981 and to 169 in 1982.⁷

During the period when the FLUT was formed, groups of

⁵The 5 % rice is a second grade rice which consists of 5 % broken grain.

⁶Rice is the main source of calories for Thais especially workers.

⁷Arnold Wehmhoerner, op.cit., p. 487.

unions formed another informal federation--the Labor Coordination Center of Thailand (LCCT). It was under the leadership of Therdphum Jaidee,⁸ a socialist oriented labor leader who was very active in leading workers into politics during the 'democratic period.' The LCCT, composed of some of the more activist leaders, apparently with Marxist leanings, was very actively engaged in the labor movement. Its leaders acted as advisers to movements with a broader goal than just labor relations. It was believed that this organization wanted to use workers as a means of change to another kind of political system--namely socialism. This organization, designed to co-operate with the student and farmer movement, was not officially recognized, since it did not register with the DoL. Immediately following its establishment, the LCCT quickly took joint action to prevent the police from assisting a back-to-work movement in a strike, by escorting nonstriking workers through picket lines. It threatened a general, nation-wide walkout to protest such police strike-breaking support, and only the police force's hasty repudiation of this role at the last minute prevented the first such general strike in Thai

⁸Therdphum Jaidee, a former student of Thammasat University, a socialist oriented labor leaders had involved in various political movements of workers during the 'democratic period'. His role was too radical to be compromised by the military government (1976-1977). He fled militant right-wing assassination attempts by joining the illegal popular front (Coordinating Committee for Patriotic and Democratic Front) in 1976. Later, in 1981, he returned to Bangkok under a general amnesty law.

history. Socially-minded college students and some university professors working with employee groups joined hands with the LCCT in order to educate worker associations and influence their militancy. University campuses were the scene of weekend labor schools to educate neophyte labor leaders in the law and practice of labor relations and in economic and political principles. This was something new to Thai history and it gave rise to controversy and confusion. Some were convinced that communists had infiltrated and radicalized student ranks. Student idealism according to them, was being used to foment disruption and discord in Thai industrial society. A few observers, on the other hand, praised the university activists. Mabry observed the development and saw that it was not uncommon and not so serious by Western standards. He wrote;

It appears now that some Thai students and professors were socialists, and a few may have been Marxists, but it was a socialism with a peculiar Thai nationalistic flavor. Flirtations with new ideologies are not uncommon in student bodies throughout the world. However, for the most part the students were motivated more by idealism than by commitment to a political ideology alien to traditional Thai political values.⁹

According to Thai standards, the LCCT was too radical in its political ideas to be acceptable, especially to the military and the majority of workers, even during the 'democratic period' when political participation was open.

⁹Bevars D. Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 63.

In the middle of 1976, a majority of labor organizations began to reject the LCCT's stance, and the arguments of conservative "bread-and-butter" unionists seemed to carry more weight among rank and file Thai workers. The LCCT had lost ground in the labor movement and faded away when a military junta came to power in a bloody military coup d'etat on October 6, 1976.

A majority of workers and the mainstream of Thailand's labor movement considered the LCT -- the moderate peak organization of worker -- more acceptable than the LCCT. By 1976 the LCT concentrated on improving the economic condition of its members: it had become conservative. Although unions had a growing awareness of their potential political influence, most of the leadership did not want to engage directly in politics. They seemed committed to working within the existing political framework, and even within that framework they believed that neither the unions nor their leaders should support or endorse a particular party or parties in general elections. In the Thai context, conservative trade unions were more acceptable to Thai workers. That explains why a great number of unions were attracted to the LCT during 1976-1982. That pattern was interrupted only briefly under the dictatorship of Thanin Kraivixian, 1976-1977.¹⁰ The LCT was seen as the strongest

¹⁰David Morell and Chai-anan, Political Conflict in Thailand, pp. 190-191.

union, and the workers movement under the leaders of the LCT was quite united.

Unfortunately, the unity of the workers movement did not last long. The LCT split into two poles when the Sawas Lookdote faction, which strongly believed that trade union must engage in politics and who had closely associated with military leaders, won the controversial 1982 LCT election. Paisan Thawatchainand, who favored a more conservative approach to unionism and the former president of the LCT, withdrew along with about 80 unions and formed another labor council at a national level: the Thailand Trade Union Congress (TTUC). This new organization has also been very active in the labor movement. The two peak organizations--the LCT and the TTUC--have been the most influential spokesmen of labor's interests since then. Since Sawas Lookdote's faction left the LCT in 1984 the two organizations have tried to re-unite again. However, that attempt has been only partly successful.

The National Free Labor Unions Congress (NFLUC) and the National Council of Thai Labor (NCTL) registered at about the same time that the LCT did. It was believed that the Thanin regime and governments that followed him used the NFLUC to break the strength of the independent LCT. Even in 1982, the Department of Labor (DoL) continued to recognize the NFLUC, in spite of the fact that it did not secure the required number of 15 affiliated unions. The other labor

peak organization, the National Council of Thai Labor (NCTL), affiliated with the Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unions (BATU). Since early 1980, the NCTL effectively under the leadership of Panas Thailuan¹¹ has been very active in competition for posts in various tripartite committees and especially, associated judge posts in the Labor Court. More union affiliated members (see table 5 below) and hence candidates for the post were elected under the list of the NCTL than from any other organizations. The vote is counted "one union one vote," regardless of how many members. The NCTL's major goal is to co-operate and work peacefully with government and employers.

Table 5

Basic Data of the 4 Peak Labor Organization: 1988

Name	President, General Secretary	Number of Union Affiliated	Number of Membership
LCT.	Mr. Thanong Po-an Mr. Chalee Jantawong	96	70,420
TTUC.	Mr. Watana Iambumrung Mr. Panich Jareonphaow	94	104,994
NCTL.	Mr. Att Sri-at Mr. Panas Thailuan	106	21,370
NFLUC.	Mr. Anusakdi Bunyapranai Mr. Preecha Thityanpong	29	7,527

(Data as of 20 September 1988)

Source: Division of Labor Relations, Department of Labor.

¹¹Mr. Panas Thailuan has been very active in recent labor movements. He is one of the few labor leaders that has command in English.

Among the four labor peak organization the TTUC and the LCT have been the most active in speaking on behalf of workers as a whole. As we shall see in later chapters, the two not only represent their own membership's interests but that of working class as a whole and sometimes of the lower class and farmers. The two labor councils have more membership than either the NCTL or the NFLC, as shown in the table 5 above.

There are also informal groups of unions which are not recognized by law. These groups are organized mostly for political action. Since the RLA 1975 does not allow unions to be involved in political matters, the loosely organized groups take on this function when needed. Leaders from various unions affiliated to these kinds of organizations form an executive body to operate and employ the resources from their formally recognized trade unions. Since the informal groups are not recognized by law, their movements cannot be considered as trade union movements in the eyes of law. This is one of the ways to get around the legal restriction, making it possible for the movement to engage in the politics. The organizations have been very effective in representing workers' interests. Some example of these groups are 'Gloom Yan Rangsit' (or Rangsit Group), 'Gloom Yan Omnoi' (Omnoi Group), and 'Gloom Ratwisahakij Sampan' (State Enterprise Labor Unions Relations Group). The latter

has been very active in broader political issues.¹² The differentiation of organizations designed to work for workers' interests and preferences indicates that the trade unions have become institutionalized and to some extent acquired autonomy from state control. This was something that could not be perceived in the early history of the Thai labor movements.

Organizations, of course, do not develop without leaders, and leaders obviously influence the course of organizational development. But leadership is also influenced by the stage and course of organization and, above all, by the context in which they must operate. We turn to some of these issues next.

Labor Leaders in the Thai Context

Thai labor leaders have not been accepted as equal partner of other political elites as has been the case in those countries where a labor movement and labor leaders engaged, shoulder to shoulder, to fight for independence such as happened in countries in Africa.¹³ Laborers also, according to Thai culture, where hierarchy prevails, are considered inferior in Thai society. Their leaders, then,

¹²Lae Dilokvidhyarat. "Industrialization and Trade Union Movement in hailand," n.d. Chulalongkorn university, pp. 12-13.

¹³For more detail see, Markovitz, Irving L. Power and Class in Africa (Englewood, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), pp. 261-283.

were hardly accepted as being on the same level as other elites. Thai governments in the past also saw labor and labor organizations as agents of communist penetration to the country. Therefore, government policies were frequently geared towards security problems, not industrial relations. Unions, then, were not allowed to function and workers' right were suppressed. Only in the past 15 years have labor movements gained momentum in their roles in politics. This has been due to changes in socioeconomic conditions that have taken place in the country. Now labor movements have to some extent been accepted as an legitimate political groups.

As noted earlier, Thailand was not colonized, hence there was no war for independence in which workers joined other groups and interests. Lacking such a history, labor leaders did not have a chance to become part of a new political elite, as was the case in those countries which had fought for liberation. Thai labor leaders, then, did not have a chance to influence the early development of the country including the shaping of industrial relations.¹⁴ That helps to explain why economic development strategies which sacrificed the interests of workers have been the priority of the Thai government.

Also, because of the lack of influence by a colonial administration, trade unions came to Thailand late, when

¹⁴Arnold Wehmhoerner, "Trade Unionism in Thailand -- A New Dimension in a Modernizing Society," Journal of Contemporary Asia 13: 4 (1983), p. 481.

compared to Singapore and the Philippines, where the same level of industrial development had been reached by the mid 1950s. The latter's pattern of laws and labor legislation were influenced by colonial masters and, hence, trade unions were formed earlier than in Thailand. As noted, the first trade union in Thailand was organized in 1897 by tram workers.

Another important factor which contributed to the late appearance of trade unions was the fact that the original workers in Thailand were overseas Chinese who were imported by the Thai government, since the Thais preferred to work independently on lands which were unoccupied in those days. Labor organizations in the early period, even after World War II, were mostly comprised of Chinese workers and their purposes were to provide for the welfare of their members. Labor leaders, mainly Chinese, hence, had no legitimate claim to become involved in the politics of the country.

When workers formed organization during the government of Pridi¹⁵ and Rear Admiral Thamrong, their leaders were government agents and, hence, there was no attempt by those union leaders to develop trade union autonomy. It was clear that worker organizations were used as political bases for men in power. This same pattern developed again when Field Marshal Pibun and his supporters overthrew Thamrong's government in 1947. Pibun also had his men sponsor and lead

¹⁵Pridi Banomyong, Prime Minister, 1944-1947.

two labor federations--the Free Labor Federation and the Labor Federation of Thailand.¹⁶ When Field Marshal Sarit overthrew Pibun in 1958, he abolished trade unions and many union leaders were put in jail. After 1972 labor again was allowed to organize but was not really in the form of trade unions as they are today.

The on-and-off status of trade union existence provided less chances for labor leaders to prove themselves useful to their members and society at large. Only recently, after Field Marshal Thanom's government was overthrown by a student revolution in October 1973, have trade unions and their leaders had a chance to develop. The role of labor leaders in protecting and advancing the interests of union members and the working class as a whole was evident during the 'democratic period,' when politics was open to all political groups. Such experiences and the image of victory have influenced the thinking and attitudes of both leaders and rank and file of unions.

Trade unions have grown continuously since 1973 even though there was a short interruption by the Thanin government during 1976-1977. Nevertheless, the right to form trade unions has not been abolished. Unions began to be institutionalized, especially unions in public enterprises,

¹⁶Phichit Chongsathitwatana, "The Thai Labor Movement From 1945 To October 14, 1973," in The Trade Union Movement in Thailand ed., Arnold Wehmhoerner and Suebsaeng Promboon (Bangkok: Friedreich Ebert Stiftung, 1978), p. 33.

where they have been relatively long-lasting organizations with the ability to attract and retain resources and leaders. The existence of trade unions has been useful to industrial relations in the country and it is unlikely that process described above will be pushed back by any government to a stage that there are no trade unions.

The Selection of Labor Leaders

Labor leaders, since the NEC Announcement No. 103 of 1972, reached their positions through the democratic process. Elections of labor leaders at every level, from a single trade union all the way to the labor council at the national level, have been conducted. The next step is to report the results to the DoL for registration. If the DoL approves and registers the result, then the leaders are legitimate. According to the law, the DoL director has a right to reject any elected labor leader if he or she finds the latter is not a good citizen. And even after registration, if the DoL director finds that a labor leader does anything to interrupt the good climate of industrial relations, the director is empowered to remove the leader from the post and the union has to find a new leader. However, there have been few cases where the DoL chose to use its power. Among the few, was the case of Ahmad Khamthesthong, the President of LCT--a leading peak labor organization, and also, a member of the Senate, who was

removed from the presidential post in 1983. The DoL justified the removal on the ground that Ahmad was no longer an employee of the State Railways of Thailand, hence he was not entitled to a position in the trade union.¹⁷ This is one of the ways in which the government through the DoL can, if it chooses to do so, can control and contain the labor movement.

The Thai labor leaders have to be insiders (actual employees of an enterprise and members of a union). This is different from what has been practiced in the Philippines, where leaders are not necessarily rank-and-file members. A lawyer in a law office which takes care legal matters for workers could also be a union leader in the Philippines. In Thailand, the link between leaders and membership is still close, and the former come to office through election. This process helps to shape the role of labor leaders; they have to represent the interests of their unions' members, otherwise they would lose in the next election. Since government has recognized the importance of industrial relations, unions in Thailand now become a means of career advancement and status for their leaders. Various tripartite committees concerned with labor problems have been initiated and established. To be members of any tripartite committee is an honor and prestige for anyone, especially for a worker

¹⁷Rai ngan chak pok, "Phaen lab khong Thianchai," [The Secret Plan of Thianchai] Soo Anakot 5, 232 (August 15-21, 1984): 9-10.

who has little chance to advance and be recognized in the Thai context. Members of the Labor Court are appointed by the King, which is the most prestigious form of recognition that one can find in Thailand, and hence labor leaders want to be elected as members of the Court. Union leaders must, then, act in the interests of union members and the working class as a whole, otherwise they will lose their post to other contenders in the next union election. There are limitations here, however, as we shall see immediately.

The Role of Labor Leaders

It is still true in Thailand that the patron-client relationship within trade unions is important. Workers have a tendency to elect leaders who have good relations with management and/or government officials, since they believe that through the right connections their problems will be solved or at least taken into account. A General Secretary of a labor council acts as a patron to his followers. His role in the labor movement since the early 1980s has been prominent, and he and his council dominated the election of membership for the Labor Court during 1985-86.¹⁸ Other signs of a patron-client relationship has been that a great many leaders were reelected and stayed in their position for a long time even though they had not performed good enough

¹⁸Personal point of views, personal interview with some labor activists in NCTL during the month of August 1987.

to meet members' expectation. Such behavior of workers can be understood in the Thai context, where avoidance of direct confrontation is an important pattern of culture. The workers probably reelected their leaders because they feel 'krengchai'.¹⁹ In this context, 'krengchai' would approximately mean that the leader should not be made to 'lose face' and should not develop 'bad feelings' about the voting. This attitude is fading away, however, as unions become institutionalized and as leaders can move upward in the social ladder. The elections of the LC^T and TTUC leaders in the last two generations showed the change in this attitude; members voted without compromise to push through candidates of different factions.²⁰

The active role of union leaders, especially at the peak organizations, which act in the interests of workers has been increasingly accepted in contemporary Thai society. Leaders have to take care of their members in industrial disputes at the plant level and lead in collective bargaining at a higher level. To do so, leaders also have to face an obstacles created by Thai culture. Leaders at the plant level have to face un-supportive attitudes when they have to bargain with employers. In the early industrial

¹⁹For an interpretation of 'krengchai' see Niels Mulder, Everyday Life in Thailand: An Interpretation (Bangkok, 1979), p. 122.

²⁰Arnold Wehmhoerner, "Trade Unionism in Thailand -- A New Dimension in a Modernizing Society," p. 492.

development of Thailand, where workers could find other means of subsistence, for example, to go back to countryside where they came from, dissatisfied workers preferred to leave their jobs and, hence, leaders could avoid direct confrontation with employers. But when the workers have to hold their jobs, since they can no longer go back to find their means of subsistence in the countryside, when disputes occur leaders have to represent them, otherwise they would lose their post in the coming election. To represent interests of their members means that leaders have to confront employers. To do so has not been easy in the Thai context, where the worker is considered inferior and has been socialized to respect higher authority. In the Thai cultural context, the employer is not simply the investor or the capitalist who employs workers. Employer means more than that. Many Thai entrepreneurs still believe in their role as patrons and are convinced of the positive values of paternalism, e.g., the patron's obligation towards his workers. The worker at the same time not only works for the employer but is also expected to respect him and deep in his mind to be thankful to his employer for giving him the opportunity to work. However, this cultural obstacle to modern industrial relations has eroded as the industrialization of the country increases. Phiraphol Trisatavit analyzed the relations between industrialization and culture in Thailand and contends that "as

industrialization and urbanization developed, the traditional values weakened and could no longer be treated as major obstacles to trade unionism."²¹ We move next to a more specific context in which Thai labor leaders must operate: their relations with military leaders.

Connection of Labor leaders and Military leaders.

Given the importance of military leaders in the Thai political system (see Chapter Two) and the context in which labor leadership has emerged, discussed earlier in this chapter, it will be no surprise that a considerable relationship between military leaders and some labor leaders existed and continues to exist. The relationship could assume a patron-client character as it did in the time of Prime Ministers Pridi and Pibun, where labor leaders were totally dependent on support of these prime ministers. Some of the officials of these governments were assigned as labor leaders at that time. Or the relation could assume a new dimension, as it has today, where labor leaders have to some extent gained their independence from control and mobilization by military elites. But even Union leaders at the national level or some strong unions such as those in some state enterprises--State Railways Unions, Metropolitan Water Workers Trade unions--have not been immune from

²¹Phiraphol Trisatavit, "Labor Policy and Practices in Thailand: A Study of Government Policy on Labor Relations, 1932-1976" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1978), p. 90.

intervention of the military. Some sort of relations have to be established. "No union leader can play his role effectively and stay in position long without establishing a good relation with men in the military."²² Nevertheless, the relationship is now moving toward a situation where labor unions are increasingly independent of military control. This is not to say that the military has given up its attempt to control, mobilize and make use of the labor movement, but it does mean that union leaders have learned how to articulate their resources in order to bargain in the interest of their membership. In contemporary Thai politics, labor movements that work in concert with the military cannot be seen as workers mobilized exclusively for the interest of military but, rather, as working for mutual interests, where both labor and military could gain. This is the way that a labor leader commented on the relationship: "It does not matter if our movement may be exploited by the military at a particular time or in a particular situation. What is important is that we act in our own interests. In some cases the military may support us and may not do so in others. Again what we are concerned with is the benefits of workers as a whole."²³

²²Mr. Panas Thailuan, General Secretary of the NCTL, personal interview, May 18, 1988.

²³Mr. Pratin Thamrongjoy, personal interview, September 30, 1988. Pratin is a labor leader who believes in the idea that workers have to engage in politics of the country in order to protect and advance their right. He has access to

Recently, the military--the leader of 'bureaucratic polity' force, has been loosing its grip in controlling the politics of the country. As discussed in the previous chapter, the recent semi-democratic government of Thailand has been the result of the balancing of different forces--the monarchy, the military and its junior partner, the civil-servants, the Parliament, and new extrabureaucratic forces of which the trade unions are a part. The military, of course, still wants to dominate politics. But since the parliament gained its momentum through the backing of the middle class and the business sector, the military has had to find support from the workers. The military has been forced to fight in popular game and it is unlikely that the military could push the country back to military rule again since, such attempt by military leaders would jeopardize the political opportunity of middle class and business leaders and other extrabureaucratic forces. The latter, then, try to socialize the Thai people in support of the democratic process, where the government must come from general elections. Evidence can be seen in various pro-democratic ideas published in daily newspapers and other means of mass communication. All Members of Parliament who have won their posts in general elections take every opportunity to sell the idea that military coups and military dictatorship are

military leaders and participated in various coup attempts. He was put in jail after the September 9, 1985 military coup attempt failed.

out-of-date. Parliamentary democracy, where government is based on general elections, has been the dominant idea since the late 1970s. In support of this proposition we note that General Kriangsakdi chose to resign from the premiership in 1980 instead of dissolving the parliament or allowing the military to take over the government as used to be the practice in the past. During eight years in power, General Prem's governments survived two military coup attempts. There were also many rumors about the possibility of military coups, yet, Prem's governments weathered such crises and democratic government has survived since then. Military leaders who wanted to stay on top of Thai politics have realized that they cannot take for granted the right to come to power through military means. The military, then, takes a soft stance towards workers and is now adopting co-optation policies.

Union leaders from peak organizations and/or strong state enterprises who are close to the military have been appointed to the Upper House. Ahmad Khamthesthong and Sawas Lookdote, the President and General Secretary of the LCT respectively, were appointed to the post as were the late Paisan Thawatchainand the President, and Vichai Thosuwanjinda, the TTUC Executive Committee Member responsible for education. Preecha Sri-measap and Pracha Khiewwan were also appointed to their posts in 1983. Preecha and Pracha were believed to have worked closely with a

military faction in the Internal Security Operation Committee (ISOC). This organization dealt mainly with communist insurgency and other security problems.

In Thai society it is known that ISOC has a great deal of power and that it is an important organization under military control. Within ISOC there were two lines of strategy advocated for winning the communist war in the country-- one calls for the use of military power to suppress the war and the other calls for political measures. The former is called the 'hawk line' and the latter the 'dove line.' The latter line was led by the then Major General Choawalit Yongjaiyudh²⁴ who was associated with Prasert Sapsunthorn, a communist defector who worked for the ISOC. Prasert was convinced that the only way to win the communist war in Thailand was to establish democratic government and in order to do that the government must first allow those who joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) to come back to town²⁵ without any penalty. Choawalit was so convinced by the idea that he persuaded the government of General Prem to decree Government Order 66/2522 and

²⁴The general was later made the Army Commander-in-Chief and acting Supreme Commander in 1986. He left the Army and assumed Deputy Prime Ministry response for security in the Fall 1990.

²⁵'Come back to town' or 'return to town', in this context has special meaning. It mean that people who used to join the CPT and engaged in armed fighting with the government are immune from any penalty under the Order 66/2523 if they would leave the Party and live normal life as an ordinary citizen.

66/2523 in 1979 and 1980. After the Orders were announced the government literally won the communist war in the country. After the communist war was brought under control in the mid 1980s, the role of this organization and its relations with labor unions changed significantly.

The direct impact of the Order upon the labor movement has been that the ISOC stopped its program of organizing and training workers because it would lead to conflict between the mobilized workers and those who got out of the CPT. The military men no longer come down to organize any groups or unions of workers, but they continue contact with prominent labor leaders on an individual basis. Panas Thailuan, a General Secretary of the NCTL and a well known labor leader who has been very cooperative with government and military leaders gave his view on military intervention in labor affairs: "In NCTL I would say none at all. After Order 66/23 was promulgated and after the September 9, 1985 abortive coup the military has stayed away from the labor movement."²⁶ However, military elites still continue contact with, and support some prominent labor leaders on an individual basis. In any labor activities such as strikes or demonstrations, leaders may get financial or other support from military men. The latter do so to keep contact with labor leaders in order to be sure that when the military

²⁶Mr. Art Sri-art, President of the NCTL, personal interview, May 5, 1988.

needs mass support the labor unions would be its base. Such mutual relations between military and union leaders create some room for labor unions to gain autonomy from government control. This will be discussed in a later Chapter, where we shall see that unions are no longer totally controlled by military or government.

Background of labor leaders

Recent labor leaders have performed their roles in politics differently than labor leaders in the past, in the sense that they have increased their autonomy, they have been elected from their own ranks, they are insiders and were not designated from political elites. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, trade unions are new to the Thai context and the number of members, which is the most important source of union's strength, has not been great. Thus the power of the labor movement vis-a-vis employers, and/or government has been largely dependent on the capacity of labor leaders. More specifically, we refer to the ability of labor leaders to articulate the potential power of the labor movement, to demonstrate strength in the eyes of employers and government. Panas reflected on the role of labor leaders in Thailand in this way: "Most of the activities that led to benefits for the workers as well as the involvement in politics for the benefit of labor are because labor leaders have learned how to manipulate and mobilize their followers

to create more power than they really have."²⁷ His view was not without ground. It is therefore, important to be aware of the background of some of present labor leaders.

The following background of labor leaders based on data collected in the spring of 1990 from the DoL--the only place that keeps records on data of labor leaders at the time unions seek registration with it. The labor leaders are required to fill an application form, but there is only a limited amount of sociological background which labor leaders are requested to fill out in the form. We could collect from the DoL data of labor leaders on sex, age, religious, education, and their origins. The data collected are based on the years the federations or labor councils registered with the DoL. The period of data available is from 1979-1989.

Labor leaders on whom we collected data are those who were executive committee members of 14 out of 15 federations and 4 labor congresses or councils registered with the DoL. All these higher level of trade union organizations were located in the Greater Bangkok area. These labor leaders were chosen for analysis because they lead the higher level of workers' organizations, and, what is more important, because the leaders in the 4 labor councils have been accepted as labor leaders at the national level and speak on behalf of workers as a whole in various aspects. The Labor

²⁷Mr. Panas Thailuan, personal interview, May 18, 1988.

Congress of Thailand (LCT) and the Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC), as discussed earlier in this chapter, have been the two most politically active labor organization at the national level. There were 565 labor leaders, approximately 90 percent men and about 10 percent women (there were 53 women), that fitted into the mentioned category. Within the numbers mentioned, there were 318 leaders from federations and 247 from the labor councils. Most of them are Buddhist with 18 Islamic and 2 Christian. Since gender and religion were quite homogeneous we see no need to analyze. We concentrated our analyses on level of education, age, and origin of labor leaders. We also compared them with bureaucratic elites. One purpose of the comparison is to highlight the background of labor leaders. The other purpose is to show the difference between the two groups of elites--to show that the bureaucracy is still far better educated than the labor leaders. It is not intended to propose a precise comparison since the time and method of research is different.

Table 6 shows the level of education of present labor leaders, those who emerged after the fall of the military regime in October 1973. They have been actively involved in unions activities as well as in politics. About 63 per cent of labor leaders had education not higher than secondary school. The educational background of leaders in federations were higher than those leaders in the council. More than 40

% of the leaders at the federation level had vocational education or higher, while there were about 32.7 per cent in labor councils with that level of education. The percentage of leaders who had earned a Bachelor degree or better was higher at the federation level as well. There were 12.8 % of leaders at the federation level while there were 8.4% at the council level. Federation leaders have not played a significant role in the politics of Thailand when compared to leaders at the council levels. The latter were more accepted as representative of labor. The present 4 labor councils have played a substantial role in protecting and advancing labor interests as we shall see in later chapters.

There is an explanation for the higher education of leaders at the federation level. A federation can be formed by as few as two trade union which might have a number of members with higher education. For example, the sahapan raeng ngan karn tanakarn lae karn ngern haeng pratet tai (Federation of Banking and Financing Workers of Thailand or FBFWT), had many leaders with higher education. Seventeen out of 27 leaders, about 63 per cent of its leaders registered with the DoL, had earned the Bachelor degree. Furthermore, the rest of its leaders had vocational education or higher.²⁸ Some of FBFWT's leaders such as Mr. Vichai Thosuwanjinda, who earned a Bachelor degree in law

²⁸Data collected from Division of Labor Relations, Department of Labor, Ministry of Interior, January 1990.

and a Master degree in economics, and Mr Manas Uthongsap, with a B.A. in law, have played significant roles in the labor movement in the politics of Thailand. Mr. Vichai in particular has been involved in the labor movement and politics since the mid 1970s, which we shall see as our discussion progresses.

Table 6

Educational Background of Labor Leaders

Type of Org.	Primary		Secondary		Vocational		University		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Federation	66	21.6	117	38.2	84	27.4	39	12.8	306	56.1
Council	67	28.0	94	39.3	58	24.3	20	8.4	239	43.9
Total	133	24.4	211	38.7	142	26.0	59	10.9	557	100

Source: Division of Labor Relations, Department of Labor, Ministry of Interior, Data collected in January 1989.

Average educational background of leaders of sahapan raeng ngan karn fai fah haeng pratet tai (Federation of Electricity Workers of Thailand or FEWT) was also comparatively high. Of all 42 of the FEWT's leaders, there were 14 leaders who had earned a bachelor degree, 27 leaders had vocational or higher training, and only 1 labor leaders had only secondary school. The late Paisan Thawatchainand, who play very important roles in labor and the union movement during early 1970s to 1988, had vocational training and was also an executive committee member. Tasanai

Suwansilp also found that labor leaders of the Metropolitan Electricity Authority Workers' Union, a member of the mentioned FEWT, had a higher educational background. In his study on the formation of the role of unions in the politics of Thailand, he found that during 1973-77, 57% of the executive members of the Metropolitan Electricity Authority Workers' Union had acquired Certificates of High Vocational Learning, and other employees were mostly graduates of vocational colleges.²⁹

Educational background of executive committee members of the 4 labor councils were, as shown in Table 6, lower than those leaders at federation level. In the case of NFLC, there were only 3 leaders who had earned a bachelor degree or equivalent. They accounted for only about 5 per cent out of 58 leaders registered with DoL between 1978-1986. Moreover, there were 15 leaders with only a primary education, 26 with secondary school, and 14 leaders who had vocational training.³⁰ The NFLC has been believed to be labor council sponsored by the ISOC for the interests of military elites.

