

CHAPTER V

NEW CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ECONOMIC UNIONISM, 1991-2002

From the late 1980s to 1990, the economic trade unions achieve some degree of success when the trade unions played a prominent role in the mobilisation of the workers who organised strong autonomous collective action to defend their common interests. However, from 1991 onwards, the economic unionism has developed towards the new characteristics that are different from what it was in the previous decade. The new political and economic situations and the changes in the organisations of the workers' collective action were the determinants of these differences.

In order to examine the new character of the trade unionism, this study emphasizes three issues of the trade union movement in 1991-2002. The first issue is the involvement of the trade unions in the political movement. The second is the change in the leadership structure of the workers' collective action from the union-based organisations to the coalitions of trade unions and other like-minded groups, and finally, the labour campaigns on the non-wage demands during this period.

5.1 Political Crisis and the Constitutional Reform

The relatively stable democratic system between the late 1970s and 1990 was associated with decreasing political actions of trade unions and other social organisations. However, the situation was changed in 1991 when a group of military leaders calling themselves "National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC)" staged a coup d' e tat on February 24. The NPKC outlined five major reasons for their action: i) government corruption; ii) harassment of public servants by politicians; iii) parliamentary dictatorship; iv) government's attempt to undermine the military; and v) government's distortion of evidence in attempts to assassinate members of the royal family.

However, the real causes of the coup were generally analysed by two approaches. One was to focus on the personal conflicts within the ruling elite, between the Chatichai government and the military leaders. The conflicts had been building up in terms of issues and developed into irreconcilable conflicts. The second approach was based on the belief that conflicts underlying the coup were structural ones. The coup was seen to be a manifestation of the power struggle between the capitalists and the military. Thai politics during the Chatichai regime were very much

dominated by the capitalists, who could intervene to restructure the bureaucracy, who also managed to extend their power into areas previously controlled by the bureaucracy and the military. The coup was thus the military's attempt to restore their power politics (SFT and MODEM 1992: 2).

The control by the NPKC of Thai politics ended after a series of mass protests demonstrations culminated in a violent crackdown by military forces from May 17-20, 1992 in Bangkok. The first large demonstration took place in Bangkok in April 20, 1992, when more than 5,000 people gathered to demand General Suchinda's resignation. Other large demonstrations had taken place from May 4 to 11. Finally, Chamlong Sri-meung, the most important leader of the opposition Phalangdham Party, had called for a large public demonstration on May 17 to pressure Suchinda to resign from premier position. The mass protest demonstrations then culminated in a violent crackdown by military forces during May 17-20. Government official statements reported that 52 persons were killed, 696 others were injured, and 175 persons disappeared (Amnesty International 1992: 1). The May 1992 uprising, however, resulted in the overthrow of the domination of the military over Thai politics and the beginning of another political campaign on the Constitutional reform.

After May 1992, the ideas of political reform were raised by the groups of people that played an important role in the May events. The political reform was aimed at eliminating the obstructions of Thai political development caused by: political and bureaucratic corruption, vote buying in the elections, over centralised administration, and the fragility of the rule of law. It was indicated that these causes led to problems of legitimacy and efficiency, and hence political and democratic system instability. Holistic and continuous political reform were thus imperative to achieve political stability, democracy and efficient government (Committee for Development Democracy 1995: 25-26).

A starting point for political reform was to draft a new constitution that would embarrass the politicians and bureaucrats for the practices of political actions that would undermine the development of the democratic system. During 1994-1997, the democratic alliance, which played an important role in the 1992 May events, had been active again in the campaigns for constitutional reform. A Constitution Amendment Bill in May, 1996, provided for the establishment of the Constitution Drafting Assembly. After the drafted Constitution had been finished, the democratic alliance pressured hard and bargained with the members of

the Parliament for the approval of the new Constitution. The campaigns were launched by a network of a broad spectrum of people comprising NGO activists, students, workers, businessmen and peasants. The organisations included in the network were, for instance: Confederation of Democracy, Poll-watch, Union for Civil Liberty, Klongtoey Slum Group for Political Reform, Student Federation of Thailand, Assembly of the Poor, and State Enterprise Labour Relations Confederation. The drafted Constitution gained parliamentary approval on September 27, 1997 (Prudhisana Jumbala 1998: 272).

The wide support of the new Constitution was caused by several reasons. The business groups were dissatisfied with the government's response to economic crisis in 1997. The businessmen blamed the Chaowalit Yongjaiyut government and the members of the Parliament for their failing to regulate the financial system and delaying infrastructure development. These businessmen thus favored the new Constitution with its transparency and accountability provisions (Far Eastern Economic Review, October 9, 1997: 21). As for NGOs and other groups, they aimed at creating political reform under the new Constitution, which would strengthen the people's ability to exercise their rights to participate in public decision-making, and hence pave the way for a more participatory form of democracy.

The new Constitution provides some opportunities for the social movements to participate in the process of political development. To promote citizen participation in politics, the article 170 of the 1997 Constitution states that fifty thousand eligible voters can submit a piece of legislation to the Parliament. They also can request the Senate to remove high office holders of the three branches of government if they are proved unusually wealthy or intentionally exercise power contrary to the Constitution or Law.

5.2 The Contrasting Roles of the Trade Unions in the May 1992 Democratic Movement

In this study, the May 1992 democratic movement means the actions of various groups of people from mid- 1991 to May 1992 to protest the authoritarianism of the NPKC and demand a new constitution and democratic regime free from the NPKC's power. The role of workers in the May, 1992, democratic movement interested a number of Thai scholars. However, the academics' attention focused only on one side of the workers' role in the pro-democratic movement, but did not intensively discuss the other side of the coin, the anti-democratic actions

of the union leaders in the May events. Debatable issues were the two points on the comparison of the role of the white collar and blue collar workers in the pro- democratic movement, and the arguments about the role of the working class and the middle class in such a movement.

As for the first debatable issue, Sungsidh Piriyaungsan concluded that in the May events, the white- collar workers played a more important role than the blue- collar workers. In his studies, Sungsidh included the salary earners in the service sector, NGO staffs, and state enterprise employees, as the white- collar workers. Among these white- collar workers, the NGO staffs played the most active role in the movement, while a large number of state enterprise employees, although they participated in the street demonstrations, had not openly acted against the NPKC (Sungsidh Piriyaungsan 1993: 336).

Narong Petprasert also concluded that white- collar workers had played a more active role in the May democratic movement, at the forefront of the movement, than the blue- collar workers, who were only the rear guard of the movement (Narong Petprasert 1992: 148). However, Narong differed from Sungsidh in his definition of white- collar workers when he discussed their involvement in the May events saying that the white-collar workers included only the state enterprise employees and the private employees in the service sector, but not the NGO staffs.

As for the other debatable point about the working class and the middle class in the May events, Ji Ungpakorn disagreed with the numerous studies that called the May democratic movement a middle-class led political uprising. On the contrary, he argued that the most important actors of the movement were the working class, not the middle-class. To Ji, the definition of the working class is not based on income and lifestyle, but the Marxist explanation based on the relationship with the means of production. Anyone who has no control over the work process and has only manual or mental labour to sell, is defined as working class. By this definition, Ji included all wage and salary earners as the working class, the major groups of people who participated in the May democratic movement (Ji Unpakorn 1997: 108-116).

Although the role of the workers, both white collar and blue collar, in the May democratic movement was a very interesting issue, it could not be denied that the image of the workers in the May events was not represented by both the pro-and anti-democratic actions of trade unions. My study in 1993 tried to indicate the role of both the pro-democratic and

anti- democratic wings of trade unions in the May events (Napaporn Ativanichayapong 1993: 114-145).

The following study will examine the contrasting role of trade unions in the May democratic movement, as well as the factors determining these contradictions within the union movement. The political uprising against the NPKC from the late 1991 till May 1992, had incorporated workers and trade unions into the political movement led by broad democratic alliances. Meanwhile, the NPKC also co-opted some union leaders to support its power during the political crisis. The political conditions in 1991-1992 thus led to more fragmentation in the trade union movement as trade unions split into the pro- NPKC wing and the anti-NPKC wing.

The contrasting roles of trade unions in the political movement during this period was the consequence of state labour control strategies. During 1991-1992, the NPKC employed two different policies to control the trade union movement. First, strict control through the new labour laws and regulations were used to limit the political actions of the anti-NPKC labour unions. Second, the NPKC offered benefits to some labour leaders was used to co-opt trade unions as its supporters and to use them as a political instrument to counter the powers of the anti- NPKC groups. Consequently, the role of trade unions in the political movement was characterised by both a pro- democratic and anti-democratic movement.

5.2.1 The NPKC Strict Labour Control

The union resistance against the NPKC did not occur immediately after the coup. In the early days after the coup, trade union leaders, including the leaders of the national labour congress, the SERC, and the area-based trade unions, had not opposed the NPKC, because they expected that the NPKC-appointed government would not threaten union rights. In addition, these union leaders expressed their positive attitude towards the NPKC and hoped that the NPKC would help the workers.

Immediately after the coup, the NPKC held a meeting with 600 union leaders on February 25, 1991. In the meeting, Thanong Po-aun, the then President of the LCT, requested that the new government to increase the daily minimum wage rate and promote the enforcement of the new Social Security Act. Thanong also claimed that the leaders of all the five labour congresses were willing to support the new NPKC- appointed government (*Matichon* February 20, 1991: 18, 21). Apart from Thanong, the leaders of the state enterprise unions also acted to support the NPKC.

On February 28, 1991, thirty state enterprise unions, led by the State Enterprise Labour Relations Confederation (SERC), offered their congratulations to the NPKC by presenting a basket of flowers to General Suchinda Kraprayoon (Napaporn Ativanichayapong 1993: 135). Even the area-based trade union groups also asked the new government to introduced the policies to help workers and agriculturists such as: to increase minimum wages, to promote the implementation of the Social Security Law, and to guarantee the minimum prices of the agricultural products.

However, it was the NPKC' s strict labour control policy that disappointed the union leaders, particularly the leaders of state enterprise unions, and drastically changed their attitudes towards protesting against the NPKC after the NPKC had banned all state enterprise unions.

While the coup leaders tried to win public support from the middle class and the business groups, they obviously ignored the workers and trade unions. Although the causes of the coup were very little related to the trade union movement, the coup strongly affected the workers and trade unions. The junta that came to power following the coup imposed severe restrictions on the labour rights of both private and state enterprise workers.

In the private sector, the most significant impact was the promulgation of the NPKC Announcement No. 54 on the amendment of the 1975 Labour Relation Act, on February 28, 1991. According to this Announcement, labour strikes became impossible, as a union could stage a strike only after more than half of the union's members supported the strike by direct ballot. It also prohibited outsiders to be union advisors without a license issued by the Department of Labour. As leaders of most small unions lacked legal knowledge and experience of collective bargaining, they often appointed outsiders, from other big unions or NGOs, to be their formal advisors in the process of collective negotiation. This Announcement thus isolated trade unions and pushed them into a disadvantageous position when they were negotiating with the employers.

In the public sector, the NPKC promulgated the State Enterprise Employees Relations Act on April 15, 1991, which withdrew state enterprise employees from coverage by the 1975 Labour Relation Act that resulted in the abolition of all unions in state enterprises. The state enterprise employees were allowed to form only employee associations which did not have the right of collective bargaining or being members of

union organisations, such as labour union federations or national labour congresses.

The reasons why the NPKC had banned the state enterprise unions, but allowed the existence of their counterparts in the private sector, could be explained in relating to the legitimacy crisis and the strength of state enterprise unions in 1990. The state enterprise unions were very unpopular after their collective actions, including rallies and strikes against privatisation and demands for salary increases, had been strongly criticized by the media. The NPKC leaders thus realized that the policy to abrogate state enterprise unions would not be opposed by the public but, on the contrary, would make the people view the NPKC favorably. Without popular support, the SERC had no legitimacy to organise a militant protest against the NPKC's using authoritarian power to ban state enterprise unions. On the contrary, the private enterprise unions could gain sympathy from the public when they launched labour campaigns on the Social Security Law and other issues. The ban of unions in private enterprise would lead the NPKC to be unpopular among a large number of workers' sympathizers. In addition, conflicts among the leaders of private enterprise unions were obviously recognized by observers, so it was not difficult for the state to intervene and control the private union movement. Another reason was that the state enterprise unions were much stronger and more united than the private sector union, so it was difficult for the state to intervene and co-opt them.

