

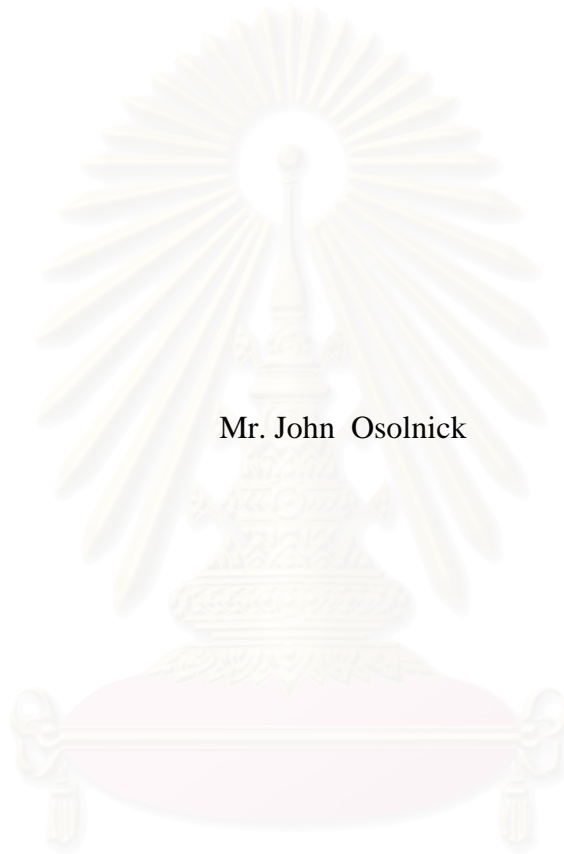
ขบวนการสหภาพแรงงานไทย:  
การศึกษาข้อจำกัดภายในขบวนการที่มีต่อประสิทธิผล  
ในการปกป้องผลประโยชน์ของสมาชิกในสถานประกอบการและสังคม



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THE THAI LABOUR UNIONS: IDENTIFYING INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS TO  
EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS IN THE  
WORKPLACE AND IN SOCIETY



Mr. John Osolnick

สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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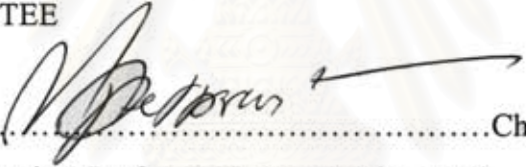
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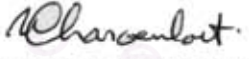
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ดูเหมือนว่าผู้ใช้แรงงานทั่วโลกต่างต้องดิ้นรนต่อสู้เพื่อศักดิ์ศรี ความเป็นธรรม ความยุติธรรม และ  
คุณภาพของชีวิตที่ดีขึ้นอย่างไม่อาจหยุดยั้งได้ สหภาพแรงงานเป็นสถาบันที่สำคัญอย่างยิ่งยวดในการ  
ช่วยเหลือผู้ใช้แรงงานให้สามารถดิ้นรนต่อสู้เพื่อตัวเอง เพื่อครอบครัวและชุมชนมาโดยตลอด ซึ่ง สามารถ  
ประจักษ์ได้กว้างว่ายี่สิบสามสิบปีที่ผ่านมา ผู้ใช้แรงงานและสหภาพแรงงานต้องพบกับความท้าทายที่รุนแรง  
ขึ้นเมื่อมีคนเชื่อว่าการวิตรอนอำนาจและประสิทธิภาพของสหภาพแรงงานจะทำให้พวกเขาได้ผลประโยชน์  
เพิ่มขึ้น ดังนั้น สหภาพแรงงานทั่วโลก ไม่เว้นแม้แต่ในอเมริกาและประเทศไทย ต้องเผชิญกับอุปสรรคที่  
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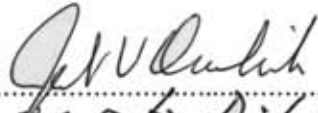
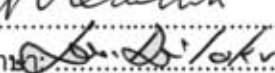
อย่างไรก็ตาม อุปสรรคเหล่านี้ได้ก่อให้เกิดพัฒนาการบางอย่างขึ้น สิ่งหนึ่งก็คือ การสร้างแบบฉบับ  
ของระบบสหภาพแรงงาน

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มุ่งเน้นแต่เฉพาะการขับเคลื่อนของสหภาพแรงงานไทย โดยไม่ได้แจงถึงรายละเอียด  
ของอุปสรรคต่างๆที่ผู้ใช้แรงงานไทยต้องเผชิญกับนายจ้าง รัฐบาลหรือกฎหมาย แต่เป็นบททดสอบถึง  
ศักยภาพของสหภาพแรงงานไทยในการสร้างแบบฉบับของระบบสหภาพแรงงานที่มีประสิทธิภาพ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มุ่งค้นหาถึงปัญหาที่สหภาพแรงงานไทยจำเป็นต้องแก้ไขก่อน จึงจะสามารถสร้างแบบ  
ฉบับของระบบสหภาพแรงงานต่อไปได้ ท้ายสุดของงานวิจัยนี้ ส่วนใหญ่เป็นการกล่าวถึงปัจจัยสำคัญสอง  
ประการที่จำเป็นต้องมีเพื่อใช้ในการสร้างแบบฉบับของระบบสหภาพ นั่นคือ การเงิน(ค่าบำรุงสมาชิก) และ  
บุคลากรจัดตั้ง/หาสมาชิก

ผลงานวิจัยนี้ได้เปิดเผยให้เห็นว่าสหภาพแรงงานไทยในปัจจุบันขาดทั้งเงินทุนและบุคลากรจัดตั้ง/  
หาสมาชิก

สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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Workers around the globe seem to share the same constant up-hill struggle for dignity, justice, fairness and a decent way of life. Trade unions have been and continue to be the pivotal institution for working class people to advance their struggle for themselves, their families, and their communities. The past few decades have borne witness to ever-greater challenges to workers and their unions by those who believe they benefit from limiting the power and effectiveness of unions. Consequently, unions all over the world, including in America and Thailand, have faced setbacks in recent decades.

There have however been developments that have shown real promise in turning around the setbacks organized labor has been facing. One such development is the organizing model of unionism.

This research is focused on the Thai trade union movement. It is not an elaboration of the many hurdles the movement faces from employers, the government or the law. It is instead an examination of what capacities Thai unions have to adopt and implement the organizing model of unionism.

This research seeks to examine what internal constraints Thai unions need to address as a prerequisite to adopting the organizing model. To that end, the research is chiefly concerned with examining two key resources needed to adopt the model: financial resources (dues) and organizing staff.

The research reveals that Thai unions currently lack both the financial resources and organizing staff to adopt the organizing model.

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Field of Study International Development  
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*Dr. Dsokvichya*

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Strong labor movements have historically proven to be an effective, if not the most effective means by which workers can protect their interests and share in the rewards of the wealth that is generated through industrialization and development. Unions provide a means by which workers can collectively deal with their employers and their government through a peaceful, constructive, and democratic process. Strong, effective, and democratic unions are the vehicles through which working class people learn to participate in and appreciate democratic processes.

Unions do this by providing workers an economic avenue by which they can become members of the middle class. In so doing, it can be said that unions help foster a growing middle class and thereby help create a larger domestic market of consumers and a larger domestic economy. As workers enter the middle class through their participation in unions, the nation's tax base is expanded as well. Finally, by giving workers an organization where they can both interact effectively with their government but also participate in a meaningful way in the political process, unions vest working class people in the political process and representative democracy.

Historically, the power of those economic interests in any society that benefit from denying workers their rights never simply recognize the rights of workers until after the workers themselves have already built strong and effective unions that must be recognized. In effect, the legitimacy of workers' organizations is not granted by the existing power structure but rather it is simply recognized after workers and their unions have already attained power. Workers, through their own organizations, create their own space!

Trade union leaders around the world are constantly talking about the need to stand together against the onslaught of globalization. The pantheon of national and international Labor Solidarity Support Organizations (SSOs) around the globe is built on the premise that workers need to help other workers. That by doing so,

workers in every country can build strong, self-reliant unions that can work together as partners to arrest what they call to the race to the bottom.

Non Governmental Organizations of all varieties have been engaged in these activities for over thirty years in Thailand. Nonetheless, the Thai Labor Movement has not become stronger or more self-reliant. To the contrary, it has become weaker, particularly over the past fifteen years. What is the explanation?

This research is aimed at identifying what obstacles are preventing the Thai Labor Union movement from becoming stronger and more self-reliant. What capacities do Thai Labor Unions have or need to develop to overcome the obstacles to their development? What can NGOs do or have failed to do to assist the Thai Labor Movement becoming a self-reliant, capable representative of the interests of Thai workers?

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The rights to organize and collectively bargain are universal human rights that are recognized as such both in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organization core conventions 87 and 98.(International Labour Organization, 1948, , 1949; United Nations, 1948) Previous research by Compa, Bundit, Brown and others demonstrates that neither the United States nor Thailand are in compliance with conventions 87 and 98.(Brown, Bundit, & Hewison, 2002; Bundit, 2003; Compa & Human Rights Watch (Organization), 2000)

By extending this earlier research to the realm of International Human Rights demonstrates that since both governments are out of compliance with ILO Conventions 87 and 96 both governments are also out of compliance with at least two of the six universally recognized Human Rights Treaties. Both governments fail in their duty to ensure the rights of workers and their unions as set forth in the International Covenant on Economic and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Specifically they

appear to be out of compliance with at least articles 7 and 8 of the ICESCR and the ICCPR in articles 22 and possibly 12, 13, 19, 20, 21 and 25 as well(UN, 1966, , 1996).

In both the United States and Thailand, the percentage of the workforce represented by unions has been declining. In the United States and in Thailand there has been a continuing decline in what had been the most densely organized sectors - manufacturing and the public sector in the US and the state enterprises in Thailand - for reasons largely outside the control of the respective unions involved. In both Thailand and America, workers are not adequately protected during the process of organizing.

The neo-liberal economic policies that Stiglitz calls refers to as market fundamentalism have put workers on the defensive(Stiglitz, 2002). Indeed, both in the country where the Washington Consensus was derived and in a country such as Thailand, where it has been imposed or adopted depending ones perceived interests lie, the policies with regard to workers and unions are very much the same. Both governments have adopted policies that encourage privatization and more flexibility that translates into the substituting of employees with contract workers, the failure to protect of labor rights and ignoring the widespread exploitation of foreign migrant workers.

The strongest and best-organized sector of the workforce in Thailand has traditionally been among the state enterprise workers. Since 1991 the unions in the state enterprise sector have had their rights restricted to the extent that they cannot organize private sector workers in the same industries.(Somsak, 2004) As a result, the unions with the most experience in organizing and bargaining cannot organize workers in the private sector. This has deprived State Enterprise Unions of the opportunity to grow and represent more workers and it has denied workers in the private sector the benefit of joining strong and effective unions run by experienced trade unionists. Additionally, all the governments since 1993 have been privatizing the state enterprises thereby constantly reducing the size of the state enterprise workforce and the membership of the state enterprise unions.

