THE INDUSTRIAL WORKING CLASS AND THE STATE IN THAILAND: AN INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS

by

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This thesis is the product of my own work and all sources used have been acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

The rise of capitalism and the emergence of working classes in the countries of the so-called 'Third World' is now the subject of increasing academic research. This study seeks to make a contribution to this research by providing an introductory analysis into the historical development of the industrial working class in Thailand. The period covered by this study extends from the mid-nineteenth century up to 1957. Some initial and largely exploratory attempts are made to trace the processes of formation of this class fraction with particular emphasis being given to an examination of the role played by the state in the process.

Drawing on both secondary sources and hitherto unused primary documents, this study seeks to demonstrate that, during the period under review, an industrial working class emerged as an important social force within Thai society and that members of this class were making significant contributions to Thai economic, political and social life. In arguing for this position the study directly challenges the widespread view that Thai society lacked a 'true' working class movement during the pre-1957 period. This thesis demonstrates that this view is both theoretically and empirically mistaken.
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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an introductory analysis into the historical development of the industrial working class in Thailand. The period covered by the study extends from the mid-nineteenth century up to 1957. Some preliminary steps will be taken toward tracing the process of formation of the industrial working class during this period, with particular emphasis being given to an examination of the role played by the state in this process. The principle substantive aim of this thesis is to demonstrate empirically that, during the period under review, an industrial working class had emerged as an important social force within Thai society and that members of this class were making significant contributions to Thai economic, political and social life.

The arguments presented in this study stand in marked contrast to a view which has long been associated with previous academic perceptions of the contributions which Thai industrial workers made to the development of their society prior to 1957. This view which, to borrow a term from Vickery [1984:36], I will call the Standard Total View (STV), has its social scientific origins in Virginia Thompson's work [1947], is contained in studies written in the 1950's and 1960's [Fogg, 1953; Nikhom, 1955; Shurcliffe, 1959; Pasuknirunth, 1959; Thian, 1969] and finds its clearest expression in Mabry [1977:931] as follows:

Although Thailand earlier (1932-1958) had organisations that called themselves labor unions, it is questionable whether Thailand, in fact, has until recently ever had a true labor movement [My emphasis].

Although this idea that the various historical actions of Thai workers prior to 1957 did not represent the makings of a 'true', 'real' or 'proper' working class movement is, first and foremost, a product of the work carried out by scholars associated with modernisation perspectives, it is also a notion which to varying extents can be found in the studies of writers who have been influenced by radical theory [Pichit, (ed.) 1975; Anon, 1980; Petprasert, 1982; Somkiet, 1982a; Sangsit, 1986]. Of course, there exists a vast difference between these writers with regard to what they feel a 'true' working class should or should not be and, as will be discussed below, there is an equally vast difference in the explanations which have been invoked to account for this purported absence of a 'proper' working class. Nevertheless, for all
their substantive differences, it is remarkable that both groups of scholars have arrived at a similar conclusion with respect to the overall historical significance of the contributions which industrial workers made to Thai history during the pre-1957 period.

It is a central contention of this study that the STV in both its modernisation (STVM) and radical (STVR) variants, is both theoretically and empirically mistaken. On a theoretical level, this thesis will show that the entire search for a 'true' working class is misplaced. It will be argued that there is no form of working class development and struggle which can a priori be considered to be superior to any other and therefore what is required is a theoretically informed discussion of the actual forms which the development of an industrial working class assumed in the Thai context. In applying this approach to the analysis of the pre-1957 period, the intention is to demonstrate empirically that: first, Thailand's incorporation into the world capitalist social order combined with a domestic based process of capital accumulation was accompanied by the emergence of a new class of producers who, for their social survival, were dependent on the receipt of a regular wage; second it will be demonstrated that dependence on a wage served to generate certain shared experiences and interests among industrial workers and that, on the basis of these shared interests, Thai workers began to launch struggles which not only brought them into conflict with their employers but also brought them into direct confrontation with the power of the Thai state; finally it will be argued that even though industrial workers were unable to free themselves from dependence on a wage, their overall response to this dependence altered and redirected the flow of socio-historical change in Thailand in ways which were indeed significant.

The aim of the remaining sections of this chapter is threefold: first, to make some brief remarks on the empirical underpinnings of the STV; second, to examine and provide a critique of its theoretical foundations and finally, to outline in more detail the structure of the present study.

1.2 The STV and Empirical Research

Perhaps the most striking feature of the various academic studies which have denied industrial workers any significant place in Thai history prior to 1957 is the extent to which the authors of these works have been prepared to arrive at their conclusions on the basis of minimal amounts of empirical research. Indeed, when compared to the truly massive amount of research which has been brought to bear on the analysis of the development of wage-labour and working classes in both the advanced capitalist societies of the West and increasingly in areas such as Latin America, Africa, Asia and
other parts of Southeast Asia, the entire field of labour studies in Thailand must, empirically at least, be considered to be very much in its infancy. Although the first social scientific study to focus on Thai labour was completed in the late 1940's, research into wage-labour and the working class has, however, not figured prominently within the field of Thai studies generally [cf. Reynolds, 1984:2]. In fact it has only been since the early to mid 1970's, during which time workers combined with students and peasants to help overthrow a despotic military regime and usher in a period of open democratic politics, that both Thai and Western scholars have recognised the need for a more critical and thoroughgoing analysis of the historical development and current position of the working class within contemporary Thai society. However, while the intervening years have witnessed the steady production of journal articles, data papers, unpublished essays, conference reports, postgraduate theses and monographs, much of this work has tended to remain focused on more recent problems and issues and is decidedly lacking in a firm historical grounding. In more recent times, however, there has been a growing recognition that contemporary problems must be analysed and placed within an historical perspective [Phaisan, 1986:9-11]. Nevertheless, apart from a few schematic and provisional analyses, studies of the historical development of the Thai working class have continued to remain infrequent [Anon, 1980; Somkiat, 1982a and 1982b]. It is important to note that the studies which have concentrated on the historical development of labour have, with some recent exceptions [Sangsit, 1986; Damri & Carun, 1986; Brown, 1987; Poonpanich, 1988], been almost wholly based on secondary sources. Virginia Thompson's work of the late 1940's continues to be used as the point of departure for studies of the pre-war and immediate post-war period, while Mabry [1979], who relies on Thompson for much of his historical background, continues to be cited as the main source of information for our understanding of the 1950's. It is symptomatic of the as yet underdeveloped nature of primary empirical research that even basic historical questions, such as the dating of the establishment of the first legally recognised labour organisation in Thailand, continue to be the subject of some confusion.  

To some extent the general lack of primary research and the problem this poses for our understanding of the historical development of the Thai working class has been due to the difficulty in gaining access to relevant material. As Anderson [1978:195] has indicated, the absence of a colonial period in Thailand has meant that researchers have been deprived of the rich body of colonial scholarship which has formed such an

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1 It has generally been thought that the first legally registered trade union in Thailand was established in 1897. This is empirically inaccurate. In fact, it was to take Thai workers another thirty five years of struggle after this date before they won the right to legally establish their own organisation. For more details see Chapter Three, Section 3.3.5.
important empirical basis for the socio-historical analysis of development and change in those countries which did experience a period of colonial rule. To complicate matters even further, Thai workers have left little in the way of written records of their experiences, nor are trade union and archival documents easily obtainable, a situation which makes the investigation of problems such as the early development and growth of class organisations and class consciousness exceedingly difficult to investigate. Nevertheless, while it must be accepted that the lack of such material places definite constraints on our ability to investigate and understand the past, past writers have been reluctant to make use of the primary materials which are available. One of the principal tasks of this study will be, therefore, to make a contribution to our basic empirical knowledge of the historical development of labour in Thailand. While not wishing to impugn the important contributions which have been made by past writers, it is hoped that a more rigorous employment of secondary sources, together with the use of hitherto unused primary documents, will permit us to begin to recognise the fact that industrial workers were making more significant contributions to the development of their society than proponents of the STV would suggest. It is the intention of this study, however, not only to show that the STV cannot be sustained on empirical grounds, but also to demonstrate that it is the product of an approach which is theoretically unacceptable. It is to a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the STV to which I now turn.

1.3 The STV and Theory

On a substantive theoretical level studies of the historical development of the Thai working class have been and, to a large extent, continue to be informed by the concerns of either modernisation or radical theory.\(^2\) Over recent years both of these theoretical orientations have been subjected to rigorous theoretical critiques [Hewison, 1989:5-30; Higgott & Robison, 1985:16-61; Evans & Stephens, 1988:713-745]. The purpose here is not simply to repeat the many criticisms which have been directed against these approaches. In the present context it will be sufficient to draw attention to the fact that, despite the intellectual gulf which serves to separate these particular perspectives, they have nevertheless displayed, at least within the context of Thai labour studies, certain similarities. The most notable of these is that scholars from both theoretical camps have built their analyses around the search for a real, pure or

\(^2\) By the terms modernisation and radical theory I refer simply to two broad positions within development theory both of which have exercised an enormous influence over both Thai and Southeast Asian studies. For a very useful discussion which treats both the historical genesis of these approaches and the way they have changed over time see, Chapter 1 in Higgott and Robison [1985:16-61].
proper form of working class development. This search has, however, not been limited to analyses of the Thai working class for it has also served to exercise a considerable influence over studies of the historical development of wage-labour and working classes in the Third World generally [Lloyd, 1982; Munck, 1988; Gutkind, 1988]. Although no attempt will be made to canvass all of the relevant debates, it will be argued that this widespread concern for an exemplary form of working class development is the product of a specific approach which, albeit implicitly, is underpinned by certain assumptions which are theoretically unacceptable. It will be appropriate to discuss this criticism further in the light of some recent debates which have centred around the nature of the relationship between class structure and class formation.

1.3.1 Class Structure and Class Formation

As Isaacs [1987:134] observes, the concept of class in Marxist theory is 'paradigmatically ambiguous' denoting as it does both a 'structural relation between economic positions and the collectivities that occupy these positions and reproduce them in the course of their activity'. Given this ambiguity it is therefore important to make a clear distinction between two dimensions of class theory; first, theories of class structure where the emphasis is placed on developing abstract models of the structure and dynamics of social relations 'into which individuals...enter which determine their class interests' [Wright, 1985:9] and second, theories of class formation where attention is directed away from structure in order to provide a theoretical account of the process 'whereby class collectivities develop group solidarities and act collectively to negotiate and transform class relations' [Isaacs, 1987:134].

Wright [1985:123] has argued that in 'classical' Marxist theory the nature of the relationship between class structure and class formation was 'generally treated as relatively unproblematic'. He states that:

...in the analysis of the working class it was usually assumed that there was a one-to-one relationship between the proletariat as structurally defined and the proletariat as a collective actor engaged in struggle. The transformation of the working class from a class-in-itself (a class determined structurally) into a class-for-itself (a class consciously engaged in collective struggle over its class interests) may not have been understood as a smooth and untroubled process, but it was seen as inevitable.

Metcalfe [1988:13-14] has pointed to the important implications which this classical understanding of the relationship between class structure and class formation
has had with regard to the conducting of concrete historical analysis. He argues that, if the proletariat's historical actions are assumed to be defined by a 'fixed essence' (i.e. merely by the position they occupy within the class structure) and if individual workers are perceived to be the mere bearers of this essence then:

...the characteristics of class struggle and the course of history can be 'read-off' the essential qualities which classes possess because of their place in society...Historical change is thus seen as progress, or the unfolding of an immanent social order, and historical analyses have 'explained' phenomena when they have situated them in the pre-classificatory model or historical projection.

Although neither modernisation nor radical writers work within the substantive propositions of Marxist theory, their studies of the historical development of the Thai working class have been informed by a type of historical analysis which is strikingly similar to the one identified by Metcalfe. That is, both groups of scholars have approached the study of Thai working class history through the imposition of a pre-classificatory model which carries with it images of what the Thai working class should do or should be [cf. Zeenponsekul, 1987:2]. When brought to bear on the analysis of pre-1957 Thai society, the major consequence of this approach is as follows: first, it has taken scholars only minimal amounts of empirical research to establish the fact that Thai workers seemingly failed to reproduce what have been held to be the proper forms of struggle, thought and organisation; second, the gap which is therefore opened between what their historical projections suggest should be the case and what empirical research has shown to have actually happened has led both groups of writers to the conclusion that no true working class emerged in Thailand, with the bulk of the research effort being directed toward explaining why Thai workers appeared to have failed to fulfill their historical destiny.