Although since the mid- 1980s, the members of state enterprise unions did not actively participate in the trade union movement of the private enterprise workers, the SERC, as the most important state enterprise union organisation, had provided resources in terms of money and persons to support private enterprise trade unions. The cooperation between the area-based trade unions in the private sector and the SERC was evident in the workers' collective action against the temporary-contracting employment, and the Social Security Act campaign, as discussed in chapter four. As the NPKC needed to control any political unrest caused by the workers' actions, the ban of state enterprise unions thus benefited the NPKC by reducing labour unrest in the public sector and isolating the trade unions in the private sector.

5.2.2 The NPKC Co-optation Policy and the Union Response

While the leaders of the NPKC used strict labour control policy to limit the unions' actions through the introduction of some new labour laws, they simultaneously employed another policy to co-opt union

leaders as their supporters. This was to use selective incentives to prevent the union leaders from acting against the NPKC. The political and economic contexts of the coup and military rule in Thailand of 1991 were not the same as in the past. There was no security threat to justify the coup, and confidence of the business community, both domestic and international, was an important countervailing factor against excessive military ambition. The public at large, while not viewing the coup unfavorably, wanted to see the military return to barracks as soon as possible (Ananya Bhuchongkul 1992: 315). The Legislative Assembly was thus appointed by the NPKC to draft a new constitution to guarantee the public that the political regime would return to democracy after the new constitution was promulgated.

The Legislative Assembly comprised 292 members from various social groups, but 51 percent were military officials. In order to reduce reaction against the NPKC by workers, the NPKC appointed four union leaders to be the members of the Legislative Assembly. The four union leaders included high- position leaders of two labour congresses, one leader of labour union federation, and one leader of the SERC.* It should be remarked that Thanong Po-aun, the President of the LCT and a prominent leader of the trade union movement, was not appointed member of the Legislative Assembly. As Thanong had close relations with a former Deputy Minister of the Interior Ministry in the Chatichai government, the NPKC thus did not offer Thanong a political position.

In early 1992, when the protests against the NPKC organised by the democratic alliance became very strong, the NPKC tried to offer economic and political benefits to ordinary workers and their leaders. After the 1991 Constitution had been promulgated, the NPKC had authority to appoint the Senate's members. On March 22, 1992, the NPKC appointed five labour leaders to be senators, three of whom were members of the former Legislative Assembly, including three presidents of the labour congresses**. It should be noted that the number of labour leaders appointed by the NPKC to be senators is the largest in the Thai political history.

* These union leaders were Phanich Chareonpao, the General Secretary of the TTUC. Aut Sri-art, the President of the NCTL. Vichai Thosuwanchinda, the President of the Federation of Bank and Financial Workers Unions of Thailand and Ekachai Ekhankamol, a leader of the SERC.

** These five persons were Ekachai Ekhankamol, Vichai Thosuwanchinda, Phanich Chareonphao (president of the TTUC), Anusak Boonyapranai (president of the NFLUC), Manus Niyomsapmanee (president of the LCT).

Among state enterprise employees who were the important labour groups that protested against the NPKC, Sanae Tanti-sanau, the Secretary-General of the SERC, was not appointed a member of the Legislative Assembly or the Senate because he was not popular. Instead, the NPKC appointed Ekachai Ekahankamol, who was more popular than Sanae. In April, 1991, when the Assembly passed the State Enterprise Labour Relations Act to ban state enterprise unions, Ekachai and other labour leaders in the Assembly did not protest against the NPKC. In addition, all of them supported the continuing power of the NPKC over Thai politics by voting to pass the Constitution in December 1991.

Apart from the policy to co-opt labour leaders, the government also increased wages for workers in both the private and public sectors in order to reduce labour unrest. In April, 1992, the Wage committee increased daily minimum wage rates of the private workers to about 15 percent higher than the former rates in 1991. Meanwhile, the Cabinet approved a new structure of state enterprise employee salaries, a 25.66 percent increase, which was more than twice the rate of the salary increase in the Chatichai regime. For state enterprise employee leaders, there was no doubt that this salary increase, that exceeded their expectations was caused by a political reason that the government wanted to gain support from the state enterprise employees (Phaiboon Phlaykaew: 1992: 18).

However, the state co-optation policy, through providing of selective benefits for the workers at large, proved not to be a very effective tactic to limit the unions' actions against the NPKC. In addition, the appointment of some union leaders as senators in 1992, or members of the Legislative Assembly in 1991, could only prevent those appointed union leaders from participating in the democratic movement, but was a useless measure to control the workers' movement as a whole. There were some reasons to explain the failure of the state co-optation policy.

First, in the private sector, the development of the trade union movement in the 1980s, which is discussed in chapter four, indicated that the national labour congresses had already lost their position as powerful umbrella organisations of trade unions. The real coordinating centres of organised workers and most active trade unions were the area-based trade unions. The appointment of some leaders of some national labour congresses as members of state-appointed organisations thus being useless to co-opt active trade unions at large. In the public sector, the structure of the SERC administrative committee in 1991 was decentralized, including all representatives of its affiliates, and the SERC

became an institution rather than an organisation, like many labour organisations, that was completely dominated by some leaders. The appointment of one SERC leader to be a member of the Legislative Assembly and Senate thus had no impact on the collective actions of the workers and the SERC, against the NPKC.

Second, the appointment of the Legislative Assembly's members without Thanong Po-aun was a tactical mistake in the NPKC's labour control policy. Thanong Po-aun immediately shifted his position from a supporter to an aggressive opponent of the NPKC, after he had not been appointed a member of the Legislative Assembly. On March 17, 1991, Thanong denounced the NPKC for the plan to abrogate state enterprise unions and the introduction of Announcement No. 54. Since then Thanong openly acted against the NPKC. When Thanong was invited to attend the Annual Conference of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), held on June 3-20, 1991, at Geneva, the NPKC was afraid that Thanong would present the labour situation in the country in a way that would damage the reputation of the NPKC in the international arena. As a result, Thanong was prohibited by the Department of Labour from attending the ILO Conference and later he mysteriously disappeared on June 19, 1991.

The disappearance of Thanong became one of the significant issues, not only for the domestic workers and democratic alliance, but also for the international labour and human rights movements, being raised to undermine the political legitimacy of the NPKC. The reason was because Thanong held several important positions in both domestic and international labour organisations, including the President of the LCT and Vice-President of the International Confederation for Free Trade Unions-Asia and Pacific Regional Office (ICFTU-APRO).

After Thanong had disappeared, trade unions in the private sector began to cooperate with the state enterprise employee associations to organise demonstrations of workers against the NPKC. On August 3, 1991, some leaders of trade unions and the SERC formed an ad hoc organisation, the Labour Confederation for Democracy, to carry out, in particular, the political activities. However, the state enterprise employees were strictly controlled in order to prevent them from collaboration with the private union movement. On August 4, 1991, seventeen leaders of thirteen state enterprise employee associations attended a meeting held by an ad hoc "Committee to Investigate the Disappearance of Thanong Po-an". Subsequently, all the seventeen labour leaders were interrogated by their managers. As a result, two leaders of the Metropolitan Electricity

Authority State enterprise Employees' Association were punished by a ten percent wage reduction for 3 months, while the other 15 persons were prohibited from joining any activity against the government.

5.2.3 The Role of the Trade Unions as a Supportive Element of the Democratic Movement

Apart from the disappointment of the NPKC labour control policy, the union resistance against the NPKC was also encouraged by the high tide of democratic movement led by the democratic alliances and the opposition political parties. Despite Thanong, the trade union groups also mobilised workers' collective action against the NPKC, in cooperation with the students. In March and April, the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) organised some demonstrations to pressure the government to repeal the Martial Law and the law that prohibited five or more persons from organising a political gathering. The three area-based trade union groups and the SERC joined the campaign by submitting their demands to the Prime Minister, on April 18, 1991, in association with the students' demands. This campaign was successful since the government abrogated the Martial Law on May 3 (*Labour Review* May 1991: 20-21).

In the campaign for the new Constitution of the NGOs and business groups, the SERC was the first labour organisation that participated in the movement. After state enterprise unions had been banned in April 1991, the SERC tried to create a new image of the unions. It was stated in the SERC Solution dated June 24, 1991, that the unions had reconsidered their struggle experiences and accepted all the comments of the media and the government on the unions' actions in the past. The SERC also made a commitment to play a new role, in cooperating with the NGOs and others, in the democratic development (*Labour Review* July 1991: 22).

Until mid-1991, protest against the coup had not been strong. Only a small group of activists from NGOs, student organisations, area-based trade union groups and the SERC organised some academic seminars to demand that the government abrogate Martial Law (*Labour Review* May 1991: 19-21). The most important organisation that led the activities was

the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD)*. However, the situation was changed in late 1991, when the NPKC seemed to prepare the ground for the military to continue in power through the new constitution. The provisional clauses gave considerable power to the Senate, whose members were appointed by the NPKC and allowed for a non-elected person to be a Prime Minister. It was obvious that the provisions paved the way for General Suchinda Khraprayoon, one of the most important leaders of the NPKC, to become Prime Minister without having to leave the Army or stand for election.

When the new constitution was drafted in the way that prepared the ground for the NPKC to continue in power, large public demonstrations were organised in the late 1991. The largest protest was organised on December 6, at Thammasat University, when the Student Federation of Thailand staged a hunger strike of 11 protesters, including one academic, one worker from the SERC, nine students and NGO activists. In addition, other trade union groups began to join the campaign against the new Constitution by cooperating with the SERC to lobby the four labour leaders in the Legislative Assembly to vote against the Drafted Constitution. The protesters' efforts failed, as the members of the Assembly, including the four labour leaders, voted to pass the Draft Constitution.

Consequently, political parties, together with the NGOs, student organisations and trade unions, began to launch a campaign against the enactment of the 1991 Constitution. However, the new Constitution was promulgated on December 9, 1991, followed by a general election on March 22, 1992. The results of the general election showed that no any one party won a majority of seats in the House of Representative. Subsequently, five political parties nominated General Suchinda, who previously promised not to accept the premiership, as the new Prime Minister.

* The CPD was an NGO formed on April 23, 1980, by a group of academics, students and political activists under the original name of "Campaign for Democratic Constitutional Reform". The main objective of the CPD in 1980 was to campaign for a revision of the 1978 Constitution towards a more democratic orientation. The 1978 Constitution was promulgated to replace the 1974 Constitution which had been abrogated after the October 6, 1976 coup d' e tat. The 1978 Constitution was viewed as a " semi- dictatorial Constitution" as it provided a privilege role to the military and civilian officials as well as sustained their power through the appointed Senate (Thanapol Iewsakul 2000: 23-24).

The formation of this coalition government signified the influences of the NPKC over the new government and hence the continuing control by the military of Thai politics. As a result, protests against the Suchinda Government were launched in which the protesters came to represent a broad cross section of Thai society, including the middle class of various professional groups, NGO activists, students and organised workers. For the workers, the state enterprise employees, although being strictly controlled by their management, had actively participated in the political movement when the democratic alliances were formed by the opposition parties, NGOs, Student Federation of Thailand and labour organisations. On May 14, 1992, the Confederation of Democratic Forces was formed by the members of this alliance in which Somsak Kosaisuk from the SERC was one of the Committee members.

These various groups of people formed a loose democratic alliance and joined the political campaign with different reasons. The workers participated in the democratic movement because they were extremely disappointed by the NPKC labour control policy after the coup. The NGO and student activists aimed at overthrowing the military control over Thai politics and restoring a full democratic system. The middle class and the business community had involved themselves in the democratic movement because of their dissatisfaction with the recession of the economy. By the end of 1991, the economic growth rate had slowed down. In fact, this slow down was caused mainly by the Gulf-War Crisis in early 1991, and the slow down of the world trade growth rate. However, the middle class and the business community believed that the NPKC must be responsible for this economic downturn, as the February 1991 coup had led to a serious decline in foreign investment and tourism (Anek Laothamatas 1991: 20).

5.2.4 The Role of the Trade Unions as a Counter-Democratic Force

While a large number of the workers and trade unions acted as the supportive elements of the democratic movement in the May events, it was evident that other small groups of workers played a key role in countering the powers of the democratic forces. In chapter three, it is stated that by mid- 1975, several anti-student movement groups were formed to counter the influences of the students and to destroy the emerging alliances of students, workers, and peasants. These groups were composed of the college students- Red Gaur, The Village Scouts, and the Nine Forces. From mid- 1975 to October 1976, these anti- student

movement groups played a crucial role against the student-led campaigns on political issues.