In both countries, employers and large corporations have managed to create a legal environment that is extremely hostile to organized labor that puts downward pressure on wages and reduces the bargaining power of organized workers. The vested- interests that benefit from these policies in both countries are essentially the same; although, the names of the individuals and the corporations may be different. In both countries, the political parties are beholden to the wealthy and the already powerful. Pasuk's work demonstrates that money has dominated Thai politics for a long time even before Thaksin took direct involvement by business to a new level (P. Pasuk & C. Baker, 2002; P. Pasuk & C. J. Baker, 2002). Certainly, the same can be said of the United States at this time as well. Greider demonstrated throughout in *Who Will Tell the People* in 1992 that labor and its allies had already lost the Democratic Party to big money for nearly a decade, at least, by that time (Greider, 1992). In both countries, Labor has learned it cannot outspend its political opponents.

The apparent difference is how some unions in America have adapted and are growing once again whereas unions are not growing in the growing private sector in Thailand.

American unions have begun to grow again and even organize contract workers and undocumented aliens such as janitors, by revisiting what they did decades ago to achieve the power they once had. They have gone back to organizing and recommitted themselves to rebuilding their capacity to organize. It is a recognition that the path to regaining power lies in unions' ability to become proficient again in the methods, techniques and strategies of organizing and adapting them to a changing economy and workforce. (Aronowitz, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, AFL-CIO. Dept. of Economic Research., & New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations., 1998) It is a slow process that begins with internally organizing existing members to win better contracts that justify members' committing greater resources (dues) to organizing new workers all the way up to organizing new political coalitions, voter outreach programs and Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaigns. It is a method of re-structuring unions to build greater organizing capacity among the staff and the membership that is being used in a number of countries. (Cooper, 1998)

For example, unions in America understand the concerns and issues of their members through their internal servicing and organizing activities. They know their workplaces and their living standards. The leadership consists of people who have been elected from the working membership. As a result, the unions can see how public policies can and do affect their members.

Unions can hold public officials accountable at the ballot box. They keep their members informed of the issues discussed and proposed by government and maintain an on-going dialogue with the membership about the critical issues of the day. They keep members informed about the positions and voting records of elected officials and candidates. Unions maintain lists of their members by voting district. As elections draw near, unions perform GOTV activities that consist of reminding their members to go to the polls and exercise their rights as responsible citizens. Unions build lists of non-members that polling and research has led them to identify as coalition partners –voters likely to vote for candidates that will be accountable to workers and other groups that share similar concerns with regard to accountability and justice. Unions have the manpower and experience to field organizers and member volunteers that are necessary to mount GOTV campaigns directed at these non members voters too. As such, unions are the strong institutions that have the capacity to make the political system accountable to people instead of money. Unions organizers and member organizers are the indispensable personnel that carry out the voter outreach and GOTV campaigns that labor's political rely upon.

Ultimately, many trade unionists in America have recognized that they need to become more self-reliant again. They recognize they cannot expect politicians who are financed by business to be elected, to solve their problems. It is about returning to the fundamentals. It is doing what they do best and what they did long ago to originally achieve the power necessary to change labor law and enforcement. It is about doing what they must to produce a more just and equitable society.

The purpose in describing how American unions are seeking to recover their power is not to suggest that they have all the answers or that the answers for American unions are always the same for Thai workers and their unions.

Undoubtedly, there are many differences between American and Thai culture and the author recognizes that. However, the author has observed, first hand, many similarities between workers in Thailand and workers in the United States as well. Many workers in both countries work in tedious, monotonous, difficult, sometimes dangerous and largely un-rewarding occupations not out of preference but rather out of necessity. These workers do the work they do to earn a living to support themselves and their families and if possible, provide a better life for their parents and children. Workers in both countries are reluctant and even fearful of confronting their employers and other powers in society when they correctly understand that doing so may jeopardize their livelihoods and thereby their ability to provide for the well-being of themselves and their families. For the aforementioned reasons, the author is going to set aside an examination the cultural differences between Thai and American workers and look at the Thai Labor movement in terms its fundamental capacities just as American unions do in assessing their strengths and weaknesses to promote their agendas.

In America where the unions that are growing again, and growing very fast, they have developed (or rediscovered) and are employing the organizing model of unionism. This model, as Bronfenbrenner points out, accepts the fact that labor unions and workers have fewer protections under the law than in the past. It recognizes that employers can expect few if any meaningful penalties for violating the laws that protect workers and unions and hence they have become more aggressive in opposing unions that at any time in nearly a century. Nonetheless, Bronfenbrenner's (p.33) research has shown the ability of unions to successfully organize and obtain good contracts is much more dependent upon how unions organize themselves and tactics they use than on what business or government does or does not do.

A very succinct definition of the organizing model that I have taken from Wikipedia and found helpful in explaining the model to people outside the labor movement is as follows:

“Defining the Organising Model

It is often claimed that the principle underlying the organising model is that of giving power directly to union members. While the practical

exercise of the model sometimes leaves something to be desired in this respect (see below), its embodiment of a set of campaigning and organisational approaches is much less ambiguous. The organising model in its ideal type has these features:

Proactive recruitment drives.

Proactive campaigning, involving a large commitment of resources and large numbers of members.

Creative campaigning tactics - including demonstrations, street theatre, media stunts, direct action, civil disobedience, music etc.

Strong emphasis on the importance of personal contact in organising. Organisers will often put in long hours talking to workers about their situation, and what they believe the union can help them achieve. Visits to workers' homes will often be a component of this.

Acceptance of the view that workers need to take some appreciable responsibility for winning union struggles and making the union strong. Hence (in theory) an attitude geared toward empowering workers.

As a central tool of both recruitment and campaigning, the identification and recruitment of leaders from among the workforce, to spread information about the union, and encourage others to join and take action. These leaders working together in a campaign committee, to steer campaigns.

A conception of leadership in which leaders are those willing to take the initiative and contribute effort, rather than one based on authority. It will be hoped that leadership (as confidence to initiation organisation with others) will spread as broadly as possible.

Strong relationship (especially in America) to Social Movement Unionism and Community Unionism which (respectively) seek to ally the labour movement to broader social movements and to local community

organisations - including for example, campaigns such as United Students Against Sweatshops and ACORN.

Employment of relatively large numbers of full-time staff union organizers and member organizers in order to facilitate the above.

In order to finance this, typically a relatively high level of membership dues (at least for industrial unions, as opposed to craft unions.)

Unions that employ the organizing model often try to apply the above tactics in "internal"/representational/bargaining campaigns, not just "external" organizing/recruitment campaigns. Indeed, many unions that employ the organizing model attempt to "bargain to organize" -- that is, win a greater right to organize non-union workers through pressuring an employer through using current members collective strength.

In contrast, the service model focuses on the provision of services - such as legal advice, training, or even consumer discount programmes - to members. Practitioners of this model will generally avoid industrial, or direct, action of any kind, preferring to develop a 'good relationship' with employers. Typically, but not necessarily, service model unions will be less democratic in structure." (Wikipedia, 2006)

In many respects, the debate about the efficacy and effectiveness of the organizing model has been settled not by academics and union staff among whom many have continuing reservations but by the results demonstrated by the unions that have adopted the model. Unions such as SEIU and others have more than doubled in size over the past decade by employing the model.

Nonetheless, as Aronowitz points out there is an implicit threat to some existing union structures when local unions and their members have the means and wherewithal to organize themselves and their fellow workers. It gives them strength and the confidence to define their own interests. It puts some who claim to be



organizers and leaders on the defensive if those credentials have been manufactured for the purposes of maintaining legitimacy among the membership.(Aronowitz, 2000) or the purpose of this research, the author will seek to simplify and distill the organizing model as follows:

- 1) Unions employing the organizing model must devote more resources to supporting organizing. Doing so means redirect a substantial portion of resources away from servicing into organizing for the purpose of maintaining a pool of professional organizers augmented by a much larger pool of member-organizers that can work on campaigns full-time for weeks or months at a time as paid time off (PTO) organizers. Member organizers are the key to having the number of organizers familiar with workplace issues required to conduct the aggressive grassroots rand-and-file strategy needed to overcome the power and money of labor's opponents that Bronfenbrenner and Juravich describe (p.20) (Bronfenbrenner, AFL-CIO. Dept. of Economic Research., & New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations., 1998)
- 2) Unions must undertake the difficult task of reorganizing their operations to adopt and employ the organizing model. Fletcher and Hurd (p.37-53) describe how difficult this task can be because doing so entails first internally organizing the existing membership to see the benefits of adopting the model and then subsequently accepting the responsibilities inherent in making it a reality. Appedndix A is a short description of the difference between the new organizing model of unionism and the traditional service model.

Finally, the resources to support the organizing model must come from somewhere. Aside from having a reasonable dues structure, where in the US anything less than 1% is simply unsustainable regardless of the size of the union and 2% is considered the norm, unions need scale. Florito points out that the larger the union is the more resources it has at its disposal to devote to innovation and change (p.8).(Florito, 1996)

The rationale for this research is admittedly very normative. The author believes strong independent unions are a necessary countervailing force to the

excesses of accumulated capital and power. Unions are institutions. Unions, like other institutions, need resources both financial and human to be viable and effective. Viable unions, where members support them with adequate dues, can deliver tangible benefits to their members who in turn are more actively involved in their day-to-day activities. Furthermore, having obtained a toehold into the lower middle class, union members have more incentive to be responsible public citizens by virtue of their having a stake in public policy.

Conversely, underfinanced unions are ineffective and members tend to be passive and uninvolved. Ineffective, underfinanced unions are susceptible to outside influences because they cannot service their membership with their own resources and the membership itself remains largely uninvolved in the union's activities. The Thai trade unions have little space to operate in and the laws afford them little protection.

This research is an attempt to identify the principle internal and external constraints Thai unions are dealing with and must overcome in order to gain power or as Brown describes it as gaining more "space" in which to operate (Brown, 2004). This research is particularly focused on identifying the internal constraints, from the perspective of the organizing model, that Thai labor must address to reverse the decline and growing marginalization of their labor movement.

American unions are dealing with laws and political obstacles that affect them in every jurisdiction locally as well as nationally. The framework that American unions use to analyze these issues is to work backward from the standpoint of what needs to be done to achieve the power requisite to either elect officials or influence them to change the laws, create more space, and hold them accountable. To do this, they develop campaigns where they organize their own members on the issues and then look to build coalitions with other groups to develop a plurality. The coalition building is an outreach program to identify and build alliances with other segments of the community or society, with whom there are shared interests or at least agendas that are not at odds with labor. Obviously, if a coalition is still not large enough to form a plurality then unions further seek to organize more members to

increase their power and the size of the coalition. At the national level, this need to organize more members is the goal of every union and their closest coalition partners because their failure to do so in the past has directly translated into losing elections inside the Democratic presidential primary system for over two decades.