The average level of education of committee members of the NCTL registered with the DoL during 1979-1986 was also

²⁹Tasanai Suwansilp, "Formation and Political Role of Labor Union in Thailand: A Case Study of Metropolitan Electricity Authority Workers Union Between 1972-1976," (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1977), pp. 149-150.

³⁰Data by courtesy of Division of Labor Relations, Department of Labor, Ministry of Interior, January 1990.

lower than the federation level, as shown in table 6. There was only one labor leader from this labor council: Mr. Thanit Thawornsuk who earned a law degree and was Vice President of the NCTL. There were 16 leaders with a vocational background, 22 had secondary school and 20 had primary school level.

Educational background of labor leaders was comparatively much lower than those of bureaucratic elites. There are not only the higher qualification to enter the office: bureaucrats also have opportunities to continue their education or to have in-service training. As a result, Likhit found that among the Special Grade Officials, 93.29 % hold at least a college degree and 33.10% are foreign-trained. Among the First Grade Officials 77.19% hold at least a college degree and 19.36% are foreign-trained.³¹

Table 7 shows the ages of 562 labor leaders at the time they registered with the DoL during 1979-1989. Leaders at the federation level were much younger than those at the council level. We can see from table 7 that about 62 per cent of executive committee members of federations were not older than 34 years of age while there were about 43 per cent of leaders at council level who were younger than 34. There was no particular reason to explain why labor leaders

³¹Likhit Dhiravegin, The Bureaucratic Elite of Thailand: A Study of their Sociological Attributes, Educational Backgrounds and Career Advancement Pattern (Bangkok: Wacharin Press, 1978), p. 113.

at the federation level were younger than at council level since both federations and councils have only recently emerged. They all have registered with the DoL from 1979 until the present. One possible explanation, in the Thai context, would be that there has been an expansion in the education system and in opportunity for education. More young men with higher education enter into the labor market.

Table 7

Age of Labor Leaders

Type of Org.	18-24 No. %	25-34 No. %	35-44 No. %	45-54 No. %	55 and up No. %	Total No. %
Federations	23 7.3	172 54.4	84 26.6	34 10.8	3 0.9	316 56.1
Councils	11 4.4	97 39.2	102 41.3	31 12.6	6 2.5	247 43.9
Total	34 6.0	269 47.8	186 33.0	65 11.5	9 1.6	563 100

Source: Division of Labor Relations, Department of Labor, Ministry of Interior. Data collected in January 1990.

However, the age of leaders from both levels is not very different if we expand the range of age to 44 years. In that category there were 88.3 per cent of the leaders at the federation level, and this was the same at the council level, where there were 83.9 per cent of total leaders under 44. Therefore, the average age of leaders at the federation and council level was about the same. But age is important for another reason. The considerable youth of these labor leaders indicates that they are not the same generation of

leaders that presided in the period of the Pridi, Thamrong and Pibun governments. They are a new generation of labor leaders who emerged after the October 1973 revolution. They gained experience in the politics of Thailand during its transition to democracy. As we shall see later, these leaders learned how to act and bargain within a democratic form of government and demonstrated preference for the democratic form of government rather than the military-bureaucratic form.

The average age of the bureaucratic elites was much higher. In the study which Likhit carried out in 1977, he found that almost 60% of the elite were between the ages of 50-60 years.³² This was because the bureaucratic elites had to move up through the ladders established by the procedures of bureaucracy. In contrast, trade unions are young in Thai history and their leaders come to power through election.

Table 8 below shows the geographic origin of labor leaders as registered with DoL at the time federations or councils sought registration. Of 557 executive committee members of both federations and councils, there were only 141 labor leaders, only 25.3 per cent, whose origin was Bangkok. By contrast, 327 leaders originated in the provinces of the Central region, 58.7 per cent of the total number of leaders at both the federation and council level. The provinces of the Central region are included because the

³²Likhit Dhiravagin, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

five provinces are included in the Greater Bangkok area. This shows that the largest number of labor leaders were from the Central region. Likhit Dhiravegin in his study of bureaucratic elite of Thailand in 1978 also found that 68.19 per cent of bureaucratic elites had a Central region origin.³³

Table 8

Place of Origin of Labor Leaders

Type of Organi- zation	Bangkok		Central		North		South		East		N.East		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Federa- tion	76	23.9	113	35.5	32	10.1	35	11.0	16	5.0	46	14.5	318	57.1
Council	65	27.2	73	30.5	13	5.4	25	10.5	21	8.8	42	17.6	239	42.9
Total	141	25.3	186	33.4	45	8.1	60	10.8	37	6.6	88	15.8	557	100

Source: Division of Labor Relations, Department of Labor, Ministry of Interior. Data collected in January 1990.

However, the most recent active and prominent labor leaders were not from the Central region. For example; the late Arom Pongpangan, a Southerner in origin, was perhaps the most progressive and dynamic of FLUT leaders during mid 1975. Arom was 29 in June 1975, when he founded the Labor Union of the Metropolitan Waterworks Authority and became its president. He graduated from the Korat Technical School

³³Ibid., p. 81.

and started to work for the Waterworks Authority in 1972 as a construction supervisor, founding the union there three years later. Arom was perhaps the only member of the FLUT executive committee with a strong ideological orientation. After the 1976 coup he was the only FLUT leader among the few labor organizers arrested. He was detained without trial as "a person dangerous to society."³⁴ Because of his devotion in the struggle for a better life for the working class in Thailand, a foundation was established in his memory after his death.

The late Paisan Thawatchainand who was a labor leader at the national level from mid 1970 until his death in 1988, was born in the northern province of Phitsanulok. Graduated from a vocational college. He had represented workers from many industries on the National Wage Committee in 1973 and 1974, and was also on the committee appointed by the Ministry of Interior to amend the labor law. Paisan was instrumental in coordinating the activities of various public enterprise workers' union, creating the Federation of Public Enterprise Workers Union in 1975. He formed the ICT and was its president until he formed another labor council--the TTUC. He remained its president until his death. He was appointed to the Senate as well. His highest formal education background was at the vocational level.

The spokesman of the Federation of the Labor Union of

³⁴Morell and Chai-anan, op. cit., p. 192.

Thailand (FLUT) was Jittisak Chumnummani, 35, son of a rubber planter in the southern province of Yala, near the Malaysian border. He earned his college degree from Thammasat University. Another southerner on the FLUT executive committee was Sa-ad Chandi, 39, who finished his secondary education in a Bangkok temple school.

Thanong Po-an, President of the LCT (1986 to present), also a Senator, finished only secondary school. Sawas Lookdote, a political oriented labor leader, former LCT general secretary, and former appointed member of the Senate, graduate from SRT's training school. Ahmad Khamthesthong, a prominent labor leader who was president of the LCT from 1982 to 1985, was born in Bangkok and graduated from the same school of Sawas. They both worked closely in bringing the labor movement into the politics of the country. They were involved in the September 9, 1985 military coup attempt and were arrested after the coup was crushed. Ahmad was also appointed to the Senate at the same time as Sawas.

The leader who earned the highest degree was Mr. Vichai Thosuwanjinda. He was born in Samutr Songkram, earned a bachelor degree in law and a Master degree in economics and worked with Krungthai Bank--a state owned bank. He has been in the labor movement since the mid 1970s, has served on various tripartite committees, especially on the Wage Committee. In 1983 he was appointed to the Senate but was

too young to be qualified--he was 34 years old in that year. He has been described as moderate, negotiable, and soft speaking. Vichai is now serving also as vice president of the LCT.

An active labor leader who has been involved in labor movement since early 1980s was Mr. Panas Thailuan. He is now serving as general secretary of the NCTL, which associated with BATU. Panas was born in Bangkok, finished secondary school and works with the State Railways of Thailand (SRT). He used to work with Paisan, Ahmad, and Sawas in the LCT, but later, when conflict occurred, he left and turned to the NCTL. Under his leadership, the NCTL has been very active in filing and competing among labor leaders for the membership of the Labor Court, which is a tripartite institution. The NCTL is comprised of many small unions which have a small membership. At the time of election for Labor Court members, each union has one vote. The NCTL won all seats of the Court in 1986 because it had the advantage of a number of affiliated unions. Panas, though he had little formal education, had a very good command of English, and hence could find international sources of funds to sponsor the activities of the NCTL.

In short, the foregoing data and discussion show that the recent labor leaders are different from the labor leaders in the early period after World War II. The new leaders were insiders and were elected by their union

membership. No politicians in power had sent any of these labor leaders to organize labor unions to support them. By contrast, Pibun, had his man--Sang Pattanotai, for example, to lead the labor movement. Pibun's wife supported and sponsored the woman workers' organization, and a member of the Pibun faction--Police General Phao--organized labor organizations and picked his men as leaders of labor. These are only a few examples of the earlier pattern of labor and politics.

The new labor leaders were younger, had a good educational background, with skills to lead an evolving labor movement. This required not only the skills to organize and lead their membership in collective bargaining for wages, benefits and working conditions. Given the Thai context, it also meant bringing them into the political system as an extrabureaucratic force, working for the benefit of their membership and the working class as a whole. They no longer accepted the role of acting in the interest of a bureaucratic or military patron, albeit with some benefits for labor. They now function more as a member of an alliance, where both parties have something to gain. This will be illustrated in a series of case studies in chapter 6 and 7, where we focus on trade union's role in the political arena.

CHAPTER FIVE
TRADE UNIONS IN POLITICS

This study has frequently referred to the growing "autonomy" of the trade union movement in Thailand. In this chapter, a number of cases will be analyzed in order to show in more detail the nature, the process and the extent of what has been referred to as "autonomy." All of these factors may be seen in the central issues, the proceedings and the outcome of specific strikes. The general format will be to first give a brief "overview" of each case, then, offer a more detailed presentation and, finally, an "analysis." In order to put this material in perspective, however, we begin with a brief overview of the pattern of strikes in the textile industry, because that industry has been vital to the recent Thai economy and at the same time produces labor disputes and strike more than any other industry in Thailand. Some specific and important textile strikes which occurred recently were selected for analysis in order to show the independence or "autonomy" of trade union in this kind of industry.

After the textile strikes have been analyzed, we will then move on to a discussion of strikes in other kinds of industry, namely, the hotel industry. The purpose of the analysis, once again, is to show the "autonomous" role of

trade union in the Thai polity. After reading these sections, the reader will perceive the effectiveness of trade unions and their growing autonomy as opposed to their role during the period which we have characterized as a "bureaucratic polity," described in an earlier chapter.

Textile Strikes¹

A Brief Overview on the Causes of Strikes

The textile industry has been one of the most important sources of export goods since 1973. In 1973, export volume was 1,868 million baht.² Since then, the increase of exports has been enormous. Since 1978 there has been an increase of 2 billion baht each year. There has also been an increasing rate of value of exports--at 17.3% each year during 1978 to 1984. The most interesting thing was the fact that there was an especially large increase in the value of exports during the year 1986 and 1987. Exports increased 55.2 percent from the preceding year: they jumped from 31,296.1 to 48,580 million baht. The year 1987 may be seen

¹The following brief overview of strikes in the textile industry, unless otherwise indicated, is drawn from Somyos Prueksakasemsuk, utsahakam singto tai kab karn cluenwai raeng ngan [The Thai Textile Industry and the Labor Movement] (Bangkok: Arom Pongpangan Foundation, 1988), PP. 5-15.

²Baht is the unit of Thai currency. Rate of exchange in early 1970s, was approximately 20 Baht to 1 U.S. dollar.

as a golden year for textile exporters.³ The export of textile product was the leader of all industrial export goods.

The textile industry is now very important to the economy of Thailand. It is a source of added value which is 20 percent of all industrial production of the country. In 1984 there were approximately 568,756 workers employed in the textile industry. This amount of employment comprised 18 per cent of all workers employed in the production of all industrial goods. In 1988 there were more than 20,000 textile factories, almost all of them are located in the Greater Bangkok area. Small and middle size factories which employed less than 500 workers made up the majority of the entire textile industry.

As late as 1986, almost all small and middle size factories had failed to improve their working condition up to the standard required by law. A survey of a sample of 8 factories conducted in 1985 in Samutprakarn province, which is in the Greater Bangkok area, revealed that all in the sample had not provided working conditions and safety conditions required by law. For example, the room temperature was higher than normal human temperature, there was not enough light, sound was too loud, and ventilation was not good. These were some of unpleasant conditions that

³"Yuk thong singto tai," [The Golden Year of Thai Textile] Warasarn settakij lae sungkom year 25, vol., 3, (May-June 1989).

led to various labor disputes and strikes in the textile industry. But there were other reasons.

At present, almost employment in the textile industry assumes a temporary basis. Workers are employed to work in a particular job and for a definite amount of time. The average wage per day is about 73-85 baht,⁴ with an average of 12-16 working hours per day. Most of the factories in Omnoi, Omyai, and Prapadaeng had not paid workers at the minimum wages rate required by law. It is not surprising, then, that wages are one of the main source of labor disputes and strikes in the industry. The majority of factories that had not met the standard of working condition and payment required by law. These were the main cause of labor disputes and strikes in this kind of industry from 1976 until the present.

Almost all the textile strikes during the so called 'democratic period'(1973-1976) resulted in a victory for the workers. But this was not the cases in the later period. In strikes of the later period, especially during most of the time of the Prem government (1979-1988), textile workers did not easily win their struggle against their employers. Most of the strikes ended in defeat for the workers who the staged strikes. A main cause of defeat was the economic difficulty, due to the world recession in the early 1980s.

⁴Official rate of exchange between Thai and the U.S. currency since November 1984 until present time is approximately 27 baht to 1 U.S. dollar.

Employees were laid off, hence, it reduced the power of labor to bargain with employers. Moreover, the employers have employed offensive strategies toward the workers movement. One of them has been the firing of labor activists and trade union executive committee members. They preferred to pay for severance rather than to let these union leaders establish strong unions. It is important to note that employers in Thailand were not happy with being challenged by workers, since they saw them as their client. Strikes and labor disputes have been seen as incidents that create a loss of face for employers.

The second important employer strategy has been the use of short term or temporary employment. This was practiced even though the law prohibits short term employment after a certain period of probation, which usually the law says would not be more than 6 months. However, in practice employers in the textile industries have abused the law and hence spurred more conflict and labor disputes in the industry. Recently, there were many strikes caused by short term employment. And in most of the strikes the workers lost.

The following section gives a brief discussion of some specific textile strikes in the semi-democratic period (1977-1986). Almost all of the strikes that occurred in the period grew out of mainly bread-and-butter issues, but they had some impact on the politics of the country. Yet, the

impact was less than in the 'democratic period.' The majority of trade union leaders concentrated on wage and benefit issues rather than political issues. The impact of the later strikes on politics was minimal, but, since the disputes between employers and employees could not be settled, the disputes were brought to the government agencies concerned.

The case of the Thai Melon Polyester Strike, which occurred on November 10, 1983 when 10 talks between employers and employees could not reach a peaceful settlement, also ended up with the defeat of the strikers. The employers also exercised their legal right by a lockout in the plant. Causes of the strike were bread-and-butter issues that had accumulated since 1982 when the employers fired some union committees and members, a total of 101 on October 1982. On September 13, 1983 the employers laid off 45 workers and filed a case in court to sue 5 union leaders. Moreover, the employer had not increased salaries for the workers as had been promised in July every year. The union tried to convince the employers to rehire the fired workers and increase salaries. The employer refused to do so, the union then filed its grievance and after 10 unsuccessful talks the workers staged a strike. The employers responded with a lockout at the plants.

During the lockout the manager employed new workers and the strikers gathered in front of the Ministry of Interior

asking for help. The Director General of the DoL, Mr. Chamnan Pochana, expressed his view on the movement: "there is the 'third hand' involved in this movement and the strikers filed the grievance that the employers cannot render." On July 26, 1984 the strikers turned to General Arthit Kamlang-ek, the Supreme Commander and Commander-in-Chief, for help. This time they just wanted to go back to work and they would agree to work with the company within the previous terms of employment. That is to say, the strikers had dropped all points in their grievance. There might have been some pressure from the General applied to the employers. There seemed to be hope for a settlement. But on August 7, 1984 just before the situation was getting worse, the factory owners decided to close their business and agreed to pay for compensation which was about 26 million baht (approximately US \$ 1 million).⁵

In this case, the legal right of the employer to close a business and lay off employees was an effective method to reduce the strength and influence of labor. Recently, the same method has been used by employers in the other textile factories. What they did was not only to decrease the power of the union movement but also to lay off their old employees whose wages and salaries were high. Instead, they could hire new employees at a much lower wage. Moreover, they could apply the short term employment contract to their

⁵Somyos Prueksakasemsuk, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-25.

benefit, since they did not have to abide by certain labor laws for the protection and compensation of labor. By these methods, employers have considerably reduced the strength of the trade union movement in the textile industry.

The impact of the strike on the politics of the country became inevitable when the strikers moved to ask for help from the military chief: they turned to General Arthit Kamlang-ek, Commander-in-Chief (1982 to 1986). This was a matter of importance because the country was in a delicate period of transition to democracy. Although the government came to power through a general election, such government had not been totally accepted as a legitimate government. The military and bureaucrats who were the long-time rulers of the country were not yet out of politics. They were really part of it, even though the new Constitution does not allow a bureaucrat to hold a political post simultaneously. There was a good possibility that a military coup might occur anytime, and the elected government under retired General Prem was consistently pressured by the military.

By using the labor problem the military could discredit the government by helping workers to get their demands met. It was not uncommon in Thailand that the military would use its power to force the employers to comply with workers' demands. By doing so, General Arthit gained mass support, earned popularity and hence paved the way for another military coup.

In view of what happened in the Thai Melon Polyester strike, it might be said that labor acted autonomously and was not subjected to the state control. The strike began in order to demand benefits for the workers in accordance with what was provided in various labor laws but which the employer refused to implement. The strike was partly supported by the Sahapan raeng ngan singto (the Federation of Textile Industry Unions) and Gloom Yan Rangsit (Group of Unions in Rangsit).⁶ At the outset, There was no sign of intervention by military men or bureaucrats so that the movement would benefit the latter. The strikers' decision to turn to General Arthit for help was a decision of the workers, a decision in their own interests. The General's willingness to help was also in his interests. That is to say, the General wanted to discredit the government and expand his popular base. This was a case of mutual benefits shared by the two partners. Viewed in this light, the strike was autonomous.

Viewed in the context of the transition to democracy, the strike was within the accepted rules. Strikers did not use or threaten to use violence to have their demands met. They preferred to employ unionism as a guideline to bargain

⁶The Group of Unions in Rangsit is an informal association of workers which is neither labor federation or labor congress. It is a loosely organization comprised of unions from various industries located in the Rangsit area on the north part of Bangkok metropolitan. The main purpose of the organization is to avoid Labor Relations Act which prohibited trade unions to involve in the politics.

collectively with their employer. Hence they were much more restrained by the situation. Such situation, according to Valenzuela's theory supports the transitional process.

Strikes which occurred in the later period of Prem's government were similar to what had happened to the Thai Melon Polyester Union in the sense that their demands were bread-and-butter issues yet could not be settled peacefully through collective bargaining and in the end the strikes lost. Throughout Prem's government, strikes took a long time to reach a settlement and hence opened opportunities for forces outside government to discredit the government. The srikow karnto [Srikow Weaving Strike] which had lasted about 3 months (from May 7 to August 10, 1987) had many political implications. There had been various labor unions, labor organizations, student activists, political groups, political parties, and politicians involved in the incident.⁷

The Srikow Weaving Strikers were lucky enough to win against the employer, since the government saw the trouble ahead. The Minister of Interior, empowered by the Labor Relations Act 1975 section 35, ended the strike and forced the employer to rehire the fired workers. Specifically, section 35 provides that:

In the case the Minister considers that the lock-out or strike may adversely affect the economy of the

⁷Wanna Asawasuchote, op.,cit, pp. 19-22.

country or cause hardship to the public or endanger the security of the country or is against public order, the Minister shall have the following power to: (1) order the employer effecting the lock-out to re-engage employees and pay wages at the rate previously received by the employees; (2) order employees on strike to return to work; (3) arrange for persons to replace the employees who are not working because of the lock-out or strike; the employer shall allow such persons to work and the employees shall not obstruct those persons from working. The employer shall pay such persons wages at the same rate as that paid to the employee; (4) order the Labor Relations Committee to decide the labor dispute.⁸

Now we turn to selected cases studies in more details. It is worth noting that all of following cases began with so called bread-and-butter issue which directly effected interests of unions' members, yet had an impact on the politics of the country. To repeat for emphasis, the purpose of the following analyses is to show the "autonomy" of trade unions. We shall begin with the June 1974 Textile strike.

The June 1974 Textile Strike

In June 1974 the first big strike ever occurring in the "Democratic Period" broke out when thousands of textile workers from about 600 factories came to the street and asked for help from the caretaker government under the leadership of Professor Sanya Dhammasakdi. The cause of the strike was mainly economic -- workers were cut off from their benefits and were laid off due to the sharp drop in

⁸LRA 1975, Section 35.

world demand for Thai textile products in that year. The textile industry workers began a strike prompted by their employers' announcement of production cutbacks, reduction of working hours and wages, and worker layoffs. Most textile factories are jointly owned by Thai industrialists and Japanese or Taiwanese investors.⁹ The textile industry had expanded greatly in 1973, accounting for about 17 percent of total gross domestic product (GNP) in the year. However, in 1974 their fortunes quickly changed as "rising oil prices, cotton shortages, a glut of world textile products, and dumping by the Japanese and Taiwanese caused Thai producers to reduce outputs by twenty-five percent." The drop in demand for Thai textile products had a serious effect on employment in this kind of industry.¹⁰

The strike erupted even though employers agreed not to lay off workers, and large numbers of the more than 70,000 textile workers in various factories in the Greater Bangkok area marched into the center of Bangkok and camped before

⁹The most prominent Thai industrialist involved in textile manufacturing is Police General (ret.) Praman Adireksan, one of the prominent leader of the Thai Nation party. He has held various position in cabinets in various government. Praman now is the Minister of the Ministry of Industry. His wife's brother General Chatichai Choonhavan is now the Prime Minister of Thailand (1989-). Praman has been chairman of the Textile Owners Association of Thailand since the late 1960s.

¹⁰"Labor Relations," Far Eastern Economic Review (June 24, 1975), p. 16. There were 600 textile factories in Thailand in 1975 and 80 percent of the employees were young women.

the ancient, ornate Royal Palace (known also as sanam luang) for five days and nights. The strike was strongly supported by the most active and influential group in Thai politics at the time--the student organization, the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) as well as labor leaders of both conservative and leftist leanings.¹¹ Furthermore, the strike was also supported by two other active organizations--the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST) and the People for Democracy Group (PDG).¹² The strike was led by Prasit Chaiyo, president of the Samut Sakon Textile Workers Union, who was an influential labor leader at the time.

In the meantime, striking workers were given a boost when workers from the railways, the plastic factories, and glass factories joined the protest. An effigy representing a Japanese capitalist was hang from a wooden pole during the protest. The workers also raised their demands to include a

¹¹Students were a great help to the workers' cause after the October 1973 revolution. The successful collaboration between students and workers became particularly evident about eight months after the Revolution. See also, Ross Prizzia, Thailand in Transition: The Role of Oppositional Forces (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 29-30.

¹²The Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST) comprised of more radical students when compared to those students in the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT). FIST under the leadership of Seksan Prasertkul had advised and supported various strikes during the Democratic period. While the People for Democracy Group (PDG) comprised of socialist oriented people. This group later in 1975 form a political party name--Socialist Party of Thailand.

higher minimum wage and greater employment security, including a new system of severance pay for any worker who was laid off. After six days of labor unrest, the government offered the striking workers an employment plan which, among other things, provided for job security and a compromise minimum wage increase.¹³

The Sanya government also agreed to raise the minimum wage for all industrial workers in the Bangkok area to twenty baht (U.S. \$1) a day. The government also promised to legalize labor unions for collective bargaining. Furthermore, it urged that workers who were laid off receive severance pay, and agreed that all textile workers should be paid for the week during which they were out on strike.¹⁴

Analysis of the strike

The June 1974 Textile strike showed the ability of workers to independently insert their demand into the political system of the country without any interference from elite in military, civil servants or other political elites. The goal of the strike was initiated by and for the benefit of the textile workers as a whole and for workers at large, since the government agreed to raise the minimum wage to 20 baht per day for all industrial workers in the Greater

¹³Ross Prizzia, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁴Bevars D. Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 61., Far Eastern Economic Review: 1975 Year Book, pp. 310-311.

Bangkok area.

The fact that the workers won their demands shows that the Sanya government had not yet developed a method to control workers or manipulate them. The military was in a position of retreat due to its defeat in the October 1973 incident and hence was not in a position to establish linkages with labor leaders. The labor leaders themselves believed in the strength of the workers and were confident of the support from student and other labor leaders, hence they could conduct their rally independently. The strike and its outcome, then, shows the labor movement as an extra-bureaucratic force. It acted as a force outside the bureaucratic realm, which had independently inserted its political influence into the politics of the country.

The Hara (Thailand) Factory Strike.¹⁵

A Brief Overview

The Hara (Thailand) case also involved a strike in the textile industry. This strike broke out in the democratic period, with active and strong support from political forces such as students and other worker unions. However, after 4 months of conflict the workers did not win what they had

¹⁵See Wanna Asawasuchote, "pawakarn plaek yaek lae karn plord pon jakkwam plaek yaek: sukka cha poh karani raeng ngan satri nai utsahakam sua pha sumrejroop," [Alienation and the Escape from Alienation: A Case study of Woman Worker in Garment Industry] (M.A. Thesis, Thammasat University, 1988), pp. 14-17.

asked for. The strike grew out of purely economic concerns, yet it had a great deal of impact on the politics of the country. The strike, to a great extent, became involved in an ideological struggle by radical students and leaders who came to advise and supervise the strikers. The latter seized the factory, operated and managed it for their interests. The government had to use force to end the strike, and many workers were injured during the removal of the strikers by anti-riot police.

The Hara case is a classic example of the strike in Thailand (especially in the textile industry) in the sense that it was originally a bread-and-butter issue that consequently had an impact in the politics of the country. Strikers and employers could not reach a settlement through peaceful negotiations. Government intervened.

Narrative

The Hara (Thailand) company limited was a small-sized garment factory that employed about 200 young women workers. Originally the company's factory was located in Bangkok. In March 1975 the company moved to a new factory located in Nakornpathom province which is still in the Greater Bangkok area. As a result, the workers in its factory in Bangkok were reallocated and also changed the kind of job. The workers then were put in a position of on-the-job training and after a month the worker was to be evaluated and the

manager had a right to choose whether or not to place that worker in a new position on the production line. Workers felt insecure. Furthermore, during the job training period, wages were reduced. Immediately affected by the reduction of income and insecurity in their jobs in the near future, the workers waged a strike on October 2, 1975.

The management retaliated and dismissed labor representatives on October 8, and 15, 1975. The next day some workers were encouraged to return to work by a company promise of an increase of 2 baht (U.S.\$ 10 cents) a day added to the wage already paid to those who willingly returned to work. The offer created conflict among the strikers. Some of those who wanted to return to work assaulted and injured some 20 women workers who joined the rally.

On October 22, employees at the new factory seized the factory and operated it by themselves and for themselves. This was the first time that this ever happen in Thailand. The movement was seen by some as having been influenced by socialism and the incident frightened not only the management and the owner of this factory but also other industrialists.

The company requested a temporary lock-out from the court and was permitted to do so on October 24. Workers then went on strike. On November 7, the company signed an agreement to re-open the closed factory and agreed to pay

for wages during the strike period. However, the agreement was not fulfilled. The workers then moved production instruments from the new factory in Nakornpathom to the old one in Bangkok, and on December 18 they gave the factory a new name--"rong ngan samakki kamakorn" (meaning "United Workers Factory.") The new factory was designed to operate for mutual benefits and 80 strikers who were women workers joined the system.