In 1992, a similar phenomenon to what occurred in 1975-1976 appeared again when mass protests against the NPKC led to political polarization between the pro- and the anti- NPKC groups. However, some of the differences were that the May 1992 democratic movement led by the middle class and the anti-democratic force were some leaders of the national labour congresses. When Suchinda KraPrayoon was nominated by the five political parties as the new Prime Minister after the general election in March, 1992, the first union leader who immediately sent a letter to invite Suchinda to accept the premiership was Anusak Boonyapranai, the President of the NFLUC.* In addition, after Suchinda was appointed Prime Minister, the leaders of four national labour congresses out of the six congresses, NFLUC, NCTL, NLC, and TTUC, led the members of their congresses to congratulate Suchinda.

By the end of March, 1992, trade union leaders had already split into two groups, the pro-democratic alliance and the pro-NPKC. These two groups tried to mobilize trade union supports for their political actions. Consequently, the May Day celebrations on May 1, 1992, were separately organized by two groups of trade unions.

The first group comprised the six national labour congresses and the Rangsit trade union Group, granted 945,000 Baht to hold the celebration at the Royal Field. Their demands on May Day consisted of non-political issues, none of which related to the labour- rights**. The second group, led by two trade union groups from the Omnoi-Omyai and Phrapadang, labour federations and the SERC, organised a celebration by marching from the Parliament building to the Democracy Monument. Their demands were associated with those of the democratic alliance that demanded the government: i) revise the Constitution for decreasing the power of the Senate and require the Prime Minister to be an elected MP; ii) abrogate the NPKC Announcement No. 54; iii) restore the union rights of state enterprise employees; iv) response to the mysterious disappearance of Thanong Po-aun in June 1991; v) ratify the ILO

* Letter of Anusak Boonyapranai to General Suchinda Kraproyoon, dated April 7, 1992.

** These demands comprised the issues that requested the government i) provide occupational training for the workers; ii) promote safety in the workplaces; iii) ratify ILO conventions; iv) preserve environments and people's safety and wealth and; iv) establish a Ministry of Labour.

conventions No.11, 87,95, 135, 151; vi) to support the maternity rights of women workers and ; vii) to control prices of commodities.

As the May Day celebration held by the trade union groups and labour federations and the SERC was obviously a political campaign aimed at resisting the NPKC and the government, the Department of labour thus sent letters to warn the state enterprise employees that their involvement in the anti-government campaign would lead them to be dismissed from work. In addition, the management of some state enterprises tried to prevent their employees from joining trade unions in the private sector for the May Day celebration by changing the May Day holiday to another day (*Labour Review* June 1992: 17-18). Consequently, only a small number of state enterprise employees attended the May Day celebration that the SERC co-organised with the other trade union groups.

The pro- democratic wing consisted of the trade union groups and the labour federations, while the pro-NPKC wing obviously comprised several national labour congresses. The most active ones in the latter wing were the leaders of two labour congresses, the NCL and the NFLUC. Their actions to support the NPKC, shortly before and after May 17, could be summarized as follows.

- On May 15, 1992, Chin Thabplee, the president of the National Labour Congress (NLC)* demanded that the revision of the Constitution must be processed within the parliamentary system rather than outside the parliament (*Matichon* May 16, 1992: 20).

- On May 17, 1992, when the democratic alliance organised a large public demonstration to pressure Suchinda to resign from the Premiership, Chin Thabplee openly acted as the spearhead of the Suchinda- government supporters. He cooperated with a group of the Village Scouts to organise “Concerts Against Drought” on the same day as the public demonstration was organised by the democratic alliance at the Royal Field. The concerts were conducted simultaneously in the evening of May 17 at the Army Stadium and the King Taksin Monument. Chin, as the chairman of the Concert Committee, claimed that the concerts were aimed at raising public donations for the people who suffered drought in the rural areas. However, the hidden objective of the concerts was to divert the people’s attention away from the

* The NLC was registered as the sixth national labour congress on June 12, 1991.

demonstration. It was reported that the Army granted Chin 11 million Baht for organising these concerts (*Khao Pisets*, June 12-18, 1992: 28).

After the May events ended with the collapse of the Suchinda government, the former five government parties paid efforts to form a new coalition government again by supporting the head of the Chatit Thai Party to be the new Prime Minister. However, the public and the democratic alliance of the May movement viewed that the former government parties had to take responsibility for the military crackdown on May 17-19 and thus lacked the political legitimacy to form a new coalition government. The democratic alliance then launched a campaign against the return to power of the former government parties .

While the trade union groups in the private sector, the SERC, and the labour federations involved themselves as part of the pro- democratic alliances, Chin and Anusak continued their role as a spearhead of the anti-democratic movement. They aggressively acted to support the five parties of the former Suchinda government by organising a rally of workers, in June, to urge the nomination of the Chatit Thai Party head as the new Prime Minister, regardless of the extreme opposition by the democratic alliances. Because of the actions of these union leaders to support the NPKC, the image of the trade union movement, during the May democratic movement, was inevitably negative in the eyes of the public.

As discussed in Chapter Four, in the 1980s, most of the national labour congresses became the organisations that produced private benefits for some union leaders rather than defended the common interests of the working class. It was thus not difficult for the state to co-opt the leaders of these labour congresses by offering some benefits to them. Consequently, these union leaders became an instrument of the NPKC to counter the democratic movement during the May events.

5.2.5 The Limited Roles of Trade Unions in the Democratic Movement

The workers involvement in the May events indicated the fragmentation of the trade union movement, as the leaders of national labour congresses ignored or resisted the democratic movement while the other union organisations supported the democratic movement. The leaders of labour congresses did not have mass mobilisation when they organised the collective action to support the NPKC, but used resources offered by the state to act as the spearhead of the counter- democratic

movement. The unions in the democratic wing, although having more workers as their power base, could be only a supportive element of the democratic movement.

Although a large number of organised workers in both the private and public sectors had participated in the May events, trade unions did not plan to use a general strike as an effective instrument to resist the military power. Because of the lack of unity and strong leadership, some union leaders had asserted that it was impossible for the trade unions in the private sector to stage a general strike to bargain with the state during the days that the military had shot people (Napaporn Ativanichayapong 1992: 125). Somsak Kosaisuk, a leader of the SERC, claimed that on May 20, the leaders of state enterprise employee associations decided to call a general strike, in which the state railway workers would be the first to strike from mid-day of May 21 (Somsak Kosaisuk 1994: 72). However, the strike plan was canceled because the military crackdown ended in the evening of May 20.

Compared to the situation in January, 1976, when the TTUG led a general strike of trade unions to protest against the rising prices of rice and sugar, the general strike could be staged because it was well prepared by the strong and unified leading organizations of the movement. It was thus impossible for state enterprise unions to immediately call a general strike during the political crisis days, although they claimed they would hold one. The political conditions in January 1976 and May 1992 were also different, hence the difference in the transaction costs, of organizing a general strike. Under the full democratic climate in early 1976, the risk of being punished, if the strike failed, was much less than in May, 1992, when the military dominated the government.

In addition, trade unions in the private sector, in 1992, were fragmented under the leadership of various organizations. The area-based trade unions were not strong enough to lead a general strike. Another important factor was that some of the national labour congresses obviously supported the NPKC, while the rest were not active in the movement against the NPKC. As for the state enterprise unions, since 1976 the workers had never staged a strike to demand for the broad social objectives beyond their own particular interests. It was doubtful whether the unions could stage the general strike to protest against the NPKC.

As trade unions could not use their most effective weapon of strike to put pressure on the state, they thus could not lead the political movement during the May 1992 crisis. The groups that led the movement

were thus the people who had more resources than the workers in terms of time, social status, organizational skill, and ability to communicate with the mass media.

The spearhead of the May democratic movement consisted of three groups. The first one was the opposition political parties led by Chamlong Srimueng from the Palang Dham Party, with strong support from the New Aspiration Party. The second group was the NGO activists led by the Campaign for Popular Democracy. The third group was the student activists led by the Student Federation of Thailand. The workers led by the trade union groups, the SERC, and the labour federations were, however, the supportive elements, rather than the leading forces of the May democratic movement.

5.3 Organisations of Workers' Collective Action in the Post- May 1992 Period

After the May events in 1992, the democratic government did not restore the union rights of the state enterprise workers until 2000. However, the SERC remained the most important coordination centre of the state enterprise employee association. The state enterprise employees were just allowed to form unions again on April 8, 2000, when the new State Enterprise Labour Relations Act had been promulgated. Although the new Act allows state enterprise employees to form unions, the unions are more strictly controlled by this Act. A state enterprise is permitted to have only one union, which must have at least 25 percent of the total employees as its members. A state enterprise union is not allowed to affiliate to any national labour congress. Only state enterprise labour federation unions, with at least 10 unions as its members, could join a labour congress.

By 2000, the formal union organisations that have been registered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare consisted of four categories: state enterprise union, private enterprise labour union, labour union federation, and labour union congress (see table 30).

Table 30: Number of Registered Labour Organisations and Employer Organisations in the Whole Kingdom, 2000.

Type of Organisation	Number of Organisations
State Enterprise Labour Union	44
Private Enterprise Labour Union	1,084
Labour Union Federation	19
Labour Union Congress	9
Employer Association	226
Employer Association Federation	3
Employer Council	10

Source: Labour Studies of Planning Division, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

At national level, there are the further conflicts and competition among the leaders of the national labour congresses. Between 1991 to 2002, the number of national labour congresses increased from five to nine. The establishment of the four new national labour congresses: NLC, NPET, CTL, and LCLT (see table 31), was a consequence of the conflicts among the leaders of the labour congresses. When the conflicts increased, the union leaders withdrew from their congresses and formed new ones: the NPET split off from the NCTL, the CTL split off from the TTUC, and the LCLT split off from the LCT. Among the nine labour congresses, only two organizations, the LCT and the TTUC, joined the trade union groups and the NGOs in the labour campaigns.

Table 31: Newly Established National Labour Congresses from 1991-2002

Name	Date of Registration
National Labour Congress(NLC)	June 12, 1991
National Congress of Private Employees of Thailand (NPET)	September 11, 1993
Confederation Thai Labour (CTL)	October 29, 1993
Labour Congress Centre for Labour Union of Thailand (LCLT)	January 5, 2000

Source: Labour Studies of Planning Division, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

5.3.1 The Decline of the Area-Based Trade Union Groups

One of the important changes in the organizations of union actors in the post- 1992 period was the decline of the area-based trade union groups, which used to be the coordinating center of the trade union movement during 1989-1992. In the public sector the most powerful organisation of state enterprise employees remains the State Enterprise Workers' Relations Confederation Union (SERC). But cooperation between the SERC and the area-based trade union groups in the private sector is rare in the labour campaigns.

In the private sector, the area- based union groups continued their functions as the centre of trade unions within the same industrial areas or the same industrial communities. Several new trade union groups have been formed (see table 32). However, coordination of the area-based union groups across industrial area, which used to strengthen the power of trade unions in 1988- 1990, has no longer existed in the labour campaigns after 1992. Although trade union groups in three main industrial areas: Omnoi-Omyai, Phrapradang, and Rangsit, played an active role in serving the benefits of their members in their own areas, they could not form coordinating centres across industrial areas to lead the labour campaigns in the post- 1992 period.

Table 32: The Area- Based Union Groups in 2000

Name of Union Group	Year of Establishment
1. Rangsit and Nearby	1976
2. Eastern Region	1976
3. Berla Region	1981
4. Phrapradang- Suksawadi and Rasburana	1984
5. Omnoi-Omyai	1987
6. Nawanakorn	1988
7. Phuket Province	1994
8. Saraburi Province	1998
9. Central Region and Bangna-Trad	1999

Source: Bundit Thanachaisethavut 2000: 1997-205

The decline of the coordinating centre of trade union groups across industrial areas was associated with the decline of the Phrapradang Trade Union Group in 1993. During 1988-1990, they played a key role in linking the other two trade union groups in Omnoi-Omyai and Rangsit as

well as the SERC to cooperate as the “Coordinating Group of Trade Unions (CGTU)”. The CGTU led a number of labour campaigns to demand minimum wage increases, abrogation of short-term employment contract, and the introduction of Social Security Law.

However, in 1993, the Phrapradang Trade Union Group became weakened by the deteriorating industrial relations situation in the Phrapradang industrial areas. A number of union leaders had resigned or had been dismissed from work as a result of conflicts with their employers*. These people were from the active unions, including the Thailand Steel and Metal Workers’ Industrial Union, the Songserm Thai Textile Union, and the Metro Textile Union. In addition, the Thai Durable Textile (Thai kieng) Union was weakened by the lay-off problems as the employer employed new high-technology machines to replace workers in the production process. The other most important factor was the collapse of the Aporn Thai Textile Industrial Union, since 85 percent of the union’s members were dismissed in October, 1993, after the workers had gone on strike (*Labour Review* November 1993: 19).