In the Thai context, the 1998 Election Law makes meaningful participation by organized labor in the electoral process apparently impossible. The reason for this lies in the requirement that voters must cast their ballots for candidates in the districts where their names appear on the house registration lists. This is a perfectly understandable requirement that is designed to prevent people from voting in more than one district at a time. The problem for workers and thereby an obvious impediment to their meaningful participation in the electoral process is that millions of Thai workers live and work in metropolitan areas but their names appear on house registration lists in the rural districts where they used to live.

For a variety of reasons, changing your house registry to in the area where one lives and works can be very difficult for workers living in dormitories. It is difficult for the people who rent to workers as well because issues relating to the entitlement of inheritance are tied to the names appearing on a house registration. This holds true for many workers in both the formal and informal sector that have migrated internally within the country in search of jobs. Hence, in metropolitan areas where large numbers of workers live and work - and represent a plurality- most of their votes are counted in rural districts where they do not represent a sizable proportion of the vote count if they even bother to apply for absentee ballots. Workers' votes are dispersed in such a manner that they really have very little incentive to vote at all and if they do, they are voting for candidates that they are not familiar with and who are campaigning on issues of concern to their rural constituencies. It would seem this system, which denies workers an effective means to participate in the political process, might also be in violation of ICCPR article 25; although, the article is not expressly clear as to whether a voting system that disperses the vote count actually constitutes a violation of the article.

How does one organize a large portion of the population to achieve political objectives if they do not have access to the ballot box? The only parallel in the American experience is the civil rights campaign that was waged throughout the 1950's and 60's. The Civil Rights struggle was itself a lesson in organizing. It was organized first in the black churches of the south and later built a coalition with progressives, liberals and trade unionists in other parts of the country. It was also a lesson in non-violent civil disobedience which is a legitimate strategy necessary for drawing attention to and confronting laws and practices that are odious and a direct affront to fundamental human rights.

A voting system that, however unintentionally, deprives workers of a voice in the political process and thereby a political avenue to create more space for workers and unions in Thai society, is an obstacle that unions can overcome only if they have the capacity to organize. Whether through building sheer size and organizing demonstrations or building coalitions, these are organizing campaigns and as such, the ability to mount such campaigns depends on the capacity of the unions to fund and field their own organizers.

Labor leaders in Thailand are no different from the union leaders anywhere else in that they are leaders of membership driven organizations. They cannot simply dictate to their members what they feel must be done. Instead, they must organize them to recognize the problems and commit themselves to taking action to solve those problems. That is how solidarity is built. This takes us full circle back to why the author believes Thai unions ought to adopt the organizing model of unionism and the reason why the author wishes to determine what capacities currently exist in Thai unions or need to be developed to implement the model.

This research is then an attempt to document what are the capacities of Thai unions to carry out the most basic union activities on their own. These are among the topics raised by Voravidh, Napaporn and Phan in *The Impact of Trade Union Solidarity Support Organizations* that are the primary interest of this research. (Voravidh, Napaporn, & Phan, 2002)

## **1.2 Objectives of the Research**

1.2.1 To identify the financial and human capacities of Thai trade unions in terms of their ability to mount effective organizing campaigns.

1.2.2 To determine what strategies Thai trade unions have to increase their financial and organizing capacities.

1.2.3 To identify whether Thai unions are achieving a wage and benefit differential, or union premium, that justifies members paying dues that can sustain effective, independent unions.

1.2.4 To identify the principal internal constraints that Thai Unions are facing and thereby better inform the unions, NGOs, and SSOs as they make choices going forward.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1.3.1 What financial and human resources do Thai unions have at the disposal to grow and become more powerful and self-reliant?

1.3.2 What are the core priorities and goals of Thai labor leaders and what are their plans for achieving those goals?

1.3.3 What do Thai Trade Union leaders think about the programs of NGOs or SSOs that are working on their behalf and do the Thai union leaders feel the programs are complimentary to their priorities?

1.3.4 How do Thai Unions allocate their own resources?

## **1.4 Hypothesis/Expected Outcomes**

Thai Labor Unions need to prioritize strengthening their core internal capacities in terms of finances and professional full-time staff. The inability or lack of attention paid to internally organizing members to support a dues structure that enables the Thai labor movement to grow and chart its own path is a fundamental problem for Thai Labor.

## 1.5 Research Methods

I will interview Thai trade union leaders to see what they see as their strategic priorities and what their plans are for achieving those priorities. I will also ask questions about their dues rates and what human resources they have at their disposal to run campaigns and service their membership. I plan to survey those that I interview about how they allocate resources with regard to finances and personnel. I will ask them how they research potential organizing targets, structure organizing campaigns, build power for negotiating and assess results.

I will survey at least 100 union members from several different locations and industries about their pay rates, dues rates and union staffing levels. The purpose for doing so is twofold. First, the survey seeks to establish whether a union premium or differential has been achieved for the members surveyed. Second, the results will indicate the actual dues rate being paid by those members to their respective unions.

I will ask the trade union leaders I interview about the extent to which they rely upon outside sources of support and for what purposes that support is used. I will further seek to learn what are their chief concerns and where possible what are their plans for addressing those concerns.

I will ask them about their views of the programs of NGOs that are working on labor issues. To wit, are the NGO programs effective and are they congruent with what the Thai labor leaders believe are the highest priorities that need to be addressed?

After gathering all the data from the various interviews, I will analyze them in light of how all these various actors interact with each other. My frame of reference for analyzing the data will be with an eye toward determining what resources, financial and human, are required to sustain effective unions in Thailand that are not reliant upon outside sources of support. The capacities of the Thai unions will be measured in terms of their ability to implement the organizing model of trade unionism.

## 1.6 Limitations

This thesis is an attempt to document the internal capacities - financial and staff - of Thai unions. These capacities are critical if unions are to be effective in organizing and representing the interests of their members and workers in general. Inversely, the lack of these capacities is a constraint that prevents unions from being effective. Other research has noted that Thai unions have limited financial resources but none have explicitly examined how limited. There is also no research on the staffing levels and capacities of Thai unions.

This thesis seeks foremost to collect some baseline data on the dues rates of Thai unions and their staffing of organizers. Much of what is derived from the interviews with respect to priorities, programs and the unions' relationships with NGOs is likely to be more subjective and open to interpretation.

It is important to recognize the fact that trade union leaders are always reluctant to share their plans and problems with outsiders. There has never been any shortage of critics of union leaders and unions among outside observers who fail to appreciate many of the constraints under which they operate.

Unions cannot simply disgorge the detailed information on strategies and methods that they have developed at great expense; especially when their very existence and the well being of their members relies upon the continuing success of those strategies and methods. Furthermore, unions in the United States and Thailand are engaged in an uphill struggle to rebuild their strength during a time when the political balance of power as represented by the constituencies determined to prevent that from happening have the upper hand. Recognizing these limitations, I hope to obtain enough information to answer the research questions and prove my hypothesis.

## **1.7 Ethical Issues**

The new strategies for developing union power through market campaigns and voter identification, registration and mobilization campaigns that have proven to be successful where they have been implemented are not well documented, in detail, in the public domain. Unions that are developing these new methodologies are not at all eager to have this sort of information published because doing so would only make the job of the professional union-busting firms all that much easier. I am quite familiar with many of these methods and tactics as well as the new types of campaigns and strategies from my time as an employee of SEIU and other unions in the US.

I do not intend to document the methods, tactics and strategies American and Thai unions use to organize or carry out campaigns in this research in any detail. Firstly, I believe it would be unethical to provide anyone who may read this with a blueprint on how to counter the activities of unions in either country. Secondly, I do not believe doing so is necessary to answering the questions this research is seeking to examine.

## **1.8 Significance of Research**

Many of the people who are working to build unions in Thailand and America have freely devoted themselves to this task and do so for the best of reasons. Many have given much of their time and effort to overcoming formidable obstacles. The best among them could have sold out their members many times over as some others have done. It is my hope to add something to the body of knowledge about union building and organizing that makes the task of those who are laboring to build a strong, independent and representative trade union movement in Thailand that much more successful. Additionally, I hope this research can be used by those outside the labor movement to understand the role of unions in fostering a fairer and more just society.

I am not seeking to add to the many criticisms of the shortcomings of the NGOs, the unions, or their leaders.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature I have reviewed to date has been useful in describing the role of organized labor in Thailand since the 1920's. I am separating this review into three sections: 2.1 deals with the Thai labor movement and Thai labor law; 2.2 deals with the relationship between SSOs and the Thai Labor movement, 2.3 deals with the gaps in the literature I have reviewed thus far.

#### **2.1 The Thai Labor Movement**

The Working Papers Series papers by Brown, Hewison, and Bundit as well as in their individual writings describe the history and present state of affairs of the Thai Labor movement.

Brown's work is certainly the most complete historical description of the role of labor in Thailand that I have found thus far. (Brown, 2004) In his book *Labour, Politics and the State in Industrializing Thailand*, he provides a detailed history of the episodes of expansion and contraction of what he describes as the "space" in which labor and working class aspirations have operated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Brown's work also describes the limitations or constraints placed on the space in which Thai labor has been operating. He does this in several ways. First, his analysis of the labor law, specifically the 1975 Labour Relations Act, its amendments and the separate laws pertaining to State Enterprise workers and their unions is instructive as to how the Thai labor movement has come to point it has thus far.

Secondly, Brown also writes about the historical and evolving political and economic environment in which the Thai Labor has had to operate throughout its history. This is particularly useful in that it describes the various forces arrayed against the Thai trade union movement and the role those forces have played, at different times, to arrest the development of working class power and limit the space in which Thai Labor operates.

Brown's chapter in Hewison's *Political Change in Thailand* is also particularly revealing in that he further documents the role that labor has played in promoting democracy and opposing dictatorship. (Hewison, 1997) Unlike in Somsak's *Labour Against Dictatorship*, Brown directly attacks the popular misconception that labor played little or no role in the Black May events of 1992. Here Brown asserts that this notion, as articulated by Pasuk, is simply wrong and poorly informed. More importantly, Brown's refutation of Pasuk's analysis provides an excellent example of how public perceptions can be colored in such a negative way that those flawed perceptions also contribute to the limiting of the space in which Thai Labor must operate.