Besides the takeover of the factory by force, the strikers had engaged in a campaign to reveal the exploitation of workers by employers. For example, on October 28, November 11, and December 12, workers delivered public speeches to reveal capitalist exploitation in the country at large and in the Hara factory in particular.¹⁶

The "United Workers Factory" operated successfully without management and employers. With support from students they operated a "Cheap Price Week Market" every Sunday in the campus of Thammasat University, sold their products there and earned their income. The operation went on for about 4 months until the government, through the Minister of Interior, ordered the police to enter the factory, forced

¹⁶On October 28, there were some 80 women workers set a campaign revealed exploitation of workers by employers in an important textile and garment market--the Yoawarat area, so did a group of workers later on November 11, at Ratchadamri--a well known shopping center. Furthermore, on December 12, leaflets attacking capitalist exploitation were distributed at Yoawarat and two of women workers were assaulted.

the strikers out and ended the United Workers Factory.¹⁷

Analysis of the Hara Strike

This is an example of a strike that was originally sparked by bread and butter issues yet had a great deal of impact on the politics of the country. At the beginning, the demands put forward by workers were limited to demands for a wage increase to the level of the minimum wage rate prescribe by law, job security and some better working conditions. The employers refused to comply with the workers demands. Moreover, when the former determined to fight back, the workers had no choice; they took over the factory and ran it for their own benefit. Agreement could not be reached through peaceful bargaining between employees and employers. Therefore, the government became involved in the incident.

How did the workers dare to seize the factory and operate it as their own? It was unlawful and those young workers must have realize it. The main source of the ideas was undoubtedly from radical students and labor leaders who were advisors behind the scene. The Kukrit government realized the seriousness of the situation but at first calculated that it could not employ police forces to solve the problem. It waited patiently until the "right time" had come and then ordered the police to clear out the workers. Some workers were arrested.

¹⁷Somyos Prueksakasemsuk, op. cit., pp. 21-23.

The "right time," the time when the government ordered the police to force the workers out of the factory, was the time when rightist groups had gained support from newspapers and radio. The Red Gaurs and Nawapol and village boy scouts were ready to act against any movement mobilized by workers and radical students. These rightist groups viewed radical students and worker leaders who led the Hara strike as communists or communist sympathizers, which according to them and the Thai people at large were considered as dangerous agents in the country. These rightist groups were ready to be used by the government, especially through ISOC, as a mob against what they saw as mob method.

Clearly the workers were not acting as clients of the government elite or individual politicians. Viewed in this light the workers were autonomous of the state control. They had their goal to pursue. They could not win the strike and the government used force to end it. There was no direct linkage between the men in government or bureaucrats and worker leaders. There was no evidence of patron-client relations between worker and military men. Workers were in fact suspicious of military domination and the latter viewed the workers as an open gate for communists to enter into the country. The two had no mutual interests at the time, hence no patron-client relationship was established.

It is interesting to note that autonomy did not necessarily win the rally. What is significant in

considering whether or not a group was autonomous is whether it had a definite goal of its own and if it pursues its goal independently. It did, and the Hara strike, thus, illustrated the autonomy of the workers movement.

The following case studies analyze strikes that occurred in other industries over a different period of time.

The First Dusit Thani Hotel Strike

The first Dusit Thani Hotel strike occurred in August 1974 during the hey-day of democracy in Thailand. The incident gained support from other hotel workers, various labor organization and especially from the then strongest organization, the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT). The NSCT issued an official statement on May Day 1974 that it would support workers in their struggle for their just interests.¹⁸ The extension of strong hands from the NSCT gave the strike immediate nationwide attention. During this strike, student leaders who had played significant roles in the October 1973 incident delivered speeches attacking capitalists and the government. The government was alarmed, since it knew that if the demands, of the workers would not be met a large demonstration would be inevitable. The military and the police, alarmed because of the NSCT's strong support for the strike, placed troops

¹⁸Prachatipatai. May 2, 1974.

on alert in Bangkok. All schools in the area near the hotel were closed.¹⁹ Economic reasons were behind the strike, but it had a great impact on the politics of the country. The government had to take immediate action to solve the problem before it led to violence.

The Dusit Hotel workers were led by Therdphum Jaidee, the president of the Hotel and Hostel Workers Union and a close friend of Seksan Prasertkul, a radical student who played a significant role in the October 1973 incident. The strikers demanded a minimum salary of 600 baht a month; 85 percent of the service charge collections to be distributed to the employees, with a guarantee of 800 baht per month each.²⁰ There was to be no retribution against the strikers.²¹

The strike organizers, led by labor leader Therdphum and the then student leader Seksan,²² had taken various

¹⁹David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, Inc., 1981), p. 196.

²⁰First-class hotels in Bangkok normally add a 10 percent service charge to bills issued to customers; allocation of these revenues frequently has become a controversial issue.

²¹David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 197.

²²Therdphum and Seksan later established an organization called Labor Coordination Center of Thailand (LCCT) on December 8, 1974. Therdphum was its president while Seksan was General Secretary. Prasit Chaiyo a textile labor leader from Samutsakorn hold vice-president position. The objectives of the center were; to establish mutual

steps to put pressure on the government to force the employers to comply with the strike's demands. There were about 10,000 workers and students in the rally. It was also most likely that workers from various hotels and industries and students would come out in the streets in a massive of demonstration if the employers were still rejecting their demands. At the rally, workers and students spoke, attacking the hotel management and the government. The government was accused of being on the side of the hotel employers. Such an accusation had a strong impact on the caretaker government. The later, through the Ministry of Interior, then issued an official statement that the ministry was trying to solve the problem fairly and in accordance with labor law. The ministry also order a Committee on Labor Relations to arbitrate the conflict within 3 days and the decision would be enforced by September 16.²³ Therdphum convinced the strikers that the strike was not only a bread-and-butter issue but that it was a political one as well. In his own words "employers are those who have influence in the politics of the country. It is then necessary for workers to confront them in the way of politics. We must then, bring various groups into our struggle if the employers do not

relations among all worker' association; to provide education of workers; and support and organize workers to struggle for their interests. See Prachatipatai, December 9, 1974.

²³Prachatipatai, September 11, 1974.

comply with our demands."²⁴

On September 11, the organizers issued an ultimatum that, if their demands were not met by noon on September 13, there would be a massive demonstration. Just before the deadline an arbitration committee appointed by the government ruled that the Dusit Thani Hotel management must comply with the mentioned demands made by the strikers. The hotel management was not satisfied with the over all decision of the government, especially the provision which allowed employees to check the Hotel's account on services. But they had no other choice at the moment but to comply.²⁵

Analysis of the First Dusit Thani Strike

The incident showed the relative autonomy of Hotel workers organizations in their relation to the military and civil servants. There was no sign of interference on the part of the latter. The strike was initiated by the hotel workers under the leadership of Therdphum Jaidee a radical labor leader who had no connection with military leaders or high ranking bureaucrats.

At the time, the government itself was in a state of crisis, caused by the great number of strikes in that period. It was a caretaker government which had little experience in dealing with labor unrest. Industrial

²⁴Daily News, September 10, 1974.

²⁵Prachatipatai, September 15, 1974.

relations was something new to Thailand. The government acted quickly to solve the problem and to restore order in the country. There were no relations between cabinet members on the one hands and labor leaders on the other. It is safe to say that the first Dusit Thani Hotel strike was an autonomous action.

This is not to say that there had not been other elements outside the labor organization that contributed to the success of the strike. Indeed, the workers formed an alliance with the then most active political group: the students. Support from students and other trade unions was crucial to the outcome. However, such support was channelled to substantiate the original goal of the strikers. The interest of strikers were met through the strike and the threat of a massive demonstration.

This first strike of the Dusit Thani Hotel workers should be seen not only as action involving relations between employers and employees. Beyond this, there was the interaction between labor and the state, since the state was the one who finally decided the outcome through the arbitration committee appointed by the government. The strikers put pressure on the government, since they knew that it was the only way to make management comply with their demands.

The Second Dusit Thani Hotel Strike

Narrative

Less than a year after the first strike agreement was reached, the Dusit Thani Workers staged another strike, in May 1975. Again the causes that led to the strike were economic. On October 1, 1974, the minimum wage in Bangkok had been raised to twenty baht per day, with a promise to increase it to twenty-five baht (750 baht per month) in January 1975. The new minimum wage rate disappointed Dusit Hotel workers since it guaranteed more wages to other workers than the salary guaranteed by their agreement made on September 11, 1974, which was only 600 baht a month. Most first class hotels raised their minimum salary to 750 baht per month in early 1975 in order to avoid trouble with their employees. Only three first class hotels--the Sheraton, Amarin, and Dusit Thani--held out against such a wage increase. The Dusit Thani Hotel workers, after unsuccessfully negotiating with management to raise their salary in accordance to the minimum wages set by the government, resorted to a strike. On April 7, 1975, the Dusit Thani Hotel workers together with the Hotel and Hostel Workers Union under the leadership of Therdphum Jaidee, presented a new six-point demand to the hotel's management: a 200 baht per month increase in salary for all employees; a 300 baht per month increase in the cost of living allowance; provision for annual paid holidays; provision for paid sick leave (30 days a year) and personal leave (15 days a year);

payment of employees' medical bills: and the provision of life insurance for all employees.

The hotel's management forwarded these demands to the Labor Department, requesting a ruling as to whether it was legal for the union to call a strike before the passage of one year after its last strike. The DoL ruled that the September 1974 agreement was still in effect, with a minimum duration of one year; and the hotel's management informed the workers of this ruling.²⁶ Nevertheless, on May 1, 1975, the workers went on strike and the Dusit Thani Hotel was closed once again

At the moment, management was ready to counter-attack against the labor movement in the hotel industry. Their confidence came not only from the Department's ruling on the strikes but they had also gained support from various hotel industries and other industrialists, high-ranking military officers, and officials of the Metropolitan Police. Krating Daeng (Red Gaurs)²⁷ an extreme right wing organization, volunteered to act as security guards at the hotel. Public

²⁶Doaw Siam, May 5, 1975.

²⁷The Red Gaurs were admittedly rightist group, organized under the auspices of Internal Security Organization Command official (ISOC), and composed primarily of vocational students. The purpose of the Red Gaurs organization, according to its military supporters and vocational student leaders, was to defend the honor of the nation and king and to prevent the spread of communism in the kingdom. Their primary activities were in Bangkok in disrupting university student demonstrations and strike-breaking.

opinion was on the side of the industrialists since many people saw the workers' action as destructive behavior, contrary to the needs of society and damaging to the investment climate. "After the 1975 election, the newly elected government, cognizant of the extent to which public opinion was beginning to react against the confusion caused by unrest in the preceding two years, had pleaded with everyone to avoid any unlawful disturbances. The slogan of the day was: We want law, not mob rule."²⁸

In such an atmosphere the Dusit Hotel Workers were nearly isolated since other workers, students and several pressure groups which had given their support in the first strike were reluctant to give their support in the second strike. Hence, the 1975 strike was limited to the Dusit Thani workers and their once-promising labor leader, Therdphum Jaidee.

It is interesting to note that the second Dusit Thani strike was organized and supervised by the a comparatively radical labor organization known as Soon prasan ngan kamakorn haeng pratet tai (Labor Coordination Center of Thailand or the LCCT) under the leadership of Therdphum and Seksan.²⁹

We must digress, briefly, in order to understand the

²⁸David Morell, Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 198.

²⁹Seksan Prasertkul was also the leadership of the Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST).

role of the LCCT in the Second Dusit Thani Hotel workers strike. The LCCT was established in December 1974 after the victory of the first Dusit Thani strike.³⁰ It gained a number of affiliated unions and established broader linkages to other worker organizations. Its image was a radical one which was hardly accepted by a majority of the Thais including workers. During the second Dusit Thani Strike the LCCT also supervised and mobilized mass support for another strike which occurred only two buildings away from Dusit Thani Hotel--The Standard Garment strike.³¹

Because of the LCCT engaged in the Standard Garment strike, many workers organizations supported it. Some of them were: sahapap raeng ngan haeng pratet tai known as the Labor Federations of Thailand, gloom 65 sahapap (Group of 65 Workers' Unions), etc.³² Also one of the demands of this strike was to urge the government to force the Dusit Thani Hotel management to operate the hotel and allowed its workers to continue working at the hotel as well as to comply with the demand put forward by the Second Dusit Thani

³⁰The Labor Coordinating Center composed of some of the more activist leaders, apparently with Marxist leaning. And according to Mabry's study, this informal labor organization was established in May 1975. See Bevars D. Mabry, The Development of Labor Institutions in Thailand, p. 62.

³¹The Standard Garment Strike began May 2, and ended June 7, 1975 with some success.

³²Prachatipatai, May 31, 1975.

Strikers.³³ Furthermore, labor leaders took turns delivering speeches attacking the employers, capitalist and the government. Aware of the involvement of the LCCT and other pressure groups in the Standard Garment and the Second Dusit Thani Strike, the government announced in an official statement that it would try to solve the problem promptly and it would employ drastic measures to punish persons who are not involved in or directly responsible for settling labor disputes and who are acting in such a way that it would aggravate a dispute which could be settled through legal procedures. However, the statement did not identify the "persons not involved in, or not directly responsible for, settling a labor dispute."³⁴ At the moment the government determined to enforce law and order.

The Standard Garment strike resorted to violence when a group of about 40 to 50 workers, believed to have received some support from the management came to hold a rival rally, used strong words attacking the strikers³⁵ and accused the LCCT and student leaders of being communist agitators, creating disorder in the country and advocating mob rule

³³Prachachati rai sapda, June 19, 1975.

³⁴Department of Public Relations, Witayu sarn, June 4, 1975. The official statement comprised of 9 points and the 6th was about the government's attitudes towards outsider(s). The Nations, June 4. 1975.

³⁵Bangkok Post, May 14, 1975., May 16, 1975.

instead of the rule of law.³⁶ The Red Gaur were also at the scene and helped inflame the situation since it was well known that these rightist groups could use violent means to subdue any strikers. Violence broke out when police, under the leadership of Police Colonel Yuthana Wanakowit, escorted this group into the factory, through the line formed by the strikers. The police used clubs to break through the line and about 50 strikers were injured. The incident gained nation-wide attention. Students, workers, human rights activists, and opposition political parties condemned the police brutality and demanded that colonel Yuthana, who had ordered the use of force, be ousted from his job or transferred to an other area.³⁷ To reduce the tension the government ordered the Red Gaur out of the scene and promised to investigate the outbreak of violence. Later, the Kukrit government settled the case, with most of the demands proposed by the strikers being met and most of the strikers rehired to work with the company.

We return to the Second Dusit Thani strike. What had happened in the Second Dusit Thani strike was not the same as what happened to the Standard Garment workers. In the Second Dusit Thani case, the strikers did not win. After about 2 months of the strike, all of the workers

³⁶Prachatipatai, June 6, 1975.

³⁷Prachatipatai, June 4, 1975., Bangkok Post, June 4, 1975.

participating in the strike were fired and all of the hotel workers were given a clear warning.³⁸ The hotel management preferred paying severance and compensation to the fired workers rather than rehire the strikers. The strikers' failure was due to overconfidence based on previous success and to their disadvantaged position in the bargaining process, since the Ministry of Interior had ruled their strike to be illegal.³⁹ And the most important factor was the fact that the strike was seen by most of Thai society as the product of agitators who leaned toward socialism, something unacceptable to the majority of Thai. Mr. Att Sri-art the president of the National Council of Thai Labor (NCTL) expressed his view of the movement under Therdphum that;

We (unions affiliated with the NCTL) are different from Therdphum Jaidee and his associates who advocates another ideology and another form of government. They are those who represented idea that the political system of the Thailand must be changed to a socialist system.⁴⁰

The defeat caused the end of the LCCT and its leader, Mr. Therdphum Jaidee, almost lost his life in an assassination attempt. He left the country, later joined the Communist Party of Thailand in the jungle and engaged in

³⁸David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 199.

³⁹Ibid., p. 198.

⁴⁰Mr. Att Sri-art, President of the NCTL, personal interview, May 5, 1988.

armed struggle with the government.⁴¹

Analysis of the Second Dusit Thani Hotel Strike

The strike was initially called to demand higher wages for workers, yet the movement spilled over into politics. The strikers were mistaken when they thought that the newly elected government would be more responsive to their demands. Instead, the government wanted to maintain order in a country that was overwhelmed by the fear of communism which was about to take over South Vietnam. What was happening in Indochina affected the opinion of the Thai political elites and the Thai people at large. They were afraid that the communists would also gain the upper hand in fighting with the government in Thailand. The evidence of such fear was that the Thai people gave their support to, and participated in, various rightist groups such as Nawapol, Red Gaur, The Village Boy Scouts, and other paramilitary groups created by the military. The important thing was that the goal of these groups had nothing to do for the specific interests of their membership but was mainly to protect what they saw as the honor of the nation, religion, the king, and, sometimes they added, the constitution. The labor movement had been seen as being part

⁴¹David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 199.

of the communist movement in Thailand and the student movement also was seen as having gone too far. The Thai press began to turn against the student movement and labor's activities. The second Dusit Thani strike, then, ended with the complete defeat of the workers.

The defeat did not mean that the strike was not autonomous. Instead, it showed that the struggle of the strikers was with the hotel's management and the government. There was no direct linkage with men in the government especially from the military. The incident also did not happen at a time when it could benefit any political elites or military elites. Hence the rally, although a failure, was autonomously conducted by workers and their leaders.

The Maekhong Strike

A Brief Overview

The Maekhong Strike occurred in a distillery, a regulated industry under the Ministry of Industry. The ministry leased the distillery plants or factories to a private company--the Sura Maharas. The latter produces Thai whisky and sells it under the brand name Maekhong and Kwang Thong. There were two distillery factories rented by the Sura Maharas company--at Bangyikhan I & II. The Bangyikhan I workers staged a strike on February 27 and officially ended it about 40 days later, on April 5, 1984, by order of the

Interior Minister General Sitthi Jirarote.⁴² The reason given by the minister was the necessity of keeping peace and order rather than out of economic necessity. In his words: "Their movement by leaving the plant and going into the street, is a nuisance."⁴³

Causes of the strike were also bread-and-butter issues. The workers demanded payment of a two-month pension and improvement of other fringe benefits as well as a better systems of promotion. Moreover, the strikers also demanded that the management of Sura Maharas Co., Ltd strictly abide by its contract with the Industrial Works Department. According to the contract, the company was to build a permanent canteen, club and cooperative for the workers by December 31, 1984.⁴⁴ Workers who were employed on a daily basis were demanding that they be employed as permanent staff and paid a monthly salary instead of on a 26-day basis.⁴⁵

It should be pointed out that the strike occurred in accordance with labor law. It was not a sudden spontaneous one. After their demands had been submitted to the manager, the union's leaders sought peaceful negotiation with the

⁴²The Minister empower by the Labor Relations Act 1975, Section 35.

⁴³The Bangkok Post, April 6, 1984.

⁴⁴The Nations, March 1, 1984.

⁴⁵Bangkok Post, April 7, 1984.

employer, eight times, but no agreement was reached. On February 10, the union then notified the management that it would resort to a strike.⁴⁶ When the employees used their right to strike the employers did the same. They decided on a lock-out and closed the factory, claiming that they had to protect state properties after operation of the distillery was made impossible by the strike. The decision to close the factory was also made in order to avoid violence that might occur when the striking workers forcibly ordered all workers to boycott work.⁴⁷

The shutdown of the plant was significant, since it was the first time that the Capital Security Command (CSC) intervened in a labor dispute. The CSC was under the command of General Arthit Kamlang-ek. The CSC troops, comprising heavily-armed military policemen from the Navy, came into the scene, sealed off the distillery and locked out most of the striking workers. The troops were sent there to prevent any possible violence that might occur.⁴⁸

There were several parties involved in the incident. The striking workers were supported by various unions; such as the Thai Tobacco Monopoly union, which acted in order to give moral support to the strikers;⁴⁹ sahapap ongkarn

⁴⁶Matichon, February 12, 1984.

⁴⁷The Nations, March 1, 1984.

⁴⁸The nations, March 1, 1984.

⁴⁹Khaw sod, February 18, 1984.

pesach haeng pratet tai (Pharmacist Labor Union of Thailand) which gave them a basket of flowers, etc.⁵⁰ The strike was also strongly supported by the LCT, the then strongest peak organization of workers.⁵¹ Its leaders Ahmad and Sawas were known to be closely associated with military leaders, especially General Arthit Kamlang-ek. The two labor leaders also openly advocated that the labor movement in Thailand must be involved in political matters, otherwise the interests of workers would not be met. Their belief was different from those labor leaders who advocated unionism as the way to solve labor problems.

Funds for supporting the strike came from various labor unions. In the words of Mr. Somchai Ittiruek-rit the union's secretary "We are supported by many labor unions and the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT) under the leadership of Sawas Lookdote provided five sacks of rice."⁵²

On the employer side, Col Lt. Sumeth Tejapaibul⁵³ the chairman of the company has had good relations with the Democratic Party--one of the parties in the coalition government under the leadership of General Prem Tinsulanonda. However, there was no sign of support from the

⁵⁰Matuphum, February 18, 1984.

⁵¹Bangkok Post, March 12, 20, 1984.

⁵²Bangkok Post, April 7, 1984.

⁵³He later joined the Democratic Party in 1986 and was elected a Member of Parliament.

party.

The response of the employers to the strike was not one that would lead to peaceful negotiations. Agreement could not be reached despite numerous rounds of talks. The DoL made efforts to solve the problem. Its Director General went to the scene of strike and also tried to mediate the conflict, but such attempts did not gain much cooperation from the management. On April 3, Labor Director General Chamnan Pochana, who was present in the talks between the union and employer, expressed his view that the striking workers were apparently ready to drop all their demands and only wanted the distillery to reopen.⁵⁴ However, it was still not possible to reach an agreement. The employers did not easily comply with the demands. The secretary of the Maekhong union insisted that the management wanted the strike to continue because it wanted to make a deal with the government, especially with the Ministry of Industry, in order to reduce the amount that the company had to pay for its contract with the ministry.⁵⁵ At the end of the strike the government agreed to allow the company to increase retail price, which would increase the value of the company's total sales to 1,304 million baht more than the preceding year.⁵⁶

⁵⁴The Nations, April 4, 1984.

⁵⁵Matichon, February 24, 1984.

⁵⁶Chawthai, March 1, 1982.

The striking workers and the LCT then turned to General Arthit for help. Even with the involvement of the General the strike was not easily ended. Only on April 5, the Interior Ministry, under General Sitthi Jirarote, ordered an end to the Maekhong strike and the employer had to rehire the strikers, and for the unsettled dispute between management and the workers, the DoL would soon set up a committee to find a solution within 30 days.⁵⁷

Analysis of the Maekhong Strike

The strike was initiated by bread-and-butter issues, yet other parties became involved. Because other parties were involved, it was not a dispute that could be solved through an established labor relations practice and this meant that the strike was delayed longer than it would otherwise have been. It could be seen as the intention of the management to use the strike as a means of pressure to negotiate with the Ministry of Industry in order to get a better deal, which they did. But there was no link between strike leaders and the management in order to help the latter in negotiating a better deal with the government and in the interest of the management. Indeed, the Maekhong union's leaders came out to urge the government to terminate the contract given to the Sura Maharas company. They also urged the military to run the distillery. Therefore, in

⁵⁷Bangkok Post, April 6, 1984.

terms of the autonomy of the trade union, the decision to strike was totally dependent on its own judgment.

The workers turned to General Arthit for help in order to have their demands accepted. The fact that the general rendered his support to the strike is evidence of mutual interests, not of a client-patron relationship. Arthit rose rapidly to the top in military rank less than 2 years after he helped Prem's government to subdue the April 30, 1980 military coup attempt.⁵⁸ Such rapid promotion had caused conflict within the military itself. Arthit had not yet consolidated his power, had not yet been accepted as the leader and was looking for allies for popular support. He also lacked popularity in the general public. Thus, helping the workers was the way to gain popularity and, also, he could at the same time establish linkages with a part of the workers movement so that in time of need they could come to his support. However, before the workers turned to him for help there had been no patron-client linkage between the two parties.

It is worth noting that the LCT leaders at the time, Ahmad and Sawas, were closely linked to General Arthit. (The linkage will be analyzed in detail in chapter seven.) At the time it was clear that the Maekhong union's leaders turned to General Arthit because of his connection with Ahmad and

⁵⁸General Arthit Kamlang-ek was made Army Commander-in-Chief on October 1, 1981.

Sawas. The movement of the Maekhong union then could be seen as independent of control by the military, because the goal of the strikers was not changed. Turning to the general could be seen as a means to achieve their independent goal.

In the context of a transition to democracy, the movement was peacefully conducted. The concern of the union was mainly bread-and-butter issues. The movement was in accordance with labor law, and the strike was perfectly legal, since it had passed through the processes required by law before the strike took place. Viewed in this light the movement was supportive of the process of transition to democracy.

Perspectives on Trade Unions in Politics

The cases discussed in this chapter show that unions have won some battle and lost some. Clearly, whatever the outcome, the unions were principally concerned with bread-and-butter issues--wages, benefits, fairness and working conditions, etc. When in need of support, they sought (or were offered help from) allies both in and out of government. In at least one case the government ended a strike, claiming to act in the general public interest. But, and this is important, all of the strikes began out of issues of vital concern to the workers. Strikes were not initiated because unions were seen as a convenient source of support by an ambitious politician in furtherance of his own

interests. They were, instead, evidence of autonomous action.

In the next chapter we shall see that the line between what we have called bread-and-butter issues, on the one hand, and issues of public policy, on the other, is often a matter of interpretation. Unions have clearly crossed that line. An understanding of union activities in the area of public policy will shed further light on the emergence of union as an extra-bureaucratic force. That will be our next task.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND THE POLICY PROCESS

In the cases discussed in the previous chapter, unions went on strike over demands directly affecting only (or primarily) their own members--higher wages, better working conditions and other concrete fringe benefits. We have referred to these as "economic" or "bread-and-butter" issues. The conflicts, at least at their inception, were between unions and employers. However, in such cases the conflicts had an impact on politics of the country and the government had to intervene.

In the cases to be discussed in this chapter, in contrast, unions went on strike or took other forms of action over issues affecting not only the unions but a much broader public as well. These cases might be characterized as cases involving lower income people which are the majority of the country, however, since the issues were most vital to the lower classes of which laborers were a part. Here the conflict was between union and government rather than a specific employer. In this way we might say that the unions became involved in the public policy process. Since there was conflict between unions and government (bureaucracy--the state apparatus, and political elites) we might also contend that the processes here showed examples

of union "autonomy" and its performance in the process makes it even clearer that unions were acting as an extrabureaucratic force, even more so than was the case in the previous chapter.

Again, the format will be to offer first a brief "overview" of each case and then a more detailed presentation and analysis.

Trade Union Action Against Increasing the Price of Rice in December 1975: The Reversal of State Policy.

The December 1975 movement against the Kukrit government's policy to increase the price of rice up to 25 percent was the most organized and systematic movement in Thai labor history. A large number of trade unions joined the then informal organization of worker's associations--Gloom sahapap raeng ngan (Group of Trade Unions).¹ The movement took various steps under the leadership of Paisan Thawatchainand²--the leader of the Federation of Public Enterprise Workers Unions. The informal workers organization later was known as Sahapan raeng ngan haeng pratet tai, (the

¹Workers were just allowed to form "trade union" and the later allowed to form "federation, and council" in February 1975 by the Labor Relation Act 1975. It was too early for union to seek register with the Department of Labor. Hence, the group was considered "informal group."

²Paisan, then 38, was born in the northern province of Phitsanulok. Graduated from a vocational college. He was the most famous labor leader in the contemporary Thai until he died in 1987.

Federation of Labor Unions of Thailand or FLUT).³

The movement started by first expressing their concern through an open letter to the Prime Minister, and then giving their reasons for opposing the policy through various means of communications to gain support from workers and the people at large, particularly those who were in the lower income strata. The next step was to negotiate with the prime minister, his cabinet, and other government officials concerned. The final strategy was to stage a general strike with massive demonstrations to put pressure on the government. The movement was able to reverse the policy and hence benefitted both workers and the people at large. It was the first time in the history of the labor movement in Thailand that the prime minister (M.R. Kukrit Pramoj) and a labor leader (Mr. Paisan Thawatchainand) signed an agreement in a joint communique.

Narrative

On December 2, 1975 the Kukrit government announced a

³FLUT was primarily comprised of fifteen rather large labor unions, mostly in the public utilities sector. Its leader was Paisan Thawatchainand, president of the Metropolitan Electricity Authority (MEA) Worker Union. The FLUT focused on amendment of labor legislation, trade union education, and collective bargaining agreements. See Supachai Manutphaibun, "The Role of the Government and Labor Legislation in the Development of Thailand's Industrial Relations System," p. 34.

policy to increase the price of 5% rice⁴ from 60-65 baht per Tang⁵ (20 liters) to 75 baht, claiming that the policy would help increase the income of farmers. At the same time the government had guaranteed the 100% rice grain at 2,500 baht per Kwien⁶ (1000 kilograms).

