

CHAPTER IV

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM TO ECONOMIC UNIONISM, 1977-1990

A notable feature of the Thai trade union movement in 1977-1990 was that the trade unions played a very prominent role in the mobilisation of workers who organised strong autonomous economic action but failed to produce class – oriented ideology and collective action for broad social objectives. During this period, the social movement unionism of the mid-1970s was replaced by the “economic unionism” in which the trade unions strongly defended the specific interests of their members, but failed to organise class collective action and distanced themselves from the movements for broad social objectives.

The decline of the social movement unionism was associated with the decline of the national labour centres as the most important interest representatives of the working class, and the declining role of the state enterprise unions in the movements for broad social objectives. The changes in the political situation after the coup d’ e tat on October 6, 1976 was the most crucial condition for the shift in the character of the trade unionism in the post- 1976 period. The rapid economic growth under the export-led industrialisation was another condition that facilitated the development of the economic unionism in the 1980s. Of the other social movements, the non- government organisations (NGOs) played important role in shaping the trade union movement, while the influences of the students on the workers’ movement declined.

4.1 Political Opportunities under the Authoritarian Rule and Democratic Regime

The nature of political systems from 1977-1990 was characterised by three different features: authoritarian rule in the one year after the 1976 coup d’ e tat; “semi- democracy” in 1979-1987; and more liberal democracy in 1988-1990. These political natures created different political opportunities for the growth of the trade union movement and other social movements.

Although the authoritarian Thanin Krivixine government that came to power after the coup d’ e tat on October 6, 1976, could last only one year, the impact of the government’s extreme anti- communist policy on the social

movements of the mid- 1970s was very great. The violent suppression of the social activists who participated in the political demonstrations and protests during 1973-1976 resulted in the transformation of the peaceful movements into the guerrilla forces under the leadership of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). A large numbers of the student activists, labour and peasant leaders left their organisations to join the CPT in the jungle after the October 1976 coup. Subsequently, the NSCT, the LCCT, and the PFT, which were the important national centres of the student activists, organised workers and peasants respectively, collapsed.

The political conditions changed after General Kriengsak Chama-nan staged another coup d' e tat to overthrow the Thanin government in November, 1977. After a shift away from the conservative political policies to a more liberal regime, only student and labour organisations could revive again in the late 1970s, but peasant organisations collapsed until the early 1990s. Trade unions once again began to organise their activities under the new political circumstances of the 1980s.

The 1980s saw the continuing development of the parliamentary system in Thailand, despite two failed military coups in 1981 and 1985. The shift of economic strategy from import substitution to export oriented-industrialisation occurred simultaneously with political changes from military domination towards democracy with increased business influence. Political regimes during 1983-1990 were under the leadership of two Prime Ministers, General Prem Tinsulanonda and General Chatichai Choonhavan. General Prem headed the government for eight years from 1980 till mid-1988. During his regime, although the parliamentary system was established, military and bureaucrats still held a dominant role in politics. Prem himself was an un-elected incumbent, while the leaders of the political parties who were elected members of parliament (MP) were never nominated by the House of Representatives to be a Prime Minister. The characteristic of the Thai political system during this period was therefore termed as a “semi-democratic regime”.

The Prem era was the first time since 1976 that parliamentary politics were relatively stable and democracy in Thailand was also institutionalized. However, the period was characterised as “semi-democratic” because the military continued to play a strong political role and economic growth was given higher priority than the development of political rights and the deepening of democracy. This development was a consequence of two

important political factors: the collapse of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the emergence of the 1978 Constitution (Surin Maisrikrod 1999: 153).

The end of the communist threat at the beginning of Prem's premiership in the early 1980s had loosened up the state's control over society. This development gave the people more political space to assert themselves. The amnesty programme initiated for defectors of the CPT under the policy directive No. 66/23 also added to the development of the parliamentary democratic system. The CPT defectors had returned to the city and later became leaders in various sectors of society. The new forms of political movement were no longer armed or radical social organisations but were organized by relatively less radical, pro-democratic institutions such as political parties, non- governmental organisations, and other civil groups formed by the middle class and popular class.

In economic dimension, Prem resolved the economic crisis in the early 1980s by teaming up a group of technocrats with a group of businessmen, namely the Joint Public- Private Committee (JPPC) for economic policy-making. The JPPC was the first cooperation in which capitalists, and technocrats converged on development programmes under strong political leadership. A number of macro economic reform programmes initiated mainly by the technocrats, did not only enhance the power of the technocrats in politics, but also promoted and expansion of economic opportunities for the capitalists. This process of economic- policy determination, however, did not allow political parties to play more important role in policy-making. While the state continued to be hegemonic along with the rise in power of the capitalists, political parties could not advance beyond being partners in the state-led redemocratisation process and were not able to bring about their own institutional development (Surin Maisrikrod 1999: 157).

The other important "semi-democratic" characteristic of the Prem regime was the military intervention in political development through the 1978 Constitution, which provided a privilege role to the military in politics. According to the 1978 Constitution, the military officials and civil servants were allowed to occupy the premiership and cabinet posts as well as to be appointed senators. Consequently, General Prem and other military leaders took advantage of the provisions in the Constitution to become the Prime

Minister and members of cabinet and retained their powers over the armed forces.

However, the unpopularity of Prem in the late 1980s caused him to refuse another term as premier after the July 1988 general election. The end of the Prem regime gave rise to the emergence of “full democracy during the premiership of General Chatichai Choonhavan. In August 1988, the Chatichai became the first Prime Minister since 1976 who was an elected MP. From August 1988 to February 1991, Chatchai civilian government rigorously challenged the country’s conservative state by moving decision making away from the bureaucrats and military into the hands of elected politicians. Non-bureaucratic forces such as: businessmen, politicians, organised workers and social activists grew rapidly in the late 1980s. However, they were not strong enough to dominate the political arena. Although the bureaucrats and military still played a significant role in politics, they were forced to negotiated with other powerful forces. The major political actors during 1988-1990, therefore, comprised both the military bureaucratic alliance and the emerging forces of political parties, business groups, labour organisations, and NGOs.

The balance of power between the bureaucrats and military, as one side, and the other non-bureaucrat forces, as the other side’ was short- lived, because a group of military leaders staged a coup d’ e tat to seize power from the Chatichai government on February 23, 1991 and led the country back to the authoritarian regime again.

4.2 Export-Oriented Industrialisation and Structure of Employment

The Thai economy under export-promotion strategy during 1983-1990 could be categorized into three phases: the recession of 1983-1984, the economic take- off of the mid- 1980s, and the bubble economy of 1988-1991 (Phasuk and Baker 1997: 27). The shift from import-substitution industry to export-oriented one in the late 1970s was caused by several reasons. The limits of the domestic market, as well as inefficiencies fostered by protection of import-substitution industries, resulted in the slowdown of economic growth rate. The slowdown turned into crisis in 1983-1984 when the domestic economy was exacerbated by the conjunction of the effects of the OPEC oil price rise in 1979. In addition, increasing import of capital goods for import-substitution industry led to the increasing deficits in the balance of trade (Somsak Tamboonlertchai 1980: 93-94). Business leaders

became interested in exporting and began to put pressure on the government to change economic development strategy. In response to these problems, the government turned to a strategy of export-oriented industrialisation around the mid- 1980s(Phasuk and Baker 1995: 149). The shift was also influenced by the World Bank's policy which, by the mid- 1970s, had shifted from promoting import substitution to supporting export-oriented industrialisation(Bello 1998: 12).

The rapid growth of the industrial sector in the export-led economy had brought about important changes in the structure of employment. There was a proportional expansion of the industrial labour forces in which large numbers of female workers were incorporated into the export-industrial sector. The widespread use of various forms of employment in order to minimize the labour costs in export manufactures significantly effected the development of trade unions. The export-orientation strategy was dramatically successful in raising the growth rates of the non-agriculture sector and of the economy as a whole (see table 11).

Table 11: Real GDP at 1972 Price (% Change), 1983-1990

Sector	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Total	7.3	7.1	3.5	4.9	9.5	13.2	12.0	10.0
- Agriculture	4.4	5.6	6.2	0.3	-0.2	10.2	6.6	-3.7
- Non- Agriculture	8.0	7.5	2.9	6.1	11.8	13.9	13.1	12.7
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Sources: Bank of Thailand, *Annual Economic Report 1988, and 1990*

The trade structure had also experienced drastic change with manufactured goods rising to 74.7 percent of total export value in 1990 against a decline share for agricultural product to 16.9 percent (see table 12). In the first half of the 1980s, the top five principal export commodities, in terms of value, comprised four agricultural products and textiles, in which the value of rice was the largest. This situation had changed since 1985 as the value of textile products became the largest, while other manufactured products, i.e. integrated circuits, precious stones and jewelry, canned seafood, computers and components, replaced agricultural goods for the country's top five export products (see table13).

Table 12: Value of Merchandise Exports in 1990

(unit : million baht)

Exports	Value	Percentage
Manufactured products	440,395	74.7
Agriculture	100,003	16.9
Fishery	32,507	5.5
Other exports	16,908	2.9
Total	589,813	100

Sources: Bank of Thailand, *Annual Economic Report 1991***Table 13: Change of Five Principal Export Commodities, 1984-1990**

(unit : million baht)

Commodity	Value and Rank						
	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Rice	25,932 1	22,524 2	20,315 2	22,719 2	34,676 2	45,462 2	27,770 4
Tapioca product	16,600 3	14,969 3	19,086 3	20,679 3			23,136 5
		13,567 4	15,116 4	20,485 4	27,189 3	26,423 5	
Maize	10,147 5						
Textile Product	19,155 2	23,578 1	31,268 1	48,588 1	58,627 1	74,027 1	84,472 1
Integrated circuits		8,249 5					
Precious stones and jewelry			13,164 5	19,799 5	23,683 4	28,393 3	34,858 3
Canned seafood					20,839 5		
Computers and Components						26,827 5	38,671 2
Total value of export	159,728	193,367	233,383	301,437	403,570	516,315	589,813

Sources: Calculated from Bank of Thailand, *Annual Economic Report 1983, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991 and 1992*

The government policy of achieving industrialisation through export promotion was based on certain conditions. The industrialisation had been largely propelled by severe incentives for investors, i.e. low wage, small investment cost in occupational health and safety, and the powerlessness of organised labour. Labour-intensive industries such as textiles and garments

from Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan had relocated production to Thailand not only to reduce production costs, but also to find a way around the US General System of Preference (Pasuk and Baker 1995: 159). Low-technology industries based on cheap labour, such as textile, shoes, toys, and jewelry, grew most rapidly in the second half of the 1980s, but from 1989 the fastest export growth came in medium- technology products such as computers and components. The growth in manufacture export was paralleled by a proportional expansion of the industrial labour forces. However, the change in employment structure was much slower than structural change in production. Up to 1991, more than half of the employed persons were still engaged in agriculture (see table 14).

Table 14: Employment Structure, 1983-1990

(unit: thousand)

Employed Person by Sector	1983	1985	1987	1989	1990
Population	49,090.2	51,450.7	53,679.8	55,514.5	56,405.0
Labour Force	24,247.9	27,114.9	29,552.2	31,205.7	31,749.6
Total Employed Person	20,640.2	22,893.7	26,173.9	2,806.6	30,843.7
- Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing	11,528.6	14,972.5	15,659.4	17,020.0	19,725.7
- Mining and Quarrying	69.0	91.6	57.9	46.7	53.9
- Manufacturing	2,536.7	2,152.0	2,738.7	3,104.3	3,132.6
- Construction, Repair and Demolition	745.4	595.2	817.4	947.4	1,026.4
- Electricity, Gas, Water and Sanitary Services	106.7	114.5	120.0	116.6	108.7
- Commerce	2,413.6	2,083.3	3,086.3	3,063.2	2,976.2
- Transport, Storage, and Communication	619.4	572.3	674.7	698.9	732.9
- Service	2,617.3	2,312.3		3,043.4	3,065.0
- Others	2.8	-		19.7	21.6

Sources: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior, *Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1993*

Notes: 1 Due to the change of definition of labour force in 1989,

- labour force in 1983, 1985, and 1987 are persons at 11 years of age and over,

- labour force in 1989 and 1990 are persons at 13 years of age and over.

2 All absolute figures in the statistical table are independently rounded to the nearest thousand, hence group total may not always be equal to the sum of the individual figures.

The Thai economic structure in the 1980s up to the beginning of the 1990s was, therefore, characterised by a high contribution of the manufacturing sector but with a small share of industrial labour. In addition, own account workers and unpaid family workers dominated the employed persons. Over a decade from 1981 to 1990, the number of wage and salary earners, in both private and public sectors, increased significantly, but still absorbed only 31.1 per-cent of the total employed persons in 1990 (see table 15).

Table 15: Employed Persons by Work Status, 1981 and 1990

(unit: thousand)

Work Status	1981		1990	
	Employed Persons	Percent	Employed Persons	Percent
Employer	398.0	1.6	399.0	1.4
Government	1,390.4	5.7	1,942.0	6.8
Employee				
Private	3,903.7	16.0	6,892.0	24.3
Employee				
Own Account	6,772.1	27.8	8,981.0	31.7
Worker				
Unpaid Family	11,901.9	48.8	10,109.0	35.7
Worker				
Total	24,366.1	100.0	28,323.0	100.0

Sources: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior, *Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1984, 1990*

In terms of establishment size, small and medium firms with 1-499 employees were highly dominant in the private- sector employment. These firms absorbed 70.3 percent and 67.8 percent of all employed persons in 1986 and 1990 respectively (see table 16). Compared to state enterprises, it was found that most of the employees worked in large- scale firms. In 1990, fifteen state enterprises were the large- scale establishments, with more than five thousand employees (see table 17).



Table 16: Numbers of Establishments in the Private Sector with Employees by Size, 1986-1990

Size	Number of Establishments		Number of Employees and Percentage	
	1986	1990	1986	1990
1-9	101,916	158,939	312,831(17.6%)	495,052(15.4%)
10-99	22,003	36,900	559,104(31.5%)	925,339(28.8%)
100-499	1,886	3,767	375,345(21.2%)	757,936(23.6%)
500-999	222	489	150,829(8.5%)	332,936(10.3%)
>1,000	127	281	374,658(21.1%)	706,472(22.0%)
Total	126,154	200,376	1,772,767(100%)	3,217,735(100%)

Sources Calculated from Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior, *Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1986, 1990*

Table 17: Number of Employees in Large State Enterprises in 1990

State Enterprise	Number of employees
Port Authority of Thailand	6,000
The Metropolitan Waterworks Authority	5,754
Provincial Waterworks Authority	5,250
The Metropolitan Electricity Authority	12,100
Provincial Electricity Authority	26,000
The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand	31,537
The State Railways of Thailand	24,000
The Communication Authority of Thailand	22,000
Krung Thai Bank Public Company Limited	11,200
Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives	7,333
The Government Savings Bank	7,679
Thai Airways International Public Company	15,000
Thailand Tobacco Monopoly	8,000
The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority	22,000
Telephone Organisation of Thailand	18,000

Source: Calculated from Budit Thammatrirat, *Directory of Thai Labour Organisations, 1990*

The size of establishment affected the bargaining power of trade unions. The employees in a number of large state enterprises could form large unions, which were resourceful organisations in terms of money from unions' subscription and members as their sources of power. On the

contrary, most unions in the private sector were small and medium organisations, and hence needed to depend on resources from outside trade unions.