According to writers influenced by modernisation theory, this failure is due to the persistence of traditional Thai culture. Thai workers, it has been argued, were innately passive, accepting of their subordinate role and position in society, deferential to authority and possessed with an inbuilt reluctance to become involved in the affairs of others. Apparently perplexed by the ostensible lack of the development of a strong trade union movement during the pre-1957 period, Mabry [1979:32] has argued that while the individual cultural traits of innate passiveness, deference to authority etc. do not exclude the formation of voluntary organisations...[they do]...explain the paucity of them [My emphasis]. More forcefully the same author claims that as the Thai were 'culturally pre-conditioned to be non-involved in the affairs of others...the American rallying cry of 'an injury to one is an injury to all' had no corollary among the Thais, and there was almost no recognition of the principle "in union there is strength"'.

Mabry [1979:48] further argues that the innate reluctance to challenge authority meant that the 'grievance machinery' established under the 1956 Labour Act proved unworkable and therefore 'there were few union victories or accomplishments to bind workers to a continuing organisation and for which they were willing to make unusual sacrifices'.

While modernisation writers have attempted to explain the Thai proletariat's failure to fulfill its historical destiny by reifying culture, radical writers have attempted to explain this failure by reifying consciousness. In an argument which has pervaded historical studies of working classes the world over, the revolutionary maturity of the Thai working class is thought to have been checked by its inability to escape from the confines of dominant ideology. According to Petprasert [1982:4], labour 'internalised' the 'hegemonic' ideology of the Thai ruling classes, a situation which 'undermined the possibility for the progressive labour movement to develop...and transform the social and political consciousness of the working class.' Sangsit [cited in Somkiat,1982a:40] adopts a similar type of explanation arguing that 'free-labour' is freed not only from the means of production but also from the confines of 'feudal' consciousness. As elements of this consciousness remained within the minds of Thai workers then '...it cannot be concluded that a class of free workers [i.e. a working class] has emerged within Thai society'.

This study will show that the explanations proffered by both modernisation and radical writers cannot be sustained on empirical grounds. Rather than being culturally reluctant to challenge authority and become involved in the affairs of others, it will be shown that Thai industrial workers continually displayed both a willingness and ability to organise and struggle in defence of their class interests. Moreover it will be shown that, while elements of what may be termed 'feudal' consciousness did remain within labour discourse, these elements were subjected to a process of critical transformation and rather than simply 'internalising' dominant ideologies industrial workers and their leaders were able, during the course of their struggles, to map out radically different ideological conceptions of what exists and what was good and possible for the future development of their society. Nevertheless, while it is important to demonstrate the empirical weaknesses of previous studies, it is equally important to show that the entire attempt to assess the historical significance of the actions of Thai workers in terms of a pre-classificatory model or historical projection emerges from an approach which is theoretically unacceptable. With this latter aim in mind I now return to a discussion of the debates over the nature of the relationship between class structure and class formation.

In recent years there has emerged an increasingly influential body of argument which suggests that rather than being unproblematic and inevitable, the transformation
of the working class from a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself is both complex and contingent. As Przeworski,[1977:367] observes:

Classes as historical actors are not given uniquely by any objective positions...the very relations between classes as historical actors (classes-in-struggle) and places within the relations of production must become problematic. Classes are not given uniquely by any objective positions because they constitute the effect of struggles, and these struggles are not determined uniquely by the relations of production.

In other words, while the class structure may serve to generate certain socio-historical conditions and establish definite parameters of struggle, social identity, interests and power [cf Isaacs,1987:135], the various ways in which people who occupy positions within the class structure respond to these conditions, the various forms of struggle, organisation and thought which are developed as part of this response and, most crucially, the success or otherwise of these responses cannot be simply 'read-off' a knowledge of the class structure itself. Thus with regard to the working class:

It is always problematic whether workers will be formed into a class or into some other collectivity based on religion, ethnicity, region, language, nationality, trade, etc. The class structure may define the terrain of material interests upon which attempts at class formation occur, but it does not uniquely determine the outcome of those attempts [Wright,1985:123].

On a more fundamental methodological level, the rejection of the classical understanding of the relationship between class structure and class formation emerges out of a wider dissatisfaction with any approach to social theory which fails to pay sufficient attention to the role played by human agency in history. In the context of labour studies the most vociferous critics of those who have sought to deny both the moral and historical significance of the role of human agency are the social historians such as Eric Hobsbawn and E.P. Thompson [see, Kaye,1984]. Through their writing of 'history from below', these scholars have gone to enormous lengths to demonstrate that workers do not simply 'live out' their lives in accordance with some pre-determined or fixed pattern of development but rather are actively involved in the process of making history albeit 'under circumstances transmitted from the past and within social structures beyond their control' [Metcalfe,1988:10]. The virtual total eclipse of human agency has arguably been one of the outstanding features of Thai labour studies. Both in the assumption that they were, and by implication still are, destined to act in certain ways and in the explanations which have been invoked to account for why they failed to act in prescribed ways, industrial workers in Thailand
have, more often than not, been portrayed as the mere products of independently existing social structures and forces which are seemingly unaffected by the historical actions of Thai workers themselves.

In opposition to those who have portrayed human agents in general and workers in particular as the mere creations of history rather than the makers of their own history, writers such as Metcalfe [1988] have argued for the need to adopt an historical understanding of the relationship between social structure and human agency. According to this approach:

... social structures are more like the banks and sandbars of a river than a building's foundations or a body's skeleton. Built up and cut out by the river's daily flow, they nonetheless shape and divert the flow. At any one moment the river must contend with the fixed obstacles (though it is not necessarily forced by them into one channel), but the structures are simultaneously altered by the river's flow. At any time the flow and structure have certain characteristics which can be described or analysed, but the river can only be understood if the flow and the structure are considered historically and dialectically [Metcalfe, 1988:13].

In short, historical understandings of society pave the way toward the recognition that within the socio-historical sciences, the concept of determination does not and indeed cannot refer to the predictability of particular outcomes but rather refers to the defining of conditions of possibility [cf. Hall, 1983:84]. Social structures set limits on the possible forms which social life can take. They serve to constrain, limit and shape a range of possible social forms which, for their ultimate realisation, are dependent on the conscious and purposeful activities of human agents who are engaged in a continual process of forming, reforming and (occasionally) transforming the socio-historical conditions of their existence [Bhaskar, 1986:122-125]. The purpose here is not to pursue these abstract methodological matters further. Rather in the present context it will be appropriate to simply spell out the implications which the above comments have with regard to the conducting of concrete historical analyses.

In terms of historical studies of wage-labour and working classes, the adoption of an historical understanding of society necessarily leads to a rejection of any approach which attempts to assess the historical significance of working class development in terms of a pre-classificatory model or historical projection, for there is no form of working class development and struggle which is theoretically superior to any other. What is necessary therefore is the adoption of a more complex notion of applied research whereby the concepts derived from the theories of class structure and class formation are applied to the analysis of concrete historical societies in order to help explain and understand the specific forms which working class development and
struggle actually take, a task which can only be conducted on the basis of rigorous and sustained empirical research. It is this notion of applied research which informs the present study.

1.4 Structure of the Study

In Chapter Two the purpose is to draw on some recent work in Thai economic history in order to show that an industrial working class actually emerged during the pre-1957 period. Although small in number, it will be argued that this class nevertheless came to occupy a strategically important position within the Thai economy. Having demonstrated that an industrial working class emerged at a structural level, the aim of subsequent chapters is to trace the history of the processes of formation of this new social class. Chapter Three is, in some senses, the most important chapter of the study for it is here that many of the myths which surround the way in which Thai industrial workers did or did not struggle are dispelled. The chapter focuses on a strike by Thai tramway workers which erupted in the early months of 1923. Through a careful consideration of both contemporary newspaper and archival reports some insight is afforded into one important moment in the process through which workers were beginning to struggle to form themselves into a class on the basis of interests determined by their position within the class structure. Chapters Four and Five build on the analysis presented in Chapter Three. Given the as yet underdeveloped nature of research the discussion, however, must be both selective and exploratory. Two major themes are pursued. First, an attempt is made to trace the continued growth and development of the labour movement and second, special consideration is given toward an examination of the various ways in which the form of this development was shaped by the actions of the Thai state. In Chapter Six the main conclusions of the study are summarised and some suggestions are made with regard to possible directions for future research.

The present study is based on research carried out during a period of fieldwork in Thailand between September 1985 to September 1986. Extensive research was carried out in the Thai National Archives, The Thai National Library and the libraries at Thammasat and Chulalongkorn Universities. Subsequent research was carried out in Canberra at the Australian National Library and the Menzies Library at the Australian National University.

Given the fact that much of the material presented in this study is based on Thai language sources it has been necessary to romanise the names of certain authors, titles of works and other technical terms. In general, the method of transcription is based on
the Library of Congress system, however, because of technical reasons all diacritical marks have been omitted. This means, for example, that distinctions between long and short vowels are not indicated nor are distinctions made between the back rounded vowels 'oo' and 'or'. Finally, Thai statistics have enjoyed a reputation for being notoriously inaccurate. While every effort has been made to check the figures employed in this study the reader should be aware of this point.
2.1 Introduction

It has often been argued that there was no fundamental structural transformation within the Thai economy prior to 1957. Although they accept that some important changes did take place, particularly with regard to the growth in trade, writers influenced by modernisation theory have claimed that, on the whole, the Thai economy remained largely 'traditional' in character, with the changes which did occur being depicted as pertaining more to 'volume' rather than 'kind' [Ingram, 1971:216]. The absence of genuine structural change, it is argued, is most clearly evinced by the apparent lack of large scale industrial development. According to Tritasavit [1978:16], industrial development was 'almost non-existent' prior to 1932 and is held to have been 'insignificant' as late as the 1950's [Hongladarom, 1982:65], a situation which meant that for the entire pre-1957 period the vast majority of the Thai workforce continued to be engaged in 'traditional' agricultural activities. In sum, while the expansion of trade is considered to have been important, the overall underdevelopment of industry and the continuing dominance of agriculture seem to suggest that very little 'real' change occurred and it is therefore not surprising that as late as 1960 Wilson [cited in Walker, 1983:1] was able to reach the conclusion that '[O]n balance the economic system has much the same shape today that it had a century ago...'.

At the other end of the theoretical spectrum radical scholars have also tended to dismiss the notion that the Thai economy experienced structural shifts prior to 1957. While they concede that some important changes did occur these writers argue, however, that no 'real' capitalism was able to develop during this period but rather what emerged was a capitalism of a 'dependent', 'peripheral' [Somkiat, 1982a:39] or 'underdeveloped' type [Narong, 1982:13]. Similarly these scholars have tended to simply accept the 'fact' that there was little industrial development. Indeed, it has been claimed that the development of industrial capital was, in fact, 'bound to be precluded' a situation which arose because local capitalists '...could not become the leading class which would have brought about fundamental changes in the [sic] Thai society [Suthy, 1980:11].

When these underlying notions of limited industrial development, the continuing dominance of agriculture and an absence of genuine structural change are brought to bear on studies of the Thai industrial working class the image which
emerges is one of a numerically small class, the existence of which was of only marginal importance for the overall growth and functioning of what remained an essentially agrarian based economy. Moreover, in what amounts to a further diminution of its economic significance, considerable emphasis has been placed on the ethnic character of this class. Although never stated explicitly the implicit suggestion has been that, as the majority of industrial workers were Chinese, their economic contributions were somehow of less benefit to the growth of the domestic Thai economy than they would have been had the majority of workers been Thai [Sungsidh, 1985:75-76].

Over recent years both modernisation and radical analyses of twentieth century Thai economic development have been subjected to a considerable degree of empirical scrutiny. The most important work to have been carried out in this regard is that of Hewison [1983, 1986c, 1989]. Eschewing the search for a pure form of capitalist development, Hewison’s principle aim has been to empirically demonstrate that the capitalist mode of production has, in fact, emerged in Thailand. He argues that:

It is not possible to achieve an understanding of the political economy of modern Thailand without an adequate conceptualisation of the emergence of capitalism and a domestic capitalist class. The transition from a pre-capitalist mode of production to a capitalist one, and the further development of capitalism, has been crucial in shaping Thai society, politics and economics...the emergence of capitalism...[has]...brought fundamental changes in people’s lives, accompanied as it was by transformations in social relations and the economic structure of society which in turn affected political structures [Hewison, 1986c:25].