On December 24, 1975, Paisan Thawatchainand submitted a letter to the Kukrit government demanding a reduction in the price of rice, since the workers and lower income people would be particularly affected by the new price. It is worth noting that the head of government and cabinet members concerned held talks with labor representatives under the leadership of Paisan. These were Prime Minister M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, Mr. Boonchoo Rojanasathiarra, the Minister of Commerce, and his deputy, Chaisiri Reungkarnchanaset. The Kukrit government, the first elected coalition government since the end of military rule in October 1973, rejected the workers' demands.

When the government rejected their demands the labor groups called a meeting where 62 unions were represented by 197 union leaders. At the meeting, 51 unions voted for a

⁴The 5% rice is the second grade rice which contains 5% of broken grain. The first grade is the 100% rice. The former is much cheaper hence has been largely consumed by low income strata.

⁵Tang is a Thai measurement which is equal to 20 Liters.

⁶Kwien, a Thai measurement which is equal to 1,000 kilogram.

strike with 11 unions abstaining. The strike would begin on January 2, 1976.⁷ At the meeting an organizing committee was formed and 5 coordination centers were set up around Bangkok.⁸ On December 27, a meeting was held to reconfirm the date of the strike. Union representatives and leaders were convinced that the movement was not against employers but the government. They did not act in the name of a particular union. They acted as citizens, not in the name of unions, against unwanted public policy proposed by the government. Hence, this had nothing to do with the Labor Relations Law which prohibits trade union involvement in political matter.⁹

On January 2, 1976, approximately 200,000 workers staged a rally at the Rama V monument in front of the National Assembly, submitting a five-point demand to the government:

1. Fix a guaranteed paddy¹⁰ price at 2,500 baht

⁷Bandit Thamtrirat and Pairoj Polpet, Rai ngan karn wijai rueng: Bot bat khong raeng ngan ratwisahakij nai karn pattana khabuankarn raeng ngan satanprakopkarn lae karn sarngsan sungkom tai [Research Report: The Role of State Enterprise Union on the Development of Labor Movement, Working Places, and on Its Contribution to Society] (Bangkok: Arom Pongpa-ngan Foundation, 1988), p. 121.

⁸Matichon rai wan, December 27, 1976.

⁹The Law prohibits trade union to engage in politics. See union's justification for the movement in Prachatipatai, January 3, 1976.

¹⁰The milling process to mill paddy into rice, the miller would get about 25-40% by volume depends on the quality of the paddy and the quality of the mill, or 50-66 %

per kwien (1000 kilograms);

2. Postpone any further increases in sugar and rice prices for up to one year;

3. Implement the land reform program immediately;

4. Promote and establish cooperatives throughout the country, and improve the management of the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives;

5. Guarantee that government enterprise workers who participated in this strike will not face any charges and will be paid their wages for the strike period.¹¹

As noted, the Kukrit government did not promptly responded to the demands of the workers, but after the outbreak of the strikes there were two important meetings between 22 labor representatives and the government. The first talk, which was on January 4, 1976, started at 23:15 pm and ran until 0.45 am., Prime Minister Kukrit with some of his cabinet, was the leader of the government side. The government did not yield to the demands of the strikers and the talk brought no end to the strike.

The second talk between labor and government representatives took place the next day. This time Prime Minister Kukrit did not participate in the talks. The government side was led by Minister of Commerce Mr.Thongyod Jittaweera and included some cabinet members such as the Deputy Minister of Commerce, Mr.Chaisiri Reungkarnchanaset, and the Deputy Minister of Interior, Colonel Prakob

by weight.

¹¹David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija. The Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 193. It is interesting to note that the 5th point has been put as one of strikers' demands in almost strikes both public and private unions.

Prayoonbhokaraj. The Deputy Director General of Department of Police, Police Lieutenant General Surapol Julapram, was also at the talks. The 22 labor representatives were led by Mr. Paisan Thawatchainand. Viewed from the labor position, the talk was again an unsuccessful one.

On the day after that, January 6, the strikers handed a letter to Prime Minister Kukrit warning him that if the demands would not be met the strikers would use other means to put pressure on the government. The immediate one would be to reduce electric power, which would paralyze Bangkok and the province around the metropolitan area.

The Kukrit government foresaw the trouble and hence yielded to the demands of the workers on January 6, 1976. The policy of increasing the price of rice was canceled. In this case the public policy was reversed. Moreover, the government had to conform to other appended demands put forward by the strikers, such as the demand that the government would urgently promote land reform and establish cooperatives all over the country. The government also promised to improve the management of the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives and to provide low interest loans with long term payment for farmers.¹²

Analysis of the Incident

The Kukrit government's policy of increasing the price

¹²Prachachati, January 7, 1976.

of rice up to about 25 percent and potentially the price of sugar seriously affected the cost living of the lower income people. All workers were affected by the policy, hence, were willing to join the rally. The goal of the incident was very clear; it was for the benefit of workers. Furthermore, it would benefit the majority of the people as well. Workers' representatives from 62 unions both private and public, lent their support for the movement. It was the most united labor movement ever existing in the modern Thai labor movement. The strike was successful, not only because of the issue involved but also because the leader of the movement, Paisan and his associates were known as unionist leaders and had played a moderate role in politics, hence gaining support from a majority of unions which were not politically oriented. The role of the Paisan group was viewed differently, from that of Therdphum Jaidee and his associates who were viewed as being led or influenced by communist agents in Thailand.

Military elites at that time had not yet attempted to support or organize trade union(s) under their influence or establish any concrete linkage with any powerful labor leaders so that the leaders would be mobilized in the interest of the former. The military was in a state of retreat due to the October 1973 incident and had not yet regained the predominant position it occupied in Thanom's regime. Under such circumstances, the labor movement was

relatively autonomous and it was strong enough to force the government to yield to its demand, independently of any source of state interference, especially from the military and other high ranking civil servants.

The Kukrit government and other political elites newly emerged from a general election were also not ready to act and did not see any reason to become involved in the labor movement. Political parties were in their initial stage, without a strong popular base. Their existence was for the purpose of winning elections. There was no well established linkage between political parties and trade unions, especially labor leaders. Such situation provided the labor movement with an opportunity to act autonomously.

Because of its action against Kukrit's policy, labor can be considered as an extrabureaucratic force. It acted as a force outside the realm of bureaucracy and inserted its influence on the politics of the country.

Its performance also contributed to the institutionalization of democratic rule in the country in the sense that the newly emerged group, namely the labor group, was then strongly organized under a definite group of leaders who played according to the rules of democracy, which can be seen from the peaceful strike and their efforts to have their demands met through peaceful talks with the government. The movement was also led by unionist leaders who did not show other interests such as, for example,

pushing the country to assume a new form of political system--namely the socialist system. These union leaders were also against any kind of military intervention in politics or a military coup.

Drawing from the incident it could be argued that the movement of was constrained and self controlled. They demonstrated their strength in accordance with the rules of the game. And they probably realized how far they could act so that the soft liners who tolerated labor unrest would not be frightened by the movement. Otherwise, if the soft liners were frightened by the incident, they would again have asked the hard liners --in Thailand, the military--to intervene once more. As suggested in Valenzuela's framework for analysis of labor movements in transition to democracy :

"Labor leaders and/or their political allies may even become part of the democratizing coalition, either informally or by entering a formal pact or agreement. However, the same labor and popular mobilizations may have the opposite effect. The soft-liners may fear a total loss of control over social forces, and this fear may lead them to permit the hard-liners to restore a repressive, but well-known, form of order regardless of its cost. Consequently, labor movements and other popular sectors can unwittingly either facilitate or impede change towards democracy by helping to tip the political scales within the ruling circles one way or the

other."¹³ It was in this sense that the action of the Thai labor movement against the Kukrit government's policy to increase the price of rice, was in support of the democratization process.

Labor's Movement against the Government's Policy of Privatization: A Case of Opposition to Government Policy

State enterprise was established and encourage after World War Two by the Pibun government (1947-1957) in order to provide a modernization mechanism for the economic development of Thailand. Many state enterprises were established in various ministries. When Sarit came to power in October 1958, the government did not want to compete with private enterprises, yet the state enterprises continued to operate. These state enterprises have been the source of income and wealth for bureaucrats since their executive boards were appointed by the government. In the period of military dominance in politics, those executive members were appointed by the military. Appointment to such posts was mainly a political reward or payment for support by a 'superior' to 'subordinates': "The military found a way to extend their sphere of political influence by inserting control over the army, bureaucracy and public enterprises,

¹³J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Labor Movements in Transition to Democracy," Comparative Politic (July 1989), p. 446.

the business organizations of the government."¹⁴ When the elected government initiated a privatization policy in fall 1983, the interests of military were also affected. As we shall see, since the labor movement was also against the policy of privatization, labor leaders turned to military elites for support and the latter was willing to offer it.

Not every state enterprise was a profitable operation. Hence, resources were drained from the government, on the one hand, and on the other hand, private business wanted to run some of the state enterprises for its own profit. Private business foresaw a profit if the enterprise was properly managed. The Prem government, then, initiated privatization a policy.

On October 18, 1983 the government announced the policy of privatization. The main objective of the policy was to privatize poorly-managed state-owned units to reduce the government's financial burdens. There were five steps in the process of privatization: 1) the change of managerial personnel; 2) change of management; 3) improvement of market strategy; 4) allowing the private sector to own shares and management; and 5) sell the state enterprise to private sector.¹⁵

¹⁴Sungsidh Piriyarangsan, "The Rise of Labor Movement in Thailand: An Analysis of Public Enterprise Workers", Asian Review, 2 (1988), p. 65.

¹⁵Bandit Thamtrirat and Pairoj Polpet, op. cit., p. 121.

The policy, if implemented, would directly affect the interests of workers in the public sector since they would lose both economic security and social status. Socially, workers in the public enterprise enjoy the same social status as that of civil servants, and they earn 25 per cent more than the latter. Public enterprise workers have been much more secure in their employment than workers in the private sector. Public enterprise workers not only received higher wage than private workers, they were also not liable to dismissal at supervisors' will, as widely practiced in the private sector. They enjoyed as much work security as civil servants and should have been the last group to face retrenchment in time of severe economic crisis.¹⁶ Once a public enterprise is privatized, workers would be employed under private employment, and that threatened them. They also believed that the policy, if successfully implemented, would decrease the strength of the labor movement as a whole, since the largest and strongest unions and the leaders of the modern Thai labor movement have been the public enterprise unions.

After the policy was announced, some public enterprises were in fact privatized, and that threatened the rest. Unions in various public enterprises joined each other and fought against the policy. Two active groups of unions in the state enterprises strongly worked as a spearhead to lead

¹⁶Sungsidh Piriyanangsan, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

the labor movement as a whole. The two groups were; 'gloom sahapap raeng ngan ratwisahakij sampan' or the State Enterprise Labor Unions Relations Group (SELURG)¹⁷ and 'gloom sahapap raeng ngan ratwisahakij haeng pratet tai' or the Group of State Enterprise Labor Unions of Thailand (GSELUT). Neither group was legally recognized. According to the LRA 1975 they could not be classified as workers' union, or federation of union, or congress of union. These two, then, were not subjected to the regulation that prohibited the involvement of unions in the politics of the country. Consequently the groups were a practical way out for union involvement in political matters.

Besides these two groups, there have been other sources of support for the movement against the privatization policy. The sources are the four labor congress in Thailand, two of which --the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT) and the Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC)--have been actively engaged in manipulating the labor movement against the privatization policy since 1985, while the other two --the National Congress of Thai Labor (NCTL) and the National Free Labor Union Congress (NFLUC), lent their support later.

¹⁷Gloom ratwisahakij sampan [State Enterprise Labor Unions Relations Group] was formed in 1982 comprised mainly of those unions which had separated from the LCT. Paisan Thawatchainand and Ekkachai Ekhankamol were its leaders. The group later form an official labor congress name Thai Trade Union Congress or TTUC. See Department of Labor, Karn boriarn raeng ngan nai pratet tai, [Labor Administration in Thailand] (Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1984), p. 56.

The movement as a whole, especially those unions organized by the peak organization level, could be seen as designed for the benefit of the public enterprise workers. However, at the plant level, there could be some movements that functioned not only for the members' benefits but in the interest of others or outsiders as well. The Port Authority Union Workers' strike in early February 1990 was a case in point. The unions claimed that the movement was against the privatization of the new port on the eastern seaboard, but the timing of the strike was suspicious, suggesting it was manipulated by the military leader General Chaowalit Yongjaiyudh. There have been other elements involved which were not directly for the interests of the workers. Nevertheless, the majority of unions demonstrated the quality of a political group outside bureaucracy.

The movement of the public enterprise unions against the policy was complex and took various forms. It persistently put pressure on government whenever possible. The movement would: organize meetings among state enterprise unions concerned; organize public conferences by inviting various parties concerned to give their views on the policy and submitting the resolutions of the conference to the government; set programs to educate workers in various state enterprises and people at large about the policy; support political parties which opposed the policy; seek support from military elites; and resort to strikes, and

demonstrations. Some of these activities will be discussed below.

On January 31, 1987, the ASEU and GSEUT organized a conference to plan strategy to oppose or to reverse the policy of privatization at the Bangkok Palace hotel--a semi-first class hotel in Bangkok. Thirty-three state enterprise unions participated in the conference. Their strategies were well designed and feasible. Their plan was designed to consistently put pressure on the government in various ways and times. Moreover, they planned to confront the government on a long term basis. To do so they had to play the popular game: to communicate with the masses through newspapers, meeting, conferences, demonstrations, and exhibition, etc. The plan was designed to bring people and public opinion over to their side, which is one important factor to win the game. They planned also to educate workers in state enterprises about the impact of the policy on the life of workers and people at large. To meet the goal, the ASEU and GSEUT set up a central committee--the Central Committee of State Enterprise Unions of Thailand (CCSEUT), to carry out the plan.

Since the target of the plan was the cabinet members and the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the movement always put pressure on them as much as they could. Labor leaders gathered in front of the NESDB building and gave a black wreath to its General Secretary.

The committee sent a letter of protest to the government, expressing their concern that the privatization policy, if successfully implemented, would harm the interests of workers and people. They claimed that the privatization of some kind of state enterprises, such as telegraph and telephone, would cause problems for the security of the country.

On March 23, 1987 the representative of the ASEU and GSEUT went to see the Deputy Prime Minister, Admiral Sonthi Boonyachai, to present the reasons for the movement's opposition to the policy. In their view, it was not necessary to privatize state enterprises, especially those enterprises which provide public utility services, since most of them could make a profit. Only 11 or 12 out of the total of 67 state enterprises were losing money and the main cause was mismanagement. Therefore, it could be solved by improving management. At the meeting there was an exchange of viewpoints and concerns between the Deputy Prime Minister and the labor representative on many aspects. However, There was no agreement between the two parties. The government did not change its position toward the privatization policy and labor did not change its goal. The latter continued working for their goal of reversing the policy.

Arguments against the policy of privatization have come out on various occasions. Since 1985 these arguments have appeared in demands put forward by many strikes, especially

those strikes in state enterprises. The appeared in posters and speeches on May Day every year. Labor leaders, when they gave speeches or talked in various places, would also express their views against the policy.

On August 26, 1987, the LCT and TTUC handed a letter to Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda expressing their concern on urgent labor problems, and one of them was to urge the government to suspend the privatization policy, at least until the impact of such policy was studied.¹⁸ A week later the Central Committee of State Enterprise Unions of Thailand (CCSEUT) formed three other organizing committees to design a plan and strategies to oppose the policy.¹⁹

On July 7, 1988, just before the end of the Prem government, prime minister Prem Tinasulanonda opened the government house to discussions with union leaders from four labor congresses concerned with the privatization policy. After the talks Mr. Thanong Po-an informed the press that the prime minister did not promise to reverse the policy but said that any unprofitable state enterprises must be improved, and if it was too difficult to do so the government would have to privatize them. However, the premier promised that the state enterprises which deal with

¹⁸Bandit Thamtrirat and Pairoj Polpet, op. cit., p. 136.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 137.

public utilities and services would not be privatized.²⁰

Still the government implemented the policy and some thirteen state enterprises were privatized such as the Erawan Hotel, the Northeast Jute Mill Co and the Alum organization, and several more are pending total or partial privatization.²¹ For example, the government allowed the private sector to bid for contracts to do particular jobs, such as to install telephones for the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT). The government also allowed private business to own some shares and management. The cases of Naraiphan, and the state's paper factory at Bang Pa-in are some examples. And in some cases, the government just stopped its operations, as was the case with the gunny bag factory under the Ministry of Finance, which ceased to operate in 1983.²² Nevertheless, the large state enterprises which also have strong unions in them, such as the State Railways of Thailand, the Port Authority of Thailand, the Mass Telecommunication Authority of Thailand, the Bangkok Mass Transport Authority, have not been privatized. Obviously, the movement's opposition to the policy was partly effective.

²⁰Jod mai khaw sapa raeng ngan. [Labor Congress of Thailand Newsletter] (June-July 1988), Bangkok, p. 1.

²¹The Bangkok Post, August 31, 1988.

²²Bandit Thamtrirat and Pairoj Polpet, op. cit., p. 139.

Analysis of the Action

The issue of privatization was not settled, and the protest against the privatization policy continued. Trade unions in state enterprises, especially those in big state enterprise, did not give up their intention to protect their interests, and hence they continued to confront the government.

The basic question to be asked here is whether the movement in its opposition to the privatization policy was acting autonomously and independent of state control. From the above discussion we can see that the goal and interests were for the benefit of workers in state enterprises. Trade unions in this kind of enterprises and 4 peak workers organization have been actively engaged in stopping the policy. Various means and tactics have been employed. And these activities were initiated and carried out by the workers themselves. If there was any intervention from outside it was not in such a way that it changed the position of the unions toward the policy, since doing so would tremendously harm their own interests. Therefore, in this case the trade unions acted autonomously. Unions were directly opposed to the government and functioned as an extrabureaucratic force within the democratic framework

The Social Security Law: The Role of Trade Unions and the Labor Movement in the Policy Making Process

A Brief Overview²³

The Social Security draft proposed in the past and still under consideration is narrow in its application. Not all the population would benefit from the system. If it is made law, it would provide benefits for workers who are employed in industry. Other people, especially farmers, who are a majority of the Thai population, will not benefit from it. Since industrial workers would benefit from it, trade unions and their leaders have recently engaged in attempts to have the draft law enacted.

There have been at least 4 drafts of Social Security bills proposed by various sources: the Ministry of Interior; the Social Action Party; the Democratic Party; the Thai Population Party; the Unity Party; and the workers.²⁴ All but the last one were introduced in parliament, according to the policy making process. The worker's draft came out from various seminars organized by the four peak workers organizations. This draft expressed the concern of workers for their interest and expressed their preference, and was, of course, different from those proposed by other sources.

²³The general background of the history of Social Security Law in Thailand in this section, unless indicated, drew heavily from Sandose Tamsawaenglert, "karn muang khong karn ri rirm kot mai pra kan sungkom khong tai," [Politics of Initiation of Social Security Law] (M.A. Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1985).

²⁴Juti Manotas, "kod mai prakan sungkom: bot pisut kwam jing jai khong rataban," [Social Security Law: The Prove of Government Sincerity] Raeng ngan paritas, [Labor Review], Year 3, Vol. 8, (August 1989), pp. 12-13.

The worker's draft by itself did not go directly to the parliament but many of its provisions have been adopted by other drafts. A bill now passed the final reading in the House of Representatives, on July 29, 1989, and is now waiting for return the Upper House. There is a great possibility that the bill will be enacted in the very near future.

Employees would benefit from the bill, since it ensures compensation for sickness and injuries sustained during or outside working hours; childbirth, death and disability; old age; child care and unemployment. It also seeks the creation of a fund to be equally contributed to by Government, employers and employees. Compensation for old age and child care will, however, become effective six years after the bill becomes law, and no deadline has been set for the payment of unemployment compensation. It is worth noting that the House passage of the bill which was heavily amended during the scrutiny period was obviously done under pressure of unionists despite objections to certain provisions from the Ministry of Interior, for instance, the provisions pertaining to compensation for the unemployed and for old age.²⁵

The bill has yet to go through the Senate and there is a high possibility that it will be subject to heavy amendment unless there are instructions otherwise from the

²⁵Bangkok Post, August 12, 1989.

Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. Any radical changes from the version endorsed by the House in the second and final readings are likely to provoke dissent from union leaders.²⁶

The following section deals with some forms of action by labor organizations in pushing for the social security law.

In the past, attempts to establish a Social Security Law were sporadic and were within the bureaucratic realm. The full social security law was first proposed by the Pibun government in 1956, and it was supposed to go into effect in 1957, had General Sarit not staged a military coup, aborted the law, and ruled country under martial law. After the death of Sarit, there were unsuccessful attempts by the Thanom government to pass the law.

There was a cabinet resolution on October 1, 1958, to establish a committee to review the Social Security bill of 1954. The committee included some 6 labor experts from the ILO. During the review there were seminars and discussions in order to seek different opinions from intellectuals, employers and employees. Until June 23, 1964, the Welfare Department proposed the already reviewed draft to the government. The government handed it to the National Research Council (NRC) to determine whether such draft was suitable for the country at the time.

²⁶Bangkok Post, August 12, 1989.

Because most of the labor force was engaged mainly in agriculture, where most of the farmers own their small plot of land to cultivate, those who were employed did not want to pay an insurance fee, since they earned very little. Thus the Council suggested 2 possible options for the government to choose. The government could delay the bill until there were more industrial workers and these workers had requested the social security law; or it could enact the law and allow the workers to voluntarily enter into the program. The cabinet decided on November 2, 1965, to delay decreeing the law.²⁷

After the country returned to the democratic form of government in the early 1980s, there were many proposals pressed in the government to establish the law. There was a cabinet resolution on December 9, 1980 to approve the social security draft in principle. The draft was prepared by the National Council for Labor Development (NCLD). The cabinet also appointed a new committee under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior to prepare for the enactment of the social security law. This committee finished its work and proposed its draft to the cabinet. After approving in principle, the cabinet forwarded the draft to the Bureaucratic Reform Committee (BRC) under the Chairmanship of Deputy Prime Minister Maj-General Pramarn Adireksarn to study in detail the application of the bill in

²⁷Siam Rath, August 8, 1985.

Thailand. However, after the committee spent a full year studying the bill before returning it to the Cabinet, the later only approved it in principle and rejected its details. The Cabinet also suggested that a social security service for workers could be introduced under the provisions of the existing Workers Compensation Fund.²⁸ While waiting for the return of the study, the cabinet ordered the DoL to expand the coverage of the already established workers compensation funds²⁹ and also to expand the coverage of the labor protection law under the Announcement of the National Executive Council No. 103 to cover medical care resulting from sickness and accident or death outside the work place.³⁰

On May 20, 1985 the cabinet set up a committee to prepare for the establishment of a social security system in the country.³¹ Three years later, on April 25, 1987, the committee suggested that the government provide three kinds of funds; a compensation fund, a health insurance fund, and a retirement fund. These funds were supposed to apply to workers in the Greater Bangkok area. The Cabinet sent the

²⁸The Bangkok Post, September 27, 1982.

²⁹In 1984 the Compensation Funds was expanded to cover 36 provinces and 900,000 workers were covered. The Funds was expanded to all over the country in 1986. Matoophum, May 11, 1985.

³⁰Thailand Time, September 17, 1982., Siam Rath, December 22, 1986.

³¹Siam Rath, August 8, 1985.

proposal to the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) to do research to see to what extent Thailand might adopt a social security program.

NIDA together with a special committee on labor from Ministry of Interior and some labor advisors from ILO investigated the necessity and the feasibility of the social security program and suggested that the government decreed the law, arguing that it would benefit Thailand. NIDA handed its report to the government in February 1989. However, the cabinet decided not to take immediate action and waited for the incoming government, since the country was in the period of general election.

It is worth noting that the Thai government, especially the government in the bureaucratic polity period, through various cabinets, had always postponed or delayed the establishment of social security in the country. There were orders of various cabinets to have some state institutions to determine, to draft, to scrutinize, to expand some of the already established funds (which in fact are part of social security as a whole). These orders were seen by labor leaders as the government's strategy to delay the law.

In addition to this, it is also important to note that, in the past, the attempts to turn proposals into law had been limited to the government side, especially government bureaucrats. There were indeed technocrats and intellectuals who participated in the process, but their efforts were

limited to such things as studies and reporting of the results to the government. These groups did not play a significant role in pushing the law.³² Workers, the group that had most to benefit from the law, only recently entered the movement for the enactment.

Trade unions have been active in pushing the law since May Day 1980, when Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda gave a speech promising that his government would enact the social security law. However, the Government still delayed the enactment of the law, claiming that it lacked the funds to begin. And the government was also afraid that there would be pressure from the agricultural sector which would not be included in the proposed law. In 1986, there were about 12-14 million in the labor force, and if family members were included the number would be approximately 35 million who would not benefit from the proposed law.³³ Only when the two active peak organizations of unions, the LCT and the TTUC,³⁴ made it their goal to pressure the Government to

³²See Sandose Tewsawaenglert, "Karn muang nai karn ri rirm nayobai prakan sungkom khong tai" [Politics of Initiation of the Thai Social Security Policy] M.A. Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1987.

³³A Director General of DoL, Mr. Chamnarn Potjana gave his opinion in a seminar on the topic "Kammakorn kab karn plak dan nayobai haeng rath" [Workers and Its Influence on State Policy] organized by Thammasat University in December 1986. Siam Rath, December 16, 1986.

³⁴On the day the TTUC registered to the DoL, Paisan Thawatchainand said that one of the important objective goals of the organization was to push the government to enact the security bill. He also gave his view on the

establish social security did the Thai government make serious efforts to make it a law. The two peak organizations of unions have engaged in pushing for enactment of the law since the early 1980s, but the movement gained more weight after the other two peak labor organizations, the NCTL and the FLUC, entered in support of the movement in 1987.

There were various forms of actions, for example: seminars and reports of the results of the seminars to the government, campaigns in various labor functions --at any strike, at any demonstration etc; lobbying some cabinet members and members of parliament to submit and support the bill; giving tacit support to some political parties whose policy benefits workers.

On December 21, 1984, when the 4 peak federations mobilized ten thousand workers against the baht devaluation policy, the campaign for the enactment of the social security bill was also underway.³⁵ In early 1986, before the July 27, 1986 general election, the LCT and TTUC wrote letters to various political parties and went to lobby various politicians to urge them to bring up the law in the coming session of the parliament.³⁶ It might have seemed a

position of Prem government toward the bill that the later did not seriously want to enact the Social Security Law. Matuphum, September 2, 1982, and December 22, 1984.

³⁵Matuphum, December 22, 1984.

³⁶Department of Labor, satanakarn raeng ngan tai [Labor Review in Thailand] (April-June 1986), Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1986, p.31.

premature effort since the election had not yet been held, yet it was a good time to do so, since political parties and politicians needed support from the masses at election time. Therefore, action by LCT and TTUC leaders was in fact appropriate.

In a meeting among 4 labor congresses on December 4, 1983, the labor leaders adopted resolutions calling on the 4 labor congresses to: Remain in unity and continue to cooperate to solve labor problems and push forward labor demands, demand from the Government the adoption of social security, and protest the privatization of state enterprises.³⁷

On August 6, 1985 there was a seminar on "Social Security in Thailand: Its Possibility" organized by Thammasat University where there were many union leaders, concerned intellectuals and MPs. At the seminar a committee was formed in order to co-ordinate all forces to influence the Government to enact the social security law. The committee members included Professor Nikom Chandaravithoon a former Director General of the DoL, who has engaged in many struggles for workers welfare and sat as a senior advisor. It also included Associate Professor Chira Hongladarom, the Director of the Human Resources Institute, Thammasat University. At present the institution has been very active in labor matters. This was another step intended to put

³⁷Bangkok Post, December 5, 1983.

pressure on the government. In the view of the committee members, Thailand needed the bill and the Government should no longer delay enactment.³⁸

Analysis

It is clear that workers would be the immediate group that would benefit from the social security system. More benefits would be provided by the coming social security law. It has been, therefore, in the interests of workers to mobilize their resource to put pressure on government until the draft becomes law. It is worth noting, however that this movement is dealing with initiation of a law that immediately benefits workers as a whole. This is different from the movement against the privatization policy analyzed above, where the issue directly effected only workers employed in the state enterprises.

Thai governments have been reluctant to enact the law, yet labor has continuously put pressure on the former. This is another sign of the independence or the "autonomy" of trade unions. Furthermore, recent trade union action for the enactment of the law has been very united. Thus the government has to take into account the demands of trade unions. In their campaign for the enactment of social security law, trade unions acted autonomously and beyond the control of military or civil bureaucratic elites. In this

³⁸Siam Rath, August 7, 1985.

case trade unions could be seen as an "extrabureaucratic force."