Another notable feature of the employment structure in the export-led economy was the rapid incorporation of women into the industrial labour force. In 1990, the proportion of females joining the labour force was 46.9 percent, while female workers constituted 46.6 percent of the total employed persons (see table 18). In particular, women workers were concentrated in industrial lines that produced the country's key exports: garments and footwear, textiles, leather goods, precious stones, and processed food. Consequently, trade unions in these industries had women as their important power base.

Table 18: Employed Persons by Sex in 1990

(unit: thousand)

	Total	Male		Female	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population	56,405.0	28,229.0	50.1	28,176.0	49.9
Labour Force	31,749.6	16,863.1	53.1	14,886.5	46.9
Employed Persons	30,843.7	16,456.5	53.4	14,387.2	46.6
Un-Employed Persons	710.0	347.5	49.0	362.5	51.0

Source: Calculated from Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of labour and Social Welfare, *Year Book Of Labour Statistics 1993*

In terms of employment, structure of employment was also characterised by the use of various patterns of employment in order to minimize the labour costs in export manufactures. Short-term contract was one of the employment patterns widely used in small and medium local firms while large-scale multinational firms preferred to subcontract parts of their production to small firms.

A survey on the situation of casual workers in 1988 indicated that casual workers with renewable contracts were widely employed in the major industrial zones around Bangkok where a number of manufacturing firms were located (Somsak Samukkethum 1988: 27). These workers were kept perpetually "temporary" by terminating them before the mandatory regularization period of three or six months and then re-hiring them as new

casual workers. Another pattern of employment was subcontracting, which could be found in export manufacturing, such as the food and beverage industry, oil production, garment and handicraft industries (Sungsidh and Kanchada 1994: 233).

The wide practices of short-term employment contract and subcontracting in the late 1980s reflected a general feature of labour supply in Thailand, where unskilled labour was abundant and the excess labour supply was absorbed by the informal sector. As a result, short-term employment contract became an important campaigning issue of the trade union movement in the late 1980s.

4.3 The Decline of the Student Movement and the Rise of the NGO Movement

As discussed in chapter three, the trade union movement in the mid-1970s was strongly influenced by the student movement. However, in the post-1976 period, the student had been in a state of decline and their role in the trade union movement was replaced by the new elements, the NGOs that emerged as the organisations of the new social movements in Thailand in the 1980s.

4.3.1 Alliance of Workers and Students in the Post-1976 Period

After a shift away from the extreme conservative political policies in the aftermath of the October 1976 coup d'état to a more liberal regime since late 1977, the student activists began to form their organisations and reestablished a coordinating centre of university student unions, the Nineteen Student Unions. In the late 1979, students once again began to articulate their movement on political issues when the Nineteen Student Unions sent a memorandum to Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong protesting the exodus of refugees from Vietnam to Thailand. In addition, in November 1980, students could began their first demonstration after 1976, when they protested against the military officers and politicians who attempted to extend the term of General Prem Tinsulanon as army commander-in-chief (Prizzia 1985: 80-81).

For the workers, trade unions also organised activities and began to create relations with the students again. However, alliance between trade unions and students was loosely formed. The student activists did not

directly participate in the labour strikes or involve themselves in the workers' movement, but occasionally coordinated with the trade unions in the campaigns for the overlapping demands of the two parties.

After the 1976 coup, the LCT, which transformed from the TTUG in May 1976, became the only one national labour centre that could mobilise a large number of organised workers to participate in the demonstrations and protests. However, after the coup leaders promulgated the Order No. 46 to amend the 1975 Labour Relations Act, the LCT had to register with the Department of labour as a formal national labour congress, strictly controlled by the new labour relations law.* In the early 1980s, the LCT and the student unions tried to restore their roles as the representatives of the people's interests by organising public campaigns to protect the benefits of the people.

During 1979-1981, the LCT had twice launched protests against the rising oil price issues. On July 13, 1979, as a result of rising oil prices in the world market, the Kriengsak government announced an increasing in the prices of all types of oil. The LCT organised a rally at the Royal Field (Sanam Luang) in Bangkok to protest against the government policy on July 19, 1979. This rally could mobilise around 10,000 workers and other groups of people to join the protest (Bundit and Piroj 1988: 157). It was also the first demonstration led by the LCT since October 1976. However, the protest failed because the government refused to reduce the oil prices and the LTC could not gain public support to continue its movement.

The second protest on the oil price issue appeared again when the government announced another oil price increase on February 9, 1980. This time the LCT allied with the other two labour councils, and also other organisations, such as the nineteen student unions and some opposition political parties. The demands submitted to the government did not concern only the oil price issues but also covered the other issues of government policies on the prices of consumer goods and public utility services as follows: i) the government should reduce the oil prices; ii) the government should suspend any further increase of public utility service prices and; iii)

* In fact, the LCT planned to form a formal national labour congress in May 1976. The Constitution of the LCT was drafted and approved by 102 trade unions On May 30, 1976 (Arom Pongpangan 1979: 111). However, this Constitution had been suspended because there was the coup d'etat in October, 1976.

the government should control prices of all consumer goods. Otherwise it should try to find a measure to increase people's income (Bundit and Piroj 1988: 159-160).

On February 21, 1980, the LCT and its allies could lead about 50,000 people to participate in the rally at the Royal Field. The oil price movement also led to a political crisis situation that caused Prime Minister Kriengsak Chamanan to dissolve the House of Representatives on February 29, 1980. After the election, the LCT continued to pressure the new Prime Minister, Prem Tinsulanont, to reduce the oil prices. Finally, the government agreed to reduce oil prices on March 19, 1980.

The success of the oil price movement in March, 1980, could not prevent inflation and the rising of commodity prices caused by economic crisis. Students and workers again attempted to focus their movement on the cost of living issues. In December 1980, the nineteen student unions joined the LCT to plan a campaign on commodity price issues. They formally recommended that the government must reconsider the price of sugar, introduce clear and effective measures to stop hoarding, control the price of commodities, and announce guaranteed prices for agricultural products.

However, neither the workers nor the students were strong enough to pressure the government to respond to their recommendations. The plan for antigovernment campaign was changed when the student leaders decided to set up a study committee to collect facts and data on the general economic situation and presented them to the government's economic team for consideration. The government responded to this attempt at compromise by inviting labour and student representatives to the House Economic Commission meeting at the Parliament Building to discuss the LCT's recommendations to the government on economic issues (Prizzia 1985: 81).

While the trade unions and the students could not get much success in the campaigns against the rising oil prices, they could achieve more success in another campaign on the bus-fare issues. The bus fare campaign was the most important event of the 1980s in which the trade unions and the student organisations could mobilise a large number of workers and students to participate in their demonstrations.

In 1982, a number of state enterprises faced financial difficulties with large net loss and debt in their operations. Among these the Bangkok Mass

Transit Authority (BMTA) was the state enterprise with the largest net loss (Chesada Louhawenchit 1984: 2/22). The BMTA was established as a state enterprise in 1976 by merging more than 20 private bus companies within and surrounding the vicinity of the Bangkok Metropolis. From its beginning to 1982, the BMTA had consistently incurred losses every year. In order to stem losses in the BMTA, the government attempted to increase bus fares twice in 1981-1982. However, the new bus fare rates could not be implemented since they faced strong resistance from students and trade unions. In the first announcement of increased public bus fare on March 1, 1981, the government allowed the BMTA to increase bus fare from 1.50 Baht for the first 10 kilometers of bus service (Bundit and Piroj 1988: 161).

The LCT started to protest against the increased bus fare by proposing some recommendations to resolve the problems of the BMTA instead of raising the bus fares. In this proposal, the LCT demanded that the BMTA manage its operation with more efficiency and asked the government to provide a building to use for a permanent office of the BMTA in order to save the 10 million baht per month for the office's rent costs. In addition, it was also recommended that if all the administrative measures were implemented and the BMTA was still not able to solve the problems of loss, the government should privatize the BMTA (*Siam Archive* March 27-April 2, 1981). In order to pressure the government, the LCT cooperated with student unions and organised a rally on March 6, 1981. The government finally agreed to reduce the bus fares to the original levels and promised to improve the administrative system of the BMTA.

However, on November 2, 1982, the government allowed the BMTA to increase bus fares again. The students and trade unions thus launched the second campaign from November 2-24, 1982. Their demands were submitted to the government as follows (Chusak Chananiphon 1983: 8).

1. The government should suspend and reconsider the policy on increasing bus fares.
2. The director of the BMTA should be removed from the position because of her inefficiency in management of the enterprise*.
3. The government should appoint a committee to investigate and evaluate the proceeding of the BMTA.

* At that time the director of the BMTA was Mrs. Wimol Siriphaiboon, a popular novelist who openly opposed the student movement in 1973-1976.

An alliance between trade unions and the students in the bus fare-campaign was formed amidst the conflicts between the LCT and the BMTA unions. While the LCT allied with the student unions to oppose the government policy on raising bus fares, the BMTA trade unions on the contrary, moved to support the government. From the beginning of the movement in 1982, trade unions of the BMTA's employees had disagreed with the protesters since they believed that the workers would be paid better salary and working benefits if the BMTA could increase the bus fares. On November 8, 1982 eight unions in BMTA distributed a declaration to illustrate the reasons for the necessity of the BMTA to increase bus fares. After the government suspended the increase in bus fares, the BMTA unions, which were the members of the LCT, announced that they would withdraw from the LCT's affiliation. In addition, they submitted their proposal, for resolving the BMTA's problems, which opposed to the demands of the students and labour councils, to the government as follows (Chusak Chananiphon 1982: 9).

1. The government should provide office- building, land for bus parking, and buy buses for the BMTA by using government budget.
2. The BMTA should be allowed to increase bus- fare rates to the appropriate rates of, at least, 2.50-3.00 baht in order to cover the real service costs.
3. The government should collect some other additional taxes and use this income to subsidize the BMTA operation
4. The government should not often change the Director of the BMTA.

While there were conflicts among the trade unions in leading the bus-fare campaigns, the students could play the key role in organising collective action to protest against the government. In order to pressure the government to negotiate with them, the student leaders began using new tactics such as prolonged sit-ins, hunger strikes, and other non-violent means. A huge rally of thousands of people was also organised at Thammasat University. The protest ended when the government promised to temporarily suspend the new bus fares and consider the demand regarding the removal of the Director of the BMTA.

However, the success of the bus- fare campaigns could not revive the student movement from stagnation as the result of the "ideological

confusion” in the early 1970s. Since the late 1970s, a number of student activists who joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the jungle, after the 1976 coup, had some serious conflicts with the leaders of the CPT and began to leave the CPT and returned to Bangkok. In addition, the information about the suffering of the people in the Indo-China countries, which became socialist countries in 1975-1976, had spread to Thai society in the early 1980s. These two events were important factors for the decline of socialism, which used to be the dominant ideology of many student leaders in the second half of the 1970s, and also resulted in the situation of “ideological confusion”.

Under these circumstances, student movement that used to be a catalyst of social transformation in the early 1970s became stagnant. It was reported that since 1981 student unions in major universities had temporarily stopped their activities on political and social issues in order to reconsider the strategies and direction of the student movement (Jang Daowrung 1981: 24). The role of the students in social development was replaced other social forces, the NGOs, which became increasingly important in the mobilisation of the people collective action.

4.3.2 The Rise of the NGO Movement as a New Social Movement in Thailand

In this study, the NGOs mean the non-governmental development organisations, non-profit making organisations that have altruistic objectives. There is also a distinction between NGOs and People Organisations(POs) in which NGOs are set up by middle- class or popular-class activists to assist the disadvantaged, while POs are formed by the disadvantages themselves for self- help purposes (Prudhisana and Manerat 1997: 196-197).

While the student movement is seen as a catalyst of the social transformation in Thailand in the 1970s, the NGO movement is also viewed as an important factor for political and social development since the early 1980s. In the trade union movement, the NGO activists replaced the role of the students in supporting the workers’ movement.

The early history of the NGO movement in Thailand began in the late 1960s where the authoritarian military government emphasized economic growth policy involving the provision of infrastructure and promotion of

private investment. While economic growth had boomed, rural people had suffered a dislocation of their lives, as differences between urban and rural life became obvious. As a result, Puey Ungphakorn, a technocrat and economist who contributed to such economic strategy was disillusioned that development was not having the expected trickle-down effect. In 1969, he set up several rural development programmes: the Rural Reconstruction Movement working on integrated rural development in Chainat Province and the Graduate Volunteer Project at Thammasat University, providing graduates with the opportunity to train for rural development work. In 1974, Puey established another NGO, namely the Meklong Integrated Rural Development Project. The Project involved three universities to offer education outside the formal system: Mahidol University in health care, Kasetsart University in agriculture, and Thammasat University in politics (Suthy Prasartset 1995: 100).

During the democratic period from October 1973- October 1976, the NGO movement had not yet been a significant social movement in Thailand. The powerful social forces in this period were students, workers and peasants were just established. However, after the coup d' e tat on October 6, 1976, activists of all social movements came to a standstill.

It was only after 1980 that the NGOs began to play a significant role in social development. The expansion of NGOs influences related to some political and economic changes in the early 1980s. First, ideological conflicts between the leaders of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and student activists who joined the Party in the jungle after the October 1976 coup, as well as ideological splits which developed in the new communist regimes in Indochina countries resulted in the decline and collapse of the CPT. A number of student activists who used to believe in socialism and revolution retained their commitment to social change and pursued their hopes through peaceful means, working with the NGOs in the rural and urban areas. Consequently, a number of NGOs were established to be the new forums for those social activists to carry out projects on many social aspects, including rural development, urban poor, human rights, women, children, and ecological conservation.

The other important factor that facilitated the growth of the NGOs was economic conditions. The second oil crisis in the early 1980s brought about economic downturn. Agricultural commodity prices had also dropped and farmers' debt burdens increased, prompting the government to initiate a

poverty reduction plan in rural areas. In the cities, with the economic stagnation, the business sector did not expand enough to absorb university graduates. These graduates, including a number of former student activists who had recently joined the political activities after the 1973 people's uprising were, therefore, willing to work on social development issues with the NGOs in the rural and urban areas. In addition, the availability of funds and ideas from international NGOs stimulated the expansion of NGO staffs and their influences on social development.

In the early 1980s, the main stream of NGOs was represented by a number of small NGOs, which were concentrated in some rural provinces and in Bangkok. In the rural areas, most NGOs were much involved with solving basic livelihood problems of the peasants. In Bangkok, NGOs were concentrated in the fields of urban poor (slum people), women, and children. However, the economic situation had changed from depression in the early 1980s to rapid boom in the second half of the 1980s, as a result of successful export-oriented strategy. This development accompanied by great resource extraction, tourism and agro-industry, affected rural communities in unprecedented ways. Such development caused damage to the environment and new conflicts emerged between rural groups and between rural people and outsiders (Prudhisana and Manerat 1997: 201). Consequently, new NGOs were formed in order to handle these new social problems, such as NGOs working on the issues of AIDS, consumer-rights protection, conservation of national resources and ecology.

4.4 Organisations of Workers' Collective Action

From 1977- 1990, the numbers of trade unions increased more than 5 times while the unions' members increased around 3.5 times (see table 19). During this period the trade union movement was no longer led by one or two national organisations as it had been in the 1970s. The workers' collective action was mobilised by certain organisations, which could be categorized into three types: the national labour congress, the trade union group, and the labour-NGO. The inefficiency of the national labour congresses in defending the common interests of the workers gave rise to the development of the trade union groups as the new organisations of workers' collective action. At the same time, the organisational weakness of the trade unions in the private sector provided the conditions for the increasing role of the labour NGOs in the trade union movement.