All the above mentioned unions were the core of the Phrapradang Trade Union Group. The decline of these unions had thus weakened the Phrapradang Trade Union Group and its potential to further develop the Coordinating Group of Trade Unions, hence the decline of co-operation of trade unions across industrial areas.

5.3.2 Development of Cooperation between the Trade Unions and the Labour NGOs

Close co-operation between trade unions and the NGOs that began in the late 1980s has further developed in the 1990s. In addition, the trade unions-academic alliance was also formed in the labour campaigns on occupational safety and health (OSH) issues. The NGO and academic activists who participated in the OSH issues have offered themselves as advisors of trade unions and also occasionally act as the leaders of the labour campaigns.

The formation of the trade unions- NGOs alliance since the late 1980s led to the close co-operation between the two partners in the labour campaigns of the post-1990 period. In addition, there have been also

* An exception was Suchin Petroad, a prominent leader of the Phrapradang Trade Union Group and the Thailand Steel and Metal Workers’ Industrial Union, who voluntarily resigned from work to run his family’s business.

some contributions from academics and experts who have become increasingly active in social activities. A shift in unions' concentration on wage demands, which are their immediate interests, to the non-wage issues, mostly are long-term benefits relating to the social welfare scheme, in the post- 1990 period, which were much influenced by the NGOs and academics who worked closely with trade unions in the organising of the labour campaigns to demand for non- wage benefits.

Development of the cooperation between trade unions and labour NGOs in the 1990s included 2 important events. First, there was an expansion of NGOs' activities on labour issues from the Omnoi-Omyai to other industrial areas in Rangsit and Lumphun Province. The other important event was a formation of the Labour- NGOs Network, which facilitated the close co-operation among the labour NGOs.

In late 1987, Somyos Peugsagasemsuk, the then Chief of the UCL Section of Promoting Labour Rights, resigned from the UCL and began to work with the Young Workers Groups or Young Christian Workers (YCW). Somyos employed the same labour organising strategy as the UCL used in the Omnoi-Omyai, by emphasizing labour law training programmes, to organise new trade unions in several textile factories in the Rangsit industrial area*. In 1991, Somyos could form another new labour- NGO, the Center for Labour Information Service and Training (CLIST). The CLIST was originally formed to provide information on AIDS to workers in small- and medium- scale factories, but later has expanded its' activities to cover broad issues of labour and union organising programmes.

In another important event, the UCL closed the Section of Promoting Labour Rights in Omnoi-Omyai in 1995 and began to operate a new labour project working with the factory workers in the Northern Industrial Estate, Lumphun Province. As a result, the Friends of Women Foundation remains the only one NGO working with the workers in Omnoi-Omyai. This development was caused by a change of the UCL' policy to emphasize labour rights issues in the rural provinces, where most industrial workers were unorganised, and the employers often violated the basic workers' rights according to the labour laws. In Lumphun, the UCL still used the labour law training programmes to organise the workers. However, according to some difficult conditions in unionization, the UCL did not emphasize their activities on union organisations, but tried to involve workers with social activities that

* Interview with Somyos Peugsagasemsuk on August 8, 2001

would benefit both the workers and community. Some of the activities were campaigns on environmental conservation and organising saving groups of the workers and other community's members*.

Apart from expansion activities of individual NGOs, there was also a development of cooperation among these NGOs. This development was encouraged by the NGO- Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD), a national umbrella organisation of more than 200 active NGOs. The NGO-CORD was established in December, 1985, with the main objectives to promote cordial relationships and collaborative activities among NGOs into a coherent movement, and to promote coordination of joint activities between NGOs and government offices and people's organisations for rural development. (Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontorn 1992: 7). Despite its original name, with a rural focus, the NGO- CORD became a national coordinating organisation of NGOs working in both rural and urban sectors. Subsequently, the NGO-CORD dropped the word rural in its name in 1994, hence NGO-Coordinating Committee on Development(NGO-COD).

In 1992, several NGOs handling the labour issues were approached by the NGO-COD to form themselves into a network and joined the social development activities with other networks of the NGO-COD's members**. Consequently, the Labour- NGOs Network was formed in 1992 by five NGOs: Friends of Women Foundation, Union for Civil Liberty, Arom Pongpangan Foundation, Young Workers' Group, and the Center for Labour Information Service and Training. This Labour- NGOs Network also helped to strengthen the role of the labour NGOs in the trade union movement.

5.4 The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Labour and Trade Unions

A largely unexpected financial crisis in mid- 1997 is another important factor affecting the labour and trade unions in the late 1990s. Layoffs in many private companies, as a result of economic recession,

* Interviewed with Priroj Polpech, the Director of the UCL on November 7, 2001.

** According to different types of activity, there are 11 networks of the NGO-COD members: labour; Aids; human rights; public health and consumers; protection; slum; alternative agriculture; women; natural resources and environment; children; hill tribes; and human resources and development work support (Wipaphan Korketkachorn and Suntaree Kiatiprajak 1997: 2-3).

and the implementation of privatisation in the public sector, stimulated by the government's urgent need of foreign capital to improve the financial position of the country, made job security become a more important issue for the workers and trade unions than the wage increases. In addition, factory closures as a consequence of reduction in production undermined the bargaining power of trade unions in the private sector because a number of trade unions collapsed after a large number of the unions' members were laid off. Under these economic circumstances, the unions need to emphasize their priority demands on the welfare insurance and job security rather than the wage issues.

Until 1995, the Thai Economy had performed very well as economic growth in 1991-1995 had been 11.9-15.3 percent (see table 33). The basis of the boom involved major investment in manufacturing and infrastructure. Major investments had to be made in telecommunications and electric power. The growth in demand of funds for investment coincided with the decision of the Bank of Thailand to liberalize its financial system, particularly, in its relationship to the rest of the world. There were two important milestones in this liberalization of the foreign exchange system. The first was Thailand's acceptance of the obligations under Article VIII of the International Monetary Fund in 1990. The second was the opening of the Bangkok International Banking Facility (BIBF) in 1993, designed to make Bangkok a center for financial services by encouraging foreign financial institutions to set up operations in Thailand. This financial liberalization at a time when the country was growing rapidly and having major investment requirement fueled an investment boom, and latter an asset price bubble, which grew out of control (Ammar and Orapin 1998: 3).

Table 33: Economic Growth Rates in Thailand, 1991-2000

Year	GDP at Constant 1988 Price (%)			GDP at Current Price (% Change)
	Total	Agriculture	Non-agriculture	
1991	8.5	6.5	8.8	14.7
1992	8.1	6.0	8.4	12.8
1993	8.3	-1.9	9.8	11.9
1994	8.9	5.3	9.4	14.5
1995	8.8	2.5	9.7	15.3
1996	5.5	3.8	5.7	9.7
1997	-1.4	-0.7	-1.5	2.5
1998	-10.8	-3.1	-11.7	-2.4
1999	4.2	2.6	4.4	-0.3
2000	4.4	2.7	4.6	6.2

Source: Bank of Thailand

Since the late 1980s, with the economic rapid growth rate, there was a shortage of office and residential space, particularly, in Bangkok. With rapidly rising prices, property placed as collateral could be used to raise more loans, whose proceeds could in turn be used to purchase yet more property, fueling asset price rises even further. The bubble thus arose in large part out of the private sector, while there were major policy and regulatory failures. The fault was that the Bank of Thailand has liberalized the financial regime with strict prudential measures and failed to take firm action when it was needed (Rangsarn Thanapornphan 1999: 69-78).

By 1996, the export growth rate had sunk to low level as a result of the rise in real effective exchange rate of the Thai Baht. As the economy depended much on the export sector, without a high growth rate in export, there could not be a growth of the economy. The economic situation went from bad to worse in late 1996, as waves of attacks had been made against the Baht by foreign speculators. Finally, the Baht has been put on a managing float since July 2, 1997. The Baht value then sharply deteriorated after it was floated (see table 34). The deterioration in the economy began seriously to take affect on employment. In the public sector, the economic crisis also stimulated the government policies on privatisation.

Table 34: Export Values and Exchange Rate, 1994- 2000

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Exports (US\$: billion)	44.7	55.7	54.7	56.7	52.9	56.8	67.9
(% change)	(22.5)	(24.8)	(-1.9)	(3.8)	(-6.8)	(7.4)	(19.6)
Exchange Rate							
Baht : US\$ (Exchange Equalization Fund)	25.15	24.92	25.34	31.37	41.37	37.84	40.16

Source: Bank of Thailand

Note : 1 Preliminary figures

2 Since July 1997, the figures have been represented by average inter- bank exchange rate

5.4.1 Unemployment Problems after Economic Crisis

The first obvious impact of the economic crisis on workers is the layoff problem in the private sector. Official statistics from the National Statistic Office has shown that the rate of unemployment increased from about 1.5 percent of labour force during 1996-1997 to more than 4 percent in 1998-1999, and 3.6 percent in 2000 (see table 35). The increasing rate of unemployment was caused by the closing down of

manufacturing enterprises, finance and banking companies. The number of terminated employees, as a result of reduction of production and establishment-closure, drastically increased during 1997-1998 (see table 36). However, figures from the Social Security Office indicated that the number of insured persons reduced in 1998-1999 while the number of the registered establishments increased constantly (see table 37).

Table 35: Unemployment Rate 1996-2000

unit: thousand

Year	Labour Force	Unemployed Persons	Unemployed Rate
1996	32,324	498	1.54
1997	32,780	495	1.51
1998	32,409	1,413	4.36
1999	32,718	1,370	4.19
2000	33,252	1,199	3.61

Source : Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, *Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1996-2000*

Table 36: Number of Terminated Employees Caused by Termination

Cause of Termination	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total	5,015	41,927	51,960	20,886	15,646
Reduction of Production	1,222	11,296	20,205	8,610	3,004
Temporary Closure	245	3,838	2,659	1,008	1,504
Closure	3,240	12,660	17,458	4,891	7,230
Others	308	14,133	11,638	6,377	3,908

Source : Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, *Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1996-2000*

Table 37: Number of Establishments and Insured Persons Registered with the Social Security Office

Year	Establishments	Insured Persons (million)
1991	30,255	2.93
1992	30,949	3.87
1993	55,623	4.62
1994	65,181	4.97
1995	73,604	5.18
1996	82,582	5.59
1997	90,656	5.96
1998	93,093	5.92
1999	100,360	5.54
2000	107,228	5.84

Source: Technical Studies and Planning Division, Social Security Office

While the workers are suffering from the increasing unemployment problems, the unemployment scheme, according to the Social Security Act, has not been introduced. Although the 1990 Social Security Act prescribed the establishment of an unemployment insurance, it does not mandate a specific date for implementation. After the economic crisis in 1997, the government amended the Act in 1999 and stalled the implementation of unemployment insurance, citing budget problems due to economic recession, an unwillingness of employers and employees to contribute 5 % of wages, and incomplete research in the area of implementation (see table 36). In addition, since the economic crisis in 1997, the Social Security Office has lightened the burden of the government by reducing the government contribution to less than that of the other parties for the child allowance and old age schemes.

Table 38: Benefits and Contribution According to the Social Security Act BE 2542 (1999)

Type of Benefit	Benefit Start	Contribution Rates
Injury or Sickness	June 1991	- From March 1991-November 1988, employers, employees, and the government each had to pay 1.5% of wages - From December 1998, each party has to pay 1% of wages
Maternity	October 1991	The same as injury and sickness benefits
Invalidity	June 1991	The same as injury and sickness benefits
Death	April 1991	The same as injury and sickness benefits
Child allowances	December 1998	- From December 1998-December 1999, each party had to pay 1% of wages. - From January 2000, employer and employee each has to pay 2 % of wages, the government has to pay 1% of wages.
Old-age Pension	- Lump sum pension starts in September 1996 - Monthly pension will start in September 2011	The same as Child allowances
Unemployment	After Royal Decree (not available yet)	Maximum rate of 5%

Source: Social Security Office, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

5.4.2 Wage Stagnation and the New Structure of the Minimum Wage System

Wage stagnation is another impact of the economic crisis on labour. Minimum wage rates were stagnated in 1997, 1998, 1999, and in

2000, the minimum wage rates throughout the country increased only 3 Baht (see table 37). Although the minimum wage rates were stagnated or increased very little, trade unions did not take strong actions to pressure the government or the Wage Committee as they had done in the past. The economic recession made job security becoming a more important issue than wage increase. As the workers feared of job-loss, trade unions could not use the wage increase to mobilise workers' collective action.