Trade Unions and the Minimum Wage

Narrative

Recently, almost every year there is an effort on the part of labor to push for a desirable minimum wage rate, even though there was little likelihood in the past that the rate proposed by labor representatives in the Committee on Wage--a tripartite committee--would be totally achieved. The Committee on Wages which proposes the minimum wage for the Minister of Interior to announce, has been the place where workers and trade union autonomously express their demands and thus insert them in the policy making process. The Wage Committee is tripartite in character, established in accordance with the Announcement of the National Executive Council No. 103 of 1972. It consists of a Chairman and members totalling not less than nine and not more than fifteen. They are appointed by the Minister of Interior, and the appointed members "shall include at least three representatives each from the party of employers and the party of employees."³⁹ The rest are the state's representatives. However, in practice the ratio of the three

³⁹Notification of the Ministry of Interior, Re: Prescription of minimum wages, Clause 3. As amended by the Notification of the Ministry of Interior re: Prescription of minimum wages (No. 2) 1st January B.E. 2519 (1976).

representatives from the three parties concerned has varied and representatives from the state have outnumbered the other two counterparts. In the First and Second Wage Committee, employers and employees had only one representative. In the Third to Seventh Committee the ratio of representative was equal, that is, five representatives from each. But at present (the Eighth Wage Committee) the ratio is 4:4:4 plus three experts on labor problem who are appointed by the government. In theory the experts are supposed to be neutral. In practice they have been appointed from ex-bureaucrats or those who have the same view as the government.⁴⁰

The duty of the Committee is to "make a proposal to the Government to be prescribed as the national wage policy and [they] shall have the power and duty to prescribe the minimum wage which an individual employee should receive and [with which he] is able to support himself."⁴¹This definition of minimum wage has been changed from the

⁴⁰Department of Labor, rai ngan kanakammakarn kajang choodti paed 10 pruesajikayon 2530-9 presajikayon 2532 [Report of the Eight Wage Committee 10 November 1987-9 November 1989] Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1989, p. 12. See also Bandit Thamtrirat, "botbat khong kanakammakarn kajang kab karn cluenwai raeng ngan" [The Role of Wage Committee and Labor Movement] tripaki kab karn cluenwai raegn ngan tai (Bangkok: Edison Press Product, 1989), p. 123.

⁴¹Notification of the Ministry of Interior, Re: Prescription of minimum wages, Clause 6. As amended by the Notification of the Ministry of Interior re: Prescribing of minimum wages (No. 2): Government Gazette Vol. 93, Part 1, Special Issue, page 11, dated 1st January B.E. 2519 (1976).

original law. The minimum wage, as prescribed by the original law, before it was amended, provided not only the amount for a worker himself to live a normal life but also for the support of two other persons. Changes in the system of calculation for the minimum wage have caused great changes in the minimum wage in the country⁴² and the rates are not the same in all part of the country. The wage in the Greater Bangkok area has been higher than the rest, since the cost of living in the area is higher than in the provinces.

Almost every year the committee meets to determine how much the minimum wage of the coming year would be. Normally the meeting is held in the middle of the year and the result will come out around October. The Committee by itself cannot announce the rate but must hand its proposal to the Minister of Interior to make it the law.

According to the Announcement of the National Executive Council No. 103, 1972, the Interior Minister is empowered to appoint and remove members of the Committee on Wage. The law does not describe the process by which representatives from employees and employers are to be appointed or who they should be. This creates difficulty on the labor side. There have always been problems concerning who should represent workers in the Committee. In practice, only in the Fourth and the Fifth committees were labor representatives directly

⁴²Bandit, op. cit., p. 126.

elected buy union representatives.⁴³ After the Sixth committee until the present one, the Ministry selected and appointed representatives proposed by employer and labor councils.⁴⁴ The Ministry's power to select and appoint labor representatives on the Committee has provided opportunity for it to manipulate the Committee decisions. Paisan Thawatchainand viewed such power as a means for government to block the influence of the TTUC in the Committee. Therefore, in the past the minimum wage adjustment has never corresponded to the increase in consumer goods price index and the inflation of the country. Another reason for the outcome on wage policies has been the disadvantageous proportion of of worker representatives on the Wage Committee.⁴⁵

The decision of the Committee on minimum wage must secure two-thirds of the votes in the meeting and this must include at least one representative from each of the three parties. However, in practice most of the decisions on minimum wage have been made by the consensus. Only the decision of the Fifth Committee on September 9, 1981 was

⁴³The term of the Fourth and Committee on Wage were during October 6, 1978 to October 5, 1980 and January 23, 1981 to January 22, 1983 respectively.

⁴⁴Bandit, op. cit., p. 124.

⁴⁵The 4/2526 (1983) Report of TTUC Executive Committee to its membership on June 24, 1983 at the Metropolitan Electricity Authority Union's Office.

made by vote.⁴⁶

Since the minimum wage system was established in Thailand in 1975 until 1989, which is about 15 years, there were 17 Notifications on Minimum wage rates regulated by the Ministry of Interior. The minimum wage rates have been announced with an average of about once a year. The table below shows details of minimum wages and also shows the rates proposed by labor's representatives in the Wage Committee, except in the first and the second notification.

By law, any party in the Committee could make proposal concerning the minimum wage. Nevertheless, in practice it has been labor's representative who have initiated the proposals.⁴⁷

In pushing for the desired minimum wages, workers have not let their representatives discuss proposals with the other two parties in the Committee, since by doing so the labor representatives would be in a disadvantageous position. The labor representatives have not been well informed, hence, at a disadvantage to bargain with employers' representatives, who have usually been more informed and better educated. Union leaders, like Paisan Thawatchainand and others have believed that government representatives on the wage committee should side with employers and the state' representatives have been inclined

⁴⁶Siam Almanac, Year 6, Vol., 38, p. 1051.

⁴⁷Bandit, op. cit., p. 127.

to do so. One way to make the government representatives side with workers is for the latter to put pressure on government.

Until now the Wage Committee has been institutionalized in the sense that the parties concerned have accepted the practice whereby every year the Committee determines whether or not the minimum wage should be increased and how much is appropriate. Nevertheless, in 1976 there was no increase of the minimum wage, since the country was under military rule (under the leadership of Thanin Kraivixian) and the labor movement was suppressed. After the dictatorship was overthrown and the country once again adopted a democratic form of government in 1977, there have been adjustments of the minimum wage rates every year except in 1984 and 1986. (see the Table 9 below.)

Table 9 shows also that the rates of increase were high during 1973-1980. The rates of increase had been reduced significantly during 1982-1989, when the average rates of increase were approximately not more than 4.2 per cent.

A couple of years after the change in the 1977 system of calculation, the percentage rate increase was not different from the system used in the preceding years. However, the percentage of minimum wage increase has been reduced significantly since 1982. It should be noted here that, from 1981 until 1988, the period in which the Prime Minister Prem led a semi-democratic government, politics was

more stable than in the so-called 'democratic period, 1973-1976.

Table 9

Minimum Wages and their Relative Changes 1973-1989

Date of Issue	Minimum Wage	Wages Proposed by Workers' Representatives	Wage increase from preceding year	Per cent change
17 April 1973	12	-		
1 January 1974	16	-	4	33.3
14 June 1974	20	25	6	25.0
16 January 1975	25	25	5	25.0
1 October 1977*	28	-	3	12.0
1 October 1978	35	45	7	25.0
1 October 1979	45	60	10	28.6
1 October 1980	54	60	9	20.0
1 October 1981	61	70	7	12.9
1 October 1982	64	83,74,66	3	4.9
1 October 1983	66	68	2	3.1
1 January 1985	70	72	4	6.0
1 April 1987	73	76	3	4.2
1 January 1989	76	80	3	4.1
1 April 1989	78	80	2	2.6

Source: Division of Research and Planning, Department of Labor.

Note. The rates are applied to Bangkok and provinces surrounding Bangkok.

* Beginning from 1977, a new system of calculation of minimum wage which bases on one worker, rather than worker and two persons of his/her family, has been introduced.

The table suggests that in a period when politics was unstable (1973-1976) and the government had not yet established channels to deal with labor problems, workers and trade unions could successfully put a great deal of

pressure on government to have their demands met. The outcome would be the opposite when the government was stable and had already established proper channels and methods to deal with labor problems. The following two case studies of labor pressure on the government for increasing the minimum wage, one in 1974 and the other in 1984, demonstrate the ways and means which workers employed to put pressure on government. As we shall see, in the case of 1984, in contrast to that of 1974, workers could employ little pressure on the government. As a result, the wage increase was only 6.0 per cent over the previous minimum wage which was announced in October 1983.

The Case of 1974.

The first announcement of minimum wage was made on 17 April 1973 by the Thanom government, about six months before the government was overthrown in October 1973. The second announcement of a minimum wage which increased the wage from 12 baht to 16 baht was made on January 1, 1974. After it was in effect only five and a half months, union leaders asked for an increase in the minimum wage to 25 baht per day. The demand was submitted to the government along with other demands put forward to the government during the Textile Strike in June 1974 (see discussion of the strike in chapter five). Because great numbers of workers had come out into the streets, it shook the caretaker government under the

leadership of Professor Sanya Dhammasakdi. The government had to make a compromise, and 20 baht was the new minimum wage that would be effective on October 1, 1974. Moreover, the government promised to increase the wage to 25 baht early in the beginning of the coming year, which was about 3 months away.⁴⁸

It should be noted here that there was only one labor representative in the wage committee at that time. Thus it appears that the unity and strong action of labor under a forceful group of labor leaders at the time contributed greatly to the success of the bargaining position of the representative appointed to the Committee. The unity and forceful action of labor under an active group of labor leaders at the time heavily contributed to the success of the bargaining position of the single worker representative. Otherwise the decision to increase the wage would have been unlikely. Therefore, we conclude that concerted action of union leaders outside the Committee has been very crucial for the workers when the minimum wage is under consideration. This was also true in the case of 1984. More specifically, it is crucial for workers to mobilize union action outside the Committee in order to put pressure on the other committee representatives to honor their demand. General strikes and threats to strike were the most forceful weapons. But labor leaders went to see the Prime Minister,

⁴⁸Bandit, p. 148.

Cabinet members, and military leaders to express their concerns, and they organized seminars as other means to put pressure on the cabinet and the government.

The Movement for the 1984 Minimum Wage.

We first present a brief overview of labor action to push for their desired minimum wage rates in 1984. Workers developed and employed various method and means to back up their representatives in the Wage Committee. Their action was well organized and their goal was clear: the increase of the minimum wage at the rate they proposed (from 66 to 72 baht in the Greater Bangkok area). The workers had to fight against the employers and at the same time put pressure on the government. It was a long struggle, since it started in early 1984 continued until the new minimum wage was announce on January 1, 1985.

The attempt of union leaders to push the government to declare new minimum wage rate was partly successful. The new minimum wage rate announced (70 baht per day in the Greater Bangkok area) was lower than the one proposed by the workers (72 baht a day), but that was two thirds of their demands. Now we present more detail to show how trade unions struggled for an increase in the new minimum wage.

The struggle to increase the minimum wage for the year

1984 began on June 15, 1984, when Mr. Vichai Thosuwanchinda,⁴⁹ the General Secretary of the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT) and one of the 5 labor representatives in the Wage Committee, requested that the chairman of the Committee call a meeting to consider the new minimum wage that would be put in effect. He made the first move, before any other members in the Committee, since he realized that it was almost 9 months since the Committee had met, and it had shown no attempt thus far to adjust or talk about the increase in the a minimum wage rate.

On June 20, the chairman of the Committee, Mr. Saneh Watanathorn⁵⁰ called a meeting but invited only representatives from the state and hence excluded labor and employer representatives. After the meeting, the Committee decided not to increase the minimum wage in the year 1984, arguing that doing so would put a heavy burden on the government, since it would have to pay more to civil servants and employees in state enterprises.⁵¹ The Committee's decision made it clear that the government did not want to increase minimum wage rates. Labor leaders were

⁴⁹Vichai Thosuwanchinda is a labor leader who has earned master degree in economic. He has been recognized as labor leader at national level since mid 1970s, has been very active in the Committee on Wages.

⁵⁰Normally the Minister of Interior appoints Deputy Permanent Secretary responsible for administration to be the chairman of the Wage Committee. Mr. Saneh was the Deputy Permanent Secretary.

⁵¹Matichon, June 21, 1984.

disappointed with the decision and accused the government of being insincere with respect to the problems of labor.⁵²

They therefore, called a meeting of labor representatives on the Wage Committee on June 24. After the meeting they handed a three point demand to the Committee, and one of them was to demand the increase of minimum wage rates in 1984.⁵³

Six days later, the three peak labor organizations, the LCT, the TTUC, and the NFLC, called a meeting and approved a resolutions to support the labor representatives' position in the Committee. That is, the new minimum wage must increase no less than 9 baht from the previous year.⁵⁴

To support and justify the position of the labor representatives on the Wage Committee, Mr. Vichai and other labor representatives on the committee, with the support of the Labor Congress of Thailand or LCT, conducted a survey on the question, what a suitable minimum wage would be for the year 1984. They asked 191 unions and the consensus was that the rate in the Greater Bangkok area should be 72 baht per day; for Cholburi, Saraburi, Nakornratchasima, and Chiangmai province it should be 69 baht per day, and the other provinces should be 65 baht per day. The labor leaders would present the result of the survey to the Committee.⁵⁵

⁵²Khaow Sod, June 23, 1984.

⁵³Matichon, and Daow Siam, June 25, 1984.

⁵⁴The Nations, and Khaow Sod, July 1, 1984.

⁵⁵Matichon, and Siam Rath, July 23, 1984.

However, when the Committee convened a meeting on July 27, to determine a new minimum wage rate, the labor representatives did not immediately submit the result to the Committee.⁵⁶ Instead it was first handed to the Deputy Prime Minister by representatives from the 4 peak organizations of workers and the labor representatives in the Committee, under the leadership of Mr. Ahmad Khamthesthong, the president of the LCT. In accordance with the survey the new minimum wage rates proposed by these union leaders was 72-69-65 baht per day.⁵⁷

On August 16, Labor representatives in the Committee also handed the desired minimum wage rates to the chairman of the committee, and the chairman put the proposal on the agenda of the committee on August 20.⁵⁸ The Committee responded by appointing a sub-committee to study and determine the new minimum wage rates. When the sub-committee reported to the meeting of the Wage committee on September 4, Mr. Vichai told the press that, it is likely that the Committee would increase the minimum wage rates. He also said that the rate should be at 72 baht.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Daow Siam, July 28, 1984.

⁵⁷Banmuang, and Matichon, July 27, 1984. The minimum wage rates has not been the same all over the country. The 72 baht per day was only applied to the Greater Bangkok area, Ranong, Pang-nga, and Phuget.

⁵⁸Siam Rath, August 23, 1984.

⁵⁹Matichon, and Khaow sod, September 5, 1984.

The LCT executive committee met on September 25 to determine what measures it should adopt to support the action of the labor representatives on the Wage committee.⁶⁰ One form of action it would take was to stage a massive demonstration. Additionally, three out of the five labor representatives would resign from the Committee if it decided not to increase the minimum wage rates.⁶¹

The Wage Committee met on September 27 and decided not to increase the minimum wage rates. Paisan Thawatchainand the leader of the TTUC accused the representatives of all three parties in the Committee of betraying the workers and said he would not accept the decision.⁶² On September 30, the LCT and TTUC agreed in principle that they would unite as a single labor peak organization in order to strengthen the labor movement in the country. The two also agreed that their immediate goal should be to push forward the desired minimum wage rates.⁶³

Also, on the same day, after the meeting of its executive committee, the LCT requested that the minimum wage rates be increased by at least two baht all over the country, before the coming December and it declared that it would mobilized the labor movement to support its position.

⁶⁰Khaow sod, September 26, 1984.

⁶¹Matichon, September 27, 1984.

⁶²Matichon, September 29, 1984.

⁶³Siam Rath, October 1, 1984.

The LCT and the TTUC also planned to convene a seminar on the question of minimum wage on November 3-4, at the New Imperial Hotel. Mr. Vichai estimated that approximately 300 union leaders would participate in the seminar. The seminar was another method used by the unions to pressure the government to announce the desired new minimum wage rates.⁶⁴

The attempts of union leaders to channel their support for the labor representatives in the Wage Committee were not successful. In spite of their efforts, the Committee announced its resolution that during the next three months the Committee would not increase the minimum wage rates. The decision aroused a group of about 56 unions leaders to come out and speak against the Committee.⁶⁵ These groups and some groups of unions associated with the LCT formed another group named "sahapap raeng ngan haeng chati" or "The National Labor Union." The new informal organization claimed a membership of 99 unions. The group aired 4 demands to the government and one of them was the minimum wage increase.⁶⁶

On October 16 a group of labor organization named "Center of Coordination of Labor Unions of Thailand," under the leadership of Panas Thailuan, together with executive

⁶⁴Naewna, October 1, 1984.

⁶⁵Matoophum, October 13, 1984.

⁶⁶Daily News, October 15, 1984.

committee from the LCT and NFLC, went to the Prime Minister's Office and handed him a letter with 5 demands. One of them was to urge the government to announce the new minimum wage rate within 3 months and, when announced, make it retroactive to October 1.⁶⁷

While the labor leaders were engaged in mobilizing their power to press the government and the employees to increase minimum wage rates, on November 2, the government declared a devaluation of the baht value by 17.3 per cent. The policy strengthened the union demands, since it would be all the more justifiable for workers who already had a very low wage to ask for an increase in the minimum wage. Paisan spoke at the seminar, saying the government must take responsibility for the decrease of the real wage of the workers, due to its policy. Hence, the government must compensate for the loss.⁶⁸ The LCT President at the time, Mr. Ahmad Khamthesthong, said that the LCT and the TTUC would hand written demands to the government on November 6. The letter asked the government to compensate the loss of worker wages due to the baht devaluation policy. Labor would give the government 7 days to follow the workers demands, otherwise labor would start its rally against the government.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Banmuang, October 17, 1984.

⁶⁸Naewna, November 4, 1984.

⁶⁹Naewna, November 6, 1984.

The LCT and TTUC set up an organizing committee to push forwards the demands of worker for a wage increase. The committee consisted of 10 representatives from the two peak labor organizations and the 5 labor representatives on the Wage Committee. The organizing committee, under the leadership of Paisan and Ahmad, handed a letter to the government. They demanded that the latter compensate for the wages lost, fix and control the price of consumer goods, provide tax exemptions for those who earned less than the minimum wage, and establish price guarantees for agricultural products.⁷⁰

The Wage Committee responded to the movement of labor by agreeing to announce the new minimum wage one month earlier than the previously set date. The new minimum wage rates would be announced on the December 1, and there would be an increase of approximately 5 per cent, or 5 baht, over the preceding year.⁷¹ The LCT and the TTUC invited two MPs (Mr. Sihanath Lucha from the Chat Thai Party and Mr. Suthee Phuwaphan from the Social Democrat Party), and student activists from Ramkhamhaeng University to a meeting in order to determine their next action if the government would not comply with the demands submitted earlier.⁷² On the same

⁷⁰Banmuang, November 6, 7, 1984. The Nations, November 6, 1984.

⁷¹Naewna, November 10, 1984., Thai Rath, November 11, 1984.

⁷²Daily News, November 11, 1984.

day that this meeting was organized, another group of labor leaders acted to move in the same direction. Representatives from the LCT, NFLC, and the National Labor Union, sat down and planned together. Mr. Vichian Srivichian, leader of Water Transportation Unions and a Senator, who acted in the name of this group, declared that the group opposed the baht devaluation policy and therefore the government should immediately pay compensation.⁷³ The following week the LCT organized a meeting of 25 representatives from unions and some 200 union members. They decided that they would stage a campaign against the baht devaluation policy, since it effected all walks of lives.⁷⁴ The president of the LCT, Ahmad Khamthesthong, said that the Congress would organize a rally against the government policy and the cabinet as a whole at Sanam Luang on December 14. The schedule was a week earlier than the date previously set with the TTUC. Ahmad not only wanted the Government to respond to the demands previously handed to it. He also wanted to topple the Government because of the devaluation. If the government continued to ignore labor demands, Ahmad declared, the LCT would "try to solve the problem at the grass-roots level by directing our movement for a change of government".⁷⁵ His position did not please Paisan and the TTUC but it injected

⁷³Matichon, November 11, 1984.

⁷⁴Thai Rath, November 19, 1984.

⁷⁵Bangkok Post, November 19, 1984.

a lot of tension into the political atmosphere.

The Employers Confederation of Thailand (ECOT) responded to the labor movement by sending 1,000 questionnaires to employers. The finding was that the employers would have to cut down welfare, bonuses or other fringe benefits if the government increased the minimum wage rate, since the baht devaluation policy had also hurt the employers as well.⁷⁶

The director of National Statistics Office (NSO), Dr. Niyom Purakum, who was the member of the Wage Committee from the government said that the rate increase presented by labor representatives was too high. He also pointed out that it might have been too soon to judge the impact of the baht devaluation policy. And it would be good to start a new minimum wage rate on January 1, since it would be convenient for private employers in making their accounting report. However, the Committee would meet on December 7.⁷⁷

Labor leaders responded to the position of Mr. Niyom by confirming their campaign plan at Sanam Luang on December 21: to educate people about the effects of the baht devaluation policy and explain the reasons for increasing the minimum wage.⁷⁸ One week before the setting date, the

⁷⁶Than setakij, November 19-24, 1984.

⁷⁷Daily News, Banmuang, Daow Siam, November 26, 1984., Naewna, Matoophum, December 7, 1984.

⁷⁸Matichon, December 9, 1984.

LCT and TTUC planed a meeting to prepare for the campaign.

The relentless pressures put on the government forced the Wage committee to agree to increase the minimum wage rates in its meeting on December 13. The rate, to be put in effect on January 1, 1985, increased the minimum wage by 4 baht (from 66 baht to 70 baht) in the Greater Bangkok area, Pang-nga and Phuget; two baht (from 63 baht to 65 baht) for Cholburi, Saraburi, Nakornratchasima, and Chiangmai; three baht (from 56 baht to 59 baht) for the other provinces.⁷⁹

Analysis of the Struggle for the Minimum Wage

Labor's struggle to increase the minimum wage in 1984 showed the strength and the autonomy of the unions. Union leaders had to put pressure on the government to increase the minimum wage rates. They knew that within the Wage Committee their representatives were at a disadvantage because representatives from government and employers were more skilled, better educated, and much better informed. They were aware that if they left their representatives to carry on the struggle alone they would not win and the minimum wage would not be increased. Furthermore, even though the Committee had agreed to recommend a minimum wage increase, the new rates had to be approved by the Minister

⁷⁹Banmuang, December 14, 1984. Chadaporn Sajjapong, "Labor Situation in Thailand: 1984," [satanakarn raeng ngan nai pratet tai: 2527] Business News Review 16, 3 (1-15 February 1985), p. 39.

of Interior, since the Committee by itself cannot make law. Its duty is only to suggest the minimum wage rates to the Minister. Therefore, union leaders had to mobilize support for their representatives in the Committee, and they used their power to press the government to comply with their demands.

In the struggle for increasing the minimum wage, conflicting interests between employers and the state emerged. The employers did not want to increase wages because they claimed that the economy of the country was just recovering from the previous economic recession of the early 1980s. Employers thus asked for some time before they could pay higher wages to the workers. The elected government had been constantly challenged by the military and now it had to prevent a situation where there would be agitation and strikes by labor. If such a situation occurred, the military would have made it a justification to stage a military coup.

Labor leaders were aware of the situation, and they continuously pressed the government until the rates were increased. At the beginning, the government did not want to increase the minimum wage rates, even though labor leaders had tried to have the rate increased. Labor's cause was strengthened when the government devalued the baht in early November. Because of the devaluation policy, the government was also challenged by the military under the leadership of

General Arthit Kamlang-ek. (see more details in a case study in Chapter Seven) Under pressure, the government allowed the increase in the minimum wage.

The action of union leaders was clearly in the interest of the workers as a whole. Clearly, action for increasing the minimum wage was initiated by union leaders. Union action was autonomous and leaders acted in the interest of members and workers generally. Military opposition to the Baht Devaluation policy of the government occurred while the unions were pressing for the minimum wage increase. That did indeed enhance the bargaining power of workers, and the military also might have gained some advantage in its power play with the government. But union action in that period was clearly not something instigated by and for military leaders, since the campaign was planned and had already begun before the military leader staged their rally against the government policy on baht devaluation. The action of unions to increase the minimum wage in 1984, then, should be seen as autonomous. The ability of unions to act independently and to put forward their demands until they are made policy is the essence of an extrabureaucratic force.

Perspectives on Unions and the Policy Process

Union action was able to force the government to reverse its policy which would have raised the price of rice. It even went beyond this and exacted a government

promise to promote land reform, establish cooperatives and improve the management of the Bank of Agriculture. In their opposition to privatization policy, unions were only partly but impressively successful. Some industries, with the strongest union, remained in government hands. A social security law was pushed through the House, now awaiting approval by the by the Senate, after a long and vigorous campaign on the part of labor. Increases in minimum wages were also on labor's agenda. Although unions found it necessary to compromise, they were able to secure significant increases in the wage. In these and in all other cases, unions probable asked for more than they expected to get and the compromises were a part of the bargaining process we might expect to find anywhere.

Unions and their leaders resorted to a variety of techniques in their efforts to bring the government to accept their demands. Participation in the official labor committee, educational seminars, public meetings, direct communication with government, contacts with political parties, demonstrations and the threat of strike were some of the measures which the reader has undoubtedly found in the case studies above.

What is most important for our purpose is the fact that in none of these cases did we see evidence of unions acting as client of powerful individuals or groups within the bureaucracy or the military. Unions acted on their own

initiative and in their own interest, as they saw it. This is what we have frequently referred to as "autonomous action" or an "extra-bureaucratic force."

In the next chapter we will turn to case studies of union involvement in attempted coups, an attempt to amend the constitution, monetary policy (devaluation of the Baht) and electoral campaigns. In these cases, even though the relationship between union action and the interests of union members and workers in general might on the surface to be less obvious, we will try to show that union leaders acted autonomously, in accordance with what they perceived to be the interest of their constituency--unions and workers in general.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRADE UNION AND COUPS, CONSTITUTION, MONETARY POLICY AND ELECTIONS

This chapter explores the role of trade unions in various significant political events which occurred during the semi-democratic period (1977-1986). In four cases studies we will analyze labor's action in detail. For purposes of perspective, however, we first present a brief overview of each of the four cases. As we shall see, trade unions have increasingly gained their strength and autonomy. In the first case we analyze the union's role in the attempt by a military leader to amend the Constitution in early 1983. Some labor leaders under the leadership of Sawas and Ahmad, who were closely associated with military elites, supported the attempt. We shall see, however, that other leaders argued that labor support would serve only the interests of the military elites. We will argue, however, that taking into account the belief and goal set by the labor leaders who supported the constitutional amendment, this action was also an example of autonomous action.

In the second case we look at the role of labor unions and leaders in the "baht devaluation crisis" (discussed in a different context in Chapter 6). The event came immediately after the government declared a devaluation of the country's

currency in early November 1984. Military elites, under the leadership of General Arthit Kamlang-ek, and opposition parties protested the policy and demanded that the government reverse the policy. It is worth noting that the policy was announced at the very time that labor leaders were campaigning and pressuring the government for an increase in the minimum wage. The policy then became another important reason for workers to ask for more wages and salary. Although the labor movement was not really opposed to devaluation, it asked for more wage and salary as compensation. Thus, within the labor movement for the increasing the minimum wage, there was a group of labor leaders led by Sawas and Ahmad that came out to support the military movement against the devaluation policy and even demanded a change of the government. However, as we shall see, the Sawas and Ahmad group had in mind the interests of workers as a whole, and the movement could also be seen as mutual interest between the military elites and labor leaders.

In the third case we will analyze the role of trade unions in various military coup attempts, with special attention to the role of union leaders in the attempted coup of September 9, 1985. We will see that a group of labor leaders under the leadership of Sawas and Ahmad, who joined the military coup, made their own choice, and they could bargain with the coup makers before they became involved in

the military coup attempt. Their participation in the coup grew out of a perceived mutual interest.

Finally, we will examine the role of unions in various recent general elections. Our discussion will show that although, legally, trade unions are not allowed to participate or become involved in politics, union leaders have found ways to participate in general elections and have contacts with political parties. We now turn to each case in detail.