Hewison makes a distinction between two phases or periods of capitalist development in Thailand prior to 1957, the period of the absolute monarchy up to June 1932 and that of the constitutional regime after 1932 [Hewison, 1989:129]. It should be noted that for each of these periods Hewison’s principal concern has been to trace the emergence and development of a domestic capitalist class and to examine the nature of the relationship between this class and the Thai state. The central purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief summary of some of the central findings which Hewison and other writers have made with regard to the general structure of capitalist development prior to 1957. Given the specific focus of the present study particular emphasis will be given to teasing out the implications which this development was to have with respect to the emergence and growth of an industrial working class and to show that by 1957, rather than being of only marginal importance, this class had come to occupy a strategically important position within the Thai political economy.
In the Thai case, capitalist relations of production emerged out of a particular historical conjuncture which was shaped by both external and internal economic, political and social forces. The importance of the external forces have been stressed by both modernisation and radical authors. The important date for these scholars is 1855, the year in which Thailand negotiated the Bowring Treaty with Great Britain. It is argued that this treaty, and similar treaties negotiated with other Western nations over the following decades, proved to be the catalyst which facilitated the opening up of Thailand's economic, political and social life to Western influence [Thompson, 1947:217; Narong, 1982:8]. More often than not this view has, however, carried with it the implicit assumption that, prior to 1855, Thai society was essentially static and possessed little or no internal dynamic of its own. While acknowledging the importance of the impact of those forces which led to the linking of Thailand's pre-existing mode(s) of production into an international system of production and exchange dominated by the West, a number of recent writers have drawn attention to the ways in which economic, political and social transformations which were taking place within Thailand served to shape the impact of Western imperialism [Hewison, 1986c:70-76; Wilson, 1987 Hong Lysa, 1983:39-109; Nithi, 1984:75-146; Somkiat, 1982b:146-147; Terweil, 1983:71-209;]. As Nithi [cited in Charoensin-olarn, 1985:153] has emphasised:

...external pressures per se cannot really determine the direction of change in any society. To understand changes in any society, attention should be given to the seeds of change that have already existed in that very society. Without these seeds, external forces will never develop internally. Thus, to understand changes in Thai society in the mid-nineteenth century, we need to search for and then analyse these seeds of change, notably the structure of interest groups and their struggle to enhance their interests in the process of change. Therefore, the dominant static picture of the 'Old Siam' must be replaced by the more dynamic one, and more attention should be devoted to the study of the continuity of change from the Old Siam to the New Siam.

In the context of the present study some of the most important 'seeds of change' relate first to changes which were taking place with regard to the system of corvee and second to developments which led to the importation of Chinese labour. Both these aspects of change merit brief discussion.
In pre-capitalist or sakdina Thai society the class of direct producers, phrai, were exploited by a class of non-producers, nai. 1 The dominant form in which this unpaid surplus was expressed was that of labour-rent and the mechanism through which this was appropriated was the corvee, a mechanism so basic that 'society and state could hardly been conceived without it' [Battye, 1974:25]. However, as the phrai were able to secure their means of subsistence quite independently of outside direction or control, the actual securing of surplus through the corvee was dependent on the effective functioning of extra-economic elements which, in the Thai case, consisted of a specific combination of political, administrative, legal and ideological structures of control within which the exploitation of the phrai was decreed as a 'natural' payment for the right to exist within the domain of the absolutist state.

Following the Burmese destruction of Ayuthaya in 1767, the system of corvee lay in ruins. The complete breakdown of the basic cycle of production and reproduction and the decimation of the population not only meant that little or no surplus was available for appropriation but also all central authority and the complex network of political and ideological relationships which were essential for the actual securing of surplus had disintegrated. Over subsequent decades the Thai kings initiated numerous attempts to re-establish the corvee. However, by the time Mongkut [r.1851-1868] ascended the throne the entire system had been seriously undermined [Terweil, 1983a:84; Hewison, 1986c:70].

The breakdown of the corvee system which had for centuries provided the ruling sakdina class with its basic source of wealth proved not to be as dramatic as one might have expected. This was due to the fact that, during the period leading up to the mid-nineteenth century, the state was able to secure large amounts of revenue, first, through an increasing interest in trading ventures which in turn led to a partial monetisation of the economy which permitted some phrai to commute their dues either in the form of rent-in-kind or money-rent, and second, through the expansion of the tax-farming system which, by the fourth reign, had become the principal means of raising revenue [Hong Lysa, 1983:385]. Moreover, the losses incurred by the breakdown of the corvee were further offset by the benefits which the state was able to gain through the encouragement it gave to the immigration of Chinese.

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1 Literally the term sakdina means power, rank or honour over irrigated rice fields. As Turton [1984:25] notes the term 'refers in the first place to the legal system of allocation of social rank in a numerical-hierarchical order, to the entire population in most traditional Thai states, especially in the Ayuthaya (1350-1767) and early Bangkok (1782-late nineteenth century) periods'. For a fuller description of the structure of sakdina society see, for example, Hong Lysa [1984:particularly Chapter Two], Terweil, [1983a: Chapter One], Wyatt, [1984: Chapter Five], and various essays in Chatthip and Somphop (eds.),[1984]. Chatthip [1985] provides an excellent description of the labour process in the pre-capitalist period.
The Chinese played a crucial role in the processes of reconstruction of state and social classes which followed in the wake of the fall of the Thai capital. As Hong Lysa [1984:45] has observed, the encouragement which the Thai state gave to the immigration of the Chinese was closely linked to the growth of trade during this period, as the immigrants not only increased the size of the population but also provided '...manpower and expertise for trading, shipping and navigation functions, as well as the development of commercial agriculture'. It has been estimated that as early as the latter half of the 1820's six to eight thousand Chinese immigrants were entering Thailand annually [Skinner, 1957:21]. Notably, the position of these immigrants was:

...in marked contrast to that of the Thai masses. Chinese alone of the Asian foreigners were exempt from corvee and from the requirement to attach themselves to a patron or government master. They almost entirely escaped slavery, for no Chinese was ever brought to Siam as a war prisoner, and voluntary sale into slavery was utterly repugnant to the Chinese. The Chinese were allowed to travel and settle anywhere in the kingdom without restrictions [Skinner, 1957:97].

While some of the Chinese immigrants were to forge close links with members of the sakdina class and act as entrepreneurs, tax-farmers and merchants, the vast majority were employed as both skilled and unskilled wage-labourers. Apart from working on state projects such as canal and temple construction, the immigrants also laboured in the southern tin mines and on agricultural plantations which produced crops such as pepper and sugar. By the end of the third reign [1824-1851] sugar exports had reached 300,000-540,000 kgs. annually with exports in 1850 being worth 700,000 baht [Wanawipha, 1983:10]. This growing industry employed large numbers of wage-labourers with the biggest mills providing work for 100 to 300 men. By the 1850's it was reported that there were more than thirty of these mills in operation [Bowring, 1969:203].

The Chinese also provided the Thai monarchs with a source of much needed revenue. Thus, while they were 'free' to travel and work anywhere within Thailand, this freedom came at a price. All Chinese were subject to a head-tax which was set at two baht and one-and-a-half fuang per annum. By 1822 it is claimed that 31,500 immigrants were paying this tax in the capital district [Terweil, 1983a:116]. Indirect

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2 The basic unit of currency in Thailand is the baht. Between 1850 and 1893 one pound sterling was worth between 8 and 13 baht. From 1894 to 1906, this figure rose to approximately 16 to 19 baht and stood at 9.5 to 14 baht between 1907 and 1941. From World War Two until the mid 1980's, the exchange rate stood at roughly 20 baht to one US dollar. [Figures cited in Hewison, 1989b:xiii].
taxes on opium, gambling and liquor also served swelled state coffers as the Chinese were the main consumers of these vices. Somkiat [1982b:147] has pointed to an additional advantage gained by the state through its employment of Chinese labour. In 1822 wages for unskilled labour were one-and-a-half satang per day which represents a yearly cost of 4 baht 50 satang for the hire of a single labourer. At the same time the cost for a phrai to commute his annual labour services stood at 18 baht. Thus, four Chinese labourers could be hired for a year (i.e. 48 months labour) at the cost of three months labour of a single phrai which therefore offered the state a sixteenfold advantage in hiring Chinese workers.

From the preceding brief discussion it is clear that important changes were taking place within the Thai political economy prior to 1855. Insofar as the present study is concerned, the most important developments relate to the breakdown in the system of traditional labour practices as well as the creation of a pool of 'free' labour-power within an essentially pre-capitalist economy. Crucially, the collapse of the corvee system combined with the increasingly widespread use of wage-labour had led to the growing realisation that this latter form of labour was more productive, and it is in this context that Mongkut's comments that the labour restrictions of the sakdina system constituted an impediment to economic development carry a great deal of historical significance [See, Chatthip & Suthy, 1981:317-320].

2.3 Thai Capitalism 1855-1957

The most immediate effect of the Bowring Treaty was to lock Thailand into an International Division of Labour (IDL) within which, for the next hundred years, it fulfilled the role of an exporter of four main primary products rice, tin, teak and rubber and an importer of Western manufactured goods [Narong, 1982; Suthy,1985; Zeeponsekul,1987:30]. Although these external structural constraints certainly place limits on the 'form' which capitalism could take in Thailand they did not prevent the capitalist mode of production (CMP) from emerging [Hewison,1986c:76-99]. Before examining the implications which the growth of the CMP was to have with regard to the development of industry and the employment of wage-labour it will be appropriate to note briefly two major effects which capitalist development was to have during this period, the first relating to the fate of rural producers and the second concerning the emergence of a domestic capitalist class.

As noted briefly in the introductory section of this chapter, for the entire pre-1957 period the vast majority of the economically active population continued to work in the area of agriculture with increasing emphasis being given to the production of rice for both domestic consumption and for export. Between 1870/74 and 1930/34, for
example, the volume of rice exports increased twenty-fivefold. This growth was made possible not so much through technological innovation but rather by the enormous expansion in the amount of land which was devoted to rice cultivation [Ingram, 1971:36-52]. While it appears that this increasing specialisation in rice production seems to have necessitated no radical break from the traditional or pre-capitalist socio-economic structure, significant changes did in fact occur with the rise of a system of peasant commodity production. As Hewison [1986c:77] explains:

Peasant commodity production became increasingly subordinated to the interests of merchant capital. Capital did not control labour, but international circuits of capital, represented by foreign demand for rice determined, to a large extent, peasant production. This was the practical effect of the new organisation of production and exchange in post-1855 Thailand, where peasants produced rice as a cash crop, sold it to the middlemen, who then transported it to provincial centres or Bangkok, where it was milled and sold to Chinese and Western merchants who exported the paddy to China and Europe.

Thus, although rural producers were not totally separated from the means of production, their labour processes were gradually becoming 'formally' subsumed under capitalist relations of production. Instead of production being primarily orientated toward producing use-values which would meet basic subsistence needs, it was becoming increasingly directed toward the production of exchange-values in order to satisfy market demands. In turn this led to a decline in rural industries as cheap imported goods were replacing handicrafts [Hewison, 1986c:77]. This growing need to produce for the market became further entrenched as traditional forms of bondage were phased out and replaced by the imposition of a general capitation tax which meant that rural producers developed an increasing need for cash. This reorientation from subsistence production to production for the market, a process which had already begun prior to 1855 and which continues to the present day [Turton, 1984, 1987], affected traditional cycles of reproduction, land ownership, relations of production and furthered the circulation of commodities [Hewison, 1986c:79].

The second major implication which the growth of capitalist relations of production was to have during the post 1855 period relates to the emergence of a domestic capitalist class. While the thrust of radical analyses has been directed toward attempting to explain why a strong domestic class of capitalists has failed to develop in Thailand [Anon. 1980:12; Narong, 1982; Suthy, 1985], Hewison [1989:30] has convincingly argued that a domestic bourgeoisie has, in fact, emerged. The origins of this new social class can be traced back to the changes which were taking place within the economy prior to 1855. Members of the sakdina class who together with their
Chinese clients had obtained considerable experience in trading ventures and, as noted above, in other activities such as sugar production, were presented with further opportunities to accumulate wealth following the opening of the economy to the world market. It is notable, therefore, that rather than emerging as an openly antagonistic class, this initial process of accumulation was achieved through co-operation with the ruling sakdina class in activities such as tax-farming, provincial administration and business as well as acting as compradores for Western firms which were operating in Thailand [Hewison, 1986c:86-92]. Thus it was from the upper ranks of the sakdina class, together with Chinese merchants and compradores '...brought together in a symbiotic relationship investing in land, industry, commerce and banking that the Thai bourgeoisie emerged' [Hewison, 1985:271]. It should be remembered, however, that this domestic capitalist class could not have developed without the simultaneous emergence of a class of wage-labourers. Before moving on to examine the development of this latter class some brief terminological clarifications need to be made.