Table 19: Number of Trade Unions and Unions' Members, 1977-1990

Year	Number Of Unions					Union's Members
	State Enterprise	Private Enterprise	New Registered Unions	Dissolved Unions	Total	
1977	47	117	2	22	164	na
1978	54	120	23	13	174	95,951
1979	62	144	52	20	206	114,349
1980	70	185	55	6	255	150,193
1981	79	255	90	11	334	153,960
1982	84	292	58	15	377	214,636
1983	91	414	47	10	505	221,739
1984	93	430	45	29	523	212,343
1985	97	436	56	50	533	234,359
1986	107	469	59	26	683	241,709
1987	116	514	69	24	630	272,608
1988	118	562	77	29	680	295,901
1989	123	593	71	40	716	309,041
1990	130	713	142	22	843	336,061

Sources: Labour Relation Division, Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

4.4.1 The National Labour Congresses: The Decline of the National Centre of Trade Unions

The labour congress has been a formal form of national trade union council in Thailand since 1976. According to the 1975 Labour Relations Act, at least 15 unions could register with the Department of Labour as a labour congress. At the end of 1990, there were five national labour congresses (see table 20), but only four congresses, LCT, NFLUC, NCTL, and TTUC, played some significant roles in the trade union movement. Conflicts and competitions among the leaders of the labour congresses were caused by the changes in the ideological orientation of the union leaders.

Table 20: List of National Labour Congresses in 1990

Name	Date of Register
1. Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT)	February 14, 1978
2. National Free Labour Union Congress(NFLUC)	March 29, 1978
3. National Congress of Thailand(NCTL)	January 27, 1979
4. Thai Trade Union Congress(TTUC)	September 16, 1983
5. Thailand Council of Industrial Labour(TCIL)	April 28, 1989

Source: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior

As discussed in chapter three, during 1974-1976, the two most important national labour organisations, the LCCT and the TTUG, were dominated by leaders who had similar objectives in leading the organisations towards the defense of the workers' interests. But since the mid-1980s, the national labour congresses were controlled by leaders who used the organisations to serve their own interests. The self-serving objectives of the union leaders were facilitated and encouraged by the state intervention in the trade union movement and by the establishment of the tripartite system as the institution for solving industrial conflicts.

The decline of the Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT) was a starting point for the decline of the trade union movement under the leadership of the national labour organisations. Its' decline was a direct effect of the patron-client relations between the high-level leaders of the LCT and some military elite. It was pointed out that in the early 1980s, a group of military leaders had already incorporated two leaders of the Union of State Railway of Thailand, Ahamad Khamthedthong and Sawas Lookdod, into their power base. In addition, this military group was successful in supporting Ahamad and Sawas to occupy the leadership of the LCT during 1980-1982. Apart from being the new President and General Secretary of the LCT, Ahamad and Sawas were appointed senators by the Prime Minister. (Narong Petprasert 1992: 163-164).

After Ahamad and his faction could dominate the LCT, Paisarn Thavatchainan, a former President of the LCT, formed a new national labour congress, TTUC, in 1983. Subsequently, many big and strong unions, whose leaders disagreed with the close relations between the new leaders of the LCT and the military, withdrew the LCT and affiliated to the new established TTUC. Losing a large number of union affiliates, the LCT

became weaker and its image in the eyes of the media was also negative as being controlled by the military.

However, relations between the LCT and the military group declined when the LCT's leaders distanced themselves from this military group and turned to support another group of military. In 1985, Ahmad criticized the government policy on the devaluation of the Thai baht and expressed his opinion to support General Arthit Kamlangek, the Commander-in-Chief, who demanded that Prime Minister Prem to restore the baht value. As the military group supported the Prime Minister, they thus dissatisfied Ahmad and ended relations with him.

In July, 1985, there was a labour dispute between the rail workers, since the administration did not comply with the order of an arbitration committee's decision to increase the wages of the daily workers and to pay overdue money to the workers. Subsequently, the Labour Union of the State Railways of Thailand, under the leadership of Ahmad Khamthesthong, the then President of the LCT, staged a strike. However, only the minority of the rail workers participated in the strike. In addition, the strike was not supported by the other unions and the media since it was viewed as being backed up by General Arthit, who wanted to topple the government. Finally, Ahmad and the other three union leaders were dismissed from their work at the State Railways of Thailand for leading the workers on an illegal strike.

Following this strike, Ahmad, who retained the presidency of the LCT, and six LCT leaders, involved themselves in the September 9, 1985 abortive coup led by a military group. Consequently, Ahmad and the other six LCT leaders were arrested and lost their power in the LCT*

The relations between the LCT and the military group were seen as those between patron and client, because the military leaders acted as a patron, while the LCT leaders were the clients who were loyal to them. The military leaders rewarded Ahmad and Sawas by supporting them to be the leaders of the LCT and members of the Senate. However, when the clients' loyalty declined, they were destroyed (Narong Petprasert 1992: 164).

* The other six persons were Sawat Lookdote and Sompong Sra-kavee, the LCT advisors; Somchai Srisuthornvoharn, Noon Suthinphuk and Issara Khaosa-ard, LCT committee members; and Prathin Thamrongchoi, an LCT official (Thongbai Thongpao 1986: 13)

After the LCT had declined, the TTUC became the largest organisation of trade unions. However, the TTUC also disappointed their members for its' inability to be a powerful national organisation of trade unions. When the trade unions in the private sector were pushed into the defensive position by the employers' aggressive reaction against unions' actions, the TTUC as the largest national labour congress did not mobilise supports from other unions to assist individual unions' struggle during the strikes and lockouts. Consequently, the class collective actions of trade unions under a strong leadership of national trade unions, which had appeared during the wave of labour strikes in 1974-1976, no longer existed in the 1980s. The role of the TTUC in supporting strikes, staged by individual unions, was reduced from mobilising class collective actions and public support to offering some material and moral supports, which did not contribute to the increase in bargaining powers of the strikers* .

The TTUC further lost its credibility after Phaisarn Thawatchainunt, the first President of the TTUC, died of cancer on March 18, 1988. Wattana Iambamrong, a state enterprise union leader from the Labour Union of the Communication Authority of Thailand, was elected the new President. However, most of the new executive committee were dominated by Panich Chareonpaw, the General- Secretary of the TTUC. Subsequently, during 1988-1989, the leaders of the TTUC split into factions similarly to the situation of the LCT in 1982.

Apart from the competition to seize power within the labour congresses, the self-serving character of the organisations was also indicated by the high competition among the national labour congresses to increase their union affiliates and compete for prestigious seats on various tripartite bodies. The competition had been facilitated by the election methods of employee representatives for the tripartite committee, which granted each union one vote regardless of size of its membership. The fostering competition between national labour congresses reflected the changes in the

* Interviewed with Vichai Narapaiboon, the Secretary-General of the Thai Melon Polyester Labour Union in 1984, on August 6, 2001. Vichai gave an example that in 1984, his union was one of the strongest unions in Rangsit. However, the union collapsed when the Thai Melon Polyester Company was closed down after the workers went on strike and the employer locked out the factory for 4 months from April to July, 1984. During the dispute period, Vichai and other union leaders in Rangsit were disappointed by the TTUC, which did not play an active role in supporting the workers to resume for work.

characteristics of these organisations from the national leading centres of the social movement unions in the mid- 1970s towards self-serving interest organisations of some union leaders in the late 1980s.

The increasing competition among trade union leaders for the seats on tripartite bodies was much related to a union leader, Panus Thailuan, who introduced a tactic of block vote in the electing of employee representatives of tripartite bodies. In 1984, Panus, a leader of the LCT, had been expelled from the LCT and affiliated with another small national labour congress, the National Labour Congress of Thai Labour(NCTL). Panus began to enhance the powers of the NCTL, not by an expansion of the size of its membership or its role in the trade union movement, but by increasing its influence in the various tripartite bodies. As discussed previously, since 1985, the number of the NCTL's affiliates increased sharply (see table 21). These unions were organised for the purpose of block votes in the elections of employee representatives on tripartite bodies. As a result, in 1986, the members of the NCTL could almost monopolise the seats of associate judges in the Central Labour Court by winning 16 from the total 20 seats (Prakaipueg Chayapong 1988: 54).

Table 21: Comparison of Four Labour Congresses' Affiliates and Members, 1984-1990

Year	LCT		NFLUC		NCTL		TTUC	
	Affiliate	Member	Affiliate	Member	Affiliate	Member	Affiliate	Member
1984	142	185,783	15	na	27	Na	46	35,744
1985	61	68,394	20	6,607	69	16,864	67	77,244
1986	57	38,486	25	6,229	87	21,353	79	90,019
1987	55	54,699	27	7,038	93	19,798	86	91,488
1988	63	63,313	29	7,527	118	24,822	94	104,959
1989	98	67,029	33	8,739	116	27,693	107	111,582
1990	118	na	39	na	237	na	135	na

Source: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior

Note: There are overlaps of the numbers of each labour congress' affiliates and members because some trade unions and their members affiliated to more than one labour congress.

This event encouraged the other national congresses to seek some tactics to defeat the NCTL in the next elections. Subsequently, a temporary coalition was formed among the four national congresses in the competition

for positions in tripartite bodies. For instance, in 1987- 1988, the NCLT blocked votes with the NFLUT and won 19 from the total 20 seats, while the LCT coordinated with the TTUC and won only one seat in an election of associate judges of employees.

However, in 1988, the four national labour congresses made a temporary coalition to lead the labour campaigns together with the trade union groups. This cooperation created a new image of the national trade union movement with some degree of unity among the labour congresses. As a result, Thanong Po-an, the President of the LCT, decided to keep this positive image by ending the competition among the four congresses on tripartite committee election in 1989. A meeting of the leaders of the four congresses had been held to discuss an allocation of the seats of the associate judges. Thanong proposed to distribute equally the number of the seats to each labour congress. But the NCLT, which had the most union affiliates, rejected Thanong's suggestion and proposed to allocate the seats on the basis of the number of affiliates of each congress. However, the other three congresses accepted Thanong's proposition. Subsequently, the three labour congresses made a coalition to isolate the NCLT in the elections of associate judges during 1989-1990 and could win all seats of the employee positions in the Central Labour Court (*Labour Review* June 1989: 13, May, 1990: 16). These conflicts disillusioned the unity of the four labour congresses, which just appeared in 1988, since the NCLT had no longer participated in the trade union movement led by the other three labour congresses.

Competition among the four national congresses in the election of employee representative tripartite bodies had indicated the fighting for self-interests rather than for the interests of the working class. First, the labour congresses' block votes were not aimed to elect appropriate persons, who had sufficient knowledge and experience, to serve as representatives of the workers in the tripartite bodies, but were aimed to expand their powers through the occupation of positions in the tripartite bodies*. Second, the union leaders involved in the competition for positions of associate judges

* Compared to the situation in the early 1980s, when competition for the positions on tripartite bodies had not yet been a major issue for the national labour congresses, the associated judges of employees in the Labour Court were carefully selected by trade unions. Most of them were the unionists who were experts on the labour laws and had experience in industrial relations conflicts. As a result, these associated judges made great contributions to assist the workers in the Labour Court.

and others were encouraged by their own interests, especially higher social status than their positions as workers. As all the tripartite bodies were set up by the government, a number of union leaders viewed that being employee representatives in these organisations was honorable for them*.

In summary, during the 1980s, the role of the national labour congresses as representatives of the working class had declined, as they developed towards the more increasing character of self-serving interest organisations. According to Olson's "By-Product" and "Special Interest" theories, some large and powerful economic lobbies are the by-products of organisations that obtained their strength and support by their performance of some function in addition to lobbying for collective goods. Some organisations provide selective incentives to retain their membership and political power. When their leaders use some of the political or economic power of the organisations for objectives other than those desired by the members, the members will have an incentive to continue belonging to the organisation, even if they disagree with the organisations' policy (Olson 197: 132-133).

In the 1980s, most national labour congresses turned to produced special interests or selective incentives for their members in stead of producing the common interests or collective goods for the workers at large. The union leaders seized the power in the national labour congresses for their own interests and used the power to produce the private goods that were not the objectives of the organisations. The employee seats on the various tripartite bodies were special interests that had been given to some members of the organisations to co-opt them as the leaders' power base. Consequently, the national labour congresses lost their position as the representatives of the working class and became self-serving interest organisations.

4.4.2 Trade Union Groups as the Effective Organisations of Workers' Collective Action

According to Tarrow, the organisation of collective action ranges from temporary formations of the collective actors to formal cells, branches

* For the Labour Court, after serving as an associate judge for four years, the person can apply for a Royal decoration.

and militias. It is either controlled by formal movement organisations in loose contact with such formations or completely autonomous of them (Tarrow 1995: 135-136). The decline of the national labour congresses in the early 1980s gave rise to a formation of another type of labour centre, the trade union group, which was not a legal form of labour organisation, but, a loose coordination centre of trade unions.

Realizing the lack of unity among the leaders of the LCT, which weakened the organisational potential, a number of the LCT's affiliates began to form another type of coordination organisation of collective action. In the private sector, trade unions in the same industrial area or same industry formed a number of trade union groups while in the public sector, a number of the state enterprise unions also formed a union group.

These trade union groups were a type of "social network" as Scott and Tarrow called them (Scott 1990: 30, and Tarrow 1995: 136). The trade union groups were formed on the basis of mutual trust and independence among the union leaders who worked in the same industry or the same industrial area. The objectives of these union groups were set primarily to help their member organisations to solve the problems of industrial relations, which were similar issues in the same industrial area or the same industry. Up to 1980, there were six important union groups, as follows:

- The Group of Labour Unions in Rangsit and Nearby Areas
- The Labour Union Group in Hotel Industry
- The Labour Union Group in Samuthprakarn and Thonburi
- The Labour Union Group in Food and Beverage Industries
- The labour Union Group in Textile Industry
- The State Enterprise Labour Relations Group

In 1980, the member unions of the above six union groups were mostly the affiliates of the LCT. Since these union groups did not register with the Department of Labour, their activities were not limited by the labour laws as the labour councils and the labour federations were. In 1980, the six unions groups coordinated with the Labour Union of the Bangkok Bank and formed a new coordinating centre of trade unions, called "Seven Groups of Trade Unions (SGTU)". The formation of these new trade union groups, including the SGTU reflected the fact that the LCT had some limitations in leading its members to cope with the new industrial relation situation in the post-1976 period.

It was during 1980-1982, when Ahmad Khamtedthong became a new President of the LCT, that the SGTU played a significant role in persuading the LCT to participate in broader social issues and acted as a working committee for policy implementation of the LCT. In addition, the SGTU sometimes coordinated with students to organise demonstrations on labour and political issues. A number of the SGTU leaders were the union activists of the mid- 1970s, who still had political consciousness and broad social objectives in leading the trade union movement. In addition, as the SGTU was a social network, or a friendship group so that the leaders' mutual trust could easily be turned into solidarity, the SGTU became an effective organisation of the trade union movement in the early 1980s.

However, after the TTUC was formally established, the SGTU dissolved itself in 1983. But some of the members of the SGTU, particularly the area-based trade union groups in the private sector and the SERC in the state enterprises, continued their roles in their own industrial areas or within their groups. It was in the late 1980s that these trade union groups began to form coordination across groups again.