Trade Union Action and the Constitutional Amendments Attempt

During January and February 1983, various political group, and parties under the leadership of General Arthit Kamlang-ek campaigned for a Constitutional amendments that would change the system of election allow bureaucrats to hold political posts simultaneously and maintain the power of the Senate.¹ Labor engaged in and played an important part in the movement. But labor was divided: it was both pro and against the movement. Those who supported the movement were the Group of Water Transportation Unions, the Group of Transportation Unions, State Railways of Thailand unions (SRT), and Thai Tobacco Monopoly union (TTM). Against the change was group of unions under the leadership of Thai Trade Union Congress or TTUC. The later accused the former

¹Clark D. Neher, "Political Forces in Thailand" Current History 83: 497 (December 1984): 420.

of receiving money from political parties and pursuing personal political interests.²

General Arthit was the central figure in the campaign to amend the Constitution, and he exercised all his possible influence, since the constitution in force prevented bureaucrats from holding a political position simultaneously. The amendment was very crucial to Thai politics since it has been a Thai political axiom since the coup of 1932 that whoever controls the army should have a greater right, more than anyone else, to be the Prime Minister of Thailand. General Arthit could legally assume the Office of Prime Minister only if the constitution were amended as he sought. General Arthit, quickly rose to fame and power as commander-in-chief of the army--the most powerful Thai military establishment, after helping Prem government to defeat the April 1, 1981, military coup attempt by a group of young military officers known as the 'Young Turks.' He was aware of the possibility of a political career. The general also realized that he had risen to the highest post very quickly and of course created conflict within the military, especially the army. He knew that in order to be accepted as the successor to the prime minister he would have to have popular support as well. Therefore, since he was made chief of the army in October

²Department of Labor, Karn boriharn raeng ngan tai [Labor Administration in Thailand], Bangkok, 1984, p. 56.

1982 he had been very active. He contacted with all important social groupings --Senators, MPs, university lecturers, businessmen, labor groups, students, farmers, and even slum dwellers.³ After establishing connections with these important social groupings, he felt he was ready in 1983 to take a big step forward-- to amend the present constitution. The amendment motion submitted by the military in 1983 had caused many political observers and virtually all the Thai news media to believe that all other opposing forces combined would never withstand the military thrust.⁴

The military under the leadership of General Arthit planned, step by step, to popularize their attempts to amend the constitution. They first utilized the news media by having key Senators and politicians as well as labor leaders, publicly express their concern for the stability of the country. The next step was to have politicians who were affront for the military lobby MPs and Senators's to sign a petition for the opening of a special session of the Parliament. Also the military issued a "White Paper" which explained and justified their involvement in the constitutional amendment. At the same time the military also contacted popular organizations and especially labor

³Siam-Rath Weekly Magazine, January 24, 1982, pp. 4-5.

⁴Pisan Suriyamongkol, Institutionalization of Democratic Political Processes in Thailand: A Three-Pronged Democratic Polity (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988), pp. 46-47.

unions, since during the constitutional controversy there were strikes and labor rallies to support the military's action. Some labor unions rallied in front of the Parliamentary during the special session.⁵

However, the military attempt was not successful. The amendment bill passed first and second readings but was turned down on the third reading. The crucial factor that caused the failure was the opposition of the Prem government. The following section analyzes role of some unions that were involved in the constitutional amendment campaign.

The army-allied labor unions announced their support for the charter amendment, rallied to support General Arthit, and interestingly, condemned Kukrit, the Social Action Party leader at that time, as a dictatorship.⁶

Ahmad the president of the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT)--the strongest congress at the time-- also continued to insist that the present constitution be amended. In a meeting among 4 labor congresses on December 5, 1983, he urged workers and unionists to unite and embark on a political campaign against employers and the Government. He said the campaign would include demands for constitutional amendments to the election laws.⁷

⁵Ibid., p. 52., and Bangkok Post, February 11, 1983.

⁶Bangkok Post, January 23, 24, 25, 1983.

⁷Bangkok Post, December 5, 1983.

Ahmad Khamthesthong said that the media misunderstood his past relations with the military, which he characterized as a "friendship." He had not supported military causes as seemed to be the case. Most actions, he said, had been in the interests of workers. "In some cases when we are expressing our views they have coincided with what the military think -- our opposition to the baht devaluation being one example."⁸

Ahmad was known as a union leader who believed that the problems of labor cannot be solved through collective bargaining alone. It was necessary to engage in the politics of the country, since Thailand had not reached a level of socioeconomic development that would guarantee fairness and peaceful bargaining.⁹ In an interview with the Bangkok Post, he said he viewed the political struggle against other influential political groups as an essential aspect of the labor movement. Such a struggle was aimed to protect workers' rights and welfare. In his words "Let's not forget, however, that we are unionists as well as an important political group. Workers must expand their role and not be confined to a unionist mentality."¹⁰

Mr. Vichian Srivichian a leaders of 10 unions from

⁸Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), (29 August 1985): 24.

⁹Khaw Sod, January 23, 1983.

¹⁰Bangkok Post, December 5, 1984.

Shipping Transportation unions and Water Transportation unions announced that the unions would stage a rally on January 26, to support the military attempt to amend the present constitution. There would be approximately 50,000 to 100,000 workers at the rally. He said the movement was independent and according to the will of the workers. However, he did not care if the movement was coincident with the action of others and was not afraid of being part of a cause that would lead to a military coup. Instead, he would support any military coup which had the purpose of amending the constitution.¹¹

The Director General of the Department of Labor, Vijit Saengthong, expressed his concern that it was unlawful for trade unions to engage in political matters. Unions, he said, should engage only in economic matters. He also urged union leaders who were engaged in the Constitutional amendment campaign to think again.¹²

Paisan Thawatchainand, a prominent union leader who did not agree with the involvement of a group of labor leaders in the incident, expressed the view that unions were being used by military leaders. Some labor leaders were opportunists, seeking only their own and their groups' interests. This, he said, was not the first time that this group had acted to serve their patrons. They served General

¹¹Khaw Sod, January 26, 1983.

¹²Matuphum, January 26, 1983.

Sawaeng Sena-narong, General Grit Seevara the former C-in-C and Supreme Commander, and they also acted in concert with the "Young Turks" during the military coup attempt in April 1981. Now they are doing a favor for General Arthit Kamlang-ek. What they have done, "is business-like, and the movement is now purely political in essence."¹³

A source said that workers who rallied in front of the Center of The Bangkok Peace Keeping Force in support of the constitutional amendment were paid 40 baht (about 1.74 US\$) each. It noted also that this same kind of movement had been mobilized in February 1980 and was one of the reasons for the resignation of Prime Minister Kriangsakdi. That movement was also led by Ahmad Khamthesthong, Sawas Lookdode and Vichian Srivichian.¹⁴

The Thai Tobacco Monopoly Union (TTM) under the leadership of Mr. Vit Borisuthikul staged a strike in late January 1983, action that was also seen as supporting the constitutional amendment campaign.¹⁵ However, the relationship was not a direct one, since the strike was based on bread-and-butter issues and administrative problems. The strikers were demanding that the TTM pay each worker a three-month bonus, an increase in employees' salaries to the level of other state enterprises and that

¹³Siam-Rath, February 11, 28, 1983.

¹⁴Matichon, January 28, 1983, p. 4.

¹⁵Mahachai, February 3, 1983.

financial assistance be provided to workers whose houses were demolished as a result of the construction of Ratchadapisek Road.¹⁶ The strike occurred at a time of political crisis, since it was known that the military was pushing for the constitutional amendment. The TTM strike, then, added heat to the crisis. The TTM strike in concert with other strikes would increase the possibility of a military coup. However, General Arthit, in an interview with a newspaper, said that the movement of labor unions in support of the constitutional amendment had nothing to do with him. In his own words "It has nothing to do with me. I am doing my job and I have already resigned from the Senate."¹⁷

The General Secretary of the TTM union also said that the strike had nothing to do with the present political issue and he wanted to end it as quickly as possible. We did not want a 'third hand' to intervene in our rally, he said.¹⁸

The TTM strike ended on January 28, shortly after the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Dr. Panas Simasathiara, in charge as the chairman of the committee of TTM, together with Mr. Vanich Chan-urai and some other TTM executive committee members went to see General Arthit at

¹⁶The Bangkok Post, January 27, 1983.

¹⁷Mahachai, January 28, 1983.

¹⁸Thai-Rath, January 27, 1983.

military commander center. The solution was that the TTM board would comply with the demands of the strikers.¹⁹

While more than 6,000 TTM workers were on strike, about 300 workers of the Communications Authority of Thailand stage a rally at the same time. But they quickly agreed to call off their protest following a plea by CAT's board of directors. The attempt of 10 transport unions, scheduled to stage a mass rally on January 25 at the Democracy Monument to demand changes in the election law, did not fully materialized since there were split within them. Four out of ten did not join the rally. Nevertheless, it was obvious to political observers in Thailand that these movements were in support of the military attempt to amend constitution.²⁰ A high ranking official in the Department of Labor gave his view: "The present movement of labor unions especially the state enterprise unions was politically motivated. It was related to the military attempt to amend the present constitution. The Marine Transportation unions obviously acted in support for the constitutional amendment."²¹

A columnist of Siam-Rath charged that the movement of unions from some state enterprises in support of the constitutional amendment was an action that was not relevant to the unions' duty. Unions should let politician and MPs

¹⁹Matuphum, January 29, 1983.

²⁰Bangkok Post, January 26, 1983.

²¹Matichon, January 26, 1983.

handle it and should have stayed away from the movement. He also believed that the movement had someone behind it pulling the strings.²²

Analysis of the role of Trade Unions in the Event

Union leaders were divided in their opinion toward the constitutional amendment attempt. Those who hold unionist views, for example, Paisan Thawatchainand the leader of the TTUC and his secretary Ekkachai Ekhankamol were against the attempt. For them the amendment would return the country to the days of dictatorship under the domination of the military and civil servants. Paisan accused those workers who rallied in support of the amendment as being used and hired by high-ranking military officers. He also said that their leaders were the same group that has always been working together with the military in any political movement.

The accusation of Paisan was not without ground. Indeed, the leaders who came gave their support, such as Ahmad, Sawas, and Vichian, had been appointed to the Senate with the support of the military. Such a position has been considered one of the most privileged in Thailand and anybody wants it. It was time to repay the military, hence support its movement. It is important to note that these labor leaders were the same ones who believed that the way

²²Siam-Rath, January 27, 1983.

to solve labor problems in the Thai context is to bring the workers into politics. They have associated with Prasert Sapsunthorn who established a firm network with high ranking military. This same group were later engaged in the military's movement in various other political events. We will see their roles more clearly in another part of this chapter.

It was clear that the campaign for amendment was not initiated by and for direct interests of workers. It was much beyond the perception of ordinary workers, most of whom have been concerned with their immediate economic gain rather than engaging in the political matters. From this perspective, it might appear that in their campaign to support the constitutional amendment labor was not acting autonomously, that they were mobilized and utilized by the military.

However, the movement could also be viewed as an alliance between the military and the union leaders. The union leaders, such as Ahmad and Sawas, who acted in support of the constitutional amendment, believed that in the Thai context the best way to solve labor problems or improve the life of workers is through political action. Workers must take political power within their hands or, if they cannot do so, they must take part in sharing the political power. Their views have been publicly known since they emerged as union leaders and became more obvious when Ahmad and Sawas

took control of the LCT in a union election in 1982. Mr. Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, a former student leader who led the student uprising in the October 1973 Revolution and had for a long time associated with the Democratic military group and union leaders, gave his view: "Ahmad and Sawas very deeply understand the politics of the country. They have been very determined to improve workers' lives and whatever they do or whichever means they have used, the end is for the benefits of workers at large."²³

Viewed in this light, the labor movement could be seen as an autonomous political entity as well. The participation could be seen as an autonomous political act which sought to establish an alliance with the military so that in the future their interests and preferences could be met by the support of the latter. Later, relations between this group of union leaders and the military developed into a partnership, though not an equal one, which had mutual interests. The case of the military coup attempt on September 9, 1985, is a case in point.

Trade Union Action and the Baht Devaluation Crisis

The Prem government decided to devalue the baht by 17.3

²³Dr. Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, personal interview, March 12, 1989. Sombat has associate with various military elites and worker leaders since 1974. He also took part in various military coup attempts. On the failure of the September 9, 1985 he was accused as one of the coup members and the government and police wanted to catch him. However, he was fortunate enough to manage to escape.

percent on November 2, 1984, arguing that the strong baht encouraged imports and hindered exports, and as a result created huge trade deficits. Devaluation would soften the baht value and make Thai products more competitive on the world market.²⁴ The government did not make the decision without taking into account the possibility that various political groups would oppose the decision. The government took a number of measures to ease public anxiety, such as a meeting of the Minister of Finance, Mr. Sommai Hoontrakul, with the Governor of the Bank of Thailand and commercial bank executives to seek cooperation from this important business sector and to explain the reasons for the baht devaluation. The government also imposed necessary measures to prevent businessmen from taking the opportunity to increase the price of consumer goods. Some economists predicted hardships and troubles ahead and ordinary citizens were in fear of a rising cost of living. Hence they were against the government decision.²⁵

Labor unions and the opposition Chart Thai Party soon began to raise their demands and objections. The labor groups demanded that the government increase the minimum wage and adjust wages in every sector to compensate for the devalued baht. One union leader pointed out that government failure to respond to labor's demands would mean the

²⁴Matichon, November 4, 1984.

²⁵pisan. op. cit., p. 61.

government was trying to protect the interests of a certain group.²⁶

Among the demands made by the two powerful labor congresses, the LCT and the TTUC, were: 1) increase the salaries of government officials, civil servants, military men, and policemen by at least 17.8 per cent, 2) exempt those who earn less than the present minimum wage from paying personal income tax, 3) impose measures to control the price of commodities and prevent traders from profiteering, and 4) impose measures to guarantee the price of agricultural products.²⁷

The political situation became more tense when General Arthit Kamlang-ek appeared on television to speak against the policy. Furthermore, the military was on alert and rumor of a possible military coup spread.²⁸ In the television interview, General Arthit denounced the baht devaluation, calling for the restoration of the previous exchange value, and threatened to cancel his support and loyalty to the government. He also demanded a purge of Prime Minister Prem's cabinet: "The reshuffle is the only chance for the government to survive. If the government refuses, then let it be. When chaos and instability reign, don't call on us

²⁶Bangkok Post, November 5, 1984, in Pisan, p. 61.

²⁷Bangkok Post, November 6, 1984. Matuphum, year 8, vol., 2420, December 22, 1984, p. 16.

²⁸Soo anakot, year 4, vol. 199 (December 27- January 2, 1985) p. 24.

[the military] because it will not be our responsibility...Those elected people sitting in the government are responsible for the mess. I myself never elected any one of them."²⁹ The general's opposition to the elected government meant that the military and bureaucrats were presenting themselves as the old and better way for the country to be ruled--under the military and bureaucrats. The elected government was accused of corruption, and elected MPs of entering into politics for fame and business interests, not for the benefit of the people at large. General Arthit might have thought that if he could force the government to reverse the policy he would immediately gain popular support from the masses. If the elected government did not change the policy and the policy caused economic hardship, then it would be legitimate for the General to come to power through a military coup.

A couple days later, there were attempts by political parties and a group of senators to petition for a special session of the parliament in order to censor the government. However, the move was not successful.³⁰

In this crisis, it was not only the labor leaders who were politically oriented and was closely associated with military elites who were directly involved. The two

²⁹Bangkok Post, 8 Nov. 1984.

³⁰Soo anakot, year 4, vol. 199. (December 27 -January 2, 1985), p. 24.

strongest peak organization of workers--the LCT and the TTUC were also involved. Moreover, workers did not act alone; they joined with other political forces such as the Chat Thai Party, Social Democrat Party and Ramkhamhaeng University.³¹ These groups combined their might to put pressure on the government to comply with the demands.

The group met again on November 18, to warn the government that there would be possible drastic actions, probably including a public demonstration, if the government would not accept their demand.³² A rally at Pramain Ground to protest against the government was originally set for November 23, but it was postponed to December 14 to give time the government time to prove that such policy was good for the country at large.³³

Originally, Paisan and 90 other union representatives had submitted their economic demands to the government and set a date to mobilize a massive rally on November 12, if the government would not comply with the demand.³⁴ The momentum of labor action to put pressure on the government would have been more serious had not a union leader--Ahmad Khamthesthong--propose a demand for constitutional amendment

³¹The Nations, November 11, 1984. Daily Mirror, November 11, 1984.

³²The Nations, November 18, 1984.

³³Khaw Sod, November 19, 1984.

³⁴Matuphum, November 19, 1984.

along with other demands put forward to management by the SRT strikers on November 8. Such attempt, according to Paisan Thawatchainand, had released a great deal of pressure on the government, since a majority of labor leaders saw the move as deeply involving the labor movement in the political conflict. Hence they were cautious in their action.³⁵ A majority of labor leaders did not want to become involved in unnecessary direct political action.³⁶

However, the government did not alter the policy and the military did not stage a coup. The controversy about the policy continued even in February 1985 when Ahmad, the LCT and 46 other union representative still demanded that the government comply with the demands of workers.³⁷ Later, when the policy was proved to be right for the economic growth of the country, the criticism came to an end.

Analysis

Economic reasons were behind the action of labor leaders. It was definitely believed that the devaluation of

³⁵Matuphum, November 19, 1984.

³⁶Mabry found that Thai labor leaders were moderate and pragmatism not lean toward ideological struggle. In his words "Because leaders of the movement have espoused traditional Thai values of morality, deference to legitimate authority, and political independence, the movement has remained acceptable to the established government (the dictatorship government under the leadership of Thanin Kraivixian)."

³⁷Matichon, February 3, 1985.

the currency would automatically reduce the real income of workers, not to mention worsening the already increasing inflation of the year. It was in the immediate interests of workers that the government stop the policy. However, the action of the workers was not united. Politically oriented labor leaders Ahmad and Sawas went further by trying to combine the movement against the baht devaluation with the movement for the constitutional amendment while the majority of labor leaders under the leadership of Paisan Thawatchainand wanted to protest against only the baht devaluation policy. The latter saw the action of the formers as being planed with military, leaders since General Arthit was also strongly oppose the devaluation policy. Rumor of a possible military coup was spread. That situation scared many economic oriented labor leaders. They very cautiously took action in a limited way to make sure that their action would not be interpreted by the military as support for a coup.

The cautiousness of the latter group could be seen as evidence of autonomous action. They took into account the immediate interests of their members and the working class at large as a guide for their action. No interest in politics was clearly seen. This was the attitude of a majority of the workers, since the majority of Thai labor leaders do not want to engage in political matters. That is why, later in 1985, there were many leaders and unions that

withdrew their support from the LCT under the leadership of Ahmad and Sawas.³⁸

In the crisis, the elected government was challenged by the military under the leadership of General Arthit. As mentioned above, the General wanted to enhance his popularity by discrediting the elected government, while the workers wanted their economic security. The movement, then could, be seen as one based on mutual benefits. That was especially true among the economic oriented union leaders. Their movement then acted autonomously.

As noted above, the threat of a coup in connection with the crisis involving devaluation and constitutional amendment never materialized. We now turn to some case studies where coup attempts actually materialized.

The Trade Union movement and military coups

Introduction: A Brief Overview

Analyses of various military coup attempts from the coup of October 6, 1976 until the last coup on September 9, 1985, showed that there has been an increase in labor's relative strength and autonomy in its relations with the coup makers. It developed from the position where the coup makers looked upon the workers as a group that could create trouble. Under these circumstance they asked for cooperation, as was the case with the military coups of

³⁸FEER, (August 29, 1985): 24.

1976, and 1977. In September 1985, the last military coup attempt (as of September 1990), the coup makers saw the trade unions as partners. This is not to say that labor power and military might are equal. But it was clear that there had been an agreement as that workers would benefit if the coup attempt were successful. The ability to protect and pursue its definite goal and interests has been the essence of an autonomous political group, hence the labor movement in the military coup and coup attempts could be seen as an autonomous political entity.

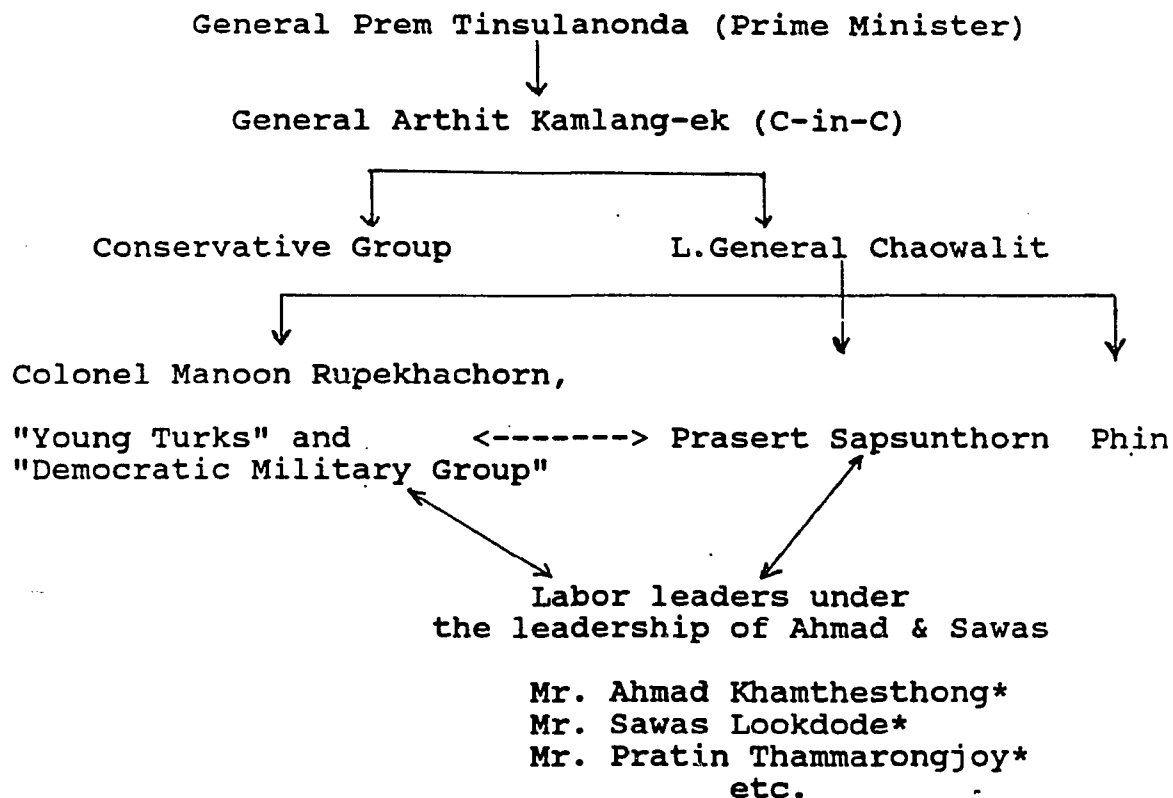
In the latest military coup attempt which occurred on September 9, 1985, there appeared to be a small group of workers who participated in it, led by labor leaders who believed that labor's problems could be better solved through political means. And they had previous good relations with military elites. Ahmad and Sawas--the two important labor leaders who participated in the military coup attempt were appointed to the Upper House, the military dominated House, through the military's support. The chart below shows a connection among military elites, Prasert Sapsunthorn and labor leaders.

Before we analyze in more detail the role of trade unions in various military coup attempts, it is important to describe how linkage between labor leaders and military elites was established. From the chart below, we can see that labor leaders were linked to high-ranking military

through Prasert's networks.

Chart 2

Linkages between Military and Labor Leaders
As of September 9, 1985.



Source: Soo anakot, 3:99 (30 January- 5 February), 1983, p. 14., and Chai-anan Samudhavanija, Young Turks kab taharn prachatipatai: vikroh botbat khong taharn in karnmuang tai [Young Turk and a Military Group for Democracy: Analysis of the Role of Military in Thai Politics] (Bangkok: Preecha Karnpim, 1982), p. 164.

Note: * Indicates labor leaders.

Labor leaders under the leadership of Ahmad and Sawas were closely associated with military elites. The important or main channel of connection was through Mr. Prasert's

networks (see Chart 2 above). These labor leaders not only associated with high ranking military elite but also with young progressives and active middle ranks--the "Young Turks" and "Democratic Soldiers." The association with the latter led to the participation of these labor leaders in the abortive coup of September 9, 1985 which we will discuss in detail later in this chapter.

Since Mr. Prasert Sapsunthorn played an important role in connecting labor leaders and military ranks, it is, therefore, important to know some of his background and his works.

It has been known in recent Thai politics that Mr. Prasert Sapsunthorn were the man behind many movements of workers especially the movement by leaders who are close to him. Prasert is an intellectual, described as a source of the so-called "democratic revolutionist" idea. He was once a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of Thailand, but because of differences in strategy he left the Party and returned to Bangkok. Later he worked for the Internal Security Operation Command or ISOC--the organization dominated by the military which was designed to win the war against communism in Thailand. Prasert argued that in order to win against communism in Thailand, the ISOC and the Thai government must use political means instead of using force. His ideas were believed to be behind the Government Order No. 66/2523, and after the Order had been

implemented, the government won the war with communism in Thailand. His work with the ISOC provided opportunity for him to establish close relations with various military elites at various times since the late 1960s. In the mid 1970s he established his relationship with "democratic soldiers"--young military men who form a progressive front within the military and another group of young military who called themselves "Young Turks." In the late 1980s he was closely associated with General Chaowalit Yongjaiyudh, the military Commander-in-Chief, and continued his relationship with the Young Turks and the Democratic Soldiers. From the above chart, we can see the connection between Prasert and military elites, between Prasert and labor leaders, and between labor leaders and military elites.

The ISOC's main task was to fight a war against communism. It organize and mobilize the masses to support the government and the military in particular. When the country returned to a democratic form of government, especially from 1977 till 1988, the military elites were threatened by elected politicians, since the later could have more chance to establish a link with the masses. The military elites also seemed to be increasingly aware of the political significance of popular political participation and mass support. They, then, through ISOC operation, engaged in establishing a link with the masses at the grass-roots level in the rural areas. The Army leaders set up

several organizations. Some of them are the National Defense Volunteers, the military Reservist Corps for National Security and the Self-Defense and Self-Development Villages. These organizations were designed to incorporate peasants to work with the military, and the military could mobilize a large number of villagers to join these military-sponsored programs. By the same token it was possible to mobilize them for political purposes, for example, to support or oppose certain political parties in elections.³⁹

The same tactic was designed to establish a link between workers and the masses in cities. Prasert played very important role in establishing a link with labor leaders in various factories around the Greater Bangkok area, and did so successfully. Linkages between military leaders, especially Army leaders, and labor leaders were also forged through Prasert's network.

Prasert played substantial roles in recent labor actions in Thailand because he has been the source of political ideas and political tactics for labor leaders who were associated with him. He was the man behind various significant labor actions in politics since the late 1960s and even more so since the October 1973 incident. It was believed by political observers in Thailand that he was the

³⁹Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Contemporary Thai Political Development" in Ansil Ramsay and Wiwat Mungkandi, ed., Thailand-U.S. Relations: Changing Political, Strategic, and Economic Factors. (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1988), p. 43.

mastermind of the art of labor action and political tactics--such as how to pull workers together, how to convince and control the mob in a specific rally, and how to employ various steps to put pressure on the government. This was how Prasert could enter into, and influence part of the Thai labor movement.⁴⁰ M.R. Kukrit Pramoj the former prime minister, and the guru of modern Thai politics expressed his view on the labor movement: "The agitation in this country has been because of the two communist defectors"⁴¹ He meant Mr. Prasert and Mr. Phin. Prasert in fact has led unions and especially union leaders connected with him into various political actions--as well as in military coup attempts.

We turn now to a more detailed analysis of trade unions participation in a military coup attempt.

The Labor Movement in the September 9, 1985 Military Coup Attempt

This military coup attempt is important for scholars interested in the Thai labor movement because labor leaders who participated in the event had bargained with the coup makers concerning what labor could gain if the coup was successful. After the agreement had been reached, these

⁴⁰ "jak Sang Patanotai tung Prasert Sapsunthorn: bon thanon khong raeng ngan" [From Sang Patanotai to Prasert Sapsunthorn: On the Road of Worker] (editorial), Matichon, 6, 1794, p. 6.

⁴¹H.R. Kukrit implies to Prasert Sapsunthorn and Phin.

labor leaders were strongly committed to support the coup makers in the event of the military coup attempt. Sawas Lookdote and Pratin Thammamongjoy were the leaders of a group of approximately 300 workers who gathered in front of the sanam sua pa, the Military Headquarter and delivered speeches attacking the Prem government while supporting the coup makers. They continued attacking the government and supported the coup makers even after the latter was subdued by government force and many coup makers had fled. Their duties, according to the agreement with the coup makers, were to mobilize not only the workers but also people who appeared at the scene. This, it was expected, would be a source of legitimacy for the military who made the coup. Why were these labor leaders so committed to the movement? The following discussion shows the linkage and connection between the coup makers and the labor leaders who were involved in the incident.