Initially, a definition of the working class is relatively straightforward. The working class may be defined as that class or group of people who neither own nor control the means of production and are therefore compelled to sell their labour-power in return for a wage. From this purely categorical definition previous writers have attempted to make certain distinctions between various divisions within the Thai working class. Depending on the particular theoretical bent of the author, these divisions have been made in terms of the concrete form of the labour process, i.e., factory workers as opposed to white collar and clerical workers, or on the basis of economic sector, i.e., formal or informal, or on the basis of geographial location, i.e., rural as opposed to urban. While these divisions hold important implications for the process of class formation, they do not represent the structural basis for divisions within the working class. In this context it is important to introduce the concept of class fractions.

The term class fraction refers to a sub-section or group within a given class. As Zeitlan, Neuman and Ratcliff [cited in Hewison, 1983:63-65] point out, a class fraction [they use the term class segment] has a:

...relatively distinct location in the social process of production and consequently its own specific political economic requirements and concrete interests which may be contradictory to those of other class segments with which, nonetheless, it shares essentially the same relationship to ownership of productive property. As such, a class segment has the inherent potential for developing a specific variant of 'intra-class consciousness' and common action in relation to other sections of the class.
As Hewison [1983:65] observes, class fractions should be defined according to the circuits of capital, i.e., industrial, banking, commercial and merchant. As the wage-labour/capital relation is a mutually conditioning relationship [cf. Marx, 1932:32], each fraction of capital therefore creates a corresponding fraction within the working class. Therefore, the industrial working class is simply that fraction employed by industrial capital. Industrial workers are, however, of crucial importance for the entire capitalist class, for it is the industrial worker who is employed specifically to produce both use-values and exchange-values. From these brief comments it follows logically that, in order to trace the emergence of an industrial working class it is necessary to simultaneously examine the development of industrial capital. It will, therefore, be appropriate to move on to a discussion of the development of Thai industry during the pre-1957 period.

2.4 Industry and Wage-Labour to 1957

As noted briefly above, both modernisation and radical writers have tended to dismiss the idea that any significant level of industrialisation occurred in Thailand prior to 1957. To be sure, there were definite limits placed on the potential for industry to develop during this period. Initially, this was due to the fact that, with cheap imports, a limited domestic market and the provisions of the 1855 treaty which prevented the government from imposing significant tariff barriers, the development of industrial capital was certainly impeded. Yet despite these constraints, movement into industrial production did take place, and on a more significant level than has hitherto been generally recognised [Hewison, 1989; Anon, 1985a, 1985b; Akiro, 1985]. Basing his studies on previously neglected sources, Hewison [1989:129] has been able to provide a more accurate characterisation of the nature of early Thai industrialisation as follows:

What is all too briefly indicated in this study is not a rampant capitalist revolution, cutting through the forces and relations of production of a pre-industrialised society, and creating an industrialised Thailand. The process was far more incremental in nature. But nor are we faced with a picture of a stagnant, dependent, compradore-based society which 'developed' only under the impact of external forces. The process of industrial development...was an essentially continuous process, albeit made up of a series of virtually singular attempts to develop in various sectors.

In the initial stages this 'incremental' yet 'essentially continuous process' of industrialisation was marked by the emergence of industries which served to compliment the growth in trade and the commercialisation of agriculture. For example, with the rapid growth in rice exports, milling quickly became a major area of industrial
activity. The first steam mill was established in 1858 by American capital and thereafter the number of mills expanded rapidly [Somkiat, 1982b:25]. By 1912, 10,000 workers were employed in 50 mills which were operating in and around Bangkok [Skinner, 1957:104-115]. With the introduction of petrol motors the industry became decentralised and by 1928 there were an estimated 300 mills operating in the provinces [Hewison, 1986b:5]. Timber milling was another area of industrial activity which was to require an increasing number of wage-labourers. The first mills were built by Cantonese engineers and by 1908 there were 7 European and 4 Chinese mills in operation. By 1930 there were 70 mills in Bangkok, 60 of which were owned by Chinese [Akiro, 1985:2-25]. Tin production was also to expand, at least until the 1880's. Some of the larger mines employed as many as 900 workers each, and by 1884 Phuket, the area with the richest deposits, had a Chinese population of over 40,000, most of whom worked in the mines [Skinner, 1957:110]. By the end of the 1880's the tin industry began to experience a decline. This was due to falling prices and an increased demand for labour in other parts of Thailand. Plantation agriculture also continued to absorb large numbers of workers throughout the nineteenth century with pepper, cotton, tobacco, seri leaf and fruits and vegetables being produced for both the domestic market and for export.

Apart from these industries, the development of infrastructural projects also led to a growth in demand for wage-labour. Railway construction began in 1892 and over the following twenty five years the numbers of workers employed 'must be numbered in the tens of thousands', building lines from Bangkok to the North, Northeast, Southeast and South [Skinner, 1957:115]. By 1925 the railways were employing a total of 14,652 workers [Chotmaihet Khong Sapha Phoephephanit, No 19, Jan.1925]. Other infrastructural projects included the construction of ports and dockyards, electricity generating plants, gas works, tramway systems as well as the more general construction of buildings, shops, houses, and roads and bridges etc. [Hewison, 1986b:6-8]. All of these developments were vital for further expansion of the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of commodities.

Medium and smaller scale industrial activities were also to require the services of an increasing number of wage-labourers. Examples of such industries included the production of aerated water, the provision of ice and cold storage facilities, the manufacture of bricks and tiles, soap, matches (an industry which by 1932 was employing 3,000 workers [Kammakara 19/6/1932]), biscuits, fish sauces, furniture carriages, textiles, animal feeds, cement, automobile and truck bodies and cinema films. In addition, a pineapple canning factory had been established with numerous tanneries also reported to have been in operation [Hewison, 1989:123].
From the preceding brief discussion it is clear that, rather than being 'almost non-existent' [Tritasavit, 1978:16], a considerable degree of industrial development was taking place prior to 1932 and it is perhaps symptomatic of the vigorous nature of this development that, for the whole of the pre-1932 period, the demand for labour continued to outstrip supply despite the fact that between 1870 and the 1920's there had been a net addition of almost one million Chinese immigrants to the Thai workforce. [Skinner, 1954:38, 215].

These initial forays into industrial production received additional boosts during the post-1932 period with the rise of a state which was determined to pursue a policy of state-led industrialisation (Hewison, 1986c:116-166). For discussion purposes the continued growth in industry during the years 1932-1957 may be examined in terms of three sub-periods: 1932-1938, 1938-1947 and 1947-1957. In the first of these periods a number of factors were involved in shaping the movement of the state into industry. First, trade treaties with Western countries were revised in 1927. This allowed some protection to be given to local manufacturers. A decade later Pridi Phanomyong negotiated further treaty revisions which gave the state a much freer hand in formulating its own economic policies [Hewison, 1986c:131]. Second, the effects of the depression which were to last until 1935 had served to underline the dangers inherent in an economy which was largely dependent on the sale of rice. However, while these factors served to suggest that greater attention should be given to the development of industry, capital funds were in short supply and it was the state which was to take the lead in this area. As early as 1933 an announcement was made that any industry which was deemed desirable by the government but proved to be too big for private capital would be started by the government [Bangkok Times Weekly Mail (hereafter BTWM) 21/9/1933].

State involvement in industry began in 1933 with the establishment, under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence, of the Fuel Division which aimed to import petroleum from overseas. In 1935 the same Ministry established a spinning and weaving factory (The Siam Cotton Mill) which produced cloth for the military as well as a paper mill (Siam Paper Mill). In 1936 The Ministry of Economic Affairs established a silk factory and over subsequent years became involved in sugar milling (1937 & 1941) [Akiro, 1985:38-39]. Private industry also expanded in the immediate post-1932 period, manufacturing products such as cigarettes and tobacco, matches, mosquito repellents, shoes, sacks, rope, glass, dry cell batteries, rubber goods, toys, neon lighting and weaving machinery [Hewison, 1986b:14]. While precise figures are difficult to obtain, a survey carried out in the Bangkok-Thonburi region by the Ministry of Commerce in 1939 shows that a wide range of industrial activity was occurring. Such activity included rice and saw mills (27), ice factories (12), tanneries
(32), textile factories (26), coconut oil factories (5), food canning and bottling plants (21), toothpaste and toothbrush factories (4), soap factories (30), cigarette and tobacco factories (2), a cement plant (1), a brewery (1), engine works (20), metal shops (78), machine shops (150), and iron foundries (57) [Anon.,1985:77].

Industry developed further during the 1938-1944 period. As part of its overall plan to 'Thai-ify' the economy, the state became involved in the rice milling industry and in commercial banking, insurance and shipping [Akiko, 1985:39-45]. In the manufacturing sector the state provided both capital and management for a number of enterprises which by the late 1940's embraced the areas of salt trading, cement production, transport, water works, tapioca production, pharmaceuticals, rubber goods, gunny bags, smelting, electricity generation, chemicals, tobacco and cigarettes, shipping, tanning, fish storage, railways, lotteries and abattoirs [Hewison, 1986c:132]. Private industrialists also expanded and diversified their activities. Once again, precise figures are difficult to obtain. But data, suggests that by 1949 there was a total of 134,891 workers employed in private industries producing paper, print, chemicals, machines, beverages, garments, food, electricity, batteries, cloth, baskets, oil, rubber goods, tobacco, and tanned hides [Pasuknirunt, 1959:40-41]. Further indications of the extent to which industry had developed by the end of the 1940's can be seen from the percentage contribution of manufacturing to Gross Domestic Product which rose from 9.9% in 1938/39 to 11.1% in 1946 and 12.6% by 1950 [Hewison, 1986c:139].

Industry continued to expand during the 1947-1957 period, attaining an average growth rate of between 7%-8% per annum. As Table One illustrates, structural changes were taking place within the economy as the importance of agriculture was declining with manufacturing, finances, services and transport becoming more significant. Although figures on employment must be treated with care, these structural changes are also reflected in the fact that between 1937 and 1957 those employed in the areas of mining, manufacturing, construction and transport and communications increased at an average of 3.25% per annum. By 1957 almost 350,000 people were employed in these sectors of the economy [Pasuknirunt, 1959:24-25; Shurcliffe, 1959:4].

Table One: Percentage of G.N.P by Industrial Origin, Selected Years 1951-1958

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1955</th>
<th>1958</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and Quarrying</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have shown that, in contradistinction to received views, a considerable degree of industrial development did, in fact, take place in Thailand prior to 1957. Although this development may not have been significant in international terms it was, however, extremely important for the overall growth of the domestic political economy. Before moving on to describe in more concrete terms the implications which the growth of industry was to have with regard to the emergence of an industrial working class it will be first appropriate to examine briefly the nature of the role played by the Thai state during the pre-1957 period.

2.5 The State and Capitalist Development to 1957

Building on a basic definition of the state as an institution, or perhaps more accurately a set of institutions, where social power is concentrated and organised, class theorists have formulated a number of substantive propositions with respect to the way in which state power will be exercised in societies where the capitalist mode of production is dominant [Isaacs, 1987:150-191]. Although it is recognised that state power cannot be simply reduced to the power of social classes and therefore possesses a degree of 'relative autonomy' from class forces, it is argued that the form and exercise of state power will nevertheless be constrained by the system of class relationships. At a most general level it is argued that in societies where the capitalist mode of production is, or is becoming, dominant the state will be forced to secure and maintain the essential conditions for capitalist accumulation [Jessop, 1982:221]. One of the most significant aspects of Hewison's work lies in the emphasis which he has given to tracing the ways in which the Thai state has come to play an absolutely crucial role in securing and maintaining the conditions for the rise of a specific form of Thai capitalism.

Hewison has argued that, during the pre-1957 period, the role of the state in securing the conditions for capital accumulation can be divided into two phases. In the
first of these phases, that is, the period of the absolute monarchy up to 1932, he has argued that the state 'took a largely laissez-faire attitude toward business and industrial development', whereas during the post-1932 period the state became 'far more involved in economic policy making and production' [Hewison, 1989:129]. In general terms it is possible, therefore, to discern a trend whereby as the process of social production and reproduction was becoming increasingly structured along capitalist lines, state managers were being forced to become progressively more involved in ensuring that the conditions for the expansion of capital continued to be met. Although I will have more to say on this subject in latter chapters, it is appropriate at this point to indicate briefly how this growing intervention in regulating the capitalist economy is reflected in state policies concerned with the development of an internal labour-market.