In the private sector, these union groups had been developed on the area basis in three main industrial zones around Bangkok: i) Rangsit and Nawanakorn, in Prathumthani Province, next to the north of Bangkok; ii) Phrapradang, in Samut Prakarn Province, next to the south-east of Bangkok; iii) Omnoi- Omyai, in Samut Sakorn Province, and Nakorn Prathom Province, next to the south of Bangkok.* In the early 1990s there were five union groups in these three industrial zones: i) Trade Union Group in Omnoi-Omyai; ii) Trade Union Group in Phrapradang, Samuth Prakarn and Nearby Areas, iii) Trade Union Group in Phrapradang- Suksawasdi; iv) Trade Union Group in Rangsit and Nearby Areas and; v) Trade Union Group in Nawanakorn Industrial Estate

Among the three industrial zones, the numbers of employees and trade unions in Omnoi- Omyai were the smallest, but the trade union group played

* Apart from these three industrial zones, trade union groups were also formed in the south- eastern part of the country. For example, in Chonburi Province, where a number of industrial factories were located, some trade unions also formed a union group, namely the Trade Union Group of the East. However, due to the long distance from Bangkok, these unions rarely participated in the unions' campaigns, which mostly took place in Bangkok and nearby Provinces.

an active role in the trade union movement. Omnoi is a sub-district in Samut Sakorn and Omyai is a sub-district in Nakorn Pathom. The two sub-districts are an adjoining industrial zone, with the large number of factories concentrated in the areas in 1990 being small- and medium- scale establishments owned by local Chinese capitalists. The general features of employment were low wage and poor working conditions. Mostly, the workers received wage at the legal minimum rate or below, without other welfare. The small number of trade unions in both Samut Sakorn and Nakorn Pathom was caused mainly by the employers' strong opposition to unions' activities. However, due to the militant characteristic of labour organisations, the organised workers in Omnoi-Omyai were the main force of the Labour Coordinating Centre of Thailand, the labour-student led organisation, in the mid- 1970s.

In Samut Prakarn Province, where two trade union groups were formed, the number of employees and trade unions was the largest in 1990. Industrial workers and trade unions were concentrated in the Phrapradang District. Generally, wages and working conditions of workers were a little bit better than those of the workers in Omnoi- Omyai. During 1988-1990, trade unions in Phapradang played the key role in the trade union movement, in cooperation with the Unions in Omnoi-Omyai and in Rangsit.

In Pathum Thani Province, two trade union groups were formed in Rangsit and Nawanakorn. Most of the trade unions in Rangsit were formed in the multinational and local textile firms. In the early 1980s, the rapid expansion of the export sector led to an establishment of a new export industrial zone in Prathumthani Province, the Nawanakorn Industrial Estate. In 1988, trade unions in this new Industrial Estate began to form another union group in Prathumthani.

Table 22: Number of Establishments, Employees and Trade Unions in the Four Provinces of Three Industrial Zones, 1990

Industrial Zone/Provinces	Establishments	Employees	Trade unions
Omnoi-Omyai			
- Samut Sakorn	4,209	90,947	26
- Nakorn Pathom	8,336	75,064	3
Phrapradang			
- Samut Prakarn	5,456	267,814	196
Rangsit and Nawanakorn			
- Pathum Thani	2,340	150,097	78

Source: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior, *Year Book of Labour Statistics 1990*

Apart from the above trade union groups in the private sector, trade unions in state enterprises also formed their own coordinating centres. In 1980 the State Enterprises Relations Confederation (SERC) was formed by eight state enterprise unions.* Due to a change in the method of collective bargaining and the introduction of government policy on privatisation of some state enterprises in 1982, state enterprise unions needed to collaborate together for negotiation with the government on wage and money benefit increases as well as to protest against privatisation policy. This development gave rise to the increasing importance of the SERC as the most powerful organisation of state enterprise unions. Apart from the SERC, there were four other groups of state enterprise trade unions, which concentrated only on the protests against the government privatisation policy and did not participate in the trade union campaigns on the other labour issues**.

* These unions are: 1) Labour Union of Metropolitan Electricity Authority; 2) Labour Union of Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand; 3) Labour Union of Provincial Electricity Authority; 4) Labour Union of Metropolitan Water Works Authority; 5) Labour Union of Bangkok Mass Transit Authority Workers; 6) Labour Union of Telephone Organisation of Thailand; 7) Labour Union of Port Authority of Thailand; 8) Labour Union of National Housing.

** Among the four union groups, the State Enterprise Labour Unions Group of Thailand was the large one, consisting of 28 unions in 1988 (Bundit Thammatrirat and Napaporn Ativanichayapong 1988:243). However, after 1991 the Group has been no longer exist.

In 1990, the SERC had around 102,400 members, who were the power base of state enterprise unions. The SERC also supported the labour campaigns in 1988-1990 on the issues of minimum wage, short-term employment contract and social security system. However, as these issues affected only the workers in the private enterprise, most of the SERC's members did not participate in the campaigns. The real power base of the trade union movement during this period came from the members of the union groups in the private sector, especially the Trade Unions Groups in the three main industrial zones around Bangkok.

There were five Union Groups in those three industrial zones, but only three groups played an important role in the trade union movement, namely, Trade Union Group in Phrapradang, Samuth Prakarn and Nearby Areas, The Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group, and Trade Union Group in Rangsit and Nearby Areas. Therefore, the real power bases of the trade union movement during this period were around 35,000 organised workers, who were the estimated members of the three union groups (see table 23).

Table 23: Membership of Main Trade Union Groups 1990

Trade Union Group	Affiliates	Estimate Members
State Enterprise Relations Confederation (SERC)	25	102,400
Trade Union Group in Phrapradang, Samuth Prakarn and Nearby Areas	10	9,800
Trade Union Group in Phrapradang-Suksawasdi	13	6,900
Trade Union Group in Rangsit and Nearby Areas	24	2,250
Trade Union Group in Nawanakorn Industrial Estate	29	5,000
Trade Union Group in Omnoi-Omyai	9	2,500

Source: Calculated from Budit Thammatirrat 1990(a)

4.4.3 The Labour NGOs as a Supportive Element of the Trade Union Movement

Apart from the national labour congresses and the trade union groups, the trade union movement in the 1980s was also driven by the labour NGOs.

Although, the number of NGOs increased rapidly in the 1980s, it should be remarked that only a small number of NGOs was interested in the labour field, especially on the industrial- labour issues and trade unions*. In 1991, there were 12 private organisations that were solely involved in, or had some projects related to, the labour issues (see table 24). Among these organisations, there were only a few NGOs that played significant role in the development of the trade union movement in the 1980s. These NGOs were the Union of Civil Liberty, the Arom Pongpangan Foundation and the Friends of Women Group. The following study emphasizes the works of these three organisations in order to examine how the labour NGOs supported the trade unions to mobilise the workers' collective action.

* This was evidenced by the absence of the labour NGOs from the networks of NGOs working on the urban social- problem issues, established by a number of Bangkok based NGOs in 1990. These networks consisted of NGO-Networking on the issues of urban poor, human rights, primary health, children, women, and AIDS (Jaturong Boonyarattanasoonthorn 1992: 97-108)

Table 24: List of Private Organisations Working on Labour Issues in 1991

Name	Year of Establishment	Activities
Union for Civil Liberty	1973	Main activities are human rights related issues. The Section of Workers' Rights Promotion was directly related to the industrial workers and trade unions.
Foundation for Thai Employees and Workers	1977	The Foundation was formed under the auspices of Kriengsak Chamanunt., a former Prime Minister in 1977-1978. No obvious activities were carried out after Kriengsak's premiership.
Friends of Women Group	1980	The Group focused on women's rights issues, with some programmes emphasizing the problems of industrial women workers.
Arom Pongpangan Foundation	1983	The Foundation engaged solely in the labour issues with the emphasis on research works and educational programmes.
Khunakorn Foundation	1983	The Foundation was founded by the employer representatives and government officials in the Workmen's Compensation Committee under the auspices of the Department of Labour. The main activities were aimed at providing assistance for those disable workers suffered from industrial injuries.
Paisal Thawatchainan Foundation	1989	The Foundation was formed in remembrance of Paisan Thawatchainan. No obvious activities were carried out in the pre-1991 period.
Center for Labour Information Service and Training	1991	The Centre was formed by the labour activists, with the initial objectives to provide information on AIDS to factory workers. However, in the late 1990s the Center expanded its activities to cover broader issues on labour and trade unions.
Thai Labour Museum	1991	It is the only one private museum of Thai workers, which aimed to inform the public of the history of the Thai labour Movement.

Table 24: Continued

Name	Year of Establishment	Activities
Child Labour Project, Foundation for Children Development	1989	The Foundation is an NGO on children's issues. The project is aimed to provide assistance to abused child labour.
Young Workers' Group (Young Christian Workers)	1981	The Group is a local branch of the YCW. Main activities are training activities for small groups of workers in certain industrial areas. Due to the culture of Buddhist dominated society in Thailand, the Young Workers' Group did not have religious objective of Christianity in its activities.
Justice and Peace Commission of Thailand	1977	This is another Christian NGO working on human rights issues. The activities relating to labour focused on labour in the informal sector, including migrant workers.
Labour Development Programme, Catholic Council of Thailand for Development	1977	The main activities of the programme focused on vocational training and skills.

Sources: Wipaphan Korkeatkachorn and Suntaree Kiatiprajak(eds), *Directory of Non-Governmental Organisation 1997*, and Chockchai Suttawet 1996, "Research on Non-Governmental Organisations on Labour in Thailand: An Overview and Alternatives".

- **The Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)**

The UCL is the first NGO working on organising industrial workers. It is a human- rights NGO, formed by a group of human- rights activists and university scholars in the aftermath of the October 14, 1973 incident. The original name of the UCL before 1982 in Thai was สหภาพสิทธิเสรีภาพของประชาชน (union for people' rights and freedom) or the Union for Civil Liberty in English. During 1973-1976, UCL's activities on labour issues concentrated on the campaigns at national level in order to demand that the government promote labour rights and welfare for workers. However, during these years,

student activists played more significant roles in working closely with the workers and their organisations than the NGOs' activists.

In the early 1980s, there were also some small groups of student activists who believed that organised workers could be the agent of social revolution. Several "Study Groups on Labour" were formed in the universities, such as in Chulalongkorn, Thammasat and Ramkhamhang, to discuss on the problems of workers and the labour movement. However, as the student movement in the early 1980s was in the stage of decline, the development of these student groups was short lived. Some of the student activists turned to work with the NGOs that were actively engaged in the activities on the labour issues.

It was after 1980 when student activists had no longer played significant roles in the labour movement that the UCL began to carry out some activities to work on labour. On August 23, 1982, the UCL transformed its' position from an unregistered NGO to a registered association, namely the สมาคมสิทธิเสรีภาพของประชาชน (association for people' rights and freedom). This development came simultaneously with an expansion of its activities on labour. The economic depression in the early 1980s led to large numbers of layoffs in the textile industry. In addition, the employers' practices of aggressive labour relations strategy as a reaction against unions' activities were widespread in many industries. Under this labour relations situation, the UCL viewed that industrial workers were under-privileged groups in the society, whose basic rights, according to the labour laws, were seriously violated. Subsequently, the UCL set up a Section of Promoting Labour Rights in 1984. The activities were carried out to provide legal services and consultant programmes on the methods of collective bargaining and union organising for the workers and unions' members in the three industrial zones.

In 1986, the UCL decided to concentrate its activities on labour in the Omnoi-Omyai area. As a result, the UCL established a labour centre in Omnoi, namely the Center for Education and Culture of Omnoi Workers (ศูนย์การศึกษาและวัฒนธรรมคนงานอ้อมน้อย), to organise meetings with the union leaders and arrange training programmes for the workers. There were two important reasons for choosing the Omnoi-Omyai workers to be the main target group for promoting the labour rights. First, most industrial factories in Omnoi-Omyai were small- scale enterprises, and only a few trade unions existed. As

a result, violations of labour laws on minimum wages, working conditions, and union rights frequently appeared. Second, compared to the other industrial zones, there was more unity among the leaders of trade unions in Omnoi-Omyai because most of them were not interested in competing for the positions of committee in the national labour congresses or in the tripartite bodies*.

Apart from working with the workers and trade unions in the Omnoi-Omyai, the UCL also operated some campaigns on the current labour issues. For instance, in 1987 the UCL initiated the campaign for social security laws, which became one of the main labour campaign issues during 1988-1990.

- **Arom Pongpangan Foundation (APF)**

APF is another NGO playing a significant role in the trade union movement from the mid- 1980s. The APF was named after a most important labour leader in the 1970s**. Following the coup d' e tat on October 6, 1976, Arom and the other 18 student activists had to suffer an almost two-year imprisonment on charges of committing rebellions and Communist actions. During the two years in jail, Arom made some contributions to extending knowledge of Thai labour movement study by writing a number of works on the history and problems of the Thai trade union movement. In addition, he also wrote some literatures relating the lives of the popular class. Arom is the only one labour activist who has been admired as an outstanding- labour leader, as well as a social critic and an intellectual of the Thai working class. Shortly after his release, Arom died of liver cancer on June 21, 1980.

In 1980, the trade union movement had just revived from being stagnant after the October 1976 coup. In addition, data and information on workers, labour organisations, and labour relations problems in Thailand were very scarce. The main available sources were only those documents published by the Department of Labour, which emphasized the official statistic and general situation of industrial relations. These documents, however, benefited only the researchers who did academic work. But they were insufficient and not much useful to the labour activists and trade

* Interview with Somyos Puegsakamesuk, a former Chief of the UCL Section of Promoting Labour Rights in 1984-1987, on August 8, 2001

** In 1975-1976, Arom Pongpangan was a leader of the Labour Union of Metropolitan Waterworks Authority and also the Vice President of the TTUC.

unionists who needed more intensive information to support their campaigns and demands for improving the life-quality of the workers at both enterprise and national levels.

As a result, after the death of Arom in 1980, a group of unionists and university academics decided to set up a labour resource centre to provide intensive information for the workers and trade unions. Subsequently, the APF was formed on January 13, 1983, as the first NGO that solely worked on labour issues. The establishment of the APF contributed to a link between the trade union movement and academic circles. The APF's activities during 1983-1991 could be categorized into research works; newsletter; seminar and training programs.

The research works focused on comparative study of working conditions in various industries and contemporary labour problems. At the workplaces, these studies aimed to provide intensive information for trade unions to determine their demands on improving working conditions and welfare. At national level, the APF's research workers also contributed to an encouragement of trade union movement on employment contract issues in 1989 and the surveyed data on the expenditure costs of the daily-wage workers were used by the Trade Union Groups in 1990 as primary data to demand the new national minimum wage rates.

The committee members of the APF consisted of trade unionists and university academics, while the staffs of the APF were graduate students and former unionists. The links between organised workers and intellectuals were built up again.

- **Friend of Women Group (FOW)***

The growth of the international feminist movement resulted in the formation of a number of NGOs working on gender and women's issues in Thailand. In 1980, the FOW was formed as the first NGOs working to promote the rights of women in Thailand. In the early 1980s, the FOW's activities had not focused on any particular issue of women rights but were aimed to broaden the public's awareness of the unfair treatment of women and promote equal rights between women and men. The main target groups

* In 1991 the FOW transformed its' status from an unregistered NGO to a foundation, namely, the Friends of Women Foundation.

were the urban middle class. However, in 1985, the FOW began to expand its target groups to cover the industrial women workers.

Activities on women workers started with the survey projects on problems of industrial workers in two industrial zones, Phrapradang and Omnoi-Omyai, where a large number of women workers worked in textile factories*. Close connections were formed between the FOW and some unions in the two areas, particularly with the Aporn Thai Industrial Union in Phrapradang**, and the Nakornlounng Textile Union in Om-yai. After three seminars were held in May, 1986, for women leaders of 8 unions to discuss on the women workers' problems in working with trade unions, the FOW decided to concentrate their activities on women workers in the Omnoi-Omyai areas. The Project for Women Workers in Production Industries was set up in co-operation with the Union for Civil Liberty, aimed at providing a health fund for women workers who suffered sickness, but could not claim medical expenses from the employers (Chusak Chaleon-hongthong and Bandit Thammatrirat 1996: 174).