In fairness to Pasuk, it seems this criticism by Brown and the writings of Somsak and others changed her analysis of the events of Black May. In her chapter entitled *The Military and Democracy*, in the second edition of *Thailand, Economy and Politics* she gives more credit to the role of Somsak and the participation of Labor in those events. (P. Pasuk & C. J. Baker, 2002)

Brown's works are primarily informative in describing the history, environment, and current state of affairs of the Thai Labor movement. It does describe well the history of the political, economic and legal challenges that Thai labor has faced and still faces today. For the purposes of this research, it provides an excellent background to the contemporary problems faced by the Thai labor movement but it is not particularly informative about potential solutions or remedies to the problems workers and Thai labor faces at this time.

In describing the state of Thai Labor under Thaksin, Brown reminds the reader that not much has changed for the better with regard to Thai labor, the labor law or the enforcement of the laws. (Brown & Hewison, 2004) In fact, very clearly, the situation has gotten worse from the standpoint of Thai Labor under Thaksin.

Somsak's *Labour Against Dictatorship* speaks directly to the role of labor in the events of Black May as well as his and other labor leader's direct participation in the Confederation for Democracy. He also speaks about how the workers in

Thailand are affected by the house registration rule and how he feels that continues to play a pivotal role in limiting what Brown refers to as the space in which labor can operate.

Somsak's book can certainly be described as a call for greater participation by Thai labor in the Thai political process. Somsak speaks to the need to build and sustain coalitions with other marginalized and/or progressive groups within society. It is not clear how Somsak believes this should occur in specific terms. He does not say how these coalitions are to be organized or whether this political participation is to be preceded by greater union organizing or not.

Bundit's research entitled *Thai Labour Relations Laws and the Conformity to ILO Conventions 87 and 98* is a particularly useful resource analysis of the hurdles Thai workers, both in the private sector and in the state enterprise sector, face in organizing and bargaining collectively. (Bundit, 2003) Bundit's analysis is concise and very informative with regard to the legal and illegal obstacles that Thai trade unions navigate through in organizing. In so doing, it provides a basis for looking at the decisions Thai trade unions need to make in forming a strategy to change or overcome the obstacles that lie before them.

Bundit's research makes clear that both law and practice are stacked against trade union organizing in Thailand. It seems that both Thai trade unions and American trade unions face similar obstacles and a similar dilemma as to what to do about it. (Compa & Human Rights Watch (Organization), 2000) This is helpful in understanding the starting point from where my research begins because both labor movements recognize that both law and practice are stacked against them. The question is how best to proceed in changing those laws and practices. Should unions strive to organize more aggressively in spite of the laws to attain the numbers and resources required and then take the fight to the political arena? Should unions seek to build political power first in order to change the laws and practices and thereby create ultimately more space to organize and grow? American unions also have had to grapple with these choices.

The question in this research is focused more on means than strategy. Specifically, do Thai unions have the means to organize effectively? If they do not, as with any labor union that seeks to become strong and self-reliant, developing the capacity to organize becomes the first order of priority. This is true because whether you are organizing new members, organizing to build power at the bargaining table or organizing in the political arena; you need to develop the capacity to organize effectively first.

## **2.2 The Labor Solidarity Organizations and NGOs**

The research of Voravidh et al. into the roles and relationships between Thai trade unions, NGOs and foreign Solidarity Support Organizations sheds more light on the problems that confront Thai trade unions from a different perspective. (Voravidh, Napaporn, & Phan, 2002) Voravidh points to the patron-client relationship that has evolved between the Solidarity Support Organizations (SSOs) and the Thai Unions. SSOs being foreign NGOs or foreign relations institutes of foreign unions and labor organizations were created to assist unions in developing countries like Thailand. The SSOs also provide a substantial amount of resources to domestic Thai NGOs that share their agenda of advancing the interests of workers in Thailand. Voravidh questions whether the very nature of that relationship between the SSOs, and presumably, by extension the Thai NGOs they have funded or created has diverted Thai unionists away from pursuing their own agendas. He also notes that Thai unions do not collect enough dues to support their own activities. By examining the effectiveness and proper roles of each, he introduces a number of other interesting questions about how the Thai trade unions should proceed in opening up more space for trade unions and workers in Thai society. Those questions revolve issue relating to the nature and quality of the assistance NGOs and SSOs can and do provide and whether their support has actually fostered internal capacities and sustainability or dependency.

In Ford's piece, *Accountable to Whom*, about SSOs, NGOs and trade unions in Indonesia a number of these same questions are raised.(Ford, 2005) This is

interesting in that it demonstrates these questions are not unique to the Thai experience.

Napaporn traces the history and fortunes of Thai Labor in terms of its engagement with larger social issues, which she defines as its period of Social Movement Unionism and narrower agenda defined as the period of Economic Unionism. Napaporn points out that since the 1990s a newer outward looking hybrid of Economic Unionism has evolved where unions work with other groups to advance a somewhat less narrow agenda. These new hybrid Economic Unions in Thailand have come to rely upon coalitions with others groups to mount effective campaigns. She points out that in the past unions often relied upon NGOs, academics and others of higher social status to help them advance their agenda.

The author of this report found what she described to be a very disturbing turn of events in that a workers movement had come to rely so heavily on non-workers to define workers' issues. Particularly, Napaporn's description of economic unionism seemed too narrow in its interpretation. One can easily see how a non-worker who is sympathetic to workers philosophically may see certain economic demands as being narrow economic interests. Whereas workers who are struggling to earn wages to support a decent living and keep their families together would see that as a fundamental right. If a couple working at minimum wage, for long hours, six days per week have to send their children home to be raised by their parents then demands for better wages and shorter working hours are not narrow economic demands. If unions cannot negotiate contracts that obtain anything better than minimum wage for their members then those members cannot be expected to pay dues that would make their unions powerful and effective.

Bronfenbrenner and Aronowitz both speak to the need for unions to address larger issues than wages and hours. Nonetheless, Bronfenbrenner also points out that the problem often lies more in the unions' ability or inability to frame workers legitimate demands properly. Hence, wages, hours and working conditions need to be appreciated and portrayed for what they really are: issues of fairness, dignity and respect.

Napaporn makes a particularly salient point in her closing conclusions when she states, “collective action for the workers’ interests can be sustained only when the trade unions play the key role in campaigns of their own interest”. The author of this report believes Napaporn is correct in that assertion. For that reason, I plan to research what financial and personnel resources Thai unions have at their disposal to play that key role in the campaigns of their own interest.

### **2.3 Literature Gaps**

Unlike so much that has been written about the external factors that affect Thai unions and workers such as the government, employers and the law; almost nothing has been written about those factors that are internal to the union itself and even more important to a unions’ ability to be successful. There is nothing I have found that examines Thai unions’ internal capacities with respect to their financial and staff resources. The unions internally controlled capacities, namely financial and staff, if insufficient, become the constraints that prevent that limit the unions’ ability to be effective. I have found nothing that describes how Thai unions prioritize their activities or allocate resources.

I really did not expect to find much written on these subjects and that is why I want to research them further myself.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

Ubon Kompipote enlisted the support of union members from several industries and locations to act as canvassers in distributing and collecting the surveys. The results of the surveys are reported in sections 3.1 and 3.2.

#### 3.1 Survey Results: state enterprise union members

Surveys were collected from 19 union members of 15 state enterprise unions. The results of the surveys are detailed in table 1

**TABLE 1**

Union Name	Position	Wage p/m	Wage p/d	Dues p/m	Dues %	Union. Staff
Airport authority of Th. W.U.	Construction Control	87700		10	0.01%	1
Road Transportation W.U.	Mgmt. Staff	60000		10	0.02%	1
Thai Airway Intl. W.U.	Safety Officer	60000		12.5	0.02%	1
Airport authority of Th. W.U.	Maintenance	47520		10	0.02%	1
Road Transportation W.U.	Car Inspector	38900		10	0.03%	1
Savings Bank W.U.	Branch Officer	29920		10	0.03%	2
Postal Union	Post Office worker	45000		18	0.04%	1
EGAT W.U.	Safety Officer	30000		15	0.05%	9
Housing Bank W.U.	Credit/debt staff	30000		16.666667	0.06%	1
Metropolitan Electricity W.U.	Practical Worker	21360		15	0.07%	2
S.E.W.U of Railway of Thailand	Train Driver	21600		21	0.10%	4
Mass Transportation W.U. (BMTA)	Inspector	15000		20	0.13%	1
Prov. Electricity W.U.	Quality Control	13740		20	0.15%	0
Prov. Water W.U.	Union Pres.	26000		39	0.15%	5
BMTA W.U.	Ticket Collector	12690		20	0.16%	2
Whiskey Organization W.U.	Store Controller	32920		60	0.18%	0
Road Transportation W.U.	Clerk		228.48	16.666667	0.33%	1
CAT Telecom	Clerk	50710		300	0.59%	2
Prov. Electricity W.U.	Finance Staff	16000		180	1.13%	0

**Table 1 – COUNT**

**19**

### 3.2 Survey Results: private sector unions members

Surveys were collected from 100 union members from private sector unions in 10 industries in Bangkok, Angthong, Singburi, Lopburi, Ayuthaya, Prathumtani and Samut Prakan. The results of the surveys are detailed in Table 2. Follow-up questions by the canvassers indicate the wages reported include overtime. The union's staff, where there were any, was reported to be secretaries.

**TABLE 2-A**

Union Name	Position	Wage p/m 26	Wage p/d	Dues p/m	Dues %	Staff	Workers
<b>Textile</b>		0R X 26					
K.Cotton W.U.	Mechanic	7891	303.5	20	0.25%	0	300
K.Cotton W.U.	Mupate	6890	265	20	0.29%	0	300
Pisatsuman W.U.		9490	365	30	0.32%	0	900
Teijin Polyester W.U.	System controller	5798	223	20	0.34%	0	400
Pisatsuman W.U.	Dying	8500		30	0.35%	0	900
Kugbo W.U.	Mechanic	8260		30	0.36%	0	
Pisatsuman W.U.	Weaver	5200	200	20	0.38%	0	900
Teijin Polyester W.U.		11500		50	0.43%	0	900
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6448	248	30	0.47%	0	498
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6188	238	30	0.48%	0	498
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6188	238	30	0.48%	0	498
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6136	236	30	0.49%	0	498
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6110	235	30	0.49%	0	498
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6110	235	30	0.49%	0	498
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	6058	233	30	0.50%	0	498
Century Textile W.U.	Weaver	7904	304	40	0.51%	0	350
Thonburi Lace W.U.	Line Production	5876	226	30	0.51%	0	498
Thai Acrylic Fibre W.U.	Mechanic	22000		120	0.55%	0	423
Mikaza W.U.	Sewer	5174	199	30	0.58%	0	200
Mikaza W.U.	Weaver	5148	198	30	0.58%	0	200
Kugbo W.U.	Weaver	5148	198	30	0.58%	0	
Mikaza W.U.	Weaver	4342	167	30	0.69%	0	200
Thai Acrylic Fibre W.U.	Maintenance	17081		120	0.70%	0	423
Century Textile W.U.	Weaver	4784	184	40	0.84%	0	350
Century Textile W.U.	Weaver	4784	184	40	0.84%	0	350
Century Textile W.U.	Weaver	4784	184	40	0.84%	0	350
Thai Rayon W.U.	Weaver	19890		230	1.16%	2	648
Thai Rayon W.U.	Maintenance	18000		230	1.28%	2	648
Thai Acrylic Fibre W.U.	Mechanic	9100	350	120	1.32%	0	423
Thai Acrylic Fibre W.U.	Weaver	7540	290	120	1.59%	0	423