Table 39: Proclaimed Minimum Daily Wage Rates, 1994-2000

unit: Baht

In Use	Zone 1		Zone 2		Zone 3	
	Wage Rate	Change %	Wage Rate	Change %	Wage Rate	Change %
April 1, 1993	125	8.7	110	2.8	102	8.5
April 1, 1994	132	5.6	116	5.5	108	5.9
October 1, 1994	135	2.6	118	1.7	110	1.9
July 1, 1995	145	7.4	126	6.8	118	7.3
October 1, 1996	157	8.3	137	8.7	128	8.5
January 1, 1998	162	3.2	140	2.2	130	1.6
January 1, 2000	165	1.9	143	2.1	133	2.3

Source: Wage Committee Office, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

Notes: 1 Zone 1 includes Bangkok, Samut Prakarn, Samut Sakorn, Nontaburi, Pathum Thani, Nakorn Pathom and Phuket.

2 Zone 2 includes Ranong, Phang-nga, Saraburi, Chonburi, Nakorn Ratchasima, and Chiang Mai.

3 Zone 3 includes the remaining 63 Provinces.

Even if there was no constraint from the economic crisis, the minimum wages in Thailand are getting more difficult to increase to a high rate because of the international competition on the labour costs of the export production. Technology improvements in transportation and communication in the past decades led to the rapid increase in the numbers of the multinational corporations (MNCs). These MNCs moved their production from the high-labour cost countries to take advantage of lower wages and growing markets in other countries. In Thailand, the active role of trade unions in demanding wage increases and welfare improvement during the years of economic boom has lifted up the wages and welfare standards of the industrial workers. Compared to other developing countries, particularly to China and other South-East Asian countries, the labour costs in Thailand are not relatively low. As a result, trade unions have to face more difficulties in demanding increases in the minimum wages.

After the economic crisis, there has been also a change in the process of the minimum wage determination. From 1999, there has been a significant change in the process of national minimum wage. According to the new Labour Protection act B.E. 2541(1998), the Wage Committee have the power to appoint sub- committee of provincial minimum wage rates in order to propose the rates of minimum wage in their provinces to the central Wage Committee for the minimum wage rates. The sub-committee is also a tripartite body consisting of representatives from the employer, employee and government sides. This development resulted in decentralization of the power of the central Wage Committee in determining the national minimum wage rates.

As trade unions are concentrated in Bangkok and surrounding provinces, workers in other provinces have no unions or have weak unions. Consequently, employee representatives in the sub-committee of provincial minimum wage rates in many areas were the persons dominated by the employers. However, there are also some provinces where trade unions are strong and actively defended the minimum wage increases for the employees in their provinces. In early 2000, the sub-committee of 44 provinces out of 67 suggested the Wage Committee maintain the minimum wage rates of 1998, while only 4 provincial sub-committees demanded increased minimum wages at 3-10 Baht (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 2000 a: 3).

The current minimum wage rates determined by the Wage Committee under the new system were first promulgated in December 2001, and have been effective from January 2002. It appears that in only 6 provinces, where employee representatives actively negotiated with the employee representatives in the sub-committee^{*}, the minimum wage rates are increased while those of the other 70 provinces have been stagnated (see table 40).

* These 6 provinces are also under a new system of the "Chief Executive Officer(CEO) where the governors of these provinces have more executive power to make decision in the administrative policies of their provinces than in the traditional system.

Table 40: New Minimum Wage Rates from January 1, 2002

Unit: Baht

Province	F o r m e r Rate	New Rate	Amount of Increase
Phuket	165	168	3
Bangkok, Samut Prakarn, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Nakorn Pathom and Samut Sakorn	165	165	-
Chon buri	143	146	-
Chieng Mai, Nakorn Ratchasima, Phangna, Ranong and Sara Buri	143	143	3
Ang Thong	133	138	5
Chachoengsaw	133	137	4
Narathivat and Sing Buri	133	135	2
The rest 59 provinces	133	133	-

Source: Wage Committee Office, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

The new structure of the minimum wage system has not only decentralized the power of the Wage Committee but also undermined the role of the national labour congresses in leading the national union movement for wage increase. The difficulty of increasing minimum wage amidst the economic crisis and the restructuring of the minimum wage system have reduced the significance of the minimum wage issue as the most important incentive for mobilising the workers' collective action. Consequently, the unions have shifted their priority to other non- wage demands that are more possible to achieve.

5.5 The Labour Campaigns on the Non-Wage Demands

After the May 1992 events, the major labour campaigns focused on the labour issues of the workers in the private sector. However, the trade unions in the private enterprises have not been the major initiators or driven forces of those labour campaigns, but the collective action came under the leaders of the coalitions between the trade unions and their alliances. The state enterprise employee associations kept a low profile in organising collective action. The only important labour campaign launched by the SERC was the anti-privatisation in 1999, in which the SERC did not use the same strategy as they had done in 1988-1990.

The following study focussed on the roles of trade unions in three major labour campaigns, which indicated the new characteristics of the trade union movement in the post- 1992 period.

5.5.1 The women workers' rights campaign

5.5.2 The OSH campaign

5.5.3 The anti-privatisation campaign

5.5.1 The Labour Campaign on Women Workers Rights

Many studies of the First World trade unionism have argued about the lack of participation by women in trade unions due to certain structural features, such as male domination in unions, the fact that women are employed in industries which are difficult to organize, the double burden which implies that women do not have time for union activities or the gender socialization that reinforces women's roles as mother and wife. However, Chhachhi and Pittin argue that the feminist theorizing on women workers has been challenged by women's actions in the Third World. Women in developing countries have responded to pressure created by changed economic conditions, and have initiated or joined in actions at various levels to support themselves and their families (Chhachhi and Pittin 1999: 75).

In Thailand, women workers have been the most important power base of the Thai trade union movement since the mid- 1970s. Nevertheless, prior to the early 1990s, trade unions never carried out any campaign on the particular interests of women. The main issues of the labour campaigns in the past were the issues of common benefits of the working class, such as wage, fair employment contract, and social security system. As men dominated the decision making position of trade unions in all levels, a specific issue on women workers' benefits was hardly considered by trade union leaders. However, the situation has changed since the early 1990s, when gender issues were promoted by both international and domestic organisations.

- The Status of Women in the Thai Trade Union Movement

The development that has significant implications for the status and role of women in the trade union movement is the rapid incorporation of women into the industrial labour forces. There had been a rapid increase in the number of women working in the export-oriented manufacturing sector in which the proportion of women in the first half of the 1990s was more than 50 percent of the total employees in workplaces. However,

from 1996, when there was a slowdown in economic growth, the proportion of women workers decreased to less than 50 percent (see table 41). This phenomenon reflected the fact that more women were dismissed than men during the economic crisis in Thailand.

Table 41: Number of Women Workers in Workplaces, 1992-2000

Year	Total Labour	Women Workers	Proportion of Women (%)
1992	4,413,780	2,770,090	62.8
1993	4,911,787	2,550,043	51.9
1994	5,920,350	3,126,879	52.8
1995	5,920,350	3,589,422	53.6
1996	7,249,952	3,317,869	45.8
1997	7,608,227	3,486,824	45.8
1998	4,381,248	2,082,783	47.5
1999	8,134,644	3,881,317	47.7
2000	8,062,338	3,829,770	47.5

Source: Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

A large proportion of women in the industrial labour force, particularly in the textile industry, provided the increased role of women in the trade union movement. Since 1974, textile workers played a significant role in the campaigns for national minimum wage increases and other labour issues. Nevertheless, the gender divide has manifested in the ranks of the trade union movement in which men dominated the decision-making positions of trade unions in all levels. There is no official statistic of proportions of male and female in the committee members of labour organisations. However, a recent survey by the Arom Pongpangan Foundation in 1998 showed that males heavily dominated trade unions, in executive positions (see table 42).

Among all labour organisations surveyed in 1998 there was only one labour union federation and one area-based trade union in which women outnumbered men in the committee members. These two labour organisations are the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Unions of Thailand, and the Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 1999: 54-55). There is an interesting fact that these two organisations usually play an important role in the trade union movement.

Table 42: Number of Committee Members of Labour Organisations by Sex in 1998

Type of Organisation	Number of Surveyed Organisations	Proportion of Committee Members (%)		
		Total Number (100%)	Male	Female
National Labour Congress	8	219	71.69	28.31
Labour Union Federation	11	169	81.66	18.34
State Enterprise Employee Association	32	724	86.05	13.95
Area-based Union Group	6	107	68.23	31.77

Source: Arom Pongpangan Foundation, cited in (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 1998: 41)

Note: 1 With the exception of the state enterprise employee associations, the numbers of the surveyed organisations were 100% of the total number of organisations.

2 The six area-based trade union groups include three trade union groups in three major industrial areas (Omnoi-Omyai, Phrapadang, and Rangsit), the Berla Industry Union Group, the Saraburi Workers Union Group and the Central and Bangna-trad Union Group.

- **The Influence of the International Organisations on the Women Workers' Rights Campaign**

Since 1975, promoting the rights and status of women has been accepted as an international debatable issue by the United Nations (UN). From 1975, world conferences on women have been organised by the UN every five years. However, Thai women unionists had never participated in such conferences until 1995. In the early 1990s, some international organisations working on women and labour issues in the Asian Region played important role in linking activities of Thai NGOs and trade unions with the international women's movement. Relations between international women's organisations and trade unions were created through local women and labour NGOs, particularly, the Friends of Women Foundation (FOW). For instance, Wilauwan Tia, a prominent woman leader from Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group, was supported by

the Committee for Asian Women (CAW), through the FOW, to attend an international seminar on “Women Workers and Trade Unions”, on November 11-18, 1990, in Tokyo.

In the early 1990s, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), a German foundation that granted trade unions for educational activities in many Asian countries also expanded its activities on women’s issues in Thailand. In the late 1992, the first organisation of woman- trade unionist, the Women Workers’ Unity Group (กลุ่มบูรณาการสตรีแรงงาน-WWUG), was formed amidst the labour campaign for 90 days maternity leave. This organisation was not initiated by the women workers themselves, but was encouraged and supported by the FES. In September 1992, the Director of the Bangkok- Office FES invited 3 woman leaders from trade unions, Arunee Srito, the President of the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation of Thailand, Wanpen Premkaew, the President of the Thailand Metal Workers’ Federation, and Supensri Peungkongsung, a leader of the Signatics Electronic Factory Union, to discuss the formation of a special organisation for women workers’ affairs*. The discussion led to the founding of the WWUG under the facilitation of the FES. In addition, the FES also formed its own Women’s Project in 1995. The WWUG functions as a networking of women trade unionists across all levels of labour organisations and industrial areas.

The first Asia-Pacific Symposium of NGOs on Women in Development was organised in Manila, Philippines, from November 16 to 20, 1993. It was a regional preparatory activity leading to the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing on August 30- September 15, 1995. In the Labour Rights Workshop organised by the Committee for Asian Women and the Asian Migration Centre, one of the major issues indicated that the lack of women’s involvement in the decision making processes and the lack of gender perspective in the labour movement have slowed down the progress of women’s struggle for the attainment of their rights (*Asian Women Workers Newsletter*, January 1994: 10). Statement of the Thai Grassroots Women’s Forum in the conference at Beijing “Women labourers must be entitled to participate in the labour policy making process as carried out by labour organisation and pertinent government offices” (*Thai Development*, No. 29, 1995: 72).

* Interview with Wanpen Premkaew and Supensri Peungkongsung by Bundit Thanachaisethavudh, cited in Bundit Thanachaisethavudh 2542: 60.

Apart from NGOs, international labour organisations also facilitated the unions' activities on women's issues. From 1996-1999, the ILO operated a project on "Workers' Education Assistance to Strengthen Trade Union Action on Women Workers" and "Child Labour in Selected South East Asian Countries". The projects were carried out in Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia. In Thailand, four national labour congresses: LCT, TTUC, NCTL, and National Congress of Private Employees of Thailand (NPET) participated in the project. In addition, the International Confederation of Free Trade Union- Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU-APRO) granted the LCT educational programs with a condition that at least 30% of participants must be women workers (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 1999: 45-46). Both the ILO and the ICFTU-APRO granted the LCT and TTUC for their activities on the International Women's Day celebration every March 8.

Promotion of women's status and rights in the trade union movement by both international and domestic enhanced unions' concerns on the importance of women workers' particular interests. The union priority demands, which traditionally focused on the common benefits of general workers, began to place more emphasis on women's interest issues.