In the morning of September 9, 1985 a group of military, led by mostly retired generals, stage a military coup to overthrow Prem's government. The coup group commanded only some 500 to 600 men on the ground and some 22 tanks on the day it opened. It was very small in comparison with the April 1981 coup. The latter comprised the largest massing of troops that has ever been carried out by coup makers in the country--42 combat battalions and approximately 8,000 men. The coup makers also attempted to

mobilize support from labor groups, students and newspapers, yet the attempt was still aborted.⁴²

The September military coup attempt mobilized such a smallest number of men because the expected military force failed to show up at the appointed time. Colonel Manoon Rupekhachorn, who was the mastermind of the April 1981 abortive coup attempt, was also the mastermind of the September 1985 coup attempt. He might have known how much manpower and other military equipment were necessary to overthrow the government. It is a recognized fact in Thai politics that in any coup attempt, the coup group would normally need a force composed of infantry, cavalry and artillery, as well as related auxiliary units to occupy various strategic locations, such as radio and television stations, crucial governmental offices, strategic roads, etc.⁴³ With so few supporters, then, there might have been many service men that did not come to the scene. The coup attempt failed quickly and badly when compared to the April 1981 military coup attempt.

It is worth noting that the leaders of this coup attempt were a diverse company of retired military general,

⁴²See James F. Guyot and Pisan Suriyamongkol, "Between Two Coups: The Continuing Institutionalization of Democracy in Thailand" Occasional Paper, (forth coming 1989), p. 19, and Pisan Suriyamongkol, (1988), op. cit., p. 72. See also "patiwat eek: krai pen krai lae kho sungket" [Coup d'etat Again: Who's Who and Some Observations], Siam Rath Weekly Magazine, September 15, 1985, pp. 6-7.

⁴³Pisan Suriyamongkol, (1988), op. cit., p. 76.

active military personnel, and civilians. The key actor in this coup was Colonel Manoon Rupekhachorn, the mastermind of the April coup.⁴⁴ Former Prime Minister General Kriangsakdi Chomanand (1977-1980), former Supreme Commander Serm na Nakhon, former Deputy Army Commander Yot Thephasdin na Ayutthaya, former Deputy Supreme Commander Krasae Intharat, and the serving Deputy Supreme Commander Arun Promthep were important members. Civilian leaders later accused of being involved in the coup attempt were Mr. Ekkayuth Anchanbutr, the organizer of a collapsed pyramid scheme which had been patronized by military personnel, and Mr. Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, former Secretary General of The National Student Center of Thailand or NSCT, who led popular uprising to overthrow military government in October 1973.

The two civilians were not detained and Ekkayuth fled. Sombat also was wanted by the government to be put on trial. In theory he should have been in hiding. Yet he continued studying for Ph.D. degree in public administration, with a police officer as his classmate, at the Graduate School of Public Administration at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in Bangkok--the

⁴⁴The April 1-3 military coup attempt had far better organized and man power than the September 9, 1985 military coup attempt. Yet the "April Coup" was aborted. For further details and analysis of the "April Coup" as well as the "September Coup," see James F. Guyot and Pisan Suriyamongkol, op. cit., p. 19, and Pisan Suriyamongkol, Institutionalization of Democratic Political Process in Thailand: A Three-Pronged Democratic Polity (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988), pp. 69-78.

government's institution.

After the coup failed all the top ranking military mentioned above were put on trial, together with forty other persons--twenty-six junior officers and NCOs and nine civilians. The latter were former student leaders and union leaders.

Three days after the coup failed, five labor leaders and one labor advisor accused of being involved were arrested. They were; Mr. Sawas Lookdote, former Secretary General of the LCT, advisor to the LCT, and a Senator; Mr.Sompong Srakravee, former student activist during 1973-1976, advisor to the LCT; Mr.Pratin Thamarongjoy, former executive committee member of the State Railways of Thailand Union or SRT union, a labor activist who was associated with Prasert Sapsunthorn; and Mr.Somchai Srisunthornwoharn, the president of Bangkok Metropolitan Transportation Authority union.⁴⁵ Mr.Ahmad Khamthesthong the president of the LCT, and the member of the Upper House, was arrested later. All were put in jail for trial except Sawas and Ahmad who were members of Upper House. Two years later, Prime Minister Prem released all those arrested.

It was the first time in Thai history that labor leaders were arrested and accused of being partners in a military coup attempt. The April 1981 coup makers requested the presence of labor leaders at the coup head quarters. But

⁴⁵Matichon, September 13, 1985.

it was not really a partnership, because labor leaders were called to support the coup makers only when the latter had to fight the government forces which were gaining the upper hand. It was true that labor leaders not only reported to the coup makers but some of them also issued a statement supporting the coup makers. However, such statement was seen as expressing a personal view, not as an expression of labor as a whole, since there had been no meeting or any agreement among labor leaders. In the April 1981 military coup attempt, labor leaders reported to the military coup center since they felt they had no choice.⁴⁶ The government was aware of this, which probably explains why no labor leader was detained after the April coup was aborted. It was different from the case of the military coup attempt of September 9, 1985, where a group of labor leaders were deeply involved as a partnership. How labor leaders were drawn in as partners in the September 1985 coup was very interesting.

The labor leaders who participated in the September coup believed that in the Thai political context labor had to engage in the politics if they wanted their demands and preferences met. These labor leaders had long associated with military elites, so much so that Sawas and Ahmad were accused by other labor leaders as having brought the labor

⁴⁶Prateep Kanchanawongse, "patiwat nung mesa kab karn cluenwai raeng ngan" [April 1, Military Coup Attempt and Labor Movement], Maticchon, 21 April 1981, p. 6.

movement under the leadership of the LCT too close to the ISOC in the expectation of political gains and rewards. In so doing, according to other labor leaders and some labor scholars, labor organizations were serving the interests of the military. The labor movement for the Constitutional Amendment in 1983, and the movement in concert with the military movement against the government policy of baht devaluation in November 1984, were the cases in point.

The involvement in the September 1985 military coup attempt was significant because the labor leaders participated in the coup as a partnership. Upon their agreement to join the coup attempt, the labor leaders had a promise from the coup makers that the new government would be more responsible to labor problems and demands. A draft for labor policy was approved by the coup makers before the day the coup was carried out. Sawas sought advice from a lawyer in his preparation of a draft for a labor law, three weeks before the military coup attempt occurred.⁴⁷ On the day of the coup, a labor policy was announced by the coup makers. The coup makers intended to implement seven immediate policies that benefitted workers. Some of them were; "to enact a social security law to promote the quality of life of workers"; to "ratify the protocol and advice of the ILO so as to guarantee the rights of workers in accordance with international principles"; to "amend the

⁴⁷Siam Rath Weekly Magazine, 15 September 1985, p. 7.

1975 Labor Relations Act to expand protection to organizing members of the subcommittee and committees of the trade unions so that they can carry out their functions in accordance with the law." The coup makers also promised to "improve the services of the state enterprises, [and that] members of the trade unions will be allowed to have responsibility in managing the work of the state enterprises on the basis of joint responsibility in an organization, which will be a key leading to fulfilling the objective of the organization as a whole" ⁴⁸ Mr.Sombat a former student leader, who was closely associate with this group of labor leaders and the coup makers, and who had deeply involved in this military coup attempt, told us:

"The draft had been agreed upon by both labor leaders and the coup makers. On the day the coup was staged, with a reluctance of the coup leader however, the draft was announced. I think Sawas was doing what is good for workers"⁴⁹

The fact was that labor leaders did not know all the coup leaders; they dealt with the coup mastermind--Colonel Manoon Rupekhachorn. In my discussion with Sompong Srakravee, a labor advisor and activist, he informed me that labor leaders contacted Colonel Manoon through Mr.Sombat and

⁴⁸The Fourth announcement of the Revolutionary Party on the policy on labor" on September 9, 1985, FBIS Daily Report: Asia & Pacific vol. iv no. 174, pp. J6-7.

⁴⁹Mr.Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, personal interview, February 12, 1989.

him. Sombat and Sompong were student activist who led the student uprising to oust military government in October 1973. Both were later associated with the "Young Turks" and "Democratic military" in which Colonel Manoon was a central personality. The colonel and Sombat not only had been associated with each other in discussions about national problems and how to solve them, they were also in the same class when they studied for the doctoral degree at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA). That was one of the factors behind the partnership of the coup makers on the one hand and Sawas and his followers on the other.

The coup makers needed mass support to legitimize their action and the labor movement was best suited to fulfil the task. On the day of the coup, Sawas and Pratin led a labor group to the scene and delivered speech attacking the government and supporting the military coup. They did their part with enthusiasm, and they did not stop even when the coup was aborted and leaders had already fled.⁵⁰

Analysis of the 1985 Military Coup Attempt

The participation of labor under the leadership of Sawas and Ahmad could be seen as that of an interest group which calculated what it could gain from the action. The policy on labor announced by the coup makers was the most

⁵⁰Thai Rath, September 10, 1985.

concrete and best policy ever announced by any governments in the Thai history. It was true that the labor leaders had associated with military for quite some times since the early 1980s. But the relationship was in the sense that each needed the other. The military needed popular support for its movement in politics while labor unions needed protection when they take action against their employers for economic gain, or in some case against government policy such as their action against the privatization policy.

The coup makers needed the support of labor mainly for the legitimization of their action. It had nothing to do with the force needed by the coup makers to overthrow the government. It was not because the coup makers had only a small unit of service men and armor that they turned to labor leaders for help. The small number of servicemen who appeared on the day the coup took place, as mentioned above, was because other supposed coup makers did not show up. Labor leaders realized their position and bargained for the benefit of the workers as a whole before they joined the coup attempt. The draft for a labor policy had been approved and agreed upon before the coup date was set. In view of the relations of the coup makers and labor leaders, labor action could not be seen as that of a client acting in the interest of its patron. Instead, both parties acted for their mutual benefit. It became clear later that military leaders provided no support for labor leaders who were put in jail

after the coup was aborted. According to Sompong, labor leaders who were jailed as well as their families had no protection or support from military leaders. Their fate was very different from that of military officers who were detained in the same place. The latter were given very good care and support by military leaders, both in terms of material and moral supports. That was because labor leaders were not in direct contact with the coup makers but through Sombat and Colonel Manoon. When the Colonel went abroad in exile, there was no one to take care of the labor leaders. In response to a question why these labors participated in the military coup attempt, Sompong said:

We [labor leaders and he] believed that the present government did not pay much attention to labor problems. And we believed that our movement to support the military coup would benefit the working class as a whole. We workers have nothing to loose. The coup makers agreed upon a draft of labor policy to be implemented if the coup was successful. So we joined the coup makers. If autonomy means the ability to choose their own preference and goal, the action of labor in the incident was really autonomous one.⁵¹

In the eyes of some labor leaders, labor involvement in the coup only served the interests of military. But for Ahmad and Sawas, who believed that the unions in Thailand should engage in the politics of the country, unionism should not be the only way to solve labor problems, especially in the Thai context, where the political system

⁵¹Mr. Sompong Srakravee, personal interview, November 2, 1988.

has not yet a pluralist democratic government. In such context unionism would not benefit the workers as a whole but would benefit only unions members and hence create a gap between union and non-union workers. The latter have no organization to protect them.

The role of labor leaders who took part in the military coup and performed a supportive role for the coup makers was different from that of the labor leaders who supported the April military coup makers. During the fighting between the coup makers and the government on 1-3 April 1981, when the coup makers were about to loose, labor leaders were requested to report to the coup head quarter and the coup leaders also requested those labor leaders to speak in support of the coup on television.⁵² Labor leaders had no choice but to follow the requests, since refusal to follow the coup instructions would be subject to retaliation. They just went to the headquarters, and some of them issued a statement of support for the coup.

Mr. Taveep Kanchanawong, an executive member of LCT and a long-time labor leader, expressed his concern: labor leaders had to report to the April 1981 military coup makers because they knew from experience of the past that the military government could harm them and the workers movement as a whole. It was a matter of having no choice but to report to the coup makers. Clearly, it was not that the

⁵²Arnold Wehmörner, op. cit. p. 490.

labor leaders voluntarily supported the coup. Workers preferred democratic government to dictatorship. Labor leaders who went to see the coup makers went there as individuals rather than as the representatives of organizations. Their views did not necessarily reflect the view of their organizations or of workers as a whole. There was no time to convene a meeting before leaders went to see the Coup makers at the latter's request. A declaration claiming worker support for the coup makers was not really representative of opinion in labor peak organizations. It was written by individual labor leaders or a group of labor leaders. Such action should not be seen as an indication of workers support the military coup.⁵³

The cautious move of labor leaders showed little linkage between military elites who made the April 1981 military coup attempt and labor leaders as a whole. It also indicated that the labor movement was not counted as a partner when the coup was organized. This was different from the September 1985 military coup attempt, where worker leaders were counted as a partner and there was agreement upon what labor would gain after the new government was established if the coup was a successful one. Viewed in this light labor action in the 1985 coup attempt was autonomous. A former Director of Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung in Bangkok

⁵³Taveep Kanchanawong, "April 1, 1981 Military Coup Attempt and Labor Movement" Matichon, April 21, 1981, p. 6.

expressed his view on the strength of labor movement in Thailand as follow;

By 1977, trade unions had already been recognized as an important pressure group whose support could influence the drift of political developments. This was well illustrated on 4 November 1977 when Kriangsakdi, on the eve of his seizure of power, spoke to a meeting of representatives of all trade unions and promised them greater trade union freedom. Another indication of the trade unions' growing political role was observed during the coup attempt of 1 April 1981. The coup leaders requested trade unionists to speak in support of the coup on television--after having promised to support trade unions through the ratification of various ILO conventions.⁵⁴

Trade Unions and General Elections

Introduction

Thailand has been in the process of 'transition to democracy' since 1973, and general elections have been held as a means of selecting governments. Unions as mass organizations were the target of various political parties who wished to establish a relationship with a mass base. Union members were not only voters; they were also capable of being mobilized to support a political party in political struggles. However, direct linkages between labor unions and political parties have not been established. Political parties in Thailand are not oriented toward ideologies or programs, but are rather organizations of a few 'patrons'. Some parties realized that they have to build up a mass

⁵⁴Arnold Wehmhoerner, "Trade unionism in Thailand--A New Dimension in a Modernizing Society", Journal of Contemporary Asia, 13:4 (1983), p. 490.

base, but no serious attempts have been made to achieve this so far.⁵⁵

The military elites realize that the system of 'bureaucratic power' in which military is the leader, has been challenged by elected politicians. The former also needed to have workers on their side to support them in political struggles with the latter. The two forces found that it is in their interests to establish their influence in the labor movement.

Trade unions, on the other hand, are prohibited by law from involvement in politics, hence as organizations they could not openly support a political party. But in a political system such as Thailand, where democracy is being institutionalized, the politicians and political parties are increasingly important. Elected politicians are now the ones who constitutionally hold various political positions. It is no longer the military or civil servants who can dominate the politics of the country. This puts labor leaders in a dilemma. On the one hand, legally, they are not allowed to become involved in politics. It means that as labor organizations, unions cannot be part of any political party. On the other hand, labor leaders realized that they could not ignore political parties since the latter could be a source of support for the workers movement, or they could

⁵⁵Ibid.

oppose the interest of workers. It is therefore, in the interest of workers to establish some links with political parties, and most labor leaders personally have to show some implicit support for them. In confronting the dilemma that we have just pointed out, some leaders have simply acted contrary to the law. Others have tried less drastic solutions in coping with the situation. For example, in 1982, Ahmad, Sawas and their followers with support from some military elites and Mr. Prasert Sapsunthorn, formed the "Labor Democratic Party" which was designed to attract workers. In the general elections of that year, Paisan Thawatchainand and his association, who advocated the unionism line for the labor movement did not agree with the Sawas and Ahmad group. They stayed out of politics and accused the latter of being manipulated by military and political elites. However, as we shall see, in 1986 Paisan and his group gave full support to the Peoples Action Party (PAP), arguing that the party had good intentions and a policy that benefitted workers and farmers.

Labor, especially labor leaders, responses to general elections have been very crucial to the autonomy of unions. The following discussion describes the involvement of unions and labor leaders in two general election--one was held in 1982 and the second in 1986--in order to show the autonomy of unions.

Trade Unions and the '1983 General Election'

Labor, under the leadership of Sawas and Ahmad, was very active in the 1983 general election. As we have discussed above this group had long been associated with Prasert Sapsunthorn, who worked for ISOC, and had established linkages with the so-called "Democratic Soldiers" group. Prasert was the mastermind in the formation of the "Labor Democratic Party" for the 1983 general election.⁵⁶ Sawas and Ahmad no doubt played a very important part since the party was originally formed and sought to register with the Ministry of Interior. There were 18 union leaders who filed as founding members.⁵⁷ Since the mastermind for the party was Prasert, who had been very closely associated with various military leaders in that period, the party was believed to be financially supported by military elites.

Early in 1982, the Sawas and Ahmad faction in the LCT won the election and Ahmad was made President while Sawas became General Secretary. The victory of this group created a split in the congress, since most of leaders realized that Sawas and Ahmad would lead the LCT into close relations with the military and move it into political matters, something which most labor leaders would prefer to stay away from. As

⁵⁶Siam Rath, October 16, 1982.

⁵⁷Department of Labor, Labor Administration in Thailand, Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1984, p. 55.

a result, Paisan and other leaders who did not want to become involved in politics left the congress and formed the TTUC.

Sawas and Pratin Thamarongjoy (the latter was the president of a labor union at the SRT) joined the Labor Democratic Party (LDP) in the 1983 general elections. The reason given for joining the party was "the party is guided by democratic thoughts and fighting for democracy." They would concentrate their campaign in the Southern part of Thailand. Their goal was to work in consort with the democratic line provided by Policy Order No. 66/B.E. 2523, which was designed to woo communist insurgents to switch from their armed struggle to political struggle. There was a rumor that Lt. General Harn Leelanond, the commander of the Fourth Army responsible for the Southern region, gave his support to the two labor leaders. Pratin denied the rumor but admitted that the party shared the same democratic line of thinking with the general who was said to be a leader of the so-called "Democratic Soldiers" grouping.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the party was not so attractive to workers, not to mention people at large.⁵⁹ In the 1983 general election only one of the candidates from this party was

⁵⁸The Nations, December 27, 1982.

⁵⁹Siam-Rath Weekly Magazine, year 31, vol. 18., p. 6.

elected⁶⁰.

Paisan's group on the other hand kept a very low profile in the 1982 general election, since they did not agree with the idea of leading labor into political matters. The group also accused Sawas and Ahmad's group of leading the labor movement to serve the interests of other political elites, especially the military. However, Pisan changed his position and led his group and the TTUC to support a political party in the 1986 general election. We now turn to that election.

The Role of Trade Unions in the '1986 General Election'

Why was it that in the 1986 general election, Pisan Thawatchainand and his colleagues known as unionist leaders openly lent their support to a political party--the Peoples Action Party (PAP)? The decision came after a seminar on what kind of socio-economic policy would be best for workers, organized by the TTUC on May 1, 1986. The problem was that political action was unlawful, since the LRA 1975 does not allow trade unions, federations, or labor congresses to engage in politics.⁶¹

⁶⁰The attempt to set up a political party by and for workers was a failure one. There was only one candidate elected under the party's name--Colonel Somkid Srisangkom. He was elected because he was a favorite son of the constituency, not because of the popularity of the party.

⁶¹Department of Labor, satanakarn raeng ngan tai [Labor Review in Thailand], (April-June 1986), Bangkok: Department of Labor, 1986, p. 33. Ahmad and Sawas, on the contrary, did

It was clear that as an organization the TTUC could not formally give support to the party since such action is prohibited by law. Labor leaders did that on individuals basis. Paisan as individual, not as the president of the TTUC, justified his position, arguing that it is good for workers to be concerned with the politics of the country, since the parliamentary system has been increasingly institutionalized and workers could make their demands through their MPs. But he still accused other leaders of being involved for personnel gain.⁶²

Paisan himself was an advisor to the PAP before he led the membership of TTUC to support the party in this general election. Before the TTUC agreed to support the PAP, the former organized a seminar and invited various representatives from political parties that planed to compete in the general election. Many parties sent their representative but only the leader of one party showed up at the seminar--Mr. Boonchoo Rojanasathiara, the leader of the PAP. Paisan in an interview with the press gave the reasons why he and his colleague supported the party: 1)the party has a policy that coincides with the interests of labors and farmers, which are the majority of the Thai population. 2)

not play a substantial role in this elected as they did in the 1983 general election, because both were detained for having been involved in the September 9, 1985 military coup attempt.

⁶²Naewna, March 10, 1986.

the party allowed the TTUC's representatives to be executive members of the PAP, and 3) the party agreed to allow the TTUC's representative to be on the Party's list in this general election.⁶³ He was accused of leading workers to serve the interests of capitalists. The accuser was an executive committee member of the Labor Democratic Party.⁶⁴

Mr. Thanong Po-an, the President elect of the LCT, after Ahmad and Sawas were detained because they were involved in the September 9, 1985 military coup attempt, announced emphatically that the LCT would support any political party that has a policy to: 1) establish a Social Security Law, 2) prevent employers from hiring employees on a short term basis, 3) regulate investment promotion which is based on permanent employment.⁶⁵ Thanong also urged that the Department of Labor be raised to ministerial level. He confirmed that if any political party would have these policies he would request workers in the LCT to vote for it.⁶⁶

However, some executive committee members of the LCT wanted to make an even stronger commitment in the general election, suggesting that the LCT should support one or two parties. But Thanong, the President of the LCT was not

⁶³Siam Rath, June 9, 1986.

⁶⁴Khaw Sod, July 1, 1986.

⁶⁵Maticchon, May 16, 1986.

⁶⁶Siam Rath, November 17, 1986.

convinced. He believed that in so doing the LCT would lose its autonomy and its action would not be independent.⁶⁷

Mr. Panas Thailuan, the Secretary General of a peak labor organization--the National Congress of Thai Labor or NCTL, presented another idea: all three peak labor organizations should withhold their supports for political parties and file their own candidates for the general election.⁶⁸

Sunthorn Kaewnetr, a well-known national labor leader and an advisor of the LCT, was a candidate for MP in his home town in the Northeast. He also encouraged workers and labor leaders to run in the election. However, he did not run under the Labor Democratic Party's list, reasoning that he was not sure that the LDP was really working for the interests of workers as a whole.⁶⁹

The position of these leaders who led the three flagship organization, especially the two strongest labor organizations--the LCT and TTUC, shows that the labor movement in Thailand supported the democratic process. They realized that such process has been increasingly accepted as a normal process for the change of government. Therefore, it was in their interests to take part in the election.

⁶⁷Siam Rath, November 17, 1986.

⁶⁸Siam Rath, November 17, 1986.

⁶⁹Siam Rath, May 19, 1986.

Analysis

From the case studies of two general elections we found an increasing role of trade unions in the politics of Thailand. In 1983, only the Ahmad and Sawas group which controlled the LCT was strongly involved in the general election. They played a substantial role in forming the Labor Democratic Party and some of them ran in the election under the list of the party.

Since Thai law did not allow trade unions or groups of trade unions to involve themselves in politics, these leaders were legally engaged in the general election on an individual basis. But in reality the majority of the LCT was strongly involved in the election.

These leaders (the Ahmad and Sawas faction) were accused by other leaders of being mobilized by military elites through the Prasert network. This accusation was not without ground. But it was debatable, nevertheless.

It was true that Ahmad, Sawas and their colleagues had for a long time associated with the so-called "Democratic Soldier" grouping. Ahmad and Sawas were requested to be on the staff of the ISOC. Later, they also were appointed to the military dominated Upper House. The close relations between these labor leaders and the military elites led to an expectation that after Ahmad and Sawas took control of the LCT in 1982, the congress would become more involve in the politics of the country. That is precisely what

happened.

Viewed from these activities alone, the group might seem to lack independence. But when we take into account the intention and other activities of these leaders, such as their role in the Baht devaluation crisis, their role in the Military attempt for the Constitutional Amendment, it could be seen as action for the mutual benefit of two independent groups--the military and labor. The latter had to work for the interests of the workers which they claimed to represent. Without serving the interests of the workers they would have no claim to represent them and they would not be regarded as legitimate labor leaders. As a result, in the next union election, they would lose.

It is important to note here that the Paisan group and other labor leaders who were economic unionists were not engaged in the 1983 general election, and they accused the Ahmad and Sawas group of serving the interests of others rather than that of the workers. Interestingly, Paisan and his colleague became involved in the 1985 general election.

The 1986 election, the next one after the 1983 general election, showed increased involvement of trade union leaders. In this general election it was not only the Ahmad and Sawas group but also the unionist oriented Paisan group that actively participated in the political event.

The direct involvement of the Paisan group in the 1986 general election indicated that workers saw that the

democratic system was more suitable for them and, hence, they supported it. They felt compelled to become involved in the general election since they knew that the elected politician would be those who rule. The military and bureaucrats were no longer the rulers, since the constitution did not allow bureaucrat to hold political and bureaucratic posts simultaneously. It was in the interest of workers to become involved in the general election, and they did it through their connection with political parties.

Paisan led the TTUC to support the PAP while the Ahmad and Sawas group was still linked with the LDP. However, Ahmad and Sawas were detained and did not have any personal role in the 1986 general election. The LCT under the leadership of Thanong Po-an did not fully lend it support to the LDP. Only some of the executive members of the LCT, colleagues of Ahmad and Sawas, wanted to give full support to the party. The LCT did not support any particular political party, but Thanong said that he would urge the membership of the LCT to elect any party that had policies in the interest of workers.

The statement of Thanong, the President of the LCT, showed the independence of labor organizations to participate in politics as it chose. The organization chose to stay independent of any political party. Their policy fits the fourth category of the relationships between trade unions and political parties given by Hayward:

There are four types of relationship. Firstly, there is the Leninist model, which has been more or (or late) less faithfully followed by Communists, in which the party, as the vanguard of the working class, dominates the trade union.... Secondly, and conversely, the trade union may be regarded as the vanguard of the working class as was the case with British Laborism. ..Thirdly, one that has relationship of symbiotic and interdependent. In such a relationship, neither the political party nor the trade union movement enjoys an enduring dominant position: they see themselves as the political and industrial wings of a united working class movement, a unity not precluding frequent tactical and strategic conflicts. Finally, the trade union may seek to avoid any partisan affiliations. ..."⁷⁰

The policy of the Paisan group to support the PAP in the 1986 general election would fit the third category of Hayward's classification, since Paisan and his group chose to support a political party that had a policy that best serve the workers' interests. The ability to choose and pursue its goal is an important aspect of the essence of trade union autonomy.

Viewed from the relationship of symbiotic and interdependent perspective, even the involvement of the Ahmad and Sawas group in the 1983 general election could be seen as the act of an autonomous group. The Ahmad and Sawas group believed in political action as way to solve labor problems in the country, hence joining other groups or persons outside labor to form a political party--the Labor

⁷⁰Jack Hayward, "Trade Union Movements and their Politico-Economic Environments: a Preliminary Framework," West European Politics, vol. 3, no. 1, (January 1980), p. 5.

Democratic Party could not be seen as serving only the interests of others.

Unions in Politics: A Concluding Perspective

In the case studies analyzed in this chapter, unions and their leaders acted in concert with what they perceived to be allies--individuals or groups not a part of the labor movement. Each member of the alliance perceived some possible gain or gains for itself in pursuing the various objectives that lay behind the political action analyzed in the several case studies. The gains for labor might not have been as immediate or as clearly identified as the perceived gains in the case studies analyzed in previous chapters. Indeed, it is even possible that in their calculation of possible gains for labor which they expected from these actions in concert with others, labor leaders might have been in error. The fact that labor leaders were sometimes divided as to the wisdom of a particular course of political action and were critical of one another certainly supports such a conclusion. What is important for our purposes is that probable gains were perceived and, thus, these case studies have been offered as further evidence of autonomous action on the part of labor.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Recapitulation

The persistence of the recent democratic form of government in Thailand, at least in the contemporary period, has been the result of the inability of the military and bureaucracy to monopolize political power. Extrabureaucratic groups generated by the development of manufacturing, commercial and service sectors of the economy produced demands for a sharing of political power. The military and civilian bureaucratic leaders cannot ignore the demands of these new forces. For Girling, the old bureaucratic polity model of Riggs is not adequate for an understanding of the present Thai political system. Changes that have taken place in the country affected the Thai polity. He emphasized that the traditional consensus based on paternalism has been disrupted, new attitudes have been produced within the bureaucracy and, most important for our purposes, the development of manufacturing, commercial and service sectors have created 'extrabureaucratic forces' in Thai society which no longer accept without question their subordinate role.

In building on Girling's conclusions, our study has analyzed the emergence, the evolution and the impact of one

of the major "extrabureaucratic forces": labor and the trade union movement.