Thai Acrylic Fibre W.U.	Weaver	4212	162	120	2.85%	0	423
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**TABLE 2-B**

Garment	Position	Wage p/m 26	Wage p/d	Dues p/m	Dues %	Staff	Workers
Triumph International W.U.		10400	400	30	0.29%	0	5800
Triumph International W.U.	Sower	10168		30	0.30%	0	5800
T.B.W.U.	Mechanic	5876	226	20	0.34%	0	
Triumph International W.U.	Sower	8242	317	30	0.36%	0	3000
Diskun W.U.	Sower	4680	180	20	0.43%	0	
Migaza Thailand W.U.	Sower	6070		30	0.49%	0	260
Triumph International W.U.	Sower	5408	208	30	0.55%	0	
<b>Hotel</b>							
Narai Hotel W.U.	Mechanic	11500		20	0.17%	0	
Narai Hotel W.U.	Bell Boy	9000		20	0.22%	0	
Chemical							
Thai Carbon Black W.U.	Mechanic	50500		50	0.10%	2	
Thai Carbon Black W.U.	Line Production	30000		50	0.17%	1	
<b>Food processing</b>							
C.P. fresh Chicken W.U.		4888	188	20	0.41%		
C.P. fresh Chicken W.U.	Line Production	4810	185	20	0.42%	0	
<b>Auto Parts</b>							
Thai Summit W.U.	Messenger	9200			0.25%	1	
Thai Summit W.U.	Mechanic	14500			0.25%	1	
Isuzu W.U.	Mechanic	9100			0.25%	1	
Goodyear W.U.	Line Production	8000		25	0.31%	0	
Breidgestone W.U.	Line Production	7150		25	0.35%	0	
Honda W.U.	Mechanic	12500			1.00%	1	
N.H.K. Spring W.U.	Store staff	13500			1.00%	1	

**TABLE 2-C**

TESCO (retail)	Position	Wage p/m 26	Wage p/d	Dues p/m	Dues %	Staff	Workers
Tesco	Shipping	11000		30	0.27%	0	1000
Tesco	Foreman	11000		30	0.27%	0	1000
Tesco	Mechanic	9100	350	30	0.33%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	truck driver	7878	303	30	0.38%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	PE	7800	300	30	0.38%	0	1000
Tesco	Prod. Receiving	7500		30	0.40%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	General	7436	286	30	0.40%	0	1000
Tesco	Prod. Inspector	7436	286	30	0.40%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Line Production	7200		30	0.42%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Line Production	7123		30	0.42%	0	1000
Tesco Lotus WangNoi	Receiving	6916	266	30	0.43%	0	1000

WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	General	6838	263	30	0.44%	0	1000
Tesco	Receiving	6763		30	0.44%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	General	6630	255	30	0.45%	0	1000
Tesco	Picking	6500		30	0.46%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Line Production	6461		30	0.46%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	Driver	6240	240	30	0.48%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Case line	6150		30	0.49%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	Pickup	6006	231	30	0.50%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	Security	5954	229	30	0.50%	0	1000
Tesco	picking	5900		30	0.51%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Case line	5900		30	0.51%	0	1000
Tesco	Picking	5720	220	30	0.52%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Case line	5680		30	0.53%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Line Production	5680		30	0.53%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Case line	5680		30	0.53%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	PE	5590	215	30	0.54%	0	1000
Tesco Dist. Center	Case line	5500		30	0.55%	0	1000
Tesco Lotus WangNoi	Shipping	5330	205	30	0.56%	0	1000
WangNoi, Ayudhaya Dist Ctr.	General	5304	204	30	0.57%	0	1000
Tesco	Receiving	5200	200	30	0.58%	0	1000

**TABLE 2-D**

AngThong & Singburi Prov.	Position	Wage p/m 26	Wage p/d	Dues p/m	Dues %	Staff	Workers
Hitachi Compressor Thailand W.U.	Energy section	20000		20	0.10%	1	
Nicon Thailand W.U. (auto parts)		9083		10	0.11%	0	1200
Tayro Fibre W.U.	Line Production	14000		20	0.14%	0	230
Bangpoin Paper Industry W.U.	Maintenance	10920	420	20	0.18%	0	280
AAL.W.U. (auto parts)	Packing Dept.	8000		20	0.25%	0	820
Thai Carbon Black W.U.	Electricity Control	32000		100	0.31%	1	249
Drug Medicine W.U.	Line Production	6500	250	30	0.46%	0	555
Fashion Express W.U.	Sower	4030	155	20	0.50%		500
Honda Thailand W.U.	Quality Control	15000		150	1.00%	2	2650
Thai Rayon W.U.	Operator	13750		280	2.04%	2	

**TABLE 2-E**

Ayuthaya Province	Position	Wage p/m 26	Wage p/d	Dues p/m	Dues %	Staff	Workers
Nikon Thailand	Parts control	5772	222	10	0.17%	0	4521
Metro Fibre W.U.	Line Production	11000		20	0.18%	0	100
Electronic Parts W.U.	Documentation staff	11960		30	0.25%	0	650
Nakasima W.U. (auto parts)	Mechanic	9945		30	0.30%	0	1200
P.I.M. W.U.	Store Room	7890		30	0.38%	0	174

Nippon Suner	Mechanic	4472	172	20	0.45%	0	500
Nakasima W.U. (auto parts)	Syetem Mechanic	6700		30	0.45%	0	700
Electronic Parts W.U.	FOS Export	6266	241	30	0.48%	0	800
<b>Table 2 – COUNT</b>		<b>100</b>					

The surveys reveal that a number things. First, few Thai unions collect dues on a percentage basis. Typically, both state enterprise unions and private sector unions collect dues at a flatly monthly or yearly rate. As a result, as wages rise each year the unions collect less dues as a percentage of members' wages if they don't seek authorization from the membership to increase the dues annually.

A flat dues rate is an unsustainable dues rate if a union is to maintain its current level of services and activities as operating costs rise with the normal rate of inflation. In order to maintain a flat rate that keeps up with inflation a union would be forced into the untenable position of revisiting that rate annually which in itself would be a constant distraction from focusing on other priorities.

A flat dues rate is inherently unfair because workers earning different wage rates for the same employers pay very different percentage rates. Examples of this can be seen in several of the tables where workers earning more wages but paying the same flat rate as workers earning much less end up paying a much lower percentage rate.

The state enterprise unions, which generally have a much larger membership base than the private sector locals, typically collect less dues per member, both in absolute terms and as a percentage, than the private sector unions. However, because state enterprise unions have a much larger membership base their total monthly income from members' dues is much higher than the typically much smaller private sector locals.

Although the private sector unions often tend to collect higher dues rates, they tend to be too small to be truly viable financially. Additionally, most of the private sector unions represent workers who are working at or just slightly above the minimum wage suggesting that they have not been able to negotiate a wage differential or premium in their labor contracts. This is particularly worrisome because if the membership cannot realize a real benefit in terms of better wages as a result of being in a union it is hard to see why they would pay higher dues rates.

Additionally, workers who have not realized a wage differential as a result of being in a union cannot be expected to be very motivated to volunteer to help organize other workers or fund additional organizing campaigns. Finally, because local private sector unions are organized around a single worksite, there is little practical logic to proposing members divert a portion of their limited dues to organizing new locals from which they can never expect to recover their organizing investment. Doing so calls for a level of altruism on the part of the local that taken to the extreme could bankrupt the local.

### **3.3 Interviews**

The author and Chutipan Tantirungkit conducted extensive interviews of approximately 2 to 3 hours each in length with the nine Thai labor leaders. The author also interviewed William Conklin, Thailand Country Program Director of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS).

- The first interview, on 3 July 2006, was with Khun Sia Chumpathong, President of the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand and President of the Pipatsumpan Workers' Union.

- The second interview, on 4 July 2006, was with Khun Sirichai Mai-  
Ngam, General Secretary of the State Enterprise Workers' Relations Confederation (SERC) and President of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand State enterprise Employees Union.

- The third interview, on 7 July 2006, was with Somsak Kosaisook, Chairman International Transport Federation - Thailand, Vice President for Railways of ITF International, General Secretary of the Labour Coordinating Center, former General Secretary of SERC and the State Railway Workers' Union of Thailand (SRUT).

- The fourth and fifth interviews, on 7 July 2006, were with Sakool Zuesongdham, member of the Board of directors of the Open Forum for Democracy Foundation and former President of the Federation of Bank and Financial Workers Unions of Thailand and the Bangkok Bankworkers Trade Unions (BBTU) and Anong Chansawangphop, former President of the BBTU.

- The sixth interview, on 10 July 2006, was with Wirat Boonprom, President of the Shangri La Hotel Workers' union.

- The seventh interview, on 21 August 2006, was with William Conklin the Thailand Country Program Director of ACILS.

- The eighth interview, on 31 August, was with Arunee Sripo, Yupa Boonkerd and Kruawon Tadbuppa. Khun Arunee is a former president of the Thai Durable Workers' Unions and the Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation of Thailand. Khun Yupa is a former president of the Thai Durable Workers' Union and Khun Kruawon is the current president.

The responses from the interviews germane to the research questions are as follows.

1. What financial and human resources do Thai unions have at the disposal to grow and become more powerful and self-reliant?

Khun Sia - There are no full-time union organizers, paid for by the unions, neither in his federation or its affiliated locals nor in any other federations or locals that he knew about. For the most part, local unions in his industry had very low dues rates and no staff. By extension, the federation suffered from the same problem. The federation collected one baht per month per member from each of its affiliated locals.

Khun Sia noted that two locals did however have very high due rates and some full-time staff which he attributed to their having effectively bargained for wages considerably higher than the norm in the industry.

Khun Sirichai - Khun Sirichai discussed how several of the unions in SERC had a large membership base but acknowledged they had also had very low dues rates. His union, EGATEU, had 15,000 members and SERC had approximately 150,000 members. Typically, dues rates were fixed at a flat rate and when the leadership sought to increase it to keep up with inflation and wages there were always a few near-sighted leaders that sought to ingratiate themselves with the membership by opposing the dues increase.

He pointed out that the membership had demonstrated a willingness to contribute substantial funds to one-off campaigns such as the recently successful anti-privatization rallies at EGAT. However, those inside the union who could not see the point in supporting a higher dues rate that would sustain a more effective and pro-active union thought the funds in the union treasuries derived from insurance plans should be enough to support whatever the unions needed to do.