- The Campaign for 90- Days Maternity Leave

The campaign to demand 90 days maternity leave was the first labour campaign that related particularly to the women workers' benefits. The campaign started in 1991 during the authoritarian regime of the Anand Panyarachun government. An alliance was formed between trade unions and NGOs concerned with women, children, and labour issues. A campaign was launched to demand that the government amend the law relevant to the entitlement of female employees to have 90 days maternity leave with full pay. However, on November 19, 1991, the cabinet only approved such rights to female government officials, but refused to give the same rights to female employees in the private sector. The reason was given that the 90 days maternity leave would result in increasing cost of production in private industries and thus would affect employment and economic growth as a whole (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 1999: 130).

The government discrimination policy led to a lengthy campaign to call for an extension to maternity leave entitlements to women workers in the private sector. The campaign was launched by a coalition consisting of trade unions, and NGOs on labour, women and children, and took one year from March, 1992, to March, 1993.

Apart from the campaign for an enactment of the Social Security Act in 1990, the campaign for 90 days maternity rights was another labour campaign that could mobilise very wide support from labour and non-labour organisations. It was evident that the campaign organisations were a social network of trade unions and NGOs. At a period of high mobilization in early 1993, an ad hoc working committee, the Campaigning Committee for Maternity Rights (CCMR), was formed in February. The President of the CCMR was Aruni Srito, who was also the President of the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand, while the Coordinator was Supawadi Petcharat from a university-based NGO, Thammasat University's Women's Development Consortium in Thailand.

The major forms of the campaign were lobbying members of the government and Parliament, and organised public rallies and seminars. The NGOs had organized a number of seminars to discuss and supported the campaign, including an international workers' forum in celebrate the People's Plan for the 21st century (PP21), which included the 90 days maternity leave to the demands made by the forum (Jadet Chouwilai 1993: 33).

There were sixteen organisations, including trade unions, NGOs, and university organisations, that had signed their names to support the workers' proposal demanding the government revise the labour laws so that women workers in the private sector could appreciate the 90 days maternity leave (*Labour Review* March 1993: 3). The list of these 16 organisations showed the broad alliance of trade unions and non-union organisations, including women groups, NGOs, and student groups.

1. Labour Congress of Thailand
2. Thai Trade Union of Thailand
3. Thailand Council of Industrial Labour
4. State Enterprise Workers' Relation Confederation
5. Federation of Bank and Financial Workers' Unions of Thailand
6. Paper and Printing Federation of Thailand
7. Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand
8. Thailand Metal Workers' Federation
9. Women Workers' Groups of Phrapradaeng, Rangsit, and Omnoi-Omyai
10. Friends of Women Foundation
11. Arom Pongpangan foundation
12. Phaisarn Thawatchainan Foundation
13. Union for Civil Liberty

14. Project for Labour Information Service and Training
15. Thammasat University's Women Development Consortium in Thailand
16. Ramkhamhang University Student's Group of Workers' Health

On April 27, 1993, the Cabinet authorised the Interior Minister to amend the labour law so that the female workers in the private sector would have the 90 days with full pay. According to the new law, the workers would be paid by their employees for the first 45 days and the workers had to claim their wages from the Social Security Fund for the remaining 45 days. In 1993, the Social Security Fund was effective only in the establishments with at least ten employees, the new law had thus benefited only women workers working in firms with at least ten employees, that registered with the Social Security Office.

In fact, the campaigning committee wanted the 90 days maternity leave with full pay to be enforced by the Labour Protection Laws, which would be effective for every woman worker, even if she worked in a workplace with only one worker. Although the campaign was initially aimed at providing maternity leave benefits for all women workers, the Coalition Committee that responded for the campaign decided to stop their actions because they were satisfied with what they had achieved (Jadet Chaowilai 1993: 34).

The success of the labour campaign on women workers' rights, particularly the 90 days maternity leave, did not depend upon only the collective action of trade unions but the ability of trade unions to seek support from the non-labour organisations. As women workers' rights are both the labour and women issues, it provided an opportunity for trade unions to gain support from the women NGOs and those who sympathized with women rights movement.

5.5.2 The Occupational Safety and Health Campaign

Following the successful campaign for 90 days maternity leave in early 1993, was another important labour campaign on the occupational safety and health (OSH) issues. This lengthy campaign has been carried out from 1993 up to the present. The OSH campaign indicated a new stage of the Thai trade union movement in which the workers and labour NGOs made an alliance with the peasant organization and academics. The remarkable character of the OSH campaign is that it created a new social network of organizations of social movement, consisting of trade unions, rural poor networks, NGOs and academics.

The OSH campaign is an articulation of two labour agitations, the demand for improvement in the conditions of occupational safety after the Kader fire tragedy and the demand for fair compensation to the occupational patients of the Bangkok Textile Company workers. The former agitation was led by an ad hoc organization consisting of trade unions, NGOs and university academics, while the latter was carried out by a network of the occupational diseases and supported by the Assembly of the Poor and a medical expert.

It was in 1995 that some labour organisations began to form an alliance with peasant organisations again. One of the major issues of the workers' demands in the 1990s was the better standard of occupational safety and health conditions as well as the fair compensation for the workers who suffered industrial sickness. The OSH demands were initiated by the problems of some particular groups of workers who suffered from occupational illness and industrial accidents. However, the demands have been developed to cover the interests of the workers at large. The unions and their alliances began to launch the campaign for the establishment of an independent institute to respond to the occupational safety and health issues.

- The Situation of Occupational Safety and Health Problems in Thailand

The problems of occupational safety and health (OSH) have long been associated with the growth of industrialisation in Thailand. However, the OSH demand was assigned a low priority by the government in the industrial development policies, and trade unions also gave less importance to the OSH issues than other labour rights, such as union rights, fair wage, and fair employment contract. It was in the early 1990s that problems of OSH have attracted the increasing attention of trade unions and the general public. This development was stimulated by two important factors. First, since 1993 there have been a number of serious cases of disasters caused by unsafe working conditions, as well as the worsening situation of industrial sickness caused by occupational-related health hazards. The second factor was that the OSH became significant issues for international labour organisations and local labour NGOs, which strongly encouraged and supported the unions in their demand for an improvement of the OSH standards.

**Table 43: Numbers of Occupational Injuries or Diseases, 1991-2000
(covered by the Workmen's Compensation Fund)**

Year	Total Employees	Adjudication	
		Number of Cases	Percentage
1991	2,751,868	102,273	3.7
1992	3,020,415	131,800	4.4
1993	3,355,805	156,548	4.7
1994	4,250,000	186,053	4.4
1995	4,903,736	216,335	4.4
1996	5,425,422	245,616	4.5
1997	5,825,821	230,376	4.0
1998	5,145,835	186,498	3.6
1999	5,321,827	171,997	3.2
2000	5,417,041	177,569	3.3

Source: Office of the Workmen's Compensation Fund, Social Security Office

The most important factor that caused unionists and labour activists to place the OSH issues as one of their priority demands is the failure of the government, employers, and trade unions to either conform to or enforce legislated health and safety standards. This inability was evidenced by some serious cases of occupational related accidents and illnesses occurring since the early 1990s.

The labour campaign on occupational health and safety was first launched after a fire disaster at the Kader Factory Buildings of a toy-producing company on May 10, 1993. The Kader disaster was a tremendous tragedy in the history of Thai workers as 188 workers died and 481 were injured. In the same year, there was another disaster, the collapse of the Royal Hotel building in Nakorn Rachasima Province on August 13. The collapse killed 137 persons, including hotel customers and workers, and more than 360 persons were injured.

Apart from these accidents, occupational health hazards also became serious problems. In the early 1990s, lung diseases and lead poisoning had been found as common diseases among labourers working in textile and electronic factories. Some of the most well known cases were the stories of the mysterious deaths of 12 workers working in the electronic factories at the Northern Region Industrial Estate, Lumphun

Province*, and the byssinosis patients working in the Bangkok Textile Mill.

- The Formation of the Campaign Committee for Workers' Health and Safety

The first issue of the labour campaign on the OSH to be discussed here is the organisation of the workers' collective action. The labour campaign on the OSH issues was not led by trade unions, either the trade union groups or the national labour congresses, but a coalition of trade unions, NGOs, and academics. This coalition was formed in the campaign for the fair compensation to the families of the Kader workers who died in the fire disaster, and was developed to be an ad hoc committee that led the campaign on the other OSH issues.

The Kader Industrial Thailand Company was located in the Omyai industrial area, Nakorn Pathom Province. Although the Kader Union was an affiliate of the National Free Labour Union Congress (NFLUC), neither the NFLUC, nor other national labour congresses, played an active role in helping the workers and their families after the disaster on May 10, 1992(Lae 1993: 15). Immediately after the accident, an ad hoc committee for assisting the Kader workers was set up by 2 union organisations, the Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group and the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand, in cooperation with some NGOs**.

The ad hoc committee, the Committee for Monitoring the Assistance of the Kader Workers, carried out major tasks to help the Kader workers by dealing with three related parties: the families of the workers, the government agencies and the international organisations. A campaign was also launched by the Committee to demand fair

* The story of the 12 workers was publicized in the Bangkok Post newspaper in 1994. It was believed that those workers were killed by lead poisoning after working in the factories for many years. The Lumphun Industrial Estate was promulgated by the government as an export-processing zone and there was no trade union in the companies located in the Estate. The workers who were sick and died lost their legal rights to claim compensation from their employers because they lacked of knowledge on labour laws and there was no union to help them (Sombat Raksakul 1994: 22-23).

** These NGOs were Friend of Women Foundation, Project for Labour Information Service and Training, Arom Pongpangan Foundation and Union for Labour Liberty.

compensation for the deceased and the injured. The campaign could mobilise wide support from labour organisations at both the domestic and international level. However, among the 7 national labour congresses, only the Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT) joined the campaign.

The campaign was organised during June 1-14, 1993 when 5 representatives of the committee coordinated with the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Union, and Asian Student Association, organised public rallies in Hong Kong, where the Kader parent company, the Kader Holding Company, was located. The Kader owners were asked to pay extra compensation for the deceased's families and the injured.

As a result of the campaign, each family of the deceased was paid 200,000 Baht by the Kader Company. In addition, some education-grants were offered by the Chareon Pokaphan (CP) Group, a major Thai holder of the Kader business, for the children of the deceased until their graduation. However, the more important consequence of the campaign is a development of the Thai trade union movement on the OSH issues after the Kader event. Trade unions began to show more concern on the health and safety problems in the workplaces. In cooperation with NGOs some activists and academics who worked closely with trade unions in the Kader campaign decided to form an ad hoc committee on the OSH issues, the Campaign Committee for Workers' Safety and Health (คณะกรรมการรณรงค์เพื่อสุขภาพและความปลอดภัยของคนงาน- CWSH).

The CWSH was formed on February 27, 1994, to transfer the Kader campaign into a larger issue of improving the occupational health and safety system in Thailand. It comprises representatives from 13 organisations, including trade unions, NGOs, and university-based organisations:

1. Women Workers' Unity Group
2. Thailand Metal Workers' Federation
3. Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Federation of Thailand
4. Federation of Bank and Financial Workers' Unions of Thailand
5. Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand
6. Paper and Printing Federation of Thailand
7. State Enterprise Workers' Relation Confederation
8. Thai Trade Union of Thailand
9. Labour Congress of Thailand
10. Labour NGO Network
11. Byssinosis Patients Group

12. Political Economy Group
13. Ramkhamhaeng University Student's Group of Workers' Health

The Political Economy Group, a member of the CWSH, is an academic group comprised of a number of economic and political scholars from Chulalongkorn University. However, the ones who actively participated in the Kader campaign were Voravidh Charoenloet and Teerarat Karnjanauksorn. It was the first time that university academics had joined the labour campaign, in which they did not only act as advisors of trade unions, but also presented themselves as the active participants in the campaign.

One of the important works that was a success of the CWSH in the campaign on OSH issues is the designation May 10 as National Health and Safety Day. This designation is very important for the labour movement because it is the first time that trade unions could pressure the government to accept a new criteria in determining what is of national significance (Brown 2001: 137).

Traditionally, the state had monopolised the designation of the national significant days in Thailand. All of the national days were Royal or religious-related days. The CWSH launched the campaigns for having May 10, the date of the Kader disaster, designated as the National Health and Safety Day in late 1994. Some important reasons for this demand were to commemorate the victims of the Kader disaster and to encourage the related parties to appreciate the importance of occupational health and safety issues.