In 1989-1990, the FOW's programmes for women workers in Omnoi-Omyai had developed into four lines: workers' health and safety fund; development of women workers' potential; exchange experiences of women workers in across industrial zones and; cooperation between the Omnoi-Omyai Union Group and the Union Groups in other industrial zones (FOW Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, August 1990:11).

The programmes that initiated the cooperation between trade unions in Omnoi-Omyai with the unions in other industrial zones had encouraged the organised workers in Omnoi-Omyai to actively participate in the national campaigns launched by the Trade Union Groups during 1989-1990. The other programmes on women's issues and workers' health and safety were not yet directly related to the labour campaigns during this period but later became the crucial issues of trade union movement in the 1990s.

* Interviewed with Jadet Chaowilai, the FOW Coordinator and a former chief of the Project for Women Workers in Production Industries, on August 10, 2001.

** Most trade unions in Thailand are company-based or house unions. In 1987, only two industrial-based unions were established, one was The Steel and Metal Labour Union of Thailand and the other was a union of textile workers, The Apornthai Industrial Union.

The activities of these three labour NGOs were organised by close working with the trade unions at the base. Consequently, by 1990, a number of trade unions had already accepted the role of the NGOs in the social development and saw the necessity to build up a close relation with the NGOs. On June 10, 1990, a group of labour union federations conducted a seminar on “ Labour Movement and Social Movements in Social Development”. This seminar was aimed at providing the unions’ members the information on the structure and activities of the various social organisations, particularly of the non-government organisations (NGOs). In the seminar, the unions also expressed their commitment to build up a relationship with and contributed some supports to the NGOs (*Labour Review* August, 1990: 16-18).

This seminar reflected the increasing importance of the NGOs in the views of the union leaders which was also a consequence of the close relations between trade unions and the labour NGOs in the second half of the 1980s. This relationship appeared in association with the rise of various NGOs, as organisations of the new social movements in Thailand, and simultaneously with the decline of student activists’ influences on trade union movement.

4.4.4 The National Labour Congresses, the Trade Union Groups, and the Labour NGOs: Separation and Interdependence

Although the trade union movement in 1983-1990 was fragmented, it had achieved some degree of unity in leading the labour campaigns at national level. During 1989- 1990, although the area-based union groups and the SERC were disappointed by the labour congresses and the labour congresses were dissatisfied with the increasing influences of the Union Groups, they occasionally joined together in leading the trade union movement. The main reasons for the forming of this temporary coalition were that the Union Groups did not have an official status in negotiating with the government while the national labour congresses did not have the mass as their power base.

All the trade union groups did not register with the Department of Labour. They are not legal labour organisations in accordance with the Labour Relations Act. The national labour congresses, on the contrary, were accepted by the state as formal leading organisations of trade unions but did not have the potential of mass mobilisation as the trade union groups had.

The trade union groups and the national labour congresses thus had to depend on each other in order to strengthen their powers.

On the relations between trade unions and the NGOs, the coordination was characterised by two important features. First, only some groups of trade unions in the private sectors, particularly the unions in Omnoi- Omyai, had close relations with the labour-NGOs, but such relations did not appear between the labour-NGOs and the national labour congresses or state enterprise workers. Secondly, the NGOs played important roles in supporting the unions' campaigns on the labour issues, but did not mobilise the organised workers to support the NGO movements. Compared to the student movement in the 1970s, the relations between trade unions and the NGOs, and the alliance of students and organised workers were both similar and different. The student activists also had been a supportive element to enhanced workers bargaining powers, but meanwhile they mobilised organised workers, through the connections with trade unions, to support the political activities led by students.

The above characteristic of trade unions- labour NGOs collaborations could be explained in relating with the determining objectives of the labour NGOs in working with the workers and trade unions. It was obvious that the UCL and the FOW chose to operate their activities on labour in an industrial area where workers suffered from bad working conditions and unions were weak. These conditions were very confined to the industrial areas in Omnoi-Omyai. National labour congresses and the strong state enterprise unions had never been the targets of the labour NGOs.

The NGO activists saw the national labour congresses as moving towards the self-serving organisations of some union leaders, but not the true representative organisations of the working class. In addition, they saw the state enterprise workers had already gained better wages and welfare, as well as strong organisations, that the NGOs had had nothing to do with*. This attitude reflected the primary goal of the labour NGOs in working with the workers and trade unions in that the NGOs viewed themselves as a supportive element to strengthen the trade union movement, but did not have

* Interviewed with Somyos Puegsakamesuk, a former Chief of the UCL Section of Promoting Labour Rights in 1984-1987, on August 8, 2001 and Chadet Chaowilai, a former Chief of the Project for Women Workers in Production Industries in 1986-2000 on August 10, 2001.

a political aim to mobilise workers' support to their movements as the students had in the mid- 1970s.

4.5 The Decline of Class Collective Action

While the social movement unionism of the 1970s is characterised by the integration of three components: defense of the common interests of the workers, class collective action, and participation in the movements for broad social objectives, the economic unionism of the 1980s was indicated by: the active defense of the common interests of the workers but, decline of class collective action, and absence of trade unions in the other movements for political and social issues.

The decline of class collective action became obvious when the state enterprise unions and private enterprise unions began to concentrate on their own special problems and separately organised collective action to achieve their demands. In addition, solidarity among the trade unions in the private sector had also declined after they were pushed into a defensive position, and by the employers' strategies of labour control and the institutionalisation of labour conflicts through the tripartite system.

4.5.1 The Different Collective Demands of Trade Unions in the State Enterprises and Private Enterprises

The differences in the industrial relations problems of the state enterprise workers and their counterparts in the private sector resulted in the differences in the demands raised by trade unions in the two sectors. From the mid-1980s to 1990, the workers' collective demands in the private sector were concentrated on three main issues: increase of minimum- wage; abolition of short- term employment contract; and enforcement of Social Security Laws. For the state enterprise workers, their campaigns were launched around two important issues: salary increase and anti-privatisation. It is obvious that, except for the wage demand, the priority demands of the workers in the two sectors were different. This difference required trade unions to concentrate on their own demands and use a special tactic to obtain their demands.

Although the wage increase is a common issue of the workers in the two sectors, there is a difference in the system of wage determination that made the unions in the state enterprises organise collective action, for wage

increase, separately from their counterparts in the private sector. In the private sector, wages of the workers depended on the national minimum wage rates, determined by the tripartite Wage Committee. The unions thus had to put pressure on the Wage Committee for increasing the wage rates as the workers required.

For state enterprise employees, by the mid-1980s, the government as the employer of the state enterprise employees, transferred the management's authority on the negotiation with the individual trade unions for wage issues at the enterprise level to the government decision. According to the Cabinet's resolution on September 15, 1981, salaries and money benefits of state enterprise employees could not be changed by collective bargaining between unions and management of individual state enterprises. The unions had to submit their demands to the Ministry of Finance for approval. In response to this policy, state enterprise unions had not negotiated with the Ministry of Finance individually, but set up their demands together on how much their salary would be increased and made a negotiation with the Ministry as a group.

The differences of the labour problems, and hence the separation of workers collective action in the private enterprises and state enterprises differently affected the bargaining powers of the trade unions in the two sectors. The state enterprise unions were rich in resources for organising collective action in terms of money, time and organisational skills. They thus had no problems to stage the actions without supports from the private enterprise unions or other organisations. The unions in the private sector, on the contrary, were less resourceful organisations, and needed supports from other organisations. As there was no effective national organisation that linked the workers' movements in state enterprises and private enterprises or mobilised class collective action, the private trade union movement was weakened by the decline of class collective action and needed to form coordination with other organisations, such as the NGOs.

4.5.2 Labour Control Strategies and Institutionalisation of Labour Conflicts

In the 1980s, solidarity among trade unions in the private sector at the workplace level declined as a result of the employers' strategies of labour control and the institutionalisation of labour conflict through the tripartite system. Trade unions were pushed into a more defensive position by the two

different strategies of labour control: the offensive industrial relations strategy and the co-optation strategy. The use of the former strategy was widespread in all industrial areas while the later was found in the Japanese-owned firms in the Rangsit industrial zone.

From the mid- 1980s, a number of employers had reacted against unions' demands for improved wages and working conditions by submitting counter-demands to the unions to reduce wages or welfare. In addition, when negotiating failed, the employers staged a lockout of only the workers' involved in the unions' demands before the unions declared a strike. This was evident by the number of lockouts in some years during 1985-1991, which were equal to, or more than, the number of strikes in the same year (see table 10). The defensive position of individual trade unions in the private sector also added to by the lack of support from other unions, particularly, the national organisations of trade unions, resulted in an absence of class collective actions of trade unions to support the individual unions' struggles in the labour disputes.

In Rangsit industrial zone, after some strong trade unions, such as the Thai Melon Textile Union and the Thai Bridges Stone Union, collapsed in 1984 and 1986 respectively, other big unions began to accept the corporatist industrial relations strategy initiated by the management of Japanese firms. The strategy was called " Joint Consultation Committee". By this strategy, the unions and management tried to avoid using a confrontation strategy such as: strike or lockout and make compromise during the process of negotiation. However, this pattern of industrial relation strategy appeared only in the Rangsit areas where most workers worked in the big multinational companies and gained better wages and working conditions than the workers in other industrial zones.

The two strategies of labour control at enterprise level significantly affected the decline of labour strikes in this period. The number of strikes decreased sharply from 1977, and reduced to less than ten a year from the mid- 1980s(see table 25).

Table 25: Number of Disputes, Strikes and Lock-Outs, 1977-1990

Year	Disputes	Strikes	Lock-Outs
1977	61	7	na
1978	156	21	na
1979	205	64	na
1980	174	18	na
1981	206	54	na
1982	376	22	na
1983	229	28	na
1984	86	17	na
1985	228	4	2
1986	168	6	4
1987	145	4	6
1988	120	5	2
1989	85	6	5
1990	127	7	2

Sources: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior, *Year Book of Labour Statistics 1984, 1989, and 1992*

The decrease in the number of strikes from the mid-1980s was partly a result of the employers' strategies of labour controlled and was, for the other reason, also a result of increasing roles of tripartite bodies in the arbitration of labour disputes. The tripartism was recognized as the development of new modes of labour control, which emphasized consultation and mediation within an institutionalized tripartite arrangement.

Prior to 1993, Thailand was one of the few countries in Asia without a labour ministry. The most prominent government player was the Ministry of Interior, which traditionally had authority on labour matters through its Labour Department. Since the early 1980s, the government had expanded the role of tripartite system to cover many aspects of industrial relations by increasing the number of tripartite bodies. According to their functions, the various tripartite committees in Thailand could be classified into six categories.

- 1 The committees to arbitrate labour disputes, i.e. the Labour Relations Committee and the Central Labour Court.

- 2 The committee to set up the national minimum wage rates and propose wage policies, namely, the Wage Committee.
- 3 The committees to advise labour management and social-welfare policies to the government, i.e. The National Advisory Council for Labour Development, the Labour Promotion Committee, and the State Enterprise Relations Committee.
- 4 The committees to promote and develop occupational health and safety, i.e. the occupational Safety Standards Committee, and the National Skill Standard Committee.
- 5 The committee to administer the social security system, i.e. the Workmen's Compensation Committee, and the Social Security Committee.
- 6 The committees to promote occupational skills and job-seekers protection, i.e. the National Occupational Skill Standard Committee, the National of Labour Development and Coordinate Vocational Training Committee, the Job Seekers Protection and Employment Services Development Committee, and the Vocational Training Promotion Committee.

However, up to 1990, only some tripartite bodies played significant roles in the settlement of labour conflicts and directly affected the development of trade unions. The most important ones were the committees to arbitrate labour disputes and the committee to set up the national minimum wage rates: the Labour Relations Committee, the Central Labour Court, and the Wage Committee.

The Labour Relations Committee (LRC) was set up in accordance with Article 24 of the Interior Minister's Announcement on the Labour Relations Committee on April 1972. The first LRC was appointed in March 1975, consisting of nine government officials, three representatives of each employer and employee side. However, in 1979, the government was forced by the LCT to change the proportion of the Committee's members to have equal number of representatives from the government, employer and employee sides at five each.

The role of the LRC in arbitrating labour disputes is stated in the 1975 Labour Relations Act that the Minister of Interior would order the LRC to pass an arbitral decision on labour disputes in state and private enterprises where strikes and lock outs are prohibited and in other cases where the Minister is of the opinion that the unsettled labour disputes, strikes, and

lock-outs may cause hardship for the public or affect national security. In addition, the LRC shall have the function to pass an arbitral decision on unfair labour practice complaints, such as employee's complaints of unfair dismissal.

The other tripartite committee set up to arbitrate labour disputes, the Labour Courts, is directed by the Act Establishing Labour Court and Labour Procedure on April 30, 1979, to mediate between the employee and the employer in an attempt to compromise and reach an agreement. The cases that came before the Labour Court included labour disputes, appeals from decisions of officers under the Labour Protection Act, or the Labour Relations Committee, or the Minister of Interior (Nikom Chandravithun and Vause 1994: 58). Labour procedure in the Labour Court is different from other courts, since judges in the Labour Court are composed of professional judges from the Ministry of Justice and associate judges of the employers and of the employees.

From 1981 when the number of strikes had reduced sharply to below ten a year, the number of orders of the LRC on labour disputes and unfair labour- practice complaints reach more than two hundred in 1981-1983. After the Labour Court was established, the number of labour cases referred to the Central Labour Court from the mid- 1980s increased to more than six thousand in each year(see table 26).

Table 26: Number of Orders of the Labour Relations Committee and Cases Referred to the Central Labour Court, 1981-1990

Year	Orders of the Labour Relations Committee			Cases Referred to the Central Labour Court
	Labour Disputes	Unfair Labour Practice Complaints	Total	
1981	20	275	295	4,131
1982	22	237	259	3,598
1983	9	222	231	3,761
1984	5	136	141	5,247
1985	8	127	135	7,583
1986	0	132	132	7,744
1987	7	49	56	6,293
1988	5	47	52	6,774
1989	4	49	53	7,421
1990	4	45	50	7,768

Sources: Department of Labour, Ministry of Interior, *Year Book of Labour Statistics 1989, 1991, and 1992*, Somsak Samukkethum, et al. *Tripartite System and the Thai labour Movement*

Studies on the important cases of labour disputes in the 1980s indicated that both the unions and the employers preferred the LRC to arbitrate the disputes, rather than to settle the disputes by negotiation between the two parties. When trade unions went on strike, employees had demanded that the Minister of Interior order the workers to return to work and sent the dispute to the LRC for arbitative decision. This situation appeared in 1984-1985 when trade unions were relatively strong and had high bargaining powers. Similarly, when the employer locked-out the unions' members with an intention to layoff the workers, the union demanded that the Minister of Interior intervene in the lockout and ordered the LRC to arbitrate the dispute. This had been the situation in the second half of the 1980s, when trade unions were weak and lockout was an effective tactic of the employer to react against the unions' demands for improved wage and welfare (Somsak Samukkethum 1988: 58-91).