Khun Sirichai said that, to his knowledge, none of the SERC affiliates had full-time organizers nor did the SERC.

Khun Somsak - Khun Somsak reiterated many of the points made by Khun Sirichai. He also added that many leaders were afraid to push for higher dues rates because they lacked a plan to convince the membership of the necessity for doing so. To that end, he agreed that unions in SERC and the private sector needed to develop strategies for building their internal organizing capacity for the purpose of educating the membership about the positive potential that could be reaped for all workers if the unions were better financed.

Khun Sakool and Khun Anong - Both spoke about how difficult it was to get members to support a dues rate that would sustain an effective union. They noted the fact that although bank workers are paid much more than most other workers but they had grown accustomed to paying among the lowest of all flat rates of any union members in Thailand.

Each spoke of how difficult it was to raise the dues rate from a mere 100 baht per year to 200 baht per year where it has remained for years. They described how at the Bangkok Bank Workers Union alone they had over 8,000 members and yet no professional organizing staff. The union consistently made significant gains for the membership at the bargaining table year after year while the union remained financially weak and understaffed because of the low flat dues rate the members had grown accustomed to over many years. They described how the union had to raise funds through alternative means such as selling union jackets to pay for the union office.

Khun Wirat - Khun Wirat spoke how the union had successfully negotiated with management to get 100% of all service charges distributed to all the workers. As a result, workers daily wages and their share of service charges provided most workers with an average combined wage in excess of 20,000 baht per month. Nonetheless, most workers were not members of the union and union dues are a low flat rate of 30 baht per month. None of the hotel unions has any staff. In his union, he had to stop publishing the union newsletter because he could no longer afford to pay the cost of printing it out of his own pocket.

Khun Arunee said she knew of no unions that had full-time organizers on their payroll. She felt unions needed to change the way they operate to raise dues to hire organizers because the nature of work in the industry had changed dramatically over the past decade. They pointed out that in the past workers usually worked eight-hour shifts and they had time after work to reflect and devote to union activities. The dues rates were low because the members in well-organized workplaces carried out most of the union's activities voluntarily or on paid-time-off. In contrast, they

asserted that it is now the norm in manufacturing for factories to have only two shifts where workers are working twelve-hours per day. Khun Arunee said that in her observation, most industrial workers now began the dayshifts at 07:00 and finished at 20:00.

Khun Yupa said twelve-hour shifts were now the norm not just in their area, Prapadaeng, or her industry but also in most industries throughout Thailand. Khun Yupa said she knew this to be true from her conversations with a relative who works in another part of the country, in the automotive industry and who told her that that twelve-hour shifts, six days per week are the norm in his industry and area as well. Khun Arunee and Khun Yupa and Khun Kruawon said workers and the union officers working these long hours lived harder lives because they had little time to do anything besides working, traveling to and from work, and sleeping.

All three said workers now relied on the overtime for several reasons. First, wages have generally not kept up with the cost of living. Second, she said workers were generally more in debt than in the past, which she attributed to lower down payment requirements for credit purchases for items such as motorcycles and other goods. Third, whereas in the past employers provided workers with benefits such as cheap housing in company dormitories, one free meal during work and free transport between the dormitories and work; workers seldom received any of these benefits any longer. As a result, workers bear higher living costs and receive less in real wages than in the past.

Khun Arunee spoke of how half the workers at one well-organized factory had accepted an early retirement program in order to receive the mandatory severance pay which most used to pay off debts. After they retired nearly all were re-hired as temporary workers thereby making them ineligible to re-join the union that was severely weakened as a result.

Khun Arunee said she felt was harder to organize workers now that before. She attributed this to several factors including the increased use of temporary workers and contract workers; the difficulty in locating workers that no longer live in



company dormitories; and the fact that these workers have so little free time to simply talk with organizers.

In summary, the interviews reinforced what the surveys revealed that nearly all the unions were under-funded. In absolute terms, the state enterprise unions had more financial resources than the private sector unions but neither group had professional organizing staff. Lacking any organizing staff, both private and public sector unions in Thailand are service model unions.

Several of the interviewees spoke about the apathy of their younger members and that they lacked a sense of working class consciousness. It was suggested that this apathy and lack of worker consciousness made it difficult to raise dues rates or fund organizing.

In nearly all the interviews, the leaders recognized the advantages of the organizing model and the need to organize more workers to improve the collective lot of all Thai workers.

Different but similar factors appear to be contributing to both the worker apathy and the inability to raise dues rates to a level sufficient to adopt the organizing model. In the case of the state enterprise unions, the unions are locked out of joining in confederations with private sector unions or organizing private sector workplaces. Hence, it is understandable that it would be difficult to convince the membership to support higher dues rates to fund organizing when there is effectively no external organizing target. Effectively, the state enterprise unions are precluded from growing by legal restrictions originally placed upon them by the Suchinda regime.

The private sector unions, as they are currently structured, suffer from a similar problem. How can the members of these local unions be expected to support higher dues rates to support the organizing of new unions that will be new stand-alone unions that never contribute anything back to the locals that organized them? The private sector locals are inhibited from organizing by a combination of their own organizational structures wherein the locals have no incentive to organize new

members and their lack of success in achieving a significant wage differential for their existing members.

Possible ways to address these problems will be examined in the analysis section, Chapter IV.

2. What are the core priorities and goals of Thai labor leaders and what are their plans for achieving those goals?

Khun Sirichai said that SERC and several of its affiliates were planning to push aggressively to increase dues rates. Some unions were planning to double flat rates while others were pushing for a conversion to a percentage rate.

Khun Somsak said SERC leaders would help mentor private sector unions through their association in consultative bodies. Also, although the state enterprise unions had been betrayed by various governments, SERC unions remained committed to making Thai democracy work for everyone including workers.

Khun Sakool described how government interference and manipulation by outsiders set labor leaders up to compete for seats on the Labor Court or for perks such as attending ILO meetings. Khun Anong stressed how important it was for labor leaders to stay strong and true to their ideals and their membership in spite of all the obstacles placed before them. They described how past governments had interfered with the union and strikes were effectively banned as a result. Both agreed workers' unions needed to find ways to become stronger in order to overcome bad labor laws and outside interference.

Khun Wirat discussed the problems unions faced in his industry. He pointed out how all but one of the six organized hotels that he were minority unions and as such the unions did not have as much leverage at the bargaining table as could have. Only one of the hotel unions had negotiated a dues check off agreement with the

employer. As a result, the leaders of the unions spent a disproportionate amount of time simply collecting members' dues each month. Addressing the aforementioned problems were the immediate goals of his union and other union in his industry.

Khun Arunee and Khun Yupa said that in the past member activists had more time to devote to organizing and other union activities whereas today workers have less time off to do those things. Both said that union leaders working such long hours did not have enough time to plan and think strategically.

In summary, both the state enterprise and private sector union leaders described their core priorities in terms of the external obstacles they felt they needed to overcome. Essentially much of what they described was their impressions of what they see as the problems the unions face. Their plans on priorities for the future were about how to react to the problems they face.

Throughout the interviews with the union leader's one could sense they were all frustrated. All had a strong sense an ideology about the role of unions and worker solidarity but were frustrated that younger workers did not seem to share those beliefs. The state enterprise leaders were frustrated by the constant betrayal of politicians and political parties. The private sector union leaders were frustrated about much harder it was to organize workers now because of the long hours they worked and the widespread use of temporary and contract workers. Khun Arunee's description of how difficult it had become to even internally organize existing members because of contracting out was particularly telling since she had internally organized her members at her own factory very successfully many times of the decades. Generally, they painted a picture where life had become much harder for workers over the past decade.

It was hard to see what they were thinking about in a proactive or strategic sense. Upon further reflection, this made sense when you consider the fact that the officers of the Thai unions spend a great deal of their time doing the servicing and organizing that better financed unions would have professional staff doing. This

reinforced what Khun Arunee said when she said the officers no longer have time to reflect and plan.

Further examination of the issues raised here will be addressed in the analysis section, Chapter IV.

3. What do Thai Trade Union leaders think about the programs of NGOs or SSOs that are working on their behalf and do the Thai union leaders feel the programs are complimentary to their priorities?

Khun Sia said workers in his unions did not understand the codes of conduct campaigns that the NGOs were seeking to involve them in. The Codes themselves seemed to be more public relations tools for the employers than useful tools for workers to strengthen their unions or improve their working conditions. In the workplaces, the codes were often displayed in such a manner that workers never saw them.

Khun Sia felt that NGOs that were organizing workers directly seemed to be building reliance upon the NGOs among the workers they organize instead of fostering solidarity and integration among newly organized workers with other workers and their unions in the same industry.

Khun Somsak said that the NGOs that were organizing unions -without helping them establish their own organizing and financial resources- were actually not helping the Thai labor movement. Instead, these NGOs might inadvertently be fostering a culture of dependency among unions that made them reliant on external support and susceptible to manipulation. In the process, the policies of some of the NGOs were actually contributing to disunity and divisions in the Thai labor movement.

Khun William said that it was true that Thai unions had low dues rates and few professional staff. He felt a lack of coordination among the foreign Solidarity Support Organizations and the NGOs they funded was preventing these problems from being addressed. He said that if there was more agreement to coordinate their activities, the SSOs and NGOs could avoid duplicating activities and more effectively devote resources to addressing the underlying problems. He said his SSO, ACILS, was committed to coordinating its program activities with other SSOs and labor NGOs and was willing incorporate their coordinated strategies into ACILS' programs.

Khun Arunee expressed her concern that more attention needed to be focused to the fate of workers who were laid-off or had become too old to work in factories. She said that in her experience workers who had spent decades working in factories in urban areas found it difficult to return to the villages they came from so many years earlier. She many who went back to their home villages felt disconnected and usually returned to the areas where they had lived and worked for most of their lives.

She repeatedly pointed out that in her district, Prapadaeng there are nearly 2,000 factories. Of those 2,000 factories, only forty were organized and only half of those had active unions. She emphasized that NGO's that wanted to help workers needed to help unions in districts like hers develop their organizing capacities.

She also appreciated the fact that people in other countries were concerned about the well-being of the workers that made the products they bought. She thought that was the best thing about Codes of Conduct. She was concerned that companies used the codes to shield themselves from criticism and that Codes had yet to produce many benefits for workers in the factories. She said as a result of the Codes many managers met more regularly with workers to discuss their grievances but those meetings tended to produce only minor improvements and major issues such as wages and working hours were never addressed.

Khun Arunee was particularly unhappy with some of the ISO standards because she said complying with many standards added to the responsibilities of workers without additional compensation.

In summary, the frustration in the remarks of the leaders interviewed was palpable throughout the interviews. It was obvious that most thought the NGOs should not be organizing and those that were supporting them should instead be helping unions organize the workers.