The CWSH demand was opposed by several government agencies, claiming that the country already had July 1-5 as National Health and Safety Week. They also argued that the country already has several other national celebration days, in May, of Royal and religious importance. It was thus inappropriate to have May 10, which related to the Kader tragedy, as National Health and Safety Day (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 1997: 57-58). However, after the CWSH had persisted with its' demand for several years, the Cabinet resolution on August 26, 1997, finally approved the designation of May 10 as National Health and Safety Day.

- Alliance of the Workers and the Rural Poor in the OSH Campaign

Another new characteristic of the labour campaigns on the OSH issues is the formation of an alliance between the workers and the rural poor, which emerged outside the trade unions. The mobilising structure of the OSH campaigns comprised four elements. Trade unions are the first element, the NGOs are the second element, the academics are the third element and the fourth element is the rural poor.

In Chapter Three of this study, it is pointed out that alliance between workers and peasants first emerged in 1975, when trade unions initiated close co-operation with the Peasant Federation of Thailand in the peasant campaign to demand the government resolve the peasants' problems. Such alliance was encouraged by the student activists who participated in the peasant movement. However, the close co-operation between workers and peasants ended because of the collapse of peasant organisations after 1976. In addition, organised workers also distanced themselves from other social movements and concentrated more on their own interest issues.

Relations between labour movement and peasant movement appeared again in 1996, when a group of workers involved themselves as a network member of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP). These workers are the members of the Council of Work and Environment Related Patients' Network of Thailand (สภาเครือข่ายกลุ่มผู้ป่วยจากงานและสิ่งแวดล้อมแห่งประเทศไทย- WEPT). The WEPT was formed in February, 1993. It is not a union-based organisation, but has developed from an organisation of the Bangkok Textile Company workers, the Byssinosis Patients Group of Bangkok Textile Mill (BPBT). The BPBT was the first group of workers who acted collectively to demand fair compensation for their illness with byssinosis, a respiratory disorder caused by inhaling cotton dust. The Group was formed in early 1993 under the leadership of a woman union leader, Somboon Srikhamdokkae, the then president of the Bangkok Textile Union. The most important person to assist the workers in forming the Group was Dr. Oraphan Jiramathakorn, an occupational medicine expert who had also provided medical treatment for those workers.

According to the Social Security Act, employees who get occupational related ailments could claim 60 percent of their wage reimbursed from their employers through the Social Security Office's

Compensation Fund. The Bangkok Textile employer, however, tried to evade this responsibility after the ill workers had claimed for their rights by filing a suit against the workers. The employer claimed that the workers' illnesses were not work-related ones, as the Bangkok Textile workplace was well equipped with ventilation and a dust control system and asked the court to order that all workers must be treated only by the doctor assigned by the company. As a result, the Compensation Fund temporarily suspended the compensatory payments to those sick workers from February 10, 1995. The 35 ill workers, including Somboon, then began to fight for their rights by taking the cases to the Labour Court. The workers fielded the suit against the Compensation Fund and finally won the cases in November 1996 (*Labour Review* 1996, Vol. 10, No.3, 22-23).

Since mid- 1993, a network of workers who suffered from occupation- related disease began to spread to other companies in various industrial areas. In September 1993, a new organisation of occupation-related patients was formed when the BTBT transformed into the WEPT. Somboon became the president of the new WEPT. With the help of 2 organisations, the Women Workers' Unity Group and the Friends of Women Foundation, the WEPT has played the key role in the struggle for fair compensation to the occupational-related patients. The WEPT' s members came from various industrial areas, and all of them had fallen ill because of toxic chemicals and unsafe conditions in the workplaces located in Rangsit, Phrapradaeng, Omnoi-Omyai, and Lumphun Industrial Estate. They also included those members of the community affected by the chemical explosions in the incident at Klongtoey Port in Bangkok.

From 1994, conflicts between the BPBT and the Bangkok Textile Company had been intensely fuelled when the news about the sick workers was publicized. On April 1, 1994, the company fired 28 workers, 6 of whom were members of the BPBT. In July 1996, Somboon was dismissed during her sick leave days. She thus turned to work full time for the WEPT.

Since the establishment of the CWSH and the WEPT, the campaigns on OSH issues were led by these two organisations. However, there are some differences between the characteristics of these two organisations. The CWSH comprises trade unions, NGOs, and academics and has unions' members as their base in the campaigns on OSH issues. The WEPT is a non- union organisation, and is included as a network of an important organisation of the rural poor networks, the Assembly of the Poor (AOP), in the late 1990s.

For Somboon, the main reason that the WEPT engaged with the AOP's networks in 1996 was because she felt that trade unions did not show concern for the rights of the occupational-related patients and thus did not place such issues in priority demands of the trade unions*.

The emergence of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP) has been one of the most important events in the development of the social movements in Thailand in the 1990s. The AOP was first founded as a peasant organisation to demand the peasants' rights over resource utilization of land, water and forests. In the mid- 1980s, the government policies to build infrastructure, to speed up industrialization and to clear rural villagers' utilization for commercial reforestation, caused the emergence of rural protests by various people's groups, mostly peasants in the Northeastern and Northern provinces, affected by these policies.

In the early 1990s, these groups of protesters began to form themselves into several organisations. The most important one was the Assembly of Small Scale Farmers of the Northeast, founded in March 1992, and the Northern Farmers Network, founded in early 1994. However, in 1995 there were some conflicts among the leaders of the Assembly of Small Scale Farmers of the Northeast, and a number of the Assembly's members formed a new organisation, the Assembly of the Poor (สมัชชาคนจน- AOP).

The AOP is composed of various groups of people which represent various problems. These groups constitute the AOP' s networks. Although the core of the AOP' s networks are the peasant groups and the main agendas concern the problems relating to land, dams, and forests, the AOP drew in some fishermen, urban poor, and industrial workers groups as its allies. In late 1995, the leaders of the AOP decided to formally establish the AOP as the networks of all types of organisations of the poor. They thus contacted a labour NGO, the Friends of Women Foundation, in order to include some groups of industrial workers who also suffered because of government development policies. Subsequently, the AOP invited labour activists from two organisations, the CHEW and the WEPT, to attend the founding day of the AOP on December 10, 1995, at Thammasat University**. However, only the WEPT was interested in the AOP' s activity and began to involve itself as a member of the AOP' s networks. It was remarked that during the early years of the AOP in

* Interview with Somboon Srikhamdogkae on November 22, 2001.

** Interview with Jadet Chaowilai on November 29, 2001.

1995-1996, most unions ignored the AOP movement in whose campaign the WEPT was participating (Nukul Kokij 1996: 10-11).

By late 1995, the AOP networks comprised 5 groups of people. The first three groups were the rural villagers whose livelihoods have been affected by the dam- construction projects, by government policies on the utilization of land and forest, and by development projects, such as the establishment of an industrial estate in Ubon Ratchathani Province. The other two groups were the urban poor, and the WEPT. In 1997, when there was a large rally of the AOP in Bangkok, the groups of problems raised by the AOP increased from 5 to 7 (see table 44).

Table 44: Groups of Problems in the AOP' s Networks, 1997

Issue	Number of Cases
1. Forest and Land	93
2. Dam Construction	16
3. State Development Project	5
4. Urban Poor (Slum Organisation for Democracy)	8
5. Occupational- Related Patients (WEPT)	1
6. Alternative Agriculture	1
7. Small Fishery	1
Total Cases	125

Source: Praphas Pintobtang 1999: 71

There is no doubt that the NGOs rendered considerable assistance to the AOP. The majority of problem groups networked in the AOP are from the areas where NGOs operated their development programmes for many years. Also the industrial- workers group, the WEPT, was supported by the Friends of Women Foundation to expand their work across factories and unions*. However, the members of the networks had their own ability to organise and to articulate their demands, while the NGO activists and a few academics assisting them played advisory roles, particularly on legal, procedural and documentary matters (Prudhisana Jumbala 1998: 267).

* Interview with Somboon Srikhamdogkae on November 22, 2001.

From March 26- April 23, 1996, the AOP organised the first rally of thousands of its members. The rally was conducted in a special way. The AOP's members encamped outside the Government House to demand redress, legal changes, and the opening up of decision-making processes to people participation on the problem-cases caused by the government policies and projects.

The members of the WEPT were compensated by the Social Security Offices' Fund, according to the 1996 Cabinet's order, after they had joined the AOP encamped-rally. However, the Cabinet order did not cover other occupational- related patients who had not joined the AOP rally. The leaders of the WEPT that learned from this experience that without political pressure, the workers cannot expect to receive fair compensation from the government. When the AOP organised another encamped rally in January 1997, the WEPT thus took other patients who had not received compensations to join the second rally.

The second encamped rally lasted longer than the first one, from January 24- May 2, 1997, with some 10,000 members of the AOP networks. In joining the rally, the WEPT did not only demand for the compensation but expanded its demands to cover the benefits of larger groups of workers. They demanded the government revise legislative and set up an institution for determining and enforcing health and the low industrial hazard standards.

The demand for the establishment of a new institution on occupational health and safety was not pursued solely by the WEPT, but had been initiated by the CWSH since 1995. The main idea was to transfer the state managed Social Security Offices' Workmen's Compensation Fund to the new independent institution, which was managed by five parties, including government officials, employers, employees, specialists or academics, and occupational-related patients (Voravidh Charoenloet 1998: 23).

In March 1997, the Ministry of Labour and Welfare Protection appointed a committee to draft a bill for the establishment of the Institution of Occupational Health, Safety and Environmental Protection in the Workplace (IOHS). The committee consisted of 32 members, including government officials, unions' representatives, medical experts, university academics, WEPT representatives, and some NGO activists.

In June 1997, the draft Bill on the establishment of the IOSH was finalised. However, the Minister of Labour and Welfare Protection

refused to submit the draft Bill to the Cabinet for approval before it would be sent to the House of Representatives (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 200: 65). In addition, after the Chaowalit Yongjaiyut government resigned in October 1997, the new coalition government, led by the Chuan Leekpai, did not support the ideas to set up the IOHS. The CWHS thus needed to seek for another channel to push forwards their demand on the IOHS.

As the 1997 new Constitution stated that 50,000 eligible voters can submit a piece of legislation to the parliament, the workers thus saw a new channel to proceed with a new bill that would facilitate their demands by collecting 50,000 signatures of their supporters to request the Parliament to pass the bill, regardless of the government support. Trade unions began to launch a signature campaign to collect 50,000 signatures of their supporters. On March 15, 1998 a meeting of union organisations, the CHSW, WEPT, Assembly of Thai Labour Councils, and the Coordinating Committee for Worker Movement was held and an ad hoc committee to push forwards with the new Institution was formed. The immediate task of the committee was to collect 50,000 signatures to support the workers-version draft Bill.

The WEPT coordinated with the Assembly of the Poor (AOP) to collect signatures of villagers who were members of the AOP's networks. With strong support from the AOP, the WEPT could collect almost 20,000 signatures of the supporters*. Another person who played a key role in the 50,000 signatures collecting campaign was Dr. Oraphan Mathadilogkul.

On May 10, 1999, the CHSW could submit 53,000 signatures of Bill supporters to Parliament. However, according to the Constitution, all the signatures must be submitted together with the copies of both identity and resident cards of the signatories. The signatures were rejected since it had been found that such documents were not complete. As the utilization of citizen rights in accordance with the new Constitution failed, the campaigning organisations had to seek another channel to achieve their demand. They waited until the new government was formed in early 2001.

On January 6, 2001, the first general election under the new 1997 Constitution was held. During the campaign before the election, the Thai Rak Thai Party included the establishment of the IOSH as one of the PARTY's policies. After the Thai Rak Thai Party won a majority and

* Interview with Somboon Srikhamdogkhae on November 22, 2001.

became the major party to form the government, the CWHS immediately urged the new government to implement the policy on the establishment of the IOHS. Consequently, the Committee for Drafting the IOSH Bill was appointed by the Minister of the Labour and Social Welfare Ministry in April 2001. The workers, thus, has nearly reached the success in their campaign on the IOSH.

- The Success and Limitation of the Trade Unions in the OSH Campaign

The labour campaign on the OSH issues since the early 1990s could achieve some degree of success. The campaign started with the demand for fair compensation to the occupational injured and diseased workers, to the immediate benefits of some groups of workers. This demand is developed to a long-term interest issue for the establishment of the IOSH, which will benefit the workers at large and empower the workers on the OSH problems. The success of the OSH demands could be explained by, at least, two important reasons.