A basic condition for the existence of capitalist relations of production in any given historical society is the presence of a class of producers who neither own nor control the means of production and are therefore compelled to sell their labour-power in return for a wage. For this class of producers to appear on the market it is essential that the seller of labour-power be a free person, the 'free-proprietor of his own labour capacity' [Marx, 1976:271]. In a society where virtually all the population was subject to various forms of bondage, the absence of free labour, in the sense defined above, represented a major barrier to the development of capitalist relations of production in Thailand. It is therefore significant to recognise that, in the Thai context, it was the state which was to play a leading role in ensuring that a source of free labour-power actually became available within Thai society. The state secured this basic condition for capitalist accumulation in two main ways: first; through the continued encouragement it gave to the immigration of Chinese, and second; through its dismantling of the system of corvee.

In the preceeding sections its has been shown that during the pre-1957 period a new class of producers had emerged within Thai society. This new class was comprised of diverse ethnic groups such as Thais, Malays, Javanese, Burmese, Shans, Singhalese, Indians, Bengalis, Tamils, Vietnamese and Laotians [Thompson, 1941:602]. By far the greatest number of wage-labourers, however, were Chinese and as late as the 1940s it is claimed that they provided between 60% and 75% of all skilled and unskilled non-agricultural labour [Skinner, 1957:217-218]. Significantly the absolutist state played a leading role in encouraging the immigration of Chinese workers into Thailand.

Essentially the policy of promoting Chinese immigration into Thailand represented a continuation of a process which had begun prior to 1855. As Wiyada [1984:25] has observed:
Immigration into Siam was made as convenient as possible. They [the Thai monarchs] wanted the labour and there was a general relaxation of payment of the head tax. New arrivals, for instance were given up to forty five days grace to find work and a place to live before they had to pay the government taxes.

Apart from giving the immigrants time to pay, the taxes imposed were kept at a much lower rate than those which were levelled on indigenous Thai, an 'inequity' which, as Skinner [1957:162] notes, was due to the urgent demand for labour. Chinese immigration provided the Thai monarchs with two notable advantages. First, as Anderson [1978:221] suggests, the immigrants presented the Thai rulers with an exploitable source of labour which could be used for a greater variety of tasks than that which could be achieved through the use of traditional conscripted labour. Moreover, as the immigrants lay outside the Thai political system, the problems associated with the slippage of phrai luang to phrai som could be avoided. Second, the Chinese provided the state with vast amounts of revenue:

...for a period of at least fifty years, during which Siam achieved a modern government, and entered the world economy and family of nations, almost half of the government revenue was derived directly or indirectly from the comparatively small Chinese minority [Skinner,1957:125].

Although some of the revenue was derived from the imposition of a head tax, by far the greatest amount was gleaned through the indirect taxes on opium, liquor, gambling and prostitution. Taxes on opium in particular, were significant. A survey carried out in the 1920's showed that the average Chinese coolie spent half of his earnings on opium despite the fact that less than one in fifty had smoked the drug before arriving in Thailand [Thompson,1941:609]. In 1905/6 revenue from the opium tax was 10 million baht which represented between 15% to 20% of total state revenue for that year. After the opium farm became a state monopoly it provided the government with an average of 14.9 million baht per annum during the 1910-1938 period.

The revenue derived from the Chinese proved also to be an important factor which allowed the state to finally abolish the system of corvee. As noted previously the system had been seriously undermined prior to 1855 and during the fourth and

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3 The terms phrai luang and phra som refer to two categories of phrai., the former were directly supervised by their nai when performing their services for the king while the latter were under the personal control of nobles and princes. [Terweil,1984:28]. Traditionally, the Thai kings faced a continual battle to ensure that a sufficient number of phrai remained within the phrai luang category and did not become phrai som.
early in Chulalongkorn's reign [r. 1868-1910] it has been claimed that the system 'hovered between one of forced labour and one of a poll tax' [Terweil, 1984:31]. In 1874 Chulalongkorn initiated moves toward a complete abandonment of the corvee when he declared that children of absolute slaves would become worth less every year until they reached the age of twenty-one, at which time they would be automatically emancipated [Terweil, 1984:31]. This initial reform was followed a decade later with a proclamation which ordered nai to set free the children of slaves. The proclamation also sought to prevent liberated slaves and freeman from selling themselves into bondage [Terweil, 1984:32]. In 1899 the system of corvee was officially abolished and all Thai and other Asian residents in Thailand, except the Chinese, had to pay a head-tax of between four and six baht per annum [Skinner, 1957:162]. The corvee was replaced with universal conscription which began in 1902 and was formally encoded in the 1905 Conscription Edict. It is claimed that this document is one of the most important documents in Thai social history for it proved to be the 'decisive step in the liberation of the commoner' [Battye, 1974:448].

Thus, through the adoption of policies which were designed to encourage the immigration of Chinese into Thailand and through the abolition of the system of corvee the absolutist state played a leading role in ensuring that a pool of free labour-power became available within Thai society and in doing so created one of the indispensable conditions for the rise of the capitalist mode of production.

Although the absolute monarchy and its supporters were able to reap enormous benefits from the growth of capitalism, the rise of this new set of productive relationships was, nevertheless, to bring with it numerous economic, political and social contradictions [Hewison, 1989b:57-60]. In the present context it will be sufficient to focus on just one of the problems associated with capitalist development, that of promoting skill formation among industrial workers.

As industry continued to develop, there was pressure on state officials to ensure that, not only should regular and stable supplies be maintained, but that greater attention should also be given toward developing the skills of industrial workers. It was argued that this could be achieved by providing training facilities not only for industrial workers but also for other workers who were needed to fill positions within the increasingly complex social division of labour [BTWM, 29/9/1919; 28/6/1920]. However, reflecting its overall laissez-faire stance toward the economy and production, it was argued that the problem of skill formation among the industrial workforce was primarily the responsibility of individual employers [National Archives (hereafter N.A.) R. 7. 13/1]. During the post-1932 period this position was to change. In a 1936 radio broadcast, Prime Minister Pahol explicitly recognised the need for the development of skills among the working population and he stated that schools had
been established which would offer training in agriculture, gardening, farming, housekeeping, tailoring, carpentry and 'other engineering branches have been established to promote the industry of the country' [BTWM 12/12.1936]. While state involvement in the training of workers was to remain rather haphazard, further developments were to take place over the following decades and by 1954 vocational training had been established in forty three provinces. Instruction was given in subjects such as motor mechanics, electrical trades, tailoring, barbering, bricklaying, accountancy and various crafts [Rowley, 1954:25]. By 1956 it was estimated that there were 49,000 students enrolled in vocational courses nationwide [Shurcliffe, 1959:11].

In this section some brief comments have been made with regard to the role played by the state during the pre-1957 period. Drawing on Hewison's observations concerning the way in which the state became increasingly involved in securing the conditions for the rise of capital, the aim of this section has been to describe briefly how this growing involvement is reflected in state policy toward the development of an internal labour-market. During the pre-1932 period the state played a crucial role in ensuring that a supply of free labour became available within Thai society. However, as the growth of industry became more important for the development of the economy the state was required to become more involved in providing facilities for skill formation. While the absolute monarchs failed to achieve anything substantial in this area, the regimes after 1932 did take some important steps toward providing training for workers and by doing so also further contributed to the continued rise of the capitalist mode of production.

2.6 Summary

Drawing on some recent work in Thai economic history, I have shown that fundamental transformations did take place within the structure of the production process prior to 1957. Thailand's integration into the world capitalist economic order combined with the growth of a domestic based process of accumulation represented a profound shift in the way Thai society was to be produced and reproduced. Integral to this process of change was the emergence of a new class of industrial workers whose social survival was dependent on the successful sale of their labour-power to the capitalist class. Certainly this class remained small. However, as Brown [1988:35] has stressed the economic significance of the working class is 'more influenced by its economic position than its relative size'. This is a point which has been overlooked by previous writers. By focusing purely on the numerical dimension, these writers have failed to appreciate how industrial workers came to occupy a strategically important, indeed crucial, position within the domestic Thai political economy prior to 1957. In
the rice and saw mills, in the tin mines, on the railways and tramways, on the ports and docks, in the electricity generating plants, in the cement and tobacco factories and in the hundreds of smaller industrial establishments industrial workers played a role which was of fundamental importance for the development of the Thai economy during this period. Moreover, the age, sex and, in particular, the ethnicity of this class of producers is, at least at a structural level, largely unimportant for it is their role as producers of both use-values and exchange-values within an emerging capitalist economy that their contributions to pre-1957 Thai economic development must be assessed.
3.1 Introduction

Having examined the development of the structural relationship between wage-labour and capital prior to 1957, the principal aim of the remaining chapters of this study is to take some initial steps toward tracing the processes of class formation which occurred among industrial workers. As indicated in the introduction of this study, the extent to which industrial workers actually began to organise and struggle in pursuit of interests determined by their position within the capitalist class structure has been the subject of considerable debate within Thai labour studies. Indeed the vast majority of writers have concluded that very little in the way of class formation actually occurred, with traditional culture and dominant ideologies seen as representing barriers to the emergence of a 'real' working class. These views suffer from a fundamental weakness in that they have been premised on a meagre amount of empirical research. In fact, it has only been in very recent years that we have the empirical evidence, drawn from archival and newspaper accounts of a strike by Thai tramway workers, which allows us to examine the beginnings of the process of class formation as it occurred in the Thai context. As the vast majority of past writers have either ignored or, in some cases, even denied that this strike actually occurred [Chandravithun, 1982:12], my aim in the first part of this chapter is to provide what is the first detailed historical account of the tramwaymen's struggle. In part two I will move on to offer an analysis of the dispute. Employing concepts derived from theories of class formation the aim is to provide an informed discussion of the strike and demonstrate why this strike was indeed a highly significant historical event.

3.2 The 1923 Tramwaymen's Strike

On 31 December 1922, 122 tramway workers employed by the Siam Electric Company (SEC) stopped work and gathered in front of the Bangkok municipal offices where, in line with established practice, they were met by members of the local constabulary. Undaunted by this reception, the men presented a list of grievances to...
the police claiming that they were being 'unjustly oppressed' (kotkhimaichoptham) by the company [NA R.6 N 13/4]. In a strictly 'economic' sense, the feeling of oppression experienced by the men was held to have been the product of the company's attempt to introduce a number of work practices which effectively reduced their monthly pay. Previously, bonuses had been paid as a percentage of the company's income over and above 55 thousand baht. However, in 1918 the company had raised this base amount to 60 thousand baht and later, to 62 thousand baht. These changes had consequently led to a reduction in the bonuses. Other economic claims concerned the payment of food allowances, more equitable payments for trips on the different routes, and payment for extra duties which the company had been asking the men to perform after the completion of their normal shifts [NA R.6 N 13/4]. The men objected to all of these practices and called for changes to be made so that they would receive what they considered to be fair and equitable monetary return for the hours they worked.

Apart from these 'economic' claims the men also objected to the 'system of rules' which governed and regulated their day to day work activities. In all there were 85 work regulations, 74 of which dealt with breaches of working rules which would result in monetary penalties and the remaining 11 concerned with offences which led to dismissal [Yamato Newspaper (hereafter YM) 15/1/1923]. It was argued that these rules were 'too severe for the men to follow' (pen runraeng...thi khao phrathruttham dai) [YM 15/1/1923], 'beyond their strength to withstand' (lua kamlang thi ca thonthan dai) [Daily Mail (hereafter DM) 14/1/1923], and represented the imposition of 'petty and trifling penalties' (khobangkhap thi capphi longthot yumyim) [Phim Thai (hereafter PT) 13/1/1923]. Apparently these penalties were being imposed to such an extent that some of the men had been left with virtually nothing out of the previous month's wage [Siam Ratsadon (hereafter SR) 19/1/1923]. The men argued that the company had never clearly stated which rules would be enforced and they demanded that the regulations be posted in writing so that they would be understood by all [NA R. 6 4 13/4].