Some very were concerned about a possible growing client-patron relationship between the NGOs and the unions. They seemed equally frustrated with the unions for not being able to become more self-reliant through their own means.

Some of their comments about codes of conduct were not actually critical of the projects per se. They were just simply disappointed they had not had as much positive impact as they had hoped.

Khun William's comments about the need for the foreign Labor SSOs to coordinate to address these issues made a good deal of sense.

Further examination of the issues raised here will be addressed in the analysis section, Chapter IV.

#### 4. How do Thai Unions allocate their own resources?

All but one of the interviews took place outside of the individual leader's own office. Few were prepared to speak to the specifics of how their union allocates its funds. This was understandable because none of the leaders were told in advance

what questions they were going to be asked beforehand. Additionally, depending upon the union's by-laws and policies, an individual union officer may not be able to released such information with receiving prior approval to so from the executive board.

Khun Arunee felt it was important to understand that when her union was at its peak, they spent the largest part of their budget on transportation costs. She said that because her members were active and participated in many activities, the union spent a great deal of money on buses to transport their members from Prapadaeng to other locations. It was also very expensive for the many leaders to attend meetings with other unionists, NGOs, SSOs and the others they had to deal with in carrying out their duties.

I simply did not learn much about how the unions currently allocate their existing resources. Possibly, I didn't ask the questions pointedly enough or maybe too pointedly. Maybe they did not feel it was appropriate to share such privileged information. I don't have an answer.

Further examination of the issues raised here will be addressed in the analysis section, Chapter IV.

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## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

By looking at the functions, unions perform with and on behalf of their members can provide some insight into determining how they should be staffed. To bargain effectively unions need experts in negotiating and contracts. The properly enforcement contracts after they have been ratified unions require service representatives. The organizing of new members or existing members to obtain a good contract requires organizers. Hence, even small unions need a minimum number of service representatives who also have expertise in contracts and negotiating, as well as organizers, clerical and financial staff and an executive director to manage the union staff and operation according to the directives of the elected local leadership. Furthermore, this staff needs an office, equipment, telephones and everything else needed to maintain an office and keep organizers and service representatives in the field.

The brief local union staffing requirement described above is atypical for American unions and especially local unions that have adopted the organizing model. Often locals that have adopted the organizing model of unionism have combined small locals into larger ones that have more specialists such as researchers, communications officers, political directors, and organizing departments staffed by teams of professional organizers and augmented by an exponentially greater number of member organizers. Where locals are not large enough to fund all the positions they need to be effective, the federations, or what is called the International Unions in America, often do. The full potential of an organizing model union can best be illustrated by SEIU's ability to field over 2,000 full-time and 50,000 part-time member organizers in GOTV campaigns in battleground states during the 2004 elections in the US. (Broder, 2004; FOURNIER, 2006; SEIU, 2004)



## **4.1 Analysis of Survey and Interview Results by Resources at their Disposal**

### **4.1.1 Analysis of Survey and Interview Results: Staff Resources**

The survey results indicate few private sector unions have any full-time staff and those that do have only clerical staff. The state enterprise unions have more staff; although, no organizers or researchers. The state enterprise unions characteristically have workers dispersed throughout the country at many worksites. As a result, SERC unions have to devote a greater proportion of staff resources to their servicing their dispersed membership than would be required to service a similarly sized, more geographically condensed membership.

### **4.1.2 Analysis of Survey and Interview Results: Financial Resources**

The surveys indicate all the unions in both the private sector and state enterprise sector have insufficient financial resources to properly research and staff organizing campaigns whether they are internal, external or political.

The state enterprise unions and some private sector unions, such as the bank workers unions, have a large enough membership base to become potentially powerful and effective organizing model unions except for the fact that they have extremely low dues rates.

Most private sector unions have higher dues rates than the state enterprise and bank workers unions but a typically much smaller membership base that is a serious impediment to their ability to adopt and implement the organizing model.

During the interviews, it was revealed that an organizer's salary started at 9,000 baht per month. Were a union to staff a very small office with one executive director/service representative (10,000), a full-time organizer (9,000), a secretary/receptionist (5,500) and part-time bookkeeper (4,000) and provide them with a phone, benefits, transportation allowance and an office, one can easily see how these costs alone will exceed the monthly dues collected by many Thai local unions.

Raising dues rates alone will not solve the serious problems private sector unions face. Obviously, private sector locals must also look at their structure. Small locals in the same industry and the same districts should merge with the former workplace locals becoming chapters in the larger local. If locals cannot be merged then they must redirect a much greater portion of their dues to their respective federation because at one level or the other the unions need to have sufficient funds to fund organizing. Additionally private sector unions must develop strategies to obtain better contracts for their existing members. They need to be able to negotiate a wage differential that justifies members paying higher dues.

If state enterprise unions managed to convince their members to support much higher dues rates that alone would not solve their problems as well. Both private and state enterprise sector unions need to hire professional organizers, researchers and train member organizers. The bottom line for unions in both sectors is the same as it is and always has been for unions all over the world: organize or die!

#### **4.2 Analysis of Interviews: Union Leaders' Core Priorities**

State Enterprise union leaders regard stopping privatization as their core priority. To that end, the leaders interviewed recognize they need to raise dues and convert to a percentage dues system in order to have the resources necessary to fight privatization attempts in the future.

The State Enterprise union leaders interviewed also regard their ability to work with other members of civil society effectively as critical to protecting their members and Thai workers in general. Each pointed to the activism and engagement of their membership with other members of civil society in larger issues, in addition to privatization, as evidence of their unions' internal organizing capability. To that end, at least some of the State Enterprise unions appear well positioned and determined to mount effective internal organizing campaigns of their membership to support a more sustainable dues structure.

The private sector union leaders interviewed wanted to obtain more immediate objectives such as contracts with dues check-off provisions, better wages, higher membership levels in the workplaces they represent in addition to higher dues rates and better labor laws.

Both private sector and state enterprise sector union leaders spoke more about obstacles they wanted to overcome than how they expected to overcome those obstacles. There was much discussion about members' apathy and lack of working class consciousness.

One cannot argue with the fact that Thai labor unions face many obstacles in law and in practice. Indeed many of the laws are egregiously unfair and not in compliance with various UN and ILO conventions. Probably many of the laws and regulations such as that which prevent workers in state enterprise from organizing and affiliating with private sector workers possibly could not survive a real court test under the 1997 Constitution. Nonetheless, dwelling on the unfairness of the laws is not going to change them.

Bad, unfair laws that are written by and for the benefit of employers will not change until workers and their unions commit themselves to challenging them. Such challenges are about justice and as such, union leaders need to be thinking about how to engage their membership in a struggle for justice. History is filled with such struggles not just in rise of labor movements but in civil rights movements, independence movements and democracy movements. Thai labor needs to look at the tactics employed in other struggles for justice and seek ways for the rest of Thai society and the world to see their struggle as such.

It would seem that the lack of urgency and the lack of a sense of struggle that might account for the apathy among the membership. If the rules are written in a manner to deny workers justice then Thai labor needs to re-examine what needs to be done to confront those rules. Leaders need to think strategically about what campaigns will force the rest of Thai society to recognize the rules as unjust.

#### **4.3 Analysis of Interviews: about NGO programs**

For the most part, the interviews revealed there was a high level of appreciation for the activities of NGOs and SSOs on behalf of Thai workers and Thai unions. There were some concerns raised about whether it was really appropriate to support NGOs that were engaged in organizing as opposed to assisting unions develop their own organizing capacity.

There were some reservations expressed as to how effective Codes of Conduct campaigns had been in addressing the problems workers and unions faced in their workplaces.

It must be noted that a number of local geographically based union centers have been adopted as an alternative to industry federations often with the active encouragement and support of NGOs. There is logic to doing so as cooperation

among unions in any given community is certainly useful when organizing community support for organizing and contract campaigns. These community or geographically based union centers offer their affiliated locals an alternative to stand alone locals and afford them the opportunity to pool their limited resources.

The community or geographically constituted union centers acting, as outright alternatives to industry specific federations; is not without significant drawbacks for their local affiliates. Whereas industry specific federations and their affiliated locals can cooperate to develop greater research and organizing expertise in their given industry that cannot be said for geographically constituted union centers that have affiliates from a variety of different industries.

There is a natural tension between NGOs and unions especially when NGOs assume the duties and responsibilities that unions ought to be doing. For example, when NGOs engage in organizing or other worker campaigns their target selections and issues may be driven more by the demands and expectation of their donors than the wishes of local union leaders. On the other hand, NGOs can rightfully respond by pointing out that they are often filling a void and responding to needs the unions cannot or have chosen not to address.

Here again, for whatever the shortcomings of the NGOs, it cannot be denied that if the Thai trade union movement were stronger and more self-reliant there would not be any need for NGOs to be doing many of the things they are doing. In effect, it gets back to the unions own internal constraints in terms of financial and human resources that make them dependent upon the NGOs.

Certainly some of the unions organized by NGOs are weak and appear to become too dependent on the NGOs rather than themselves as a result. Nonetheless, I do not believe that the NGOs intentionally set out to make them so. Actually, the larger problem for both the NGOs and unions in general is that weak unions have a long history of being co-opted or manipulated by forces that seek to undermine the interests of workers and unions.

#### 4.4 Analysis of interviews: Resource Allocations

Many, if not most, of the unions maintain some form of office where members can have meetings and officers can conduct union business. In one case where an interview was conducted at a small local union office, the union had such an office but no staff. It is not entirely clear from either the surveys or the interviews how much of each unions' financial resources are devoted to the maintenance of offices and the occasional clerical staff person. However, by looking at the surveys in terms of the actual staff the unions have, the number of members and the dues rates, it would appear that a rather large proportion of monthly dues from Thai unions is typically devoted to maintaining offices and office clerical staff.

Unions with a large membership base appear to be able to fund their office costs and office staff and still have the finances necessary to fund other activities. Such unions, which are personified by the large State Enterprise unions, structurally look like classic service model unions albeit with atypically low dues rates.

Looking closely at the private sector unions, which typically have a much smaller membership base than the state enterprise unions; it would seem prohibitively expensive in terms of the limited resources available to such unions to maintain local offices without merging their locals or pooling their resources at the federation level. During the interviews, it was noted that it costs at least 9,000 baht per month to hire a full-time organizer, not including communication and travel costs. Looking at all the unions surveyed it is difficult to see how any could staff a classic organizing model union's organizing operation with a team of professional organizers, researchers, a compensated cadre of member organizers and provide them with the funds needed to travel and communicate with each other and the campaign coordinators or directors.

None of the leaders interviewed explained in detail exactly how all their unions' financial resources are currently allocated but it was clear that none of the financial resources were being allocated to support full-time organizing staff.