First, the demands on the OSH issues are not strongly opposed by the employers and the government. The OSH issues are not strongly opposed by business and are relatively well supported by the government, compared to the wage demands, because they are seen as mutual benefit issues. Unlike trade union rights, collective bargaining, freedom of association, and other fundamental rights of workers, OSH is presented as an area of mutual interests between workers and employers, and issue free from the confrontation politics of unions. This is because the business, government and trade unions commonly describe OSH as an investment, which will lead to higher labour productivity and efficiency, with fewer causes of absenteeism due to illness, and a lower rate of labour turnover.

From the Marxist perspective, the reason for the introduction of OSH standards by the state, and the establishment of state institute to manage OSH, is political. Firstly, the state is concerned with the social reproduction of the labour force. Acting to preserve the long-term interests of capitalists and the capitalist system as a whole, the state intervenes to ensure that the proletariat is able to reproduce itself and that a pool of exploitable labour is always available. High accident rates and fatalities and poor health conditions threaten to diminish this pool of labour, possibly leading to a labour shortage. Further more, in many countries, the state introduced official minimum standards and set up government agencies to manage OSH issues in response to the working

class struggle against brutal exploitation. Strikes and protest movements stemming from workers' deaths (which often involved powerful community-wide protests in industries like mining) required more effective means of managing this unrest, especially at the local political level (Greenfield 1998: 4).

Another reason is that the OSH demands also gain wide support from many organisations apart from trade unions. The OSH campaign is a popular campaign led by various groups of people rather than the workers' collective action led by the trade unions. In terms of incentive to mobilize workers' collective action, the OSH issues are different from the wage issues. They are not the immediate benefits that could easily attract the workers' attentions. Only some groups of workers and trade unions, which realized the long-term benefits that would improve the quality of their lives, actively participated in the OSH campaign. However, this type of demands could attract the intention of the social activists from the NGOs, academics, and medical experts than the demands for the immediate benefits that affected only some particular groups of workers. Consequently, a coalition is formed by the broad-based organisations across class to lead the campaign on the OSH issues.

When the formation of the coalition between the trade unions and the grassroots labour NGO(WEPT), the rural poor networks(AOP), the labour NGOs, and the academics indicated that the unions gained wide supports from the other groups of social activists, it also reflected the limitations of the trade unions' roles in leading the OSH campaign. The decline of the national centres of trade unions, both the trade union groups and the labour congresses, in the 1990s, led to a weaker private trade union movement than in the previous decades. Trade unions in the 1990s are organisations of the relatively powerless, they cannot derive significant power from their members. They could achieve success in the role as campaigning organisations only when they cultivated alliances with other social movements whose aims overlap with the unions' demands.

But the movement that is led by a coalition has some constraints to be a sustainable movement. When the campaign is over, or in the period of low mobilisation, there is no permanent organisation to continue the aims of the movement. The NGO activists and the academics are not the people who are directly affected by the success or failure of the campaign, they will not carry on the campaign in the long term. The OSH campaign will not be sustainable without the active participation of the workers and trade unions.

5.5.3 The Anti-Privatisation Campaign

In the public sector, job security also becomes a significant issue as a result of the implementation of the government policy on privatisation of state enterprise. From 1990-1996, the government had suspended privatisation policy as partly a consequence of the unions' success in the protests against privatisation in 1988-1990, and also because, during the economic boom, there was no urgent need of the Thai economy for foreign investment. The situation has changed since the country faced economic crisis in 1997.

The privatisation of state enterprises became a significant issue again after the economic crisis in mid- 1997. The immediate need of foreign currency to improve the financial position of the country stimulated the government to carry out the policy on privatisation of state enterprises, in accordance with the economic adjustment programme outlined by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During 1997-1998, the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Bank of Thailand co-signed 8 Letters of Intent (LOI) committing Thailand to the economic adjustment package outlined by the IMF. The LOI indicated the concrete plan on privatisation of state enterprise in which the government intends to implement for the improvement of the financial position of the country. The plan included expenditure restraint and revenue measure, increases in public enterprise prices and cuts in lower-priority investment projects consistent with the World Bank and IMF standards, and seeking private sector participation in the investment programs of selected enterprises including a number of expressway and power-generation projects (LOI, No.1, item 13, 18).

By November 1997, the government claimed to have completed the preliminary work needed to increase the role of the private sector in energy, public utilities, communications, and transport sectors. The majority owned state enterprises, which had already been corporated, would be the first ones to be privatised. The government's stake in the national airline and Bangchak Petroleum Company was intended to be reduced to below 50 percent by the mid- 1998 (LOI, No. 2, item 17). After Chaowalit Yongjaiyut resigned in November 1997, the new government under Chauhan Leekphai, was determined to accelerate privatisation as part of the restructure of the economy by including the Corporatisation Law to expedite the process. On March 10, 1999, the Corporatisation Law, aimed at facilitating the incorporation of state enterprise, was passed by Parliament.

Subsequently, the state enterprise unions began to launch the campaign to react against the Corporatist Law. However, this campaign was organised in a different way from the union protests in the 1988-1990. In terms of their demands, the unions tried to legitimize their action in the eyes of the public. They thus included the issues of the people's interests and the national security aspect in the unions' demands submitted to the government, instead of emphasizing only the particular issues of the state enterprise employees. The demands could be summarized as (*Labour Review* May 1999: 13):

- The government must maintain its ownership over the state enterprises by holding , at least, 70% . Only the remaining 30 % could be sold to foreign investors.
- There must be no increasing in the prices of the public utility services after the enterprises are privatised.
- The employees' welfare and benefits must not be worse than before and the employees will not be dismissed if they are not willing to resign from their jobs.
- The employee representatives must be allowed to participate in the decision- making process of the privatisation.
- The incomes earned from selling of stake must be used for improving the efficiency of those state enterprises, but, should not be used to pay off the government's foreign debts.

On the form of the collective action, the unions did not organise militant actions, such as a strike, to protest against privatisation as they had done in 1988-1990. Instead, they attempted to fight within the category of the 1997 Constitution. The SERC tried to undermine the legitimacy of the Corporatisation Law by claiming that the Law was introduced in contravention of the Constitution.

According to article 76 of the Constitution, the government should support people's participation in the process of policy making of economic, social and political planning, but the Law was, however, legislated without allowing people's participation in the process of promulgation. For another, based on national security concerns, the public utility services were much related to national security and social interests that had to be regulated and monopolised by the government. The SERC thus argued that the Corporatisation Law, which facilitated the incorporation of state enterprises by foreign capitalists, contradicted the Constitution laws. The SERC then requested the Constitutional Court to decide whether the Corporatisation Law broke the Constitution, and hence became invalid(*Labour Review* April 1999: 6).

From March-April 1999, the SERC used mass demonstrations to press its demands on the postponement of the enforcement of the Law until a consensus could be made by a plebiscite. However, on November 10, 1999, the majority of members of the Constitutional Court decided in favor of the government that the Corporatisation Law did not contravene the Constitution, hence being effective as a law (Bundit Thanachaisethavut 2000: 124).

Although the campaign was unsuccessful, the workers' collective action to protest against the privatisation was not opposed by the media and the public. Contrary to the situation in 1988-1990, the unions did not organise their collective action in isolation, but could gain sympathy from several groups of people who also opposed the government policy on privatisation. Apart from some labour academics, who disagree with the privatisation policy on the basis of public interests and employees' job security*, there are two other important groups that support the union movement against privatisation, namely, the Workers' Democracy Group and the roughly so-called "nationalist group". These two groups emerged as the new social forces to propose alternative social development strategies to replace the old development strategy that led the country into the economic crisis of mid- 1997.

However, the two groups have different reasons in their actions against privatisation. The nationalist groups, which comprise a number of academics, local businessmen, and social activists, emphasized the national security concerns. They resist the sale of public- utilities enterprises to foreign investors which would pave the way for multinational corporations in some powerful countries, particularly the USA to have control over the country's economic and political sovereignty. However, the nationalist group do not oppose the privatisation policy on a condition that the ownership of state enterprises is transferred to local capitalists or to the state enterprise employees (Plaithouwn 1999: 8 and Narong Petprasert 2000: 89-114).

For the other group, the Workers' Democracy Group (WDG) is a socialist oriented group, formed by a Marxist university scholar, Ji Ungpakorn, and a number of labour activists in late 1997. The WDG viewed that the workers' collective action against privatisation was part of the class struggle between the capitalists and the working class. It is reasoned that privatisation is a form of labour exploitation because it

* These labour academics are, for instance: Voravidh Chareonloet, Lae Dilogvidhyarat, and Bundit Thanachaisethavudh.

would lead to wage stagnation, welfare reduction and job insecurity, which increase the rates of labour exploitation in the production process. In addition, the government's plans to privatise state-owned enterprises, such as public hospitals and universities, would enable the Thai capitalists to take more advantage, through the increasing rate of labour exploitation, in order to compete with the foreign capitalists (Ji Ungpakorn 2000: 81). The WDG thus opposed all forms of privatisation on the basis of class struggle and anti-capitalism. It is also believed that all privatisation schemes have involved workers losing their jobs. The issues of redundancies and unemployment thus would be very strong issues to use in running a campaign among workers against privatisation (Ji Ungpakorn 1999: 46).

Although these two groups have opposite perspectives in their political ideologies, they are alliances of the state enterprise unions in the issues of the privatisation. The nationalist groups oppose the domination over the Thai economy by the foreign capitalists, while the WDG oppose the labour exploitation under the private business system. Their aims, however, overlap the demands of the state enterprise unions. As a result, the labour campaign on anti-privatisation in 1999, was not demonstrations of isolated groups of workers as it had been in the previous decade, but the collective action of the unions and their alliances.

5.6 Conclusion

From 1991 there has been another stage of development of the trade union movement in Thailand in which the trade unions have articulated with other non-unionised and multi-class groups in order to achieve their demands, which also overlap the aims of those groups. The growth of the economic unionism in 1990 was interrupted by the political crisis in 1991, which brought the trade unions to engage in the political movement again after they had, for almost a decade, concentrated on organising strong collective action to defend their particular interests.

After the May, 1992, events, the several governments under the parliamentary system did not repeal the laws, issued by the NPKC, that restricted the workers' collective bargaining and union rights. From 1992-2002, the labour coordination centres have not been as strong as they were in the previous decades. The SERC kept a low profile in mobilising the collective action to defend their members' interests, while the area-based trade union groups did not further develop the coordination across industrial areas.

The forms of workers' collective action during this period were mostly the lengthy labour campaigns. In the labour campaigns on the problems of the private enterprise workers, the campaigning issues focused on the issues that affected the workers' quality of life in the long term, such as the women workers' rights and the establishment of the OSH institution. The constraints of the wage demands after the economic crisis in mid- 1997 is one of the important reasons for the shift of the unions' priority from wage to non-wage issues.

However, the campaigns on these non- wage issues were not led by the autonomous union organisations, but the coalitions of trade unions and their alliances. According to Tarrow, if movement organisations have a weakness, they cultivate ties with like-minded groups, attempting to compensate for the weakness of their constituency base (Tarrow 1995:145). In the OSH campaign, trade unions in the private sector organised major demonstrations, not under the leadership of the trade unions, but through the coalition organisation of the workers, the NGOs, the academic activists and the rural poor networks.

Similarly, in the anti-privatisation campaign, the trade unions were not in isolation when they organised the collective action. Temporary alliances were formed among the trade unions, the nationalist groups and the WDG. State enterprise unions also linked the defense of their members' interests to a broader issue concerning the public interests in the protest against privatisation. Within this new agenda, trade unions could gain more sympathy from other like-minded groups than when they focused solely on their members' employment interests in 1989-1990. The changing character of state enterprise unions is a consequence of the unions' adjustment to address the new situation. The legitimacy crisis of state enterprise unions in 1990, which led to the ban of the unions during 1993-1999, resulted in the decline of the bargaining power of the trade unions. In addition, the government used the economic crisis to legitimize the policy on the increase of the role of the private sector in the state enterprises. Consequently, the state enterprise unions, which are not as powerful organisations as they were in the previous decade, have to generate broad definitions of their members' interests and cultivate alliances with other social movements in order to achieve success in their demands.

In conclusion, the dominant feature of the trade unions in 1991-2002 has remained the economic unions, but with some new characteristics that differed them from the economic unions in the 1980s.

The trade union movement has been characterised by three main important roles and actions: the role of the trade unions in the democratic movement, the defense of the workers' interests on the non-wage issues, and the articulation of the trade unions with the other non-union forces in the effort to achieve the overlapping demands of the trade unions and their alliances.