Finally, the men insisted that those individuals who had previously been in charge of enforcing these work rules, the foreman Nai Hui, his assistant Nai Phin

In 1900 it entered into partnership with the Bangkok Tramway Company (BTC) and was granted a concession to run tram services within Bangkok. Apart from a few lean years around 1912-13 the SEC was a very successful commercial enterprise and was able to continually reward its shareholders with annual dividends and share bonuses [NA. R. 6 N 13 1-6; BTWM 14/3/1921; 12/6/1922; 26/3/1923]. In 1916 it reported a gross profit of over one and a half million baht and by 1924 it reportedly had 16,000 customers [BTWM 28/3/1917; Bangkok Post (hereafter BP) 27/2/1948]. The running of the tramways was a particularly successful branch of the company's operations and by 1923 this new form of public transportation had become an important component in the daily business and social life of the Thai capital.
and the European traffic manager, Mr Ericson, be dismissed from their positions. It was claimed that these three were 'extremely cruel' (mi namcai hotrai) [NA R. 6 N 13/4], that they acted in 'evil, uncompassionate and inhuman ways' (mi khwam phraphrut meta citto phuanmanut), that the men were more afraid of these three than they were of 'ferocious tigers' (phuak khongnan klua yingkwa suathidudusiaik), and they no longer wanted to work under their control (maiyak taibangkhapbancha khong khon thangsam) [YN 17/1/1923]. It was asserted that these three had sought ways to impose fines arbitrarily and had also attempted to secure the dismissal of 'troublesome' workers through the circulation of 'poison letters' (batssonte). The men demanded that in the future clear guide-lines be established to govern the process of hiring and firing workers [NA R. 6 N 13/4].

While the men were presenting their grievances to the police Mr. Herbert Elsoe, the SEC's vice-manager, arrived on the scene. After the Police Commissioner, Major General Athikon Prakat (hereafter Prakat), had translated the worker's petition into English, Mr. Elsoe replied to each point. He argued that workers had never been arbitrarily dismissed, nor had fines been imposed without due consideration being given to the worker's past record. Moreover, he saw no reason why the three company officials should be dismissed as he believed that they always carried out their work without bias and were honest in reporting matters to senior management. However, he did undertake to discuss the matter of bonuses at a board meeting to be held on the 11th of January and he also promised that the regulations which governed the hiring and firing of workers would be posted in writing. Not satisfied with these responses the men persisted with their arguments, but by the end of the afternoon neither side had been able to reach a satisfactory agreement [N.A R. 6 N 13/4].

Having received no promise by the company to alleviate their oppression the men struck again on the following day and this time they requested a meeting with the Minister of the Interior, Chaophraya Yomarat. The request must have proved something of an embarrassment to the Minister for only a few weeks previously, in

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2 Born Pan Suckum in Suphunburi province, Chaophraya Yomarat was one of the most powerful figures of the Sixth Reign. As Batson [1984: fn.35:23] notes he 'was a rare example of extreme social mobility in the semi-hereditary bureaucracy, having risen from obscure origins to the highest rank of the appointed nobility'. He was originally sent to Europe as a tutor to the sons of Rama 5 and was later attached to the legation in London where he became Charge 'de Affaires. After nine years in Europe, he returned to Thailand, was appointed to the Ministry of the Interior and 'soon became known as one of Prince Damrong's rising young men'. Under the name of Phraya Suckum Nayavanit he was High Commissioner to Nackon Sri Thammarat for eleven years. In 1906 he was appointed a Minister of State, as acting Minister of Public Works. He became Minister of the Interior in August 1922 and retired in 1926 amongst what was reported to be a 'storm of criticism from the Thai press' [Bangkok Times 11/3/1926]. It was said that '...throughout the greater part of his career he had more than most Ministers the confidence and the ear of his sovereign' [BTWM 31/12/1938]. Chaophraya Yomarat died in December 1938 [BTWM 31/12/1938].
response to an invitation by the League of Nations to initiate measures to protect labour, his government had replied:

The present state of industrial organisation in Siam does not require extensive legislation, for Siam being pre-eminently an agricultural country, has yet to become industrialised. In addition to agriculture, trade, chiefly retail, occupies most of the inhabitants. Factories have not yet developed to an appreciable degree...[T]he standard of living among workmen in Siam differs greatly from that to which workmen in Western countries are accustomed. Living is cheap in Siam...their [the workers] wants are satisfied with a minimum of labour, and they have not yet raised any demands for a material change in their working conditions. [T]o one accustomed to the unrest of workers in Western countries, it is very difficult to realise that workers in Siam are not in a state of discontent, but are satisfied with the conditions of employment, hours of work, etc., to which they are accustomed...There are no trade unions or organisations of workpeople. The result is co-operation rather than struggle between employer and worker. There are no strikes or lockouts among the Siamese. Their favourable conditions form one of the greatest sources of happiness of the country, and the Government should go slowly in the introduction of proposals which...might serve to upset Thai habits and customs without advantage to anyone [BT 27/11/1922].

However much the government may have wished for such an idyllic situation, the events which were beginning to unfold were to contradict such views.

A meeting between the tramwaymen and the Minister was arranged to take place at 2pm on the afternoon of 1 January 1923. The men repeated their demands and asked that the Minister speak to the company on their behalf (phutacakap borisat lae catkantamkhwamsomkhuan) [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. This he did, and suggested that the company should post up its rules and regulations. However, the Minister asked that he be allowed to examine the regulations before they were made public, a proposal which the company agreed to follow [NA R. 6 N 13/4].

On 10 January what were supposedly a new set of work rules were posted outside the company's offices at Sam Yaek. The next day 30 tramwaymen returned to see the Minister but were instead met by the Commissioner of Police. They asked the Commissioner to read out the regulations which, in accordance with agreements made on 31 December and 1 January, should have first been sent to the Minister for his consideration. It was reported that:

When Chaokhun Athikon [the Police Commissioner] had finished reading out the regulations, all the tramwaymen cried out that these were the old rules which had long been in use and were considered to be petty and trifling to the
extreme. [The men] asked the Minister to once again intervene and help to ensure the relaxation of the rules because if the regulations were maintained they would all go on strike again [PT 13/1/1923].

The Police Commissioner attempted to placate the men, declaring that he would report their complaints to the Minister so that the dispute could be finally settled. He then asked the workers to return to their normal activities and to wait for a final decision. In response the tramwaymen insisted that the Commissioner's report should include the fact that, despite its promises, the company had failed to send copies of the rules to the Minister. The Commissioner stated once again that he would fully report the matter and that the men would be informed as soon as a decision was made. At this point, '...all the men cried out and urged the Commissioner to present his report without fail' [PT 13/1/1923].

On the 12 January Mr. Elsoe went to see the Minister in order to inform him of the company's decision concerning the worker's complaints as well as to finally supply a copy of the 85 work regulations [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. With regard to the issue of bonuses, Mr. Elsoe said that the company had been forced to raise the base sum because of increased operating costs and a fall in income. However, in acknowledgment of the Minister's effort to resolve the dispute, the company had agreed to reduce the base sum to the 1918 figure of 60 thousand baht. In addition, the company had decided that a food allowance of 25 satang per shift would be paid to all employees. Finally, the company pledged that those who had participated in strike action would only be fined 2 baht for every day they did not work and that there would be no further penalty [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. After examining the company's responses the Minister suggested that the bonuses should only apply to those who were fully qualified to drive the trams and that the company should re-examine similar claims for the other workers at a later date. Moreover, while noting that the company had in fact failed to issue a new set of work rules, he felt that some of the regulations which governed the dismissal of workers were overly harsh. However, he emphasised that ultimately any decision concerning the hiring, firing and disciplining of workers rested with the company. He emphasised that these matters being were not part of the government's responsibility [NA R. 6 N 13/4].

Later that evening word filtered through to the Yomarat that another strike was being planned for the following day. The Minister immediately instructed his Police Commissioner to inform as many workers as possible that:

...on your behalf, I am studying the regulations concerning fines. For this reason, carry on with [your] work as usual and wait for a final decision. If [you] persist with [your] decision to strike I will wash my hands of the whole matter [NA R 6 N 13/4].
The following morning, however, the tramwaymen defied the Minister's warning and went out on strike. The decision to strike could not have been an easy one to make for, as this was the third strike within a month, all those who participated were liable, under company rules, to be dismissed immediately. The fact that some of the men were reluctant to strike became apparent when fighting between workers broke out early on the morning of 13 January with further scuffles reported to have taken place later in the day [PT 13/1/1923; SR 16/1/1923]. Nevertheless, despite these internal rifts, it was estimated that only 1 in 10 workers had reported for normal duties and that on each of the three occasions the number of those willing to strike had increased [PT 13/1/1923; DM 14/1/1923]. The growing unity among the men was evident when, during the afternoon of the 13th, over 300 workers, together with members of their families, gathered in front of the offices of the Minister of the Interior. A deputation of five workers went up to see the Minister and once again asked him to act on their behalf so that the dispute could be settled [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. The ensuing meeting must have become very heated with later reports suggesting that the men had been very offended with some of the forms of address to which they had been subjected [YM 17/1/1923]. Nevertheless, a decision was made to establish a committee, made up of the three parties involved in the dispute, which was given a deadline of seven days to negotiate a final settlement [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. Following the meeting, the five tramwaymen together with the Minister's assistant Phraya Phetphani, returned to the crowd waiting below. A journalist from the Yamato newspaper described the scene:

...after he had seated himself and the men had gathered around, Phraya Phetphani told them that he had been appointed as the Minister's representative. 'The Minister wishes it to be known that he is a real Thai, as are [you] workers. Therefore the Minister fully intends to help you to the best of his ability and he will not show any favouritism to foreigners'. (At this the men cheered heartily). 'The Minister wants it to be known that the strike stems from a complete misunderstanding ...because the regulations posted outside the company's offices were the old regulations and were displayed in accordance with the wishes of the workers...' At this point one of the men shouted out 'not true! the regulations put up by the company were the new rules'. The Phraya continued saying, that as the workers had not been prepared to listen to the Minister and once again had gone out on strike, the fault now lay with them. Immediately one of the men leapt to his feet and sang out 'we are not at fault for the rules are hanging outside the company's offices for all to see'.Phraya Phetphani continued by declaring that 'the Minister did wish to help and that another proposal would be considered, however, there will be a delay until the 20th of the month at which time the committee will make its final
decision known...in the meantime will all of you agree to return to work?' The men replied immediately as if with one voice 'No!' At this point one of the men, who from his manner, appeared to be one of the leaders, stood up and addressed Phraya Phetphani asking 'Why do we refuse to return to work?... because within the next seven days the company is likely to try and find replacement workers and force us all out...why should we agree to keep working for the company for nothing?' He went on to say that he would remain on strike until the 20th and wait to hear the Minister's decision. If the demands were not met all the men would resign, and they asked the Minister to speak to the company to ensure that the 50 baht bond, together with outstanding wages, be paid in full [YN 15/1/1923].

While the discussion was in progress the Minister emerged from his office and stopped to listen. He reiterated his earlier views stating that he lacked the power to force the company to accept the workers back, nor was he able to ensure that the company would meet all of their demands. However, he did hope that the dispute would finally be settled and that both sides would be able to recapture their lost unity and begin to work together once again [YM 15/1/1923].

Despite the Minister's wish to see the matter settled, the men refused to return to work. On the following day the ranks of the striking workers were swelled even further as the inspectors, who had worked the previous day, also went out in support of the drivers, conductors and part-time workers [SR 16/1/1923]. The continuation of the strike meant that tram services were brought to a virtual halt, causing considerable inconvenience to the travelling public and severely effecting local businesses [SR 16/1/1923]. Moreover, further outbreaks of violence added tension to the rapidly worsening situation. On the morning of the 14th, two striking drivers were arrested and charged with threatening a driver who had continued to work and later in the day another driver was stabbed in the neck [NA R 6 4 13/4].

Amidst this growing conflict the company was making bold attempts to get the trams rolling again by recruiting replacement workers who were drawn from the ranks of the unemployed, newspaperboys, former employees, mechanics and 'boatmen' who had been hired to collect the tickets. By the 16th the company felt compelled to place a notice in the press. It argued that, as the strike was generating a great deal of 'public interest' (mahachon aw caisai khoiang hufangkan penanmak), it was necessary that the company clearly state its position. After providing a brief background to the events, the company expressed the view that, apart from the dismissal of the three employees, it had met all of the worker's demands. The company claimed that it was always ready to consider the worker's complaints. However, it argued that there were procedures which must be followed and that the workers should have made their intentions clear before initiating strike action; their
failure to do this had resulted in 'the travelling public being inconvenienced, the company suffering losses and the reputation of the workers being damaged'. The company stated that prior to the 3rd strike, on 13 January, the men had been fully informed that a strike would not be tolerated and that all those who participated would not be reinstated. Despite this warning the men, due to their 'insolence' (phuak khongnan yanguatdi), had stopped work. The company went on to argue that 'with the interest of the company and the public in mind' such practices would 'no longer be tolerated'. Furthermore, the company sought to defend the need to maintain rules and regulations and to impose fines, arguing that such procedures were necessary in order to ensure public safety. Finally, the company thanked the Minister for his help in attempting to settle the dispute and it was hoped that the public would not be angry as every effort was being made to maintain normal services and that, in fact, the whole dispute was the work of a few dishonest leaders who were forcing the majority to strike [YM16/1/1923]. The following day the SEC began laying off the men and advertised for replacements who wished to be trained as tram drivers. By 20 January all the men had been dismissed [BT 17/1/1923; 20/1/1923].