It would be helpful to know exactly how all the unions allocate their resources currently in order to make specific recommendations about how they could best restructure their organizations and reallocate their resources to adopt the organizing model of unionism. Nonetheless, the analysis in sections 4.1 and 4.2 still is applicable. Generally, all the unions need to examine how best to reallocate whatever resources they have at their disposal to organize and grow again and if not, they can anticipate a continuation in their decline in power and influence.



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## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

In many ways, the organizing model of unionism is really a philosophy of unionism borne out of a set of best practices. It is a model that demands a great commitment of union resources to organizing and member mobilization. Much of the literature about the model is devoted to the need for unions to redirect resources to support a continuous state of internal and external organizing. As such, much of what is written is written about the American and European labor movements where it is simply assumed that existing unions have resources, particularly financial resources, to redirect to support the organizing model.

In the Thai context, it cannot be assumed there are resources to redirect to implement the organizing model. The research from the surveys and the interviews indicates that Thai unions are for the most part woefully under-financed. Many unions have no staff whatsoever because they simply do not collect enough dues from their members. Members who are full-time workers that contribute their time and energy without compensation conduct most local union business. This explains the rapid turnover among union leaders that Khun Voravidh accurately described as a persistent problem. (Voravidh, Napaporn, & Phan, 2002) Dedicated but uncompensated member activists who practically are working a second job on behalf of the membership simply burn out.



Unions need professional staff because member volunteers, especially uncompensated volunteers working for the union in their spare time, cannot do all that needs to be done run an effective union. Service model unions rely on professional service representatives to service their member's needs. Organizing model unions blend a mixture of professional staff with a much larger pool of member organizers that are compensated for their lost wages when working for the union. Regardless of which model of unionism a union adopts, the union must be able to raise enough dues to support its operations and be viable.

Full-time workers doing manual labor do not have the time or energy to perform the functions that are critical to making a union successful. For example, a worker in a factory that has to remain alert and maintain concentration for 12 hours per day lest he or she is likely to make a mistake that could injure the worker or a co-worker. Consequently, workers that do manual for long hours, six days a week cannot be expected to then also devote whatever free time they have available to something as time and energy intensive as organizing or handling grievances in the sustained manner those activities require. Even those workers that make the effort to do organizing, grievance handling and contract enforcement also require funds to carry out these tasks.

Organizers and union representatives need money to pay transportation costs and phone bills. Organizers and union service representatives build solidarity with members and potential members through hundreds of conversations over time. Big organizing campaigns that require organizers to methodically reach a large number of workers or voters in a limited amount of time requires teams of fulltime professional organizers augmented by a cadre of trained member organizers on paid time off and part-time member volunteers. This systematic method of organizing is a hallmark of the organizing model of unionism.

Service model unions require a reasonable dues rate to support the professional staff needed to service their members and properly enforce contracts. These duties are characteristically carried out by professional service representative.

Organizing requires an even greater commitment of resources. Organizing model unions recognize that having sufficient financial resources to support a mix of professional fulltime and part-time member activists is a prerequisite to successfully negotiate and service contracts as well as mount successful internal, external, and political organizing campaigns that ultimately build power to change the lives of members and non-members alike for the better. Organizing model unions rely more heavily on members acting as volunteers and shop stewards to handle many of the grievances and other activities carried out by professional service representatives in a service model union. The funds derived from having fewer professional service representatives is then channeled into organizing for professional organizers and member organizers.

Overall, Thai unions simply do not collect enough dues to be support a professional staff. Many unions have not been able to negotiate strong contracts and better wages as a result. In some cases, when overtime is not included, union members are working at the minimum wage which begs the question as to why have a union at all, if it cannot deliver anything more then what the law already requires.

Weak under-financed unions with no staff have an extremely difficult time bargaining good contracts and their failure to bargain good contracts in turn frustrates the membership. This is not a problem unique to Thai unions. Such unions, regardless of where they are located, are faced with two alternatives: internally organize the membership to fight hard for a good contract and a sustainable dues rate or spiral into ultimate irrelevance.

The surveys illustrated quite clearly that Thai labor unions have insufficient dues to support organizing and growth. Large membership unions such as the state enterprise unions have very low and often flat dues rates. Private sector unions often have somewhat higher dues rates but a membership base that is too small. Neither has any professional full-time organizing staff. These are the core internal capacities the hypothesis set out to prove needed to be made a priority to strengthen.

These capacities need to be addressed through internal organizing campaigns. The onus is on the union leaders to identify and train a cadre of member activists in every location and on every shift to carry the message to the membership to support the program. In some cases, that program may simply be to vote for a sustainable, percentage based dues rate.

In another case, it may mean organizing the membership for a contract fight to establish a wage differential that justifies a sustainable dues rate. That means organizing for a struggle, which if successful, will provide the membership with an opportunity to learn about successful organizing through experience. A particularly favorable byproduct of such a successful organizing campaign is workers will acquire a greater sense of worker consciousness and the union will have produced a cadre of member organizers.

### **5.1 Recommendations: Thai Unions**

Thai unions should carefully consider what must be done to develop their own capacities to research, staff and execute organizing campaigns. Most need to develop the internal organizing capacity to energize and engage their membership to support a sustainable dues rate and participate in organizing campaigns. Additionally, smaller unions should examine whether they need to merge with other unions to reach the critical mass needed to sustain and staff an effective local or whether its better to contribute more funds to their federations and permit the federations take the lead in organizing and negotiating.

Fortunately, because internal organizing is carried out by working members in their workplaces through their participation in internal organizing committees, it is much less dependent on professional staff and financial resources than external organizing campaigns. As such, Thai unions that need to win better contracts or win members' support for restructuring and/or dues increases have a starting point from which to do so. The starting point is developing and implementing their own internal organizing campaign plans to achieve their immediate goals with respect to becoming more self reliant in terms of financial and staff resources. To be successful

unions have to be able to organize their existing membership before they can hope to develop the capacity to organize new member.

## **5.2 Recommendations for Labor NGOs**

If NGOs want to help Thai unions organize then they might wish adopt the same standard for determining a successful organizing campaign as organizing model unions do in America. By that standard, a successful organizing effort is not measured merely by obtaining recognition or signing up so many new members. The standard for success is measured by whether a good first contact that establishes a wage differential that justifies a dues rate that supports a viable union for the workers has been obtained as a result.

NGOs should consider evaluating their programs in terms what is best for the long-term sustainability of Thai labor unions. What programs can they design that contribute to fostering more financially viable and self-reliant unions?

NGOs should also carefully consider the implications of promoting geographically based community union centers as an alternative to industry-based federations. A goal worth considering for both local unions and labor NGOs is how best to build strong local unions that can be effective members of both their specific industrial federations as well as their community based union networks.

## **5.3 Recommendations: Thai civil society**

As Khun Napaporn noted, Thai trade unions need to work with others members of civil society as partners to address many of the fundamental problems workers face in Thailand. To that end, Thai academics and intellectuals might wish to consider researching a number of topics that directly affect Thai workers and Thai unions further. One example would be to study how the use of labor contracts has impeded workers ability to organize and bargain collectively and what impact that has on female workers' eligibility to obtain paid maternity leave. Another possible research topic would be to research how the house registration laws impact workers

ability to participate in the political process and what are the implications of the current system of absentee voting with regard to vote buying and Thai democracy. Finally, further research needs to be done about the effects of working very long hours, six days per week on the workers and their families.

If further research should prove that these issues are indeed unjust then it is incumbent on Thai unions, NGOs and intellectuals to actively speak out and draw attention to these problems and work to remedy them.



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**APPENDICES**

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## Appendix A

### THE ORGANIZING MODEL OF UNIONISM

Democratic unions are based on an organizing model. That means they involve as many members as possible in all functions of the union. There can never be too many stewards, too many bargaining committee members, too many organizing campaigns.

The great upsurge of the labor movement in the 1930s when the unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), organized the major industries of the United States was based on the organizing model.

Today, organizing unions are building a new labor movement that will reverse union busting, the decrease in real wages and the loss of workplace democracy that has taken place in the last few decades. In spite of their wealth, the corporations can't stand up against an active and committed union membership.

#### Organizing Model: Service or Business Model

Defending members is most important.	<b>Attitude toward employer</b>	Good relationship with management is most important.
Inclusive. Tries to reflect workforce in composition of union leadership.	<b>Attitude toward members</b>	Exclusive. Little turnover in leadership. Suspicious of newcomers.
Tries to involve all members in the department.	<b>Grievance handling</b>	Tries to settle without involvement of members.
Make immediate supervisor settle by showing solidarity of workers.	<b>Settling grievances</b>	Settle at highest level with company or through arbitration.
Election by co-workers.	<b>Selection of stewards</b>	Appointment by union leadership.
Large bargaining committee, constant flow of information to members.	<b>Bargaining</b>	Small committee, negotiations often kept secret until a settlement is reached.
Encourage initiative and creativity of members.	<b>Strategy and tactics</b>	Reluctant to involve members in bringing pressure on employer.
Union represents all workers - organized and unorganized. In a constant state of organizing.	<b>Organizing the unorganized</b>	Unwilling and unable to organize. feels threatened by newly organized.

Take personal responsibility for success or failure of the union.	<b>Members view of the union</b>	An insurance policy or a "third party" to call on when they have a problem.
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<http://www.lalabor.org/Model.html>

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## BIOGRAPHY

John Osolnick Jr. was born and raised in the Wilkes-Barre area of Pennsylvania, USA. His father, John Sr., was a master carpenter and lifelong member of the local carpenters union in which he held numerous union offices during his career. John Sr. was also an active member of the local Democratic Party, a city council member for twenty years and a Kennedy delegate to the 1980 Democratic National Convention. His mother was a registered nurse and a proud member of 1199PA where she was a member organizer, negotiating team leader, lifelong labor activist and admirer of Leon Davis, the founder of 1199. He is the product of a union family that spans four generations.

John began his labor career as a member of the Laborers union. He worked his way through college with a combination of jobs such as a construction laborer during the summertime, as a full-time night-shift ethanol production operator during the school year and with the assistance of US Veteran's Education Benefits. He has a BS from George Mason University and AA from Penn State University.

He has held many positions throughout his career where he has lived and worked in Europe, South America, Asia and America. He was Country Program Director for the Asian-American Free Labor Institute, now called the Solidarity Center, in South Korea and the Philippines and S.E.Asia Regional Director in Bangkok Thailand. He is the Executive Director of BIDD and considers both Washington, DC and Bangkok his home.

He is particularly proud of his work as an organizer where he worked on internal, external and GOTV campaigns throughout America. In his various organizing roles, he had the privilege to organize public and private sector workers including road workers and janitors in New Hampshire, homecare workers in Wisconsin, Headstart teachers in Baltimore, state professionals in Michigan, registered nurses in Illinois, and hospital workers in California.