Our initial hypotheses were as follows. Due to socio-economic change in Thailand, especially as the economy become more liberalized, labor unions and the labor movement increased their significance in politics, even though the state, particularly the bureaucracy, still tries to maintain a certain control over the unions and the movement. At the same time, the liberalization of the Thai political system gave more political freedom and opportunity for the labor unions to defend their interests, even through political campaigns. Because of the socio-economic and political changes that encouraged the process of democratization in Thailand, labor gradually became independent and served as an extrabureaucratic force. Above all, we have traced the process whereby it came to defines its own interests and pursue its own course of action in the ways that it deems most appropriate and effective.

The Historical Context of the Thai Labor Movement

Chapter two presented an outline of the context in which the labor movement developed. With the end of the absolute monarchy, on June 24, 1932, political power which was once in the hands of an absolute monarch was smoothly transferred to the bureaucrats. The King was persuaded to become a constitutional monarch, and this conveniently

maintained the symbols of royal authority at the service of bureaucratic authority. But the "changes in the system of government" really meant the continuation of the bureaucratic system under new leaders--senior military officers and civilian officials--rather than under the monarchy. The struggle for power, after the end of the absolute monarchy became a struggle among factions within the bureaucracy. Political elites did, however, try to adopt at least the forms of democratic government. From 1932-1945 the only formal "representative" institution in Thailand was a unicameral legislature composed of two categories of members--half elected and half appointed. The group called "The People's Party" which made the June 1932 Revolution, did not find it necessary to transform itself into a political party, since its leading members and supporters were already appointed members of the National Assembly. Political parties in Thailand effectively emerged only in 1946 and were recognized as legal entities only in 1955.

Before following the trends of later Thai history, we turned briefly to the early background of the Thai labor movement (discussed in Chapter Three). In the early 1900s, Thailand's urban labor force was comprised primarily of immigrant Chinese. In the mid-1920s the annual number of legal Chinese immigrants still averaged about 10,000. These immigrant Chinese workers were enough to fill the need for labor demands, since prior to World War II, the industrial

labor force remained very small, only a little more than 2 percent of the total work force.

Thais preferred working on the land and remained free to sell their labor in the market. They joined the work force only after they were forced to do so by later economic hardship. Therefore, until the 1950s, it was estimated that the Chinese constituted as much as 75 percent of all urban labor or wage earners who worked mainly in the non-agricultural sector.

The first ethnic Thai trade union with many of the characteristic of a modern union was established in 1897 by Tramway workers. The Tramway Workers Association was formed in the Siam Electric Company, with a membership of 300 Thai workers. The organization went on strike in 1900 in response to rising prices and low wages, which were then a severe problem in Bangkok. The strike was truly economic in essence. Its objectives were the improvement of specific working conditions and there was no evidence of political influence.

The Tramway workers made two other significant strikes: in December 1922 and January 1923. Those strikes also assumed the character of modern industrial disputes. Like the 1900 strike they were significant for two reasons. First, the strikes provided active participation in the act of expressing dissatisfaction and reflected labor discontent that was economic in nature, not political. Second, since

the strikers could not get all demands that they had filed in their complaints, they had to seek help from authority. They went to Chao Praya Yommarat, Minister of the Interior, who then acted as a mediator, and a compromise between the workers and the company was reached. The former agreed to return to work while the latter promised to reconsider the demands of the strikers and to write up new regulations under the inspection of Chao Praya Yommarat. The tradition of seeking help from authority and men in higher ranks was an early feature of the Thai labor movement.

The struggle for power within the bureaucracy after 1932 brought the labor movement into the controversies. Patron-client relations between political leaders and labor leaders were soon established. This was made easier by the fact that union leaders of the time were usually not from rank and file of union membership but were outsiders because government elites were also assigned by the government to head labor organizations. During the period 1933-1956, the patron-client linkage between men in power and labor leaders became very clear. The client had to perform functions that pleased the patron while the patron would help and protect its client. Through such a relationship, workers' demands were heard and supported. In short, we may say that the role of trade unions and the labor movement in this period reflected the needs of political elites to use labor organizations and the movement as their political bases.

The labor movement began to grow and became more active after World War II, since the political climate was more liberal. The liberal Pridi Banomyong government proposed social and political objectives that were more favorable to the labor movement. In 1944, during the War, Pridi had formed a labor organization--the Bangkok Federation of Trade Union, with its main purpose to work in accordance with the Free Thai Movement against Japanese occupation of Thailand. The organization developed into a General Trade Union Association (GTUA) in 1946. Later, the GTUA was formally recognized by the more liberal government headed by Admiral Luang Thamrong Nawasawat in January 1947 as the Saha Achiwa Kammakorn, known in its English name as the Central Labor Union (CLU) and was normally led by liberal Thai political figures.

When Pibun returned to power for the second time through the military-led November 1947 coup, he again brought with him a nationalist policy and his restrictive anti-Chinese policy. In May 1948, he sponsored a Thai workers association named that Thai Labor Union. Its membership was exclusively Thai, consisting primarily of government railroad and harbor workers. His government was not happy with the existence of the CLU, and later it refused to register it as a legal organization. In 1952, the CLU was deemed to be subversive, it was disbanded and its leaders arrested under the Anti-Communist Act. Since then,

the act became the most important tool of Thai governments to suppress the working class, especially during periods of military rule.

In 1950, in order to keep a firm grip on the labor movement, Pibun sent two of his closest aides to organize and run the Thai Union Congress. The government, under the leadership of Pibun, also subsidized the TUC with some U.S.\$ 10,000 per year. The Pibun government (1947-1957) had two purposes in sending its representatives organize and lead labor associations: to use the organizations as political bases; and to counter the influence of communism and leftist labor leaders. This was the high period of the Cold War and similar reactions could be seen in many parts of the world where U.S. influence was strong.

The government sponsored several labor organizations during 1949 to 1956. The associations were organized mainly as a political base of support of their promoters, especially in the time of general elections, as was the case in the elections held in 1955 and 1957. The Labor Party was formed from three large affiliates of the Thai National Trade Union Conference (TNTUC) as a political base for Pibun.

In 1958, General Sarit came to power through a military coup. He abolished the previous Constitution and put the country under martial law. Political power was concentrated in the military and civil-servants. He ruled the country

until his death in 1963. General Thanom took his place until the government was overthrown by a Student-led Revolution in October 1973.

From 1958 to 1986, the period on which our study is focused, three types of regime appeared. The first one (1958-1973) was the regime of military dictatorship, which was also the hey-day of the 'bureaucratic polity.' The "Democratic regime (1973-1976) brought Thailand closest to a fully popular democracy. Finally, the "Semi-Democratic regime" (1976-1986) placed a number of restrictions on popular democracy but did not return to the military-bureaucratic regime of 1958-1973.

During these periods, Thailand experienced rapid changes in its economy, which may be summarized as follows:

- 1) high economic growth rates (averaging 7 percent a year),
- 2) a rapid diversification of the basically agricultural economy, with industry contributing 29.8 percent of the GDP at current market prices by 1985, and
- 3) an increase in literate and better-educated citizens. For example, student enrollment in higher education increased more than thirteen times, from 55,315 students in 1970 to 752,771 in 1982. All together, that segment which Daniel Bell has characterized as the "knowledge class," --the professional, technical, managerial and administrative occupations--grew six-fold in the last twenty-five years to encompass some six percent of the total labor force. These changes had a significant

impact on the political system in Thailand, the most important of which was the emergence of a more democratic government. Coups and governments came and went; the influence of the bureaucracy remained. But the overall pattern was in the direction of more democratic government, a decline in bureaucratic domination and the emergence of extra-bureaucratic forces. The emergence of the labor movement was one such extra-bureaucratic force.

In Chapter Six, Seven and Eight we turned to a more detailed presentation and analysis of case studies in labor action. Three categories of cases were presented in order to show labor's autonomy when acting in pursuit of different goals and under different circumstances.

Trade Union and "Bread-and-Butter" Issues

In June 1974 the first big strike ever occurring in the "Democratic Period" broke out when thousands of textile workers from about 600 factories demonstrated and asked for help from the caretaker government. The strike was prompted by their employers' announcement of production cutbacks, reduction of working hours and wages, and worker layoffs. It was strongly supported by the most active and influential group in Thai politics at the time--the student organization, the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) as well as labor leaders of both conservative and leftist leanings.

Striking workers were also given a boost when workers from the railways, the plastic factories, and glass factories joined the protest. After six days of labor unrest, the government offered the striking workers an employment plan which, among other things, provided for job security and a compromise minimum wage increase.

The June 1974 Textile strike showed the ability of workers to independently insert their demand into the political system of the country without any interference from military elite, civil servants or other political elites. The goal of the strike was initiated by and for the benefit of the textile workers as a whole and, for the workers at large. They were successful when the government agreed to raise the minimum wage to 20 baht (approximately U.S.\$ 1 dollar) per day for all industrial workers in the Greater Bangkok area.

The Hara (Thailand) factory strike also involved a strike in the textile industry. The strike grew out of purely economic concerns, yet it had a great deal of impact on the politics of the country because it became involved in an ideological struggle by radical students and leaders who came to advice and supervise the strikers. They convinced the strikers to seize the factory, operate and manage it for their own interests. The government had to use forces to end the strike, and many workers were injured during the removal of the strikers by anti-riot police.

The Hara case is a classic example of the strike in Thailand (especially in the textile industry) in the sense that it was originally a bread-and-butter issue that consequently had an impact in the politics of the country. When strikers and employers could not reach a settlement through peaceful negotiation, government intervened. In the Hara case, it waited patiently until the "right time" had come and then ordered the police to clear out the workers from the occupied factory.

Clearly the workers were not acting as clients of government elites or individual politicians. Viewed in this light, the workers were relatively autonomous of state control. They had their own goal to pursue. They could not win the strike and the government used force to end it. But there was no direct linkage between the men in government and labor leaders. No evidence of patron-client relations between worker and military men was evident. On the contrary, workers were suspicious of military domination and the latter viewed the workers as an open gate for communists to enter into the country.

The first Dusit Thani Hotel strike occurred in August 1974--two months after the June 1974 strike--during the heyday of democracy in Thailand. The incident gained support from other hotel workers, various labor organizations and especially from the then the strongest organization outside bureaucratic realm, the NSCT. The strikers demanded from the

hotel management a minimum salary of 600 baht (U.S.\$ 30 dollar) a month, 85 percent of the service charge collections to be distributed to the employees, with a guarantee of 800 baht per month each. There was to be no retribution against the strikers.

After a month the organizers issued an ultimatum that, if their demands were not met by noon on September 13, there would be a massive demonstration. The government foresaw trouble ahead, since other groups, for example, student organizations and farmer organization, had come out to show their support for the strikers and would join the demonstration. Hence, just before the deadline, an arbitration committee appointed by the government ruled that the Dusit Thani Hotel management must comply with the demands made by the strikers.

The incident showed the relative autonomy of the Hotel workers' organizations in relation to the military and civil servants. There was no sign of interference on the part of the latter. Indeed, the strike was initiated by the hotel workers under the leadership of a radical labor leader who had no connection with military leader or high ranking bureaucrats.

A Second Dusit Thani Hotel Strike, less than a year after the first, was initially called to demand higher wages for workers, yet the movement spilled over into politics. The strikers were mistaken when they thought that the newly

elected government would be more responsive to their demands. Instead, the government wanted to maintain order in the country, overwhelmed at the time by the fear of communism which was about to take over South Vietnam.

After about 2 months of the strike, all of the workers participating in the strike were fired and all of the hotel workers were given a clear warning. The hotel management preferred paying the required severance and compensation to the fired workers rather than rehire the strikers. The strikers' failure was due to overconfidence based on previous success and to their disadvantaged position in the bargaining process, since the Ministry of Interior had ruled that their strike was illegal.

The Maekhong Strike in 1984 was also initiated by bread-and-butter issues, but outside parties became involved. Because outside parties were involved, the situation changed and the dispute could be solved through an established labor relations practice. This meant that the strike was delayed longer than it would otherwise have been.

The workers turned to General Arthit for help in order to have their demands accepted. The fact that the general rendered his support to the strike is evidence of mutual interests, not of a client-patron relationship. General Arthit had moved rapidly to the top in military rank less than 2 years after he helped General Prem's government to subdue the April 30, 1980 military coup attempt. Such rapid

promotion had caused conflict within the military itself. General Arthit had not yet consolidated his power, had not yet been accepted as the leader, and somewhat lacked popularity in the general public. He was, therefore, looking for allies and popular support. Helping the workers was a way to gain popularity, and also, he could at the same time establish linkages with a part of the workers movement so that in time of need they could come out and support him. However, before the workers turned to him for help there had been no patron-client linkage between the two parties.

In all of the cases analyzed above, the issues that brought on the strikes were of immediate or direct concern to the unions. Unions some battles and lost some. Clearly, whatever the outcome, the unions were principally concerned with bread-and-butter issues--wages, benefits, fairness and working conditions. When in need of support, they sought (or were offered help from) allies both in and out of government. In at least one case, as pointed out in Chapter Five, the government ended a strike, claiming to act in the general public interest. But, and this is important, all of the strikes began out of issues of vital concern to the workers. Strikes were not initiated because unions were seen as a convenient source of support by an ambitious politician in furtherance of his own interests. They were, instead, evidence of autonomous action.

Almost all the textile strikes during the so called

"Democratic Period" (1973-1976) resulted in a victory for the workers. But this was not the case in later period. In strikes of the later period, especially during the Prem government (1979-1988), textile workers did not easily win their struggle against their employers. Most of the strikes ended in defeat for the workers who staged the strikes.

Unions and Public Policy

Following our discussion of labor action in what we termed "bread-and-butter" issue, we turned to labor union action in a series of somewhat broader issues. In the individual cases discussed in Chapter Six, unions went on strike or took other forms of action over issues affecting not only the unions but a much broader public as well. These cases might be characterized as cases involving lower income people which are the majority of the country, however, since the issues were most vital to the lower classes of which laborers were only a part. Here the conflict was between union and government rather than a specific employer.

We first discussed union action against the government policy of increasing the price of rice (December 1975). The movement leaders first expressed their concern in an open letter to the Prime Minister. They gave their reasons for opposing the policy through this and various other means of communications to gain support from workers and the people at large, particularly those who were in the lower income

strata. The next step was to negotiate with the Prime Minister, his cabinet, and other government officials concerned. The final strategy was to stage a general strike with massive demonstrations to put pressure on the government. The movement was able to reverse government policy and hence benefitted both workers and the people at large.

Because they acted as they did against the government policy, we can say that the unions became involved in the public policy process. Since there was conflict between unions and government (bureaucracy--the state apparatus, and political elites) we might also contend that the processes here was an example of union "autonomy," and its performance in the process makes it even clearer that unions were acting as an extra-bureaucratic force.

Unions again took action against the government's policy of privatization of public enterprises. We pointed out also in Chapter Five, that government policy would have directly affected the workers in the public sector, since they would lose both security and economic status as well as social status.

The movement of the public enterprise unions took various forms. It persistently put pressure on government whenever possible. The movement organized meetings among state enterprise unions concerned; organized public conferences by inviting various parties concerned to give

their views on the policy and submitted the resolutions of the conference to the government; organized programs to educate workers in various state enterprises and people at large about the policy; supported political parties which had the same view of opposing the policy; sought support from military elites and resorted to strikes and demonstrations.

The issue of privatization was not settled--some state enterprises were privatized, others remained--and the protest against the privatization policy continued. Trade unions in state enterprises, especially those in big state enterprise, did not give up their intention to protect their interests, and hence they continued to confront the government. Although they were not one hundred percent successful, it is clear that the unions acted autonomously and as an extra-bureaucratic force.

Another example of labor involvement in the policy making process was their campaign for a Social Security Law. Obviously, the law promised immediate benefits to employees. At present, there have been at least 4 drafts of Social Security bills proposed by various sources: the Ministry of Interior; the Social Action Party; the Democratic Party; the Thai Population Party; the Unity Party; and the workers. All but the last one were introduced in parliament, according to the policy making process. The worker's draft developed from various seminars organized by the four peak worker

organizations.

The labor movement engaged in various forms of action to support a Social Security law; seminars and reports to the government of the results of the seminars, campaigns in various labor functions, any strike or any demonstration; lobbying cabinet members and members of parliament to submit and support the bill; giving tacit support to political parties which promised to push for the Social Security Law.

Thai governments have been reluctant to enact the law, yet labor has continuously put pressure on the former. This is another sign of the independence or the "autonomy" of trade unions. Furthermore, trade union action for the enactment of the law has been very united recently. In their efforts for the enactment of a social security law, trade unions acted autonomously and beyond the control of military or civil bureaucratic elites. In this case trade unions could be seen as an "extra-bureaucratic force."

Almost every year there is an effort on the part of labor to push for a desirable minimum wages rate, even though there has been little likelihood in the past that the rate proposed by labor representatives in the Committee on Wage--a tripartite committee---would be totally achieved.

Labors struggle to increase the minimum wage in 1984 showed the strength and the autonomy of the unions. Union leaders put pressure on the government to increase the minimum wage rates. They knew that within the Committee on

Wages their representatives were at a disadvantage because representatives from government and employers were more skilled, better educated, and much better informed. They were aware that if they left their representatives to carry on the struggle alone they would not win and the minimum wage would not be increased. Furthermore, even though the Committee had agreed to recommend a minimum wage increase, the new rates had to be approved by the Ministry of Interior, since the Committee by itself cannot make law. Its duty is only to suggest the minimum wage rates to the Minister. Therefore, union leaders had to mobilize support for their representatives in the Committee, and they used their power to press the government to comply with their demands. Although unions found it necessary to compromise, they were able to secure significant increases in the minimum wage.

For their part in what we have termed the "policy making process," unions and their leaders resorted to a variety of techniques in their efforts to bring the government to accept their demands. Participation in the official labor committee, educational seminars, public meetings, direct communication with government, contacts with political parties, demonstrations and the threat of strike were some of the measures which the reader has undoubtedly found in the case studies presented in detail in Chapter Six.

Unions and National Issues: Coups, Constitution
Amendment, Monetary Policy and Elections

In Chapter Seven, in our final set of case studies, we analyzed the role of labor in a constitutional amendment campaign, the baht devaluation crisis, military coups and general elections. Except for the Baht devaluation crisis, it was more difficult in these cases to identify direct or immediate interests of labor. The fact that labor leadership was sometimes divided is itself evidence that labor interests in these case, were far from obvious. What stands out in these case studies, however, was the fact that unions and their leaders defined their interests and acted in concert with what they perceived to be allies--individuals or groups not a part of the labor movement. Each member of alliance perceived some possible gain or gains for itself in pursuing the various objective that lay behind the political action analyzed in the several case studies. The gains for labor might not have been as immediate or an clearly identified as the perceived gains in other case studies. Indeed, it is even possible that in their calculation of possible gains which labor expected from these actions in concert with others, labor leaders might have been in error. What is important for our purposes is that probable gains were perceived and, thus, these case studies were offered as further evidence of autonomous action on the part of labor.

Labor played an important part in campaign for a

Constitutional amendment that would change the system of election and allow bureaucrats to hold bureaucratic and political posts simultaneously and maintain the right of the Senate to vote in parliament in the case of no-confidence and government budgetary. But labor was divided. Those against the change accused supporters of the amendment of receiving money from opposition parties and of looking for personal and political gains. They also argued that it would return the country to the days of dictatorship under the domination of military and civil servants. Labor leaders who supported the amendment believed that the way to solve labor problems in the Thai context was to bring the workers into politics.

The movement could be viewed as an alliance between the military and the union leaders. The union leaders, such as Mr. Ahmad and Sawas, who supported the constitutional amendment, believed that workers must take political power within their hands or, if they cannot do so, they must at least take part in sharing political power. Support of the constitutional amendment by this group could be seen as an autonomous political action in order to establish an alliance with the military and political elites who pushed for the amendment. In the future workers' interests and preferences might then be promoted with the support of the latter.

Economic reasons were behind the action of labor leaders in opposing the government policy of the devaluation

of the Baht. It was definitely believed that the devaluation of the currency would automatically reduce the real income of workers, not to mention worsening the already increasing inflation of that year. It appeared in the immediate interests of workers that the government stop the policy. However, the workers were not united. Politically oriented labor leaders tried to combine the movement against the baht devaluation with the movement for the constitutional amendment, while the majority of labor leaders wanted to protest against only the baht devaluation policy. The latter saw the action of the former as being planned with military leaders, since General Arthit was also strongly oppose the devaluation policy.

In the crisis the elected government was challenged by the military under the leadership of General Arthit. As mentioned above, the General wanted to enhance his popularity by discrediting the elected government, while the workers wanted economic security. The movement, then, could be seen as one based on perceived mutual benefits. That was especially true among the economic oriented union leaders. They acted autonomously, as a partner in an alliance.

In our analysis of the 1985 military coup attempt, we concluded that the participation of labor in support of the coup could be seen as that of an interest group which calculated what it could gain from the action. It was true that the labor leaders involved in the coup had associated

with military for quite sometime, since the early 1980s. But the relationship was in the sense that each needed the other. The military needed popular support for its movement in politics while labor unions needed protection and support when they take action against their employers for economic gain, or in some cases against government policy (such as their action against privatization policy).

From the case studies in two general elections we also found an increasing role of trade unions in the politics of Thailand. In 1983 only the Ahmad and Sawas group which controlled the LCT, was strongly involved in the general election. They played a substantial role in forming the Labor Democratic Party and some of them ran in the election under the list of the Party. Since Thai law did not allow the involvement of trade unions or groups of trade unions in politics, these leaders were legally engaged in the general election on an individual basis. But in reality the majority of the LCT was strongly involved in the election.

The direct involvement of the Paisan group (this group was strongly oppose unions' direct involvement in the 1983 general election) in the 1986 general election indicated that workers saw that the democratic system was more suitable for them and hence, they supported it. They felt compelled to become involved in the general election since they knew that the elected politicians would be those who rule. The military and bureaucrats were no longer the

rulers, since the constitution did not allow bureaucrats to hold political and bureaucratic posts simultaneously. It was in the workers' interest to become involved in the general election, and they did so through their connection with political parties.

Conclusion and Observations

From the data analyzed in this study, it is clear that since the mid-1970s trade unions function as of an extra-bureaucratic force within the contemporary Thai semi-democratic political system (1977-1988). They did so to an even greater extent in the so called "democratic period" (1973-1976). This does not mean that all trade unions are directly involved in politics. But even in cases where unions negotiate or strike over bread-and-butter issues, they are acting autonomously, and to the extent that the process and outcome has an impact on national economic and social conditions, they are acting as an extra-bureaucratic force. That was our conclusion in chapter 5. This, of course, is less obvious in the case of many small unions which may be established only for the purpose of good industrial relations and concentrate on bilateral bargaining. As for the larger unions, however, they frequently do become directly involved in politics, as was demonstrated in Chapters Six and Seven.

To be an extrabureaucratic force trade unions must act

or interact within the political system as an independent group that has its own interest distinguishable from other groups or social forces. That is to say, a trade union has to be an "autonomous" entity in the political system. In the Thai case, trade unions are autonomous because they are free from any formal linkage to bureaucratic factions or to ruling parties as has been the case of their counterparts in Latin American countries. The findings in this study, show that in their de facto relationship with military and civilian bureaucratic elites, trade unions also act as an autonomous group, although they do seek allies among the former entities.

More specifically, trade unions act as an autonomous group or extrabureaucratic force when they act as representatives of union members or, in some circumstance, of the whole working class and lower income social strata within the political system of Thailand. The ability of trade unions to bargain for their demands and preferences is demonstrated in various ways: by resort to peaceful measure and threat of social disruption, if peaceful means are not effective. The stability of the Thai government could be shaken by labor's resort to social disruption. Such action would encourage the use of force by military elites which are central to the "bureaucratic polity." Therefore, at the present stage of socio-economic and political development in Thailand, it is not possible to exclude

unions from having a voice in the system.

From the evaluation of the above roles of labor unions, then, we reach the conclusion that trade unions in Thailand have become an independent political entity and hence an extra-bureaucratic force, one that helps the country to move into a new era of democratic rule.

The empirical findings in this study confirm Girling's assessment of the contemporary Thai political system, where he found that the old "bureaucratic polity" model formulated by Riggs in early 1960s is no longer adequate for an understanding of Thai politics. According to Girling, Thailand is a country that has experienced significant socioeconomic development and is in the stage of transition to a democratic pluralist system. As a result of these changes, he saw the "bureaucratic polity" as a system challenged by political representatives of the rising capitalist class while, at the same time, associated intellectuals, subordinate peasants, and labor movements, despite their recent setback, continue to strive for autonomy. To repeat for emphasis, trade unions and worker organizations are among the most important of these extra-bureaucratic forces. Since, he did not present a comprehensive study of the role of trade unions in the political development of Thailand, as staged at the beginning, our study expanded Girling's theory by elaborating the role of trade unions in more detail. On the

basis of our study, which demonstrate the trade unions now function as an extrabureaucratic force, it is reasonable to speculate that a re-introduction of the bureaucratic polity would not be feasible for Thailand. Instead, the democratic polity is in a process of consolidation. Further studies of the development of other extra-bureaucratic forces identified but not studied in detail by Girling, would probably support our assumption.

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- Thai Rath. (Bangkok, daily, in Thai)

VII. Selected Personal Interview

- Mr. Ahmad Khamthesthong, Former President of the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT), former member of Senate. [June 9, 1988]
- Mr. Anusak Boonyapranai, President of the National Free Labor Congress (NFLC). [July 22, 1988]
- Dr. Anusorn Limmanee, Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science, Ramkhamhaeng University. [December 28, 1988]
- Mr. Art Sri-art, President of the National Council of Thai Labor (NCTL). [May 5, 1988]
- Mr. Bandit Thamatrirat, a labor researcher and labor activist. [January 4, 1988]

- Mr. Damrih Noi-manee, Former Deputy Minister of Interior.
[August 4, 1988]
- Mr. Ekkachai Ekharakamol, Vice President of the Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC), and the General Secretary of a Group of State Enterprise Union Relations.
[September 2, 1988]
- Dr. Kanchada Poonpanich, a labor scholar. [August 30, 1990]
- Dr. Kanok Wongtrangan, Former student leaders, Professor of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University.
[December 16, 1988]
- Mr. Kosol Rojanapan, Former student leader, Associate Professor, Faculty of Political Science, Ramkhamhaeng University. [February 16, 1988]
- Mr. Lae Dilokvidhyarat, Labor scholar, Associate Professor, Faculty of Economic Chulalongkorn University, and an Advisor to Prime Minister General Chatichai Choonhavan on labor problems (1988-). [February 10, 1987]
- Mr. Nikom Chandaravithoon, Former General Director, Department of Labor, labor scholar and expert.
[August 19, 1988]
- Mr. Panas Thailuan, General Secretary of the National Congress of Thai Labor. [May 18, 1988]
- Mr. Piyachet Claewclad, labor leader, labor activist.
[January 25, 1989]
- Mr. Prasert Sapsunthorn, labor mobilizer, a former central committee of the Communist Party of Thailand who works with the ISOC. [September 30, 1988]
- Mr. Prasit Chaithongpan, High level government officer who had work closely with the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC) to mobilize workers against any infiltration of Communism. [May 16, 1988]
- Mr. Prasong Rananand, Director General of Department of Labor. [May 12, 1988]
- Mr. Pratin Thamrongjoy, labor leaders and labor activist.
[September 30, 1988]
- Mr. Sawas Lookdote, labor leader, Former General Secretary of the LCT, Former member of Senate. [September

15, 1988]

- Dr. Sombat Thamrongthanyawongse, former student leader, labor activist, a university lecturer. [February 12, 1989]
- Mr. Sompong Srakavee, former student leader, and labor activist. [November 2, 1988]
- Mr. Sopone Yompanya, Executive committee member of the NCTL. [May 24, 1988]
- Mr. Suchart Thailuan, a labor leader and activist. [May 22, 1988]
- Dr. Sungsidh Piriyanangsan, former labor activist, labor scholar, a lecturer of Faculty of Economic, Chulalongkorn University, an advisor on labor problems to Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan (1989-). [September 2, 1990]
- Mr. Sunthorn, Director of Division of Industrial Relations Department of Labor. [June 3, 1988]
- Mr. Suvit Ravivongse, a well known labor leader since the end of the World War II. [August 23, 1988]
- Mr. Thanong Po-an, President of the Labor Congress of Thailand (LCT). [July 7, 1988]
- Mr. Vichai Thosuwanchinda, a well-informed labor leader who has actively served in various tripartite committee. He earned his master degree in economics. [August 3, 1988]
- Mr. Vichian Srivichian, President of Water Transportation Worker Union, former member of the Senate. [August 9, 1988]
- Mr. Vittr Borisuthikul, President of the Thai Tobacco Monopoly, and Vice President of the NCTL. [July 15, 1988]
- Mr. Watana Iambumroong, President of the Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC). [May 19, 1988]