As trade unions passively accepted the role of the tripartite committee in the arbitration of the labour disputes, the use of strike as the most effective instrument of workers' collective bargaining declined, and hence there was no need for the trade unions to mobilise class collective action to support the strikes at individual workplaces. In addition, the competitions among the national labour congresses for winning the seats

in the tripartite bodies was aimed at self-serving interests rather than to serve the working class interests. The institutionalisation of labour conflicts into the tripartite system thus resulted in the decline of class collective action.

4.6 Development of the Economic Unionism in the Private Enterprise Union Movement

The growth of economic unionism was obvious in the second half of the 1980s. During this period, the state of the country's economy began to change from recession to economic boom. In addition, the political climate had also developed from the "semi-democratic system" in the Prem regime, towards more liberal democracy under the Chaticahi government since 1987. These economic and political conditions facilitated the success of trade unions' demands on their common interests, particularly, on wage increases and enactment of the legislation to improve the workers' welfare.

For the private trade unions, the economic unionism could develop although the trade unions were weak and there was no unity among the national labour congresses. The crucial factor that enabled this development was that the area-based trade union groups could form themselves into a new labour centre of the national trade union movement. With the support of the SERC from the state enterprise unions and the labour NGOs, the private trade unions thus could mobilise workers' collective action to strongly defend their interests on either the wage and non-wage issues.

4.6.1 The Formation of Union Coordination across Industrial Areas

The formation of a coordination among the trade union groups across the industrial areas was one of the most important factors for the success of the trade union movement in the late 1980s. As discussed in chapter three, the formation of a trade union group drew on the social networks among the trade union leaders who worked in the same industrial area of the same industry, their organisation based on the mutual trust and independence. In 1988-1990, the trade union groups had no longer limited their activities within their own industrial zones, but had formed the unions' cooperation across industrial zones and set up a new labour coordinating center to replace the national labour congress in leading the national trade union movement.

Contrary to the national labour congresses, which had huge memberships in terms of numbers, but no real power base, the trade union groups had the rank and file members of trade unions as their prime source of bargaining power. In particular, the unions' members in Phrapadang and Omnoi-Omyai were mostly the grassroots workers whose incomes depended much on the daily wages, with little welfare and small working benefits. As a result, the trade union groups in Phrapadang, and Omnoi-Omyai could mobilise a large number of workers to participate in the labour campaigns on wages and benefits of the working class and thus enhanced the power of the unions in pressuring the government and the capitalists.

The increasing role of the two trade union groups in the labour movement in 1988-1990 was also facilitated by the labour-NGOs, which actively supported the labour campaigns led by the trade union groups. However, the trade union groups could play a crucial role in the trade union movement when they were able to form coordination across the industrial areas. This coordination was started by the close relations between the trade union groups in Phrapadang, and Omnoi-Omyai, which worked together in leading the campaign to support the Samukke and Sri-kaao textile workers.

In the second half of the 1980s, the Thai economic situation had developed from recession in the early 1980s, to economic boom as a result of export-led growth. In addition, textile and garment products became the most important export commodities of the country. Under these economic circumstances, workers in textile factories began to demand wage and welfare increases. However, in Omnoi-Omyai and Phrapadang areas, the management of many textile firms still used offensive measures to react against unions' demands.

In 1986-1987, the UCL projects in Omnoi-Omyai had achieved some degree of success in supporting the factory workers to organise unions in their workplaces. The UCL staff also served as a legal advisor of new unions or employee committees when the workers submitted demands to and negotiated with their employers for improved wages and working conditions. In April 1986, the employee representatives of Srikaao Textile Company in Omnoi, Samut Sakorn Province, advised by a UCL staff, submitted 16 demands to the employer. In reaction, the employer locked out the factory and dismissed 117 workers (*Labour Review* August 1987: 13).

During the same period, a labour dispute also took place in Phrapadang, Samut Prakarn Province, between the Samukki Karntho workers and their employer. The workers were the members of the Apornthai Industrial Union. After the union had submitted 7 demands to the management, the company responded by submitting the counter-demands to the union and locked out only the union's members on March 24, 1987 (*Labour Review* August 1987: 14).

Faced with the employers' aggressive measures to react against the unions' demands, the Srikao and the Samukki workers were forced to change their tactic of collective bargaining from negotiating with the employers at the workplaces to the new forms of struggle that could mobilise wide support from the public in order to enhance their bargaining powers.

For this, the labour NGOs, particularly, the UCL and the FOW, made some contributions to publicize the labour disputes and mobilised support from non-labour groups. Firstly, the UCL encouraged the unions in Phrapadang and Omnoi-Omyai that supported the workers to join together in helping the workers of the two companies to resume their work. The unions had cooperated together in organising several rallies and demonstrations to pressure the government for taking action to settle the disputes. This cooperation was a starting point for the close relations between Trade Union Groups in Phrapadang and Omnoi-Omyai, which continued after the labour disputes ended.

In addition, the UCL and the FOW mobilised public support from sympathizers of various groups, including politicians, students, media, and international labour federations (Napaporn Ativanichayapong 1987:16-17). As a result, the Srikao and Samakki disputes became the most popular labour issue in the 1980s in which the workers gained wide supports from the media and other non-labour groups. Consequently, after the Sammakki workers could reach an agreement with the employer, the Minister of Interior ordered the employer of the Srikao Company to allow the workers to resume their work.

Cooperation between trade unions in Omnoi-Omyai and Phrapadang in supporting the Samakki and Srikao workers had resulted in the significant development of the role of trade union groups in the national trade union movement. The trade union groups of the two industrial areas began to expand their activities to defend the labour's interests at national level, in cooperation with the Rangsit Trade Union Group, the SERC, the labour NGOs and the student organisation.

Consequently, a new social network was formed across the industrial areas by the three trade union groups in the private enterprises with the support of the SERC and the labour NGOs.

4.6.2 The Role of Trade Unions in the Defense of Wage Interests

The wages of the workers in the private enterprise, particularly in the companies where trade unions exist, mostly depended on the national minimum wage rates annually set up by the Wage Committee. As a result, the minimum wage was one of the most incentive issues that could mobilise the workers to participate in the collective action to demand for an increase in the minimum wage rates.

The Wage Committee was established in accordance with the Interior Ministry Announcement on the National Minimum Wage in April 1972. In the early years of its establishment during 1972-1975, the Wage Committee consisted of nine members, including seven government representatives, one employee representative, and one employer representative. The government therefore could easily dominate the Committee's decision on setting up the minimum wage rates. However, from May 1976, the structure of the Wage Committee had been changed to equalize the number of the three parties at five each.

In the 1980s, when the unions passively accepted the role of tripartite committees in arbitration of labour disputes, the labour conflicts on wage issues were not solved exclusively by the tripartite committee. Although the establishment of the Wage Committee had transformed the collective bargaining powers of the workers and their employers at individual workplaces to the negotiation within the tripartite system, this tripartite body could not totally exclude the trade unions' influences. Principally, the Wage Committee's decision of minimum wage rates was based upon the state of the economy, such as the rate of inflation and the industrial growth rate as a whole. However, it is obvious that trade unions could pressure the Wage Committee through the expression of its powers outside the tripartite system. Consequently, the trade union campaign on the wage increase was one of the factors affecting the decision of the Wage Committee on how much the new minimum wage rates should be.

In 1974, when the government representatives were the majority of the Wage Committee's members, the workers' demands, during the general strike of the textile workers in June, to increase minimum wage from 16 Baht per day to 25 Baht was the first time that labour

organisations put pressure on the Wage Committee. Subsequently, the Wage Committee agreed to increase minimum wage twice to 20 Baht in June and to 25 Baht in January 1975. Since 1980, national labour congresses have played an active role in proposing the new minimum wage rates and organising workers' demonstrations to support their demands.

The trade union campaign on wage increase in 1988 was another event to indicate the influences of trade unions on the setting up of minimum wage rates. In 1988, minimum wage rates were fixed at 73 Baht per day in Bangkok and nearby provinces, 67 Baht and 61 Baht in other provinces. The four national congresses and the SERC, for the first time, united together to demand setting up the same national wage rate effecting for Bangkok and all provinces, at 80 Baht per day. On September 29, 1988 the Wage Committee, however, decided the new minimum wage rates at 76 Baht in Bangkok and nearby provinces, 69 Baht, and 63 Baht in other provinces.

The four national labour congresses disagreed with the new minimum wage rates and began to protest against the Wage Committee by organising a rally of thousands of workers, in front of the Government House. They also submitted the demands to the Prime Minister for increased minimum wage to 80 Baht and asked the Wage Committee to reconsider its decision. Apart from the national labour congresses, Trade Union Groups in Omnoi- Omyai, and Phrapradang also took part in the protest by organising a large worker demonstration at the Royal Field, on November 17, 1988. Faced with strong pressure from trade unions, the Wage Committee immediately reconsidered the new minimum wage rates. A compromise was made by a new announcement that the minimum wage rates determined on September 29 would be effective only from January 1 to March 31, 1989 but from April 1, 1989, the new rates would be set at 78 Baht in Bangkok and nearby provinces, 75 Baht, 70 Baht, and 65 Baht in other provinces (Napaporn Ativanichayapong, Somsak Samukkethum, and Bundit Thammatrirat 1989: 10-11).

Although the trade unions were active in the campaigns on minimum wage increases, their bargaining powers were weakened by the fragmentation of the trade union movement. In the early 1990, the three labour congresses, including the TTUC, LCT and NFTUC, demanded that the Wage Committee increase the minimum wage rate in Bangkok and nearby Provinces from 78 Baht to 95 Baht. Meanwhile, the Phrapadang Trade Union Group, the Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group and the SERC proposed their own demands that the minimum wage rate

should increase twice in 1990, to 95 Baht in April for the first increase, and to 110 Baht in October for the second increase*. In addition, they demanded the redefining of the legal minimum wage, in accordance with the ILO standard, to cover expenditures of a worker and two dependents (*Labour Review* March 1990: 15).

However, the three national labour congresses were dissatisfied with the actions of the Trade Union Groups and began to propose their own demands to increase the minimum wage to 112 Baht per day. Subsequently, the Trade Union Groups and the national labour congresses organised the campaigns separately to insist on their demands. Finally, the Wage Committee set up the new minimum wage at 100 Baht in Bangkok and nearby Provinces, 93, 88, and 83 Baht in other provinces.

The trade union campaigns on the minimum wage increases, although reflecting the fragmentation of the trade union movement, indicated the active role of the trade unions in the defense of wage interests. It was the only one issue in the 1980s on which the trade unions at all levels, including the national labour congresses and the trade union groups, could organise workers' collective action to support their demands without the involvement of other non-union forces.

* The Union Groups' demand for increasing the minimum wage to 110 Baht was based on the data survey by the APF in 1990, which indicated that the average expenses per month of a single worker was 2,903 Baht (Somsak Samukkethum 1990: 57). According to this survey, the minimum wage of a worker who worked 6 days a week, which covered the worker's daily expense, thus should be set up at around 110 Baht per day.

Table 27: Proposed and Proclaimed Minimum Wage Rates in Bangkok 1978-1990

Proposed Rate*	Proclaimed Rate	Effective Date
45	35	October 1, 1978
60	45	October 1, 1979
60	54	October 1, 1980
70	61	October 1, 1981
83	64	October 1, 1982
68	66	October 1, 1983
72	70	January 1, 1985
76	73	April 1, 1987
80	76	January 1, 1989
80	78	April 1, 1989
95	90	April 1, 1990

Sources: *Labour Review*, Vol.5, No.1, January 1991,p.21, and Somsak Samukkethum, et al. *Tripartite System and the Thai labour Movement*, p.130

Note: * Proposed rates were suggested by the employees representatives in the Wage Committee in order to negotiate with the other two parties. They might be the same or different rates proposed by the trade unions during the campaigns for wage increases.

4.6.3 The Success of the Union Campaigns on the Labour Legislation

From the late 1980s, the role of trade unions in defending the common interests of the workers was not limited only to the wage increases but the trade unions also concentrated on the labour legislation that affected the workers. During 1988-1990, trade unions were successful in the campaigns to compel the government to pass two important labour laws that improved the working conditions and welfare of the workers in the private sector.

In 1988-1989, the trade unions in the private sector collaborated with the labour NGOs to campaigns against the proliferation of short-term employment contracts and subcontracting. The increasing in the number of casual workers employed on short-term contracts and the mushrooming of subcontract-firms became the most important issue for trade unions for two main reasons.

First, it was considered unfair labour practice, as the casual and subcontract- workers lacked job-security and were not protected by the labour laws on wage and working conditions. Second, in the firms where short-term employed workers constituted the largest proportion of employees, or subcontracting was widely practiced, the bargaining powers of regular employed workers and trade unions were weakened. It was evident that many firms shifted the work to short-term hiring or subcontracting after the unions had demanded improved wages and welfare. In addition, the casual workers were pressured not to join unions' activities because of the temporary character of their employment. Consequently, short-term employment and subcontracting undermined the increase of wages of regular employed workers, as well as the growth of union membership.

The exact number of short-term employed workers and the impact of widespread short-term employment practices were not systematically collected until 1988 when the Arom Pongpangan Foundation (APF) conducted several surveys on the situation of casual workers in various industries. It was found that in all industrial zones, including Phrapadang, Omnoi-Omyai and Rangsit, short-term employment had already been practiced in a number of manufacturing firms (Somsak Samukkethum 1988: 27). The results of these surveys provided trade unions the concrete information to support their campaigns against the practices of short-term employment and subcontracting. The information was widely disseminated to the workers in seminars and meetings organised by the labour federations, the trade union groups and the national labour congresses.

The campaign started on September 17, 1989 when the four national labour congresses, LCT, TTUC, NCTL, and NFLUC, organised a national conference of more than 200 trade unions, with around 1200 workers, to discuss the topic of "Problems of Short-term Employment". Information on the number of short-term employed workers in the three industrial zones, Phrapadang, Omnoi-omyai, and Rangsit, had been presented by a researcher from the APF, and a resolution of the conference was to hold a demonstration on October 13, 1989 in order to put pressure on the government for an amendment of the legislation concerning temporary employment.

Faced with strong pressure from trade unions, the government issued the Interior Decree No. 11 to calm down the workers' rising discontent. Under the Decree, short-term employed workers were better protected, but the protection did not cover subcontract workers and piece-

rate workers. After the Decree No. 11 had been issued, all national labour congresses, except the TTUC, stopped their actions. However, the Trade Union Groups in the three industrial zones considered that the new law still had a number of shortcomings. As a result, the three Trade Union Groups, which had confidence in their own power base and alliances with other non-labour groups, decided to continue the campaign separately from the labour congresses leadership. Subsequently, a large demonstration of around ten thousands workers was held at the Royal Field on October 13, as had been planned before. This demonstration was organised by the TTUC, three Trade Union Groups in the private sector, the SERC, the Student Federation of Thailand, and the labour NGOs, with the absence of the other three national labour congresses.

Alliances of trade unions, particularly the Trade Union Groups, the labour NGOs and the Student Federation of Thailand, which first appeared during this campaign, had become an important element in strengthen the workers' bargaining power in the other campaign on the enactment on the Social Security Bill in 1989-1990.

The ideas of having the Social Security Act were first promoted in the early 1950s. In 1954, the House of Representatives approved the Draft Social Security Act, but the law's enforcement was never issued because of the fears on perceived burdens it would have on the government and the employers (Nikom and Vause 1994: 49). Numerous attempts were made during the next three decades to enforce a Social Security Law, but success was not achieved until the country enjoyed economic gains during the 1980s and trade unions played active roles to pressure the Parliament for passage of the law.

Labour campaigns on the social security law appeared in the second half of the 1980s with wide support from academics, student activists and NGOs. In the mid-1980s, the various drafts of Social Security Acts were proposed for enactment by the National Advisory Council for Labour Development and by some political parties. The UCL started to encourage public attention on the social security law by organising a seminar to discuss the differences of these Drafts on March 15, 1986. In a few years following this seminar, trade unions began to play a more active role in pushing forward the enactment of the Social Security Act.

In 1989, the Thai trade union movement could achieve some degree of unity as all trade union groups in the private sector, the SERC and the four National labour congresses jointed together in pressuring the

House of Representatives to pass the third reading of the Social Security Bill. The Bill was passed on July 27, 1989 but it had to be approved by the Senate in the next year before being promulgated. As a result, another campaign was launched, by the trade union groups in order to put pressure on the Senators to pass the Bill.

However, the cooperation between the Trade Union Groups and the four labour congresses had no longer existed late 1989. The temporary alliance of the four national labour congresses had broken down as a result of the competition among them for the seats of employee representatives in the tripartite bodies. In addition, the relations between Trade Union Groups and the national labour congresses also worsened because of conflicts arising during the protest against the short-term employment contract in October 1989. Subsequently, on November 5, 1989, the three trade union groups in the private sector and the SERC had build up a new coordinating centre of trade unions, “Coordinating Centre of Trade Unions” (กลุ่มประสานงานสหภาพแรงงาน- CCTU). The first activity of the CCTU was to support a campaign, led by the SERC, on the issues of commodity-price reduction in early 1990 (*Labour Review* December 1989: 19).

After the formation of the CCTU, the Phrapadang Trade Union Group, the Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group and the SERC openly distanced themselves from the national labour congresses, but the Rangsit Trade Union Group retained its relation with some labour congresses*. 1990 saw increasing conflicts between the trade union groups and the labour congresses. The campaign on minimum-wage increase and the May Day celebration, which had been traditionally conducted by the labour congresses, were held separately by the Trade Union Groups.

In the same year, the May Day celebration on May 1 was also organised separately by the labour congresses and the trade union groups. From 1976, the government had offered some grants to the labour congresses for organising the May Day celebrations, joined by the Department of Labour. In 1990, all five national labour congresses joined together to hold the May Day celebration at the Royal Field. As conflicts between the union groups and the labour congresses increased, the Phrapadang Trade Union Group, the Omnoi-Omyai Trade Union Group and the SERC, in cooperation with some labour union federations, held

* In 1989-1990, some leaders of the Rangsit Trade Union Group had benefited from joining the TTUC, LCT, and NFLUC faction in the competition with the NLCT for the seats of the tripartite committee.

their own May Day celebration by organising a labour demonstration in front of the Parliament Building (*Labour Review* June, 1990: 17-18).

On May Day, the Trade Union Groups started the second campaign on the Social Security Bill by demanding that the Senators pass the Bill without delay. However, when the Bill was sent to the Senate for approval on May 4, 1990, the Senators did not pass the Bill, but set up a special committee to amend the Bill. Subsequently, the workers, under the leadership of the trade union groups, began to protest against the Senators for delaying the Social Security Bill. The Trade Union Groups, however, ignored the labour congresses and turned to seek support from the labour union federations, the labour-NGOs and the student organisation. In June, 1990, the Committee to Promote the Social Security Bill was set up with a coalition of thirteen organisations including trade union groups, labour union federations' student organisation, and NGOs (*Labour Review* August 1990: 10):

- Trade Union Group in Omnoi-Omyai
- Trade Union Group in Phrapradang, Samuth Prakarn and Nearby Areas
- State Enterprise Relations Confederation
- Thailand Metal Workers' Federation
- Paper and Printing Federation of Thailand
- The Federation of Bank and Financial Workers Unions of Thailand
- Labour Confederation of Food, Beverage, Hotel and Allied Industries
- The Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand
- Student Federation of Thailand
- Union for Civil Liberty
- Arom Pongpangan Foundation
- Young Workers' Group
- Friends of Women Group

The Committee played the key role in the campaigns and gained wide support from the media and the public. The most crucial activity was to conduct a hunger strike during May 17-18, 1990, to protest against the Senators' delay of Social Security Bill enforcement. Fourteen workers and four student activists participated in the hunger strike. Subsequently, the labour campaign to promote Social Security Bill became popular as news on the hunger strike was reported sympathetically by the media. Nevertheless, on July 6, 1990, the Senators ousted the Bill with a

majority vote. However, the campaign was successful when the Bill was returned to the House of Representatives and passed a second time with an unanimous vote, of 330 to 0, on July 11, 1990.

The trade union movement had been able to achieve their demands on the Social Security Act despite the opposition of the Senate because of two main reasons. First, trade unions did not solely organise the campaign, but cooperated with the NGOs and student organisation, and the media also supported the campaign. In addition, the relatively united stand of the trade union movement led by the area-based union groups facilitated the cooperation with other supporter including political parties, academics and government advisors*.

Second, the Social Security Act was introduced in a period of liberal democratisation and the situation of power struggle between the government and the military. Under Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, the House of Representatives and the Cabinet were dominated by the economic elite (businessmen), while the Senate was dominated by the bureaucratic elite (military and civilian). As the Chatichai government lacked support from the bureaucratic elite, it depended much on support from other groups. In early 1990, while trade unions and the labour NGOs continued their campaigns in the demand for social security system, with wide support from the public and the media, conflicts between the government and the military increased. The government had to rely on the support of other groups, including the workers and all supporters of the Bill. The conflict among the elite was thus the other crucial factor for the introduction of the Social Security Act.

In summary, the growth of economic unionism in the private trade union movement was facilitated by the favorable conditions of economic and political development and the role of the labour NGOs. The economic boom, as a result of the rapid growth of the export-led economy in the late 1980s had provided positive conditions that legitimized the workers' demands for wage increases, fair employment contracts, and a social security system. Because the workers' demands were considered reasonable under the favorable economic conditions, the state and capitalists, thus, had no reason to oppose them.

* Among the Prime Minister's advisors, some important supporters of the Social Security Act were Nikhom Chandravithun and Krisak Choonhavan.

In political aspect, the political conditions had changed from the “semi- democratic” characteristics of the Prem regime towards the more democratic and liberal ones of the Chatichai Premiership. The new political climate in which the state was forced to negotiate with labour and other civil forces, apart from the military and bureaucratic forces, had facilitated the growth of social movements and the trade union movement, as well as increasing unions’ bargaining powers.

In addition, although the unions limited their role as economic unions to defend the labour’s particular interests, they were not isolated by the other social forces, particularly the NGOs. The emergence of the labour-NGOs since the mid- 1980s had contributed partly to an enhancement of unions’ bargaining powers in the private sector. The labour-NGOs in the 1980s had replaced the role of students, as a supportive element, in the development of trade unions. The labour-NGOs had provided supports to the unions in terms of academic, legal and welfare services and encouraged the cooperation between trade union groups across industrial zones. The role of the NGO activists in the trade union movement was also evidenced by the collaboration between trade unions and the labour – NGOs in the campaigns on non-wage issues. This collaboration also contributed to the success of the private enterprise union movement.

4.7 Development of Economic Unionism in the State Enterprise Union Movement

The problems in the development of the state enterprise unions were very different from those of the private enterprise unions. In the private enterprises, the conflicts among the leaders of trade unions caused the organisational weakness of the trade union movement. However, this weakness was compensated by the cooperation of the trade unions and other non-union groups. The state enterprise union movement was, on the contrary, characterised by the unity and strength of trade unions but lacked support from other organisations. The isolation of the state enterprise union movement was evident by the unpopularity of the unions in their collective action on two main issues: the anti privatisation and the demand for salary increase. This isolation led the unions to be easily destroyed after the coup d’ e tat in February, 1991.

4.7.1 Demands and Collective Actions of the State Enterprise Workers

During 1983-1990, the collective actions of the state enterprise employees were organised often by the trade unions in the forms of strikes, rallies and demonstrations to put pressure on the government. The abolition of the government's policy on privatisation and the increase of the employees' salary were the two main objectives of the trade unions.

The policy on privatisation of state enterprises had been first emphasized in the Fifth National Economic and Social Plan during 1982-1986 and was implemented by the Cabinet Solution on October 18, 1983 (Somsak Samukkethum 2000:). The principal motivation behind privatisation was the increasing need for investment in Thailand's inadequate infrastructure, including roads, rails, ports, power, phones, water, and air transportation. The government's self-imposed annual limit of \$ 1.2 billion for borrowing imposed an increasingly urgent incentive to attract private equity capital (*Foreign Labour Trends* 1990 cited in Nikom and Vause 1993: 62). This policy, however, stimulated the fear of loss of job security and working benefits among the state enterprise employees. As a result, in 1988, unions in state enterprises had gathered into five groups in order to prepare the plans for protesting against privatisation together. These unions groups were:

- The State Enterprise Relations Confederation (consisting of 18 large and active unions, including unions in all public utility enterprises, mostly affiliated with the TTUC)
- The State Enterprise Union Group of Thailand, (consisting of 28 unions, mostly medium and small unions, mostly affiliated with the LCT).
- The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority Union Group (consisting of 12 unions of the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority employees. The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority was one of the state enterprises that suffered great loss and was regarded as needing privatisation.)
- The Agricultural Industry Union Group of Thailand (consisting of 6 unions in the state enterprises under authorization of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, which were small-scale manufacturing firms under thread of being closed down or privatised).
- The Trade Union Group of State Enterprise under Authorization of the Ministry of Defence, (consisting of 5 unions in the small-scale manufacturing firms that were established during the WWII period and under thread of being closed down).

The unity and strength of state enterprise unions resulted in the strong bargaining powers of the unions in negotiating with the government, but did not contribute to unions' popularity. Since 1988, the media and public opinion began to turn against strikes in state enterprises. Strikes led by trade unions to demand salary increases and protest against privatisation did not gain support from the public but were strongly condemned by the media.

In fact, strikes in all public utility enterprises were illegal according to the labour law.* However, during 1988-1990, state enterprise unions used a special tactic to avoid illegal strike by holding a so-called "extraordinary meeting" of all the unions' members while their leaders were negotiating with the government.

When Chatichai Choonhavan assumed the office of Prime Minister in August, 1988, he continued to pressure the goal of privatisation. However, this policy stimulated increasing opposition from state enterprise unions. During 1988-1990, unions' protests against privatisation occurred frequently in those enterprises, where the government planned to transfer some parts of productions to private businesses. The major turning point against privatisation was the success of port unions' protests against the privatisation of the Laem Chabang Port in August, 1989, and January, 1990(see table 28).

Unable to reach an accommodation with the unions' opposition of privatisation, Prime Minister Chatchai announced in Mar, 1990, that the privatisation efforts would be postponed pending the creation of a tripartite State Enterprise Labour Relations Promotion Committee. The major task of the committee was to achieve consensus and search for a broader range of policy options on privatisation. The unions' successes on the protests against privatisation accumulated people's dissatisfaction of state enterprise unions. Although individual strikes of state enterprise employees did not directly affect the people, public opinion had already turned against the strikes. State enterprise employees and their unions were viewed as privilege groups that were concerned only with their own interests.

* After the coup d' e tat in October, 1976, the government amended the 1975 Labour Relations Act in order to prohibit strikes in state enterprises. According to Section 23 of the Act, labour strike was not allowed in some operations, i.e. railways, harbor, telephone or telecommunications, generating and distributing of energy or electricity to the public, water works, producing or refining fuel oil, hospitals or medical treatment centres, and other business activities as prescribed by the Ministerial Regulations.

Table 28: Chronological Protests in State Enterprises to Protest against Privatisation, 1988-1990

Date	Name of State Enterprise
17-26 May, 1988	The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority
20-26 May, 21 June, 1988	The State Railways of Thailand
27 June, 1988	Thailand Tobacco Monopoly
11-12 July, 1988	The Metropolitan Waterworks Authority
26-27 September, 1988	The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority
4 May, 1989	Thailand Tobacco Monopoly
1-9 August, 1989	Port of Authority of Thailand
10-16, 29-31 January, 1990	Port of Authority of Thailand
5, 27-28 February, 1990	The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand

Source: Summary from Somsak Samukkethum, *The Institutionalization of Labour Conflict in Thailand: the Role of the State in Capital Accumulation, Political Legitimation and Strategies of Labour Control, 1973-1992*, pp. 330-332

The negative image of the state enterprise unions was further added to in the other two campaigns for salary increases. As discussed in Chapter Three, in the early 1980s, the state enterprise unions were successful in their demands for wage and welfare improvement, while wages of industrial workers in the private enterprises increased slowly, according to the rises of minimum wage rates determined by the Wage Committee. High salary and good welfare were recognized as a general feature of working conditions in state enterprise, which distinguished the primary problems of state enterprise employees from the private industrial workers. While the primary problems of workers in the private sector remained the economic hardship from their low wage and poor welfare, the state enterprise employees no longer suffered from such employment conditions.

As the defenders of their members' interests, the state enterprise unions played active roles in keeping the high standard of the employees' wages and welfare, relative to the civil servants. Since the method of collective bargaining had been changed by the Cabinet resolution in 1982, state enterprise unions had to negotiate directly with the government on wage and money benefit increases. As a result, the unions had united under the leadership of the SERC and used the work stoppage as their instrument to put pressure on the government. However, the two campaigns on wage increases in 1989 and 1990 became the crucial events that led state enterprise unions to be on a legitimate crisis.

The first campaign was started after the Cabinet had approved, on September 13, 1988, to increase the salary of civil servants, but kept silent on the increase of state enterprise employee salaries which had been stagnated since 1982. The SERC, therefore, submitted the demands to the Prime Minister for restructuring the salaries of state enterprise employees at 12.35-21.5 percent higher than the initial rates. Unlike the increase in salaries of civil servants, the SERC's demands to increase salaries were opposed by the media and other groups of people. Some of the reasons for the resistance were: i) most people felt that wages and welfare of state enterprise employees were already higher than those of the civil servants and private employees; ii) the unions' demands were extremely unreasonable due to the problems of inefficiency and continued losses in a number of state enterprises (*Labour Review* October, 1988: 21).

The SERC, however, ignored public opinions and declared to stage a general strike on October 25, 1988, by using the tactic of holding the "extraordinary meeting" of the unions' members in all state enterprises where SERC's members existed. Faced with strong pressure by the unions, the government accepted the SERC's demands for salary increase. Although the SERC was successfully achieved their demands, this event resulted in the increasing unpopularity of state enterprise unions. In addition, some union leaders in the private sector were also dissatisfied with the state enterprise unions' campaign on salary increase, which was launched in the same period as the workers in the private sector were demanding increased minimum wage rates (Napaporn, Somsak, and Bundit 1989: 5).

The second campaign for salary increase came in 1990. In March 1990, the Cabinet approved an increase in the salaries of civil servants while the National Wage Committee also set up the new minimum wage rates which increased around fifteen percent from the old rates. Similar to the situation in 1987, the Cabinet did not state a clear policy on salaries of state enterprise employees.

The SERC therefore immediately submitted the demands to the government to increase salaries of state enterprise employees to 13.25 percent higher than the existing rates. The government responded by offering an increase of 6.85 percent but was rejected by the SERC. In addition, the leaders of the SERC began to put pressure on the government by using the same tactic as they did in 1987. A general strike of state enterprise employees, through a holding of "extraordinary meeting" at the workplaces, was staged on May 28-30, 1990. The unions

that participated in this general strike included 25 affiliates of the SERC and the other 13 unions outside the SERC. To put more pressure on the government, the SERC also organised a large rally in front of the building of the Government House. With the unity and strong bargaining powers of state enterprise unions, the government, again, accepted the SERC's demands.