The recruitment of replacement workers and the attacks on the tramwaymen in the press provoked further acts of violence. At Banglamphu it was reported that:

...a member of the public punched a tramway worker who was selling tickets. It was stated that the citizen was incensed by the ticket seller's actions. He was of the opinion that, as the tramwaymen had struck because of no longer being able to tolerate the company's regulations, then those who were Thai should help their fellow countrymen. But in full view of everyone this person [the ticket seller] was working as a replacement. It was thought that this was not the action of someone who loved his nation, and for this reason the citizen had been moved to exact his own form of punishment [SR 16/1/1923].

In another incident a worker was arrested after being involved in an altercation with a company official [SR 16/1/23]. In yet another attack of which we have more information:

...Inspector Bun was driving a tram on the Dusit Line when he had to stop at the interchange in front of Wat Mahararananop. Also on the tram at the time was Nai Thiang, whom the men...call the 'underboss'. One of the striking workers asked Nai Thiang, 'How are you feeling? Well, I hope? You are a Thai, aren't you?' Nai Thiang immediately leapt from the tram and punched the worker four or five times. Unable to ward off the blows, the tramwayman fled out of harm's way. On seeing this Nai Bun, the driver, left his seat and flayed into another of the striking men. The latter made no attempt to fight back...Nai Bun then told the
policeman who was riding on the tram that one of the striking men was carrying a concealed weapon and without further ado the man was arrested and escorted to the Samranrat police station [SR 17/1/23]

Later that afternoon Nai Thiang was again involved in some trouble when he was reported to have:

...assembled together a group of ten professional boxers from Banglamphu. They met in front of the offices at Pratumai with Nai Lek, a very capable boxer, as their leader. It was reported that Nai Thiang had hired the boxers to attack the striking men...the pugilists were offered ten baht for every head they cracked open (the point here is whose money is being used, Nai Thiang's or somebody else's?) it was said that some of the boxers were dressed as beggars, some as Chinese and some were attired in shorts and were riding bicycles. Looking at them they seemed to be acting like undercover detectives, not ordinary detectives but detectives looking for the blood of heads [SR 17/1/1923].

The presence of a policeman on the tram in the second incident described above had not been due to chance but was the result of a meeting which the SEC had had with the Minister of the Interior. Fearing for the safety of those employees who continued to work, the company had asked that a policeman be allowed to ride on every tram, for which they would be paid 1 baht per day. The Minister not only instructed Commissioner Prakat to make these police available, he also issued instructions that additional police be mobilised to carry out surveillance at the various tram stations around the city. In addition, as many of the replacement drivers did not possess the appropriate licences, the Commissioner was also asked to relax the rules which governed the licensing of drivers [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. Although these measures were a clear reflection of the Minister's attempt to ensure a resumption of the status quo, his role in the dispute was becoming the topic of some debate. While working behind the scenes the Minister, had, however, made no official statement and it seemed that for all of his activity no end to the strike seemed to be in sight. The Sayam Sakkhi, [18/1/1923] for example, argued:

We now believe this is a matter for the Minister. He cannot just sit idly by but must move quickly to settle the matter as it is causing considerable trouble to the people. He must ensure that the company relax its rules and have the men return to work quickly and that there will be no more trouble.

With such views in circulation the government was being increasingly compelled to clarify its position. This it did through its newspaper the Phim Thai [16/1/1923]. In an article titled 'Thai Labour' it was stated:
There is nothing in a country which poses greater trouble for government than a strike by labourers. There is nothing more dangerous than groups or sections of workers acting together in evil ways. Such problems are now having to be faced by all countries in today’s world…[T]here have been enormous numbers of strikes in various countries…but we have yet to have experienced them in our own country [sic.]. We had all hoped such things would not be repeated here, but alas! just the opposite has happened…[It must be asked]…will other groups of labourers in the hundreds of other places in Siam follow the example [of the tramway workers]? And if this does happen and becomes endemic to our country as it has in other places, who will be the most grievously troubled? It will be the government won’t it?...Thais have a very different disposition from Westerners, Indians and Chinese. Everybody is probably already aware of this. I simply wish to point out that when Western, Indian or Chinese workers strike there is likely to be some bodily injury. However, when Thais strike the situation is likely to become more serious and could reach the point where people are killed. I believe the government is already aware of this, for, if not, why would there be policemen riding on every tram? Now the situation has arisen and Thai labourers have shown that they wish to copy from other countries, how should we cure such occurrences? It is my opinion that we must begin immediately…[O]ther companies or places who employ large numbers of workers should learn from the example of the Tramway Company and should realise that from now on, strikes as a part of ‘civilisation’ have now reached our own workers. What are you going to do? You must think of a solution now for ‘prevention is better than cure’.

While the publication of the above would have done little to encourage the striking workers, it is likely that it would, however, have contributed further to the atmosphere of fear which was then circulating among the public, particularly as there was already some concern as to whether the ‘coolie class’ would rise up given that they, like the tramwaymen, lived ‘from hand to mouth’. [Siam Observer 16/1/1923].

On 17 January 1923, Chaophraya Yomarat submitted a report to the King. Clearly exasperated at having been unable to resolve the dispute the Minister concluded his report by stating:

The company has performed well. The workers’ refusal to agree stems from the fact that they lack a sense of responsibility. They think only of their own viewpoint. I accepted the burden of speaking to the company on their behalf, and to instruct them as to what is ‘rational’ [singthi chop] and appropriate. However, they have failed to listen to my advice [NA R. 6 N 13/4].

The King’s short reply was given on the same day. He concluded that:
The attempts at conciliation made by the Minister and other officials have been wholly appropriate. It is therefore a shame that the workers have refused to agree. The actions taken to guard the situation are good. It is hoped that the workers will soon come to their 'senses' (daisai) [NA R. 6 N 13/4].

Recognising that events were now beginning to run against them, the tramwaymen sought to place their position in front of the public '...so that everyone could see who was right and who was wrong'. In a letter sent to the Siam Ratsadon newspaper the men claimed that they felt disgusted with the lies being circulated by the SEC and anyone who was not informed of the facts would be apt to believe that they had 'unjustly mutineered and that they didn't know their place' (kokan kamroep doiphikhloitham lae midai ciamconnamansai). The men argued that it was necessary for the public to know their true feelings so that everyone would be aware of the fact that the company had lied and was taking advantage of the workers (awpriap khongnan) [SR 19/1/1923]. In explaining their stoppage the workers stated:

...that we stopped work not because someone had incited us. It was a decision taken by our group on payday last month, a month in which the company had squeezed us (ritkhaen) so harshly that we finally reached the end of our tether (thung khitthisut). They had doled out fines and deducted money from our wages and bonuses to such an extent that one man was left with not enough to buy food. Some men were reduced to tears as they looked at the money in their hands and thought of all the hours they had sweated for the company. The company had heard that some of the men were complaining, but had simply assumed the face of a monster (suamnayak) and replied in an extremely inhuman and vulgar way (top yangphasasai maidai mi khwam rusuk yantuamanut) 'If you are not satisfied you can simply piss off...'. The company claims that the men are not easily taught (mai penkhon nonsonngai), that is, we don't simply follow all the company's rules. This is because they are barbaric and beyond the ability of humans to follow (pen kobangkhap yangpathuan suwisai thimanut cathamtamdai) [SR 19/1/1923].

The men also pointed to other forms of oppression to which they were being subjected:

...we wish to make it known that the company is vile hearted (caihiamhot) and is eating the flesh and sucking the blood (kinlnualaesupluid) of workers through the use of other methods which have almost become compulsory. Whenever a worker has no money or is experiencing some other problem and is forced to borrow from the company, the latter charges a rate of interest of 5 satang for every baht borrowed. However, the person in charge of lending the money pretends that it is difficult to secure the funds so that
the person who needs the money is forced to wait until his hardship has become even more pressing, then they [the company] exact [an interest rate of] 20 or 25 satang per baht and if the worker complains the company will not lend the money at all...This is in fact, a secret truth held within the company, if you please! [SR 19/1/1923].

Finally, in an attempt to have their oppression relieved the men claimed that they:

...went to see the Minister and the Police Commissioner in the hope of receiving justice (khwamthiangtham) from those who are the leaders of all Thai workers. But, alas! for unknown reasons they have 'ummed and ahhed' and as yet absolutely no assistance has been forthcoming [SR 19/1/1923].

While the publication of their views represented an attempt to rally public support for their actions, the position of the men was becoming increasingly tenuous. While it was said that some 'old and trusted' employees had been reinstated [BTWM 22/1/23], the majority of workers now found themselves unemployed. With police guarding all the trams it was becoming increasingly difficult to exert an influence over those who continued to work. While tram services were still interrupted, the company had managed to get some services running, although it was not until the end of January that operations were said to be returning to normal [BTWM 5/2/23]. Moreover, it appeared that the Minister had no intention of becoming further involved in the dispute, and as far as he was concerned the dismissal of the workers constituted an end to the matter. While the majority of newspapers continued to express support for the striking workers, coverage of the strike was beginning to decrease and defeat seemed to be staring the men in the face. However, in a dramatic development, the strike was given a renewed impetus with the emergence of a new newspaper, Kammakon [The Labourer], the first issue of which was published on 27 January, 1923.

The paper had been established by a group of journalists who had recently left the Sayam Sakkhi newspaper after a dispute with its owner over a pay issue. Calling themselves the Labour Group [Khana Kammakon], these journalists included Thawat Rittidet [1894-1950] (hereafter Thawat), Wat Sunthoracam [1892-1954] (hereafter Wat), and Sun Kitcamnong [1898-1965] (hereafter Sun).³ Their reasons for establishing the newspaper were explained as follows:

³ Thawat Rittidet [1894-1950] was born into a well to do family in the province of Samutsongkhram. He received a 'classic' education in a local Buddhist Temple school where he later taught novice monks. He became attached to the household of a member of the Thai nobility and was a civil servant for four years in the Department of the Navy. In 1922 he became editor of the Sayam Sakkhi newspaper. One of Thawat's relations had been involved in the
Today those who think that there are no more slaves (that) are mistaken. If someone was to investigate the lives of the two groups, that is, the employers (naicang) and employees (lukcang) they would cry out 'Oh! slavery still exists concealed within the bodies of the employees'. That is the truth. One does not have to look far, it is enough merely to look at the situation as it now stands. It is true that the employee is given the option of either agreeing to work or not. But this is not a sufficient reason from which to measure the evils encountered by the employee as he falls into the great pit of slavery (toklummahathat). One must also consider what percentage of people who become employees are sufficiently wealthy enough to stand on their own two feet and what percentage are people who live from hand to mouth (hachawkinkham)...Under such conditions the making of a contract will necessarily lead [the employees] to be disadvantaged (siapriap). For whatever happens the poor must eat. No matter how much they might be disadvantaged, poverty forces them to accept. Is it just (tham) or equal (sameor) to make a contract when one is suffering in times of hardship? Ah! but the employer, the bloody face (naluat) does not limit himself to this one advantage, but in addition he seeks further advantages. He includes in the contract, if you do this your wages will be cut by this much, if you do that your wages will be cut by that much. In next to no time the employee...will be in the little court of the master [where he will be] accused of error and be fined. If the employee leaves, it would represent the breaking of the contract and therefore all outstanding wages will not be paid. Thus the employee must simply bear it (campentongthon) and allow the employer to suck his blood to the tune of this song...Apart from such methods, there are hundreds of other tricks by which the employer is able to take advantage of the employee...the examples we have provided thus far should, however, serve to bear witness to our claim that slave

abortive 1912 coup attempt against Rama 6 (Wachirawut). Influenced by the writings of such well known Thai authors as Thienwan and K.S.R. Kulap, Thawat was the leading figure within the Thai labour movement from the time of the tramway strike up until the mid-1930's. His devotion to advancing the interests of workers and other disadvantaged groups within Thai society led to his eventual impoverishment. He died in 1950 after contracting malaria in Petchabun province. Wat Suntharacam [1892-1954] was born in Ratburi province. He, like Thawat, completed his primary education in a temple school and later continued his studies at the Police Training Academy in Nahon Pathom. He worked for four years in Utaradit province where he clashed with local power interests which led to his eventual dismissal from the force. He returned to Bangkok in 1921 and began studying law. Along with Thawat, Wat spent almost all his adult life in the services of the Thai labour movement. After World War Two, he acted as legal advisor to the Central Labour Union. He was arrested during the course of the 1948 rice mill strike and was subsequently imprisoned. In 1949 he travelled to China as the Thai representative to the conference of the World Confederation of Trade Unions. After the conference he requested political asylum and died in Peking in 1954. Sun Kitcamnong [1898-1965] was one of the few early Thai labour leaders to have travelled outside Thailand. He was a member of the Thai expeditionary force which had been sent to France during the dying stages of World War One. After the war he remained in France for about six months. A trained mechanic, Sun also spent most of his adult life within the Thai labour movement. In 1952 he was arrested for his participation in the Peace Movement and spent five years in prison. For a fuller biographical account of these three 'organic intellectuals' see, Sangsit [1986].
Having asserted that the aim of the group was to 'free' workers from their 'slavery', Thawat and his fellow organisers went on to outline a strategy through which this aim could be realised. In an article titled 'The Freedom of Labour', and using the example of the tramway strike, the author argues that freedom is something which must be won and this can only be achieved through unified and collective action by workers themselves. After outlining the circumstances surrounding the strike and pointing to the fact that the Yomarat was unable to ensure that the demands of the tramwaymen were met, the author continues:

The actions pursued by the tramwaymen must be considered correct because they were no longer able to follow the rules and regulations laid down by the employers. It is right that they stopped work, and their actions are wholly appropriate for the times because our country has set itself on the path toward civilisation (khwam civil). We must ask why the tramwaymen took such action. Wasn't it to find freedom for us all? If we workers are not united, where will freedom come from?...We are members of the labouring class (pen khon chan phuak kammakon) we must look to our own group rather than to others...We should all realise that we are workers. Poverty forces us to become employees. But material wealth is not the issue for we can still survive and feed ourselves. But the important point is not to allow our freedom to slip away as well. If we lack both wealth and freedom, we will not be able to raise our heads in the future because the employer will oppress us. For this reason, we workers must help each other to recapture our freedom so that it remains stable and fixed. Our freedom rests on unity...If the tramwaymen are united and really act together...they will secure their freedom. The men should all strike on the same day. If this is done, the company will have to give them their freedom immediately. Workers! remember, freedom does not lie with others, it lies within our own group. We should follow the correct method, that is, when we are dissatisfied with the regulations or oppression of the employers, we should all stop work. Having ceased working, we should all vote one of our members, who we think capable of discussing the issue with the employer, to be our leader. We should work out an agreement with the employer to the satisfaction of all concerned. When the
employer has agreed and we think the proposal is acceptable...our leader should make the contract by which we accept to work. The contract should be made so that both sides have a solid and stable base [Kammakon 27/1/1923].

Although encouraged by the actions of the tramwaymen, the author argued that workers throughout the country must join in the struggle and that together they should be allowed to have a leader who would represent them in industrial disputes:

We direct these matters to the Minister of the Interior who is charged with the administration of the realm...We, as the representatives of labour, are fully agreed that Siam has now entered into a civilised era (khao khun sukhit haengkhwamcivili ) and it is appropriate that we be allowed to have a labour leader. At the moment the Minister has the task of representing the labourers'. We think that this is a great honour for we labourers that the Minister has tried to help us and we wish to show our deepest appreciation toward the Minister for the benevolent attitude he has shown toward us. However, we believe that it does not befit the honour of the Minister, for his position demands that he administer the entire realm. If the Minister is unable to settle the matter in accordance with the labourers wishes, as is already the case, we feel this will reflect badly on the honour of the Minister. If the Minister feels kindness toward the workers and wishes to help them secure their freedom or the freedom (khwampenthai ) of Thailand and not allow employers to oppress the labourers, then he will give his permission so that Siam can have its own labour leader...[Kammakon 27/1/1923].

Despite the emergence of Kammakon and the appeals made to the Minister to ensure an equitable solution to the conflict, the struggle was to end in eventual defeat. With the tram services resumed and the presence of police on every tramcar thwarting any attempt to encourage those who worked to join the strikers, the power of the men to continue their struggle was gradually being undermined. Nevertheless, the bitterness and violence which had been such a characteristic feature of the conflict was to continue. It was reported that trams had been disabled through bomb attacks with some tram lines also reported to have been damaged. In another incident a passenger had apparently been shot, while barricades had been erected across one of the tramlines [BT 31/1/1923].

Although the men refused to yield and continued to protest throughout February, by the first week of March 1923 the struggle could no longer be sustained and it was reported that most of the men and their families had been forced to return to their former homes in the provinces in the hope of eking out a living [Kammakon 3/3/1923]. In April the SEC established a new set of work rules and reduced wages from 70 to 50 baht per month [BTWM 16/4/1923]. Interestingly, the Bangkok Times,
which had supported the company throughout the dispute, was to admit that the previous system was 'vicious' and suggested that the strike grew out of 'poor work practices' [BTWM 16/4/1923]. The defeat of the workers and the hardships they now faced no doubt proved to be a bitter lesson for all those involved. In particular, the role played by the Minister of the Interior was to come in for special criticism. In a dramatic turnabout from its previous admiration of the Minister's attempt to mediate the dispute, Kammakon [3/3/1923] was to sum up his role as follows:

The Yomarat has been unable to settle the strike involving the tramway workers and he has now left on government business to Monthon Phayap thus abandoning the striking workers who, unable to find work, are being left to lead an itinerant life. Some have already been tragically forced to leave for the countryside. We feel great sorrow for these striking workers but we are unable to help...The Yomarat has refused to help despite all the outcry; in the final analysis, nothing had eventuated. We have not seen one official who has offered to help this group of Thai workers. The company has organised police protection. Why is this? Because the company is rich isn't it? And, people of noble rank hold many shares in the company and have therefore helped each other to resolve the matter. This is true isn't it? As for the labourers, they can grumble all they like, just forget about them...The King has granted to you [Yomarat ] the position of Minister of the Interior with the task of governing all the people throughout the kingdom...But Minister, do you think it is fitting to have simply abandoned the workers, who are poor, to suffer hardship and be left to lead an itinerant life? Or do you simply think 'Ah! just forget them, what use is there in helping the poor?' Would you claim that you have tried to help them to the best of your ability? By leaving now on a tour of inspection do you realise you are being accused of simply fleeing?...You said you would help the poor workers and you have not done this. We would like to ask you, as a person of senior status, as the Minister of the Interior charged with governing all the people, do you not feel just a little embarrassed?...Minister you should think very carefully about just how poor the people are. When the people are poor, how will the country flourish and develop? A country depends on its people doesn't it? You are the King's Minister and therefore you should know better than most. But how do you feel now? Is it because of your old age that you declare yourself unable to help? If this is the case, perhaps you should hand over office to people with more vitality and see how they handle things. You have been a public servant for a long time and perhaps you have done enough for the Nation, Religion and King. We apologise if what we have said does not please you Minister.
3.3 Analysis

The massive body of social scientific literature which deals with the historical development of wage-labour and working classes is filled with literally thousands of descriptions of strikes which are, in many respects, similar to that of the 1923 events. The historical significance of the tramwaymen's protests cannot, however, be simply assessed in terms of the extent to which the men are perceived to have produced a proper or correct form of struggle. In the following sections the aim is to provide an informed theoretical analysis of this dispute and show why the strike, long ignored by past writers, was indeed a significant historical event representing as it did one important moment in the process of formation of the Thai industrial working class.

3.3.1 Struggles Over the Working Day

According to Marx the contradictory nature of the relationship which exists between wage-labour and capital becomes expressed, at the point of production itself, in the form of a struggle over the establishment of a 'norm' for the working day. Under capitalism a normal working day is not a fixed but a fluid quantity. On one side stands the capitalist whose interests are determined by the need to produce and secure surplus-value. On the other side stands labour, whose interests are determined by the need to both preserve and secure the value of its labour power [Marx, 1976:342-344].

We see then that, leaving aside certain extremely elastic restrictions, the nature of the commodity exchange itself imposes no limit to the working day, no limit to surplus labour. The capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and, where possible, to make two working days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the worker maintains his rights as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length. There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between...the class of capitalists and...the working class [Marx, 1976:344].

For many writers the emergence of struggles over the working day in Thailand are thought to have been blocked by the fact that Thai workers possessed the innate cultural characteristics of submissiveness, passivity and individualism. Such views are, however, difficult to sustain on empirical grounds. Although unprecedented in
terms of both its duration and the extent of its violence, the 1923 tramwayworker's strike was certainly not an isolated incident which provided an exception to a norm of industrial passivity. In fact, the events of 1923 represented the culmination of a series of struggles by the tramwaymen, the earliest of which dates back to 1896. Little is known of the actual events but one English language newspaper reported that in March of that year:

The Bangkok Tramway Company during the last week has gone through a trying crisis of the nature of a labour dispute. For some reason the drivers and collectors were dissatisfied and agreed to strike work upon a given day. The directors fortunately heard what was afoot, and now a large number of new faces meet one on the trams [Report from Bangkok Times (hereafter BT) cited in BTWM 21/3/1932].

Late in 1897 the same newspaper reported that:

The employees in the tramway company have formed themselves into a secret society. The management have not got an easy task in coping with the tendency of the workmen, clothed with little authority, to run a society for their own benefit, but they seem to be doing their best, and if they do not weary in well-doing no society within the ranks of their employees can become a serious menace to the peace [Report in BT cited in BTWM 25/12/1933].

Little is known about the organisation or industrial militancy of the tramwaymen between 1897 and 1923 except for a report of another strike which erupted in 1921, when it was claimed that 78 workers had gone out in protest over the disciplinary rules which were then being enforced by the company. Objections were also lodged against the severity of fines which had been levied on some of the men. All those involved in the strike were arrested for holding an illegal meeting and, following a warning from the police, they were only reinstated after admitting that they had been wrong for striking without giving the company prior notice [BTWM

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4 It is important to recognise that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the term 'secret society' was no longer restricted to refer only to the 'secret' organisations which the Chinese had brought to Thailand. As Battye [1974:77] explains 'Angyui', a proper name and generic term for secret society would creep into Siamese writing as a figure of speech for serious lawlessness measured by numbers and organisation. This is a point which has been overlooked by past writers. For example, Mabry [1979:37] argues that the 'secret societies' were not 'true' labour organisations. However, as the above passage demonstrates workers' organisations were in fact referred to as secret societies and continued to be referred to in this way even after the Second World War. It is important also to note that being accused of 'secret society' activity was a very serious charge for it suggested that the person so accused was an enemy of the Thai nation. Later the term 'communist' was to fulfill a similar function. Both terms, therefore, were part of a discourse of 'excommunication' which was directed against workers and their organisations, a discourse within which they were depicted as threatening the peace and stability of the Thai social order. [For a discussion of the concept of 'excommunication' see, Therborn, 1980:82-83].
The tramwaymen were not the only ones, however, to have possessed a history of industrial militancy for there exist other reports of wage-labourers being involved in struggles for better pay and working conditions. The earliest of these struggles date back to the 1880's with those involved in these and subsequent disputes including; rice mill workers [1880's;1890's], tin miners [1880's], railway construction crews [1890's], drivers [1893], port labourers [1900;1901], moulders [1905], lightermen [1907], rickshaw pullers, dock workers, cargo and rice mill coolies, railway workers [1910] and printers [1921].

In their work on the process of class formation, the social historians have pointed to the subject area of personal experience as being fundamental to an understanding of the emergence of working class struggles [Thompson,1978:147, Metcalfe,1988:58-60]. Given the deterministic assumptions which have prevaded previous studies of the historical development of the Thai working class, it is not surprising that the actual experience out of which these early struggles in Thailand emerged, is an area of research which has virtually been ignored by previous scholars. While recognising that a great deal of further research needs to be conducted in this area, some preliminary comments about the nature of the experience encountered by the first generation of Thai industrial workers can, however, be made through a consideration of an idiomatic expression which was used during the course of the 1923 events.

On a number of occasions during the course of the 1923 strike, the tramwaymen were described as belonging to that category of people who 'lived from hand to mouth' [ha chaw