4.7.2 Causes of the Unions' Strength

The promotion of the industrialisation since 1960 required the government to provide the infrastructure to facilitate the operations of the private businesses. This development resulted in the growth of the number of employees in the public utility sector. A number of public utility enterprises owned by the government are large-scale establishments, with more than five thousand to thirty thousand employees. These state enterprises also the sources of the large unions, which have high bargaining power in negotiating with the government for their demands.

In addition, the government policy to centralise the power of determining the wages of the state enterprise employees unwillingly promoted the collective action of the workers under the leadership of the SERC. From the late 1980s up to 1990, the SERC became the most powerful leading organisation of trade unions, its members increased from 8 unions in 1980 to 25 strong and active unions in 1990(see table 29). The growth of the SERC was encouraged by the need of the state enterprise unions to unite under a strong organisation in order to negotiate directly with the government. The SERC thus became an organisation workers' collective action, rich in resources: money, time and organisational skills.

Table 29: SERC Membership in 1990

Name of Labour Union	Members
1 Labour Union of Metropolitan Electricity Authority	10,733
2 Labour Union of Provincial Electricity Authority	11,740
3 Labour Union of Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand	17,722
4 Labour Union of The Metropolitan Waterworks Authority	4,505
5 Labour Union of Telephone Organisation of Thailand	13,000
6 Labour Union of Port Authority of Thailand	2,486
7 Labour Union of National Housing Authority	1,340
8 Labour Union of Petroleum Authority of Thailand	1,446
9 Labour Union of Petroleum Authority of Thailand Workers	1,275
10 Labour Union of The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority Workers	9,800
11 Labour Union of Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research	180
12 Labour Union of The Government Pharmaceutical Organisation	1,780
13 Labour Union of Kurusapa Business Organisation	1,501
14 Labour Union of Dairy Farming Promotion Organisation of Thailand	730
15 Labour Union of The Government Lottery Office	580
16 Labour Union of Thai Airways International Public Company Ltd. Workers	2,036
17 Labour Union of The Forest Industry Organisation Workers	720
18 Labour Union of Public Warehouse Organisation	na
19 Labour Union of The Government Savings Bank Workers	1,018
20 Labour Union of The Express Transportation Organisation of Thailand Workers	150
21 State Railway Locomotive Operation Trade Union of Thailand	6,500
22 Labour Union of Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund	1,987
23 Labour Union of Sports Authority of Thailand	324
24 Labour Union of Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives	6,241
25 Labour Union of Telecommunication and Communication Authority of Thailand	4,850

Source: Calculated from Bandit Thammatrirat 1990, *Directory of Thai Labour Organisations*

4.7.3 Causes of the Union Unpopularity

The strong bargaining power of trade unions without wide public support was not a sufficient factor to protect the unions from being destroyed. After a military group calling themselves the National Peace

Keeping Council (NPKC) staged a coup d' e tat to seize political power from General Chatchai Chunhavan' s government on February 23, 1991, the junta that came to power following the coup wasted no time in imposing severe restrictions on labour rights. However, only the unions in state enterprises were banned, while workers in the private sector could continue their functions under the new restricted conditions. The unpopularity of state enterprise unions had legitimized the ban of these organisations. Consequently, the state enterprise employees could gain little sympathy from the media and the public when their union rights were abolished. The unpopularity of the state enterprise unions was the result of several factors: the isolation of trade unions, the influence of the media, and the middle class attitude towards the state enterprise employees.

Ironically, the causes of the unions' strength were also, at the same time, the sources of their isolation. The isolation was caused by the unions' confidence in their own unity and strong bargaining power. In the 1980s, all the national labour congresses' influences of declined and all the trade union groups in the private sector were weaker than the SERC. State enterprise unions, therefore, were confident in their own powers and saw it was useless to seek support from either the national labour congresses or the trade union groups in the private sector. During the years of protesting against privatisation, the SERC never had a plan to raise support from trade unions in the private sector or other pressure groups, apart from labour. Contrary to the state enterprise unions, the trade union groups in the private sector had weak bargaining powers, they therefore needed not only to cooperate with the national labour congresses, but also to seek support from other sympathizers such as: NGOs and the mass media.

In 1990, after the state enterprise unions had staged a number of strikes to demand salary increases and to protest against the privatisation policy, the SERC realized that the state enterprise unions had begun to face serious problems caused by its increasing unpopularity. But it decided to choose to campaign for its members' immediate interests on the salary increase, regardless of the negative impact on the legitimacy of the campaign, which would affect the unions in the long term. This decision was determined by the SERC' s strong confidence in the unity and strength of state enterprise unions and the ideological orientation of the union actors, which were based on the sense of self-serving interest.

After the first campaign on salary increase, the state enterprise unions found themselves increasingly isolated from other social

movements and alienating the public. The SERC therefore tried to create a new image of state enterprise unions by organising some activities that benefited the community's members at large.

In the late 1988, people in the Southern provinces were suffering from a flood disaster, so the SERC then arranged a program to collect clothes, food, medicine and money from the state enterprise employees and donate them to those people in the flooded areas. For another, a Coordinating Centre of Consumer- Rights Protection and Corruption Resistance in State Enterprise was formed in early 1989 to seek information on problems of public utility service and corruption. In addition, when there was a political movement on constitutional reform, led by six opposition parties, the SERC also presented itself to support the movement (Napaporn Ativanichayapong 1990: 7).

The other important effort to change public attitude on state enterprise unions was a campaign on reducing commodity prices in late 1989. Rising prices of consumer goods in 1989 was a result of rapid economic growth in the late 1980s. The SERC saw this problem as an opportunity to create a new image of state enterprise unions. The SERC, therefore, launched a campaign, by carrying out a public survey, organised press conference, and met with some government leaders in order to demand price reductions on foods such as rice, pork, milk, and vegetable oil. The campaign was not successful, but more important for the SERC was public response to the new role of state enterprise unions. The media and other social organisations had given a welcome to this campaign, but the unions' concern towards the public interests had proved to be a tactic rather than a strategic change in the aim of the union movement. State enterprise unions threw out all successes of social activities they had performed to reduce their negative image, when they went on a general strike to demand for salary increase again in 1990. Regardless of the extremely negative image of the unions' collective action in the eyes of the public, the state enterprise unions aggressively acted for their demands. As a result, the unions pushed themselves into the more isolated position.

However, the unpopularity of the state enterprise unions was not only caused by the effects of their collective actions on the public interests, but was also related to another element, the increasing influence of the mass media on the determination of the public attitude towards the social movements.

Since 1980, pictures of trade unions were presented by the mass media through both the electronic media and the print media. Before 1992, television and radio broadcasts were operated or controlled by the state, but newspapers were more independent from the state control. The role of the media in Thailand was seen as to have oscillated between servant and watchdog. The state-controlled electronic media were viewed as the servants of the state as they were required to present information in favor of the state. The print media, throughout the 1980s, had an opportunity to bolster their independence and growth into their role as the public's watchdog, especially during the 1988-1990 full democracy and economic boom (Thitinan Pongsudhirak 1997: 218-222).

As labour conflicts in state enterprises were the problems between the unions and the government, the unions campaigns to pressure or to protest against the government had undermined the state stability. The state-controlled television and radio media, therefore, did not present the whole information on the union campaigns, but were biased in reporting only the information from the government view.

The print media did not report news in favor of the government and neither did it promote the unions' activities. The newspaper business, although growing enormously in the late 1980s, was one of the industries in which the employers strongly opposed unions' activities in their companies. The employees who had tried to form unions in several newspaper companies were dismissed before the unions would be established. Consequently, the Bangkok Post Company of an English-Language newspaper was the only one in which the employees could set up a trade union. Generally, the unions' activities that contributed a positive impact on the society were rarely reported on the pages of the newspapers, while the media's attention tended to place emphasis on the unions' actions that resulted in negative effects on the public interest.

The public attitude towards the trade union movement was strongly influenced by the image of trade unions presented through the newspapers. During 1988-1990, strikes of state enterprise employees were strongly condemned by the reporters and the columnists of the

newspapers^{*}. This resulted in an extremely negative image of state enterprise unions.

Apart from the media influence, unpopularity of trade unions was also a result of public attitude towards state enterprise employees. The rapid growth of industrial economy in the 1980s brought about the increasing number and influence of the middle class on Thai politics. This social class significantly benefitted from the liberal politics and the surge in economic growth in the late 1980s, which was contributed to partly by the stagnation of labour unrest. The middle class, which constitutes the largest proportion of the urban population⁷ tended to oppose the militant forms of labour resistance, such as strike and protest that might disturb the political stability and economic growth.

However, the public had more sympathy with the private unions' demands for wage increase than on the state enterprise unions' demands on the same issue. This difference was a consequence of public attitude towards the state enterprise employees. The state enterprise employees were considered privileged wage earners. Among the wage earners, state enterprise employees in the late 1980s were viewed as having the best working conditions in terms of payment, welfare, job security and social status, in comparison with civil servants and industrial workers in the private sector. As a result, the state enterprise unions' demands for salary increases were not reasonable or justified in the eyes of the public.

Similarly, the unions' protests against privatisation were not supported by the public as a result of the efficiency of the public utility services. In fact, the government policy on privatisation also affected public interest because there was no guarantee that prices or quality of

* The only exception was the strike of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) employees in protest against the Cabinet's decision on the termination of all members of the Board of the EGAT. As the EGAT union believed that the government planned to privatise the EGAT by terminating the old Board members and appointing the pro-privatisation technocrats to be the new Board Committee, the union led about 6,000 EGAT employees to go on strike on June 29-July 3, 1989. This strike was aimed at pressuring the government to remove Chalerm Yoobamrong, a Cabinet member, who authorized the EGAT administration, and to re-appoint the terminated Board members. Unlike the other strikes of state enterprise employees, the newspapers reported the news in favor of the workers and the EGAT union. The main reasons were that Chalerm Yoobamrong was a very unpopular Minister in the Chatichai government and he also had some conflicts with the newspapers, particularly with the owner of Thairat, the most popular newspaper of the country. The union's demand to remove this Minister from the EGAT regulation was therefore appreciated by the media and the public.

public utilities would be maintained. However, the unions only presented their demands in relation to their own interests, namely, fear of loss of good welfare and job security. The other issue usually mentioned by the unions during their protests was national security concerns, which was not reasonable enough to legitimize the unions' campaigns. As a result, the unions' anti-privatisation campaigns were viewed by the media and the public as a consequence of conflict of interest between the state enterprise unions and the public in which the unions had tried to protect their members' benefits, regardless of the public interests.

4.8 Conclusion

From 1977 up to 1990 there was a continuing development of the trade union movement in Thailand. However, during this period, trade unions limited their role to collective bargaining for the common interests of the workers and did not participate in the movement for broad social objectives. The dominant character of the trade union movement during this period was identified by the economic unionism in which the trade unions strongly defended the specific interests of their members, but failed to organise class collective action and distanced themselves from the movement for broad social objectives.

A transformation of the social movement unionism in the mid-1970s to the economic unionism in the 1980s was a result of the interaction between the trade unions and the changes in the political system, the industrial policies and the development of the other social movements in the post-1976 period.

The separation of the, 1976, was the direct consequence of the sudden change in the political climate. The violent suppression of the social activists during the one year under the authoritarian rule, had prevented the trade unions from continuing their political actions.

However, the internal conditions of the union organisations also caused the change in the characteristics of the trade union movement. The components of the union leadership in the 1980s changed significantly from those in the mid- 1970s. In 1975-1976, the most important national labour centres were the Labour Coordination Centre of Thailand(LCCT) and the Trade Union Group of Thailand (TUG). These two organisations were controlled by the union leaders who had the same objectives in protecting the benefits of the working class. They thus could create the cooperation between their organisations and led the trade union movement without serious conflicting interests among themselves. Under

the unity of the leadership, the trade unions could mobilise the workers' class collective action for the benefits of the workers as well as for the broad social objectives.

However, since the early 1980s, conflicts and competition among the leaders of the national labour congresses to serve their own interests led to the fragmentation of the trade union movement and isolation of national union organisations from their rank and file members, as well as from other movements on social issues. Initially, this fragmentation was encouraged by some of the political elite in order to control the trade union movement.

The first half of the decade after the 1976 coup d' e tat was the period of the ideological struggle between the Thai state and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). During those years, conflicts and competition among the union leaders were encouraged by the state intervention through the patron- client relations between some military leaders and some leaders of the Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT). However, after the CPT collapsed and politics became more stable under the parliamentary system, there was no need for the state to intervene the trade union movement. Since the second half of the 1980s, the conflicts and among the trade union leaders were caused by the competitions for self- interests, not by the state intervention.

When the conflicts and competition became a general feature of the all the national labour congresses in the 1980s, there was no organisation to be a genuine representative of the workers, and hence no organisation to organise class collective action and lead the unions to participate in the movements for broad social objectives. Under these circumstances, only the collective action for demanding the particular interests of the workers, organised separately by the private enterprise trade unions and the state enterprise trade unions, were successful.

Although the national labour congresses were ineffective in mobilising collective action, the organisational weakness of the leadership structure was compensated for by the new structure of the movement organisations. The trade union groups were formed by both the unions in the private sector and the state enterprise unions to replace the national labour congresses in mobilising the workers' collective action.

For state enterprise unions, the SERC was strong enough to organise the collective action independently from the control of the

national labour congresses. However, the development of the state enterprise union movement indicated both the success and failure of the economic unionism in the 1980s. The unions could organise strong autonomous action to defend their members' interest but failed to gain support from the public and the other social movements. The unions' unity and strength thus could not prevent them from the legitimacy crisis and unpopularity.

Unlike the trade unions in the private sector, the state enterprise unions were rich in terms of resources for mobilising collective action. Their organisational strength provided two different impacts on the development of the trade unions. On one side, there was no condition for the social activists outside the trade unions to intervene in the determination of unions' objectives. The state enterprise unions were thus less influenced by the other social movements when they determined the movement' aims and strategy. On the other side, the trade unions had no need to make alliances with other organisations because they could organise strong collective action by themselves to achieve their demands. These conditions, however, led to the isolation of the state enterprise unions from the other social movements. The causes of the unions' strength were thus also the sources of their isolation.

As for unions in the private sector, the area-based trade union groups were not as strong as the SER. They thus needed to cooperate with the national labour congresses in organising large demonstrations and protests. However, the trade union groups were supported by the other non-union forces, particularly, the labour NGOs. In the post-1976 period, the students had no longer influenced the trade union movement. It was the labour NGO activists that worked closely with the trade unions and offered themselves as the advisors or organisers of the workers.

Since the early 1980s, the student movement had declined, while the NGO movements had emerged as the new social movements to replace the student, labour, and peasant movements in catalyzing the social transition. However, the NGO movements in the 1980s were the issue movements in response to certain social problems, none of which became a nationwide campaign that could mobilise the workers to participate in.

Collaboration between trade unions and labour NGOs did not lead to the involvement of organised workers in the broad social issues beyond the workers' interests. Since mobilising workers to support the NGOs movements was not the primary goal of the labour NGOs in working with

trade unions, the NGO activists made no effort to build up a connection with strong unions that had potential to support the NGO movements. Instead, the NGO activists viewed themselves as a supportive element of the trade union movement. Their main target groups were therefore those grassroots workers who suffered low wages and poor working conditions, and the unions of these workers. Consequently, the labour NGO activists that worked with the trade unions facilitated the growth of the economic unionism but could not radicalize the trade union movement as the students did in the mid- 1970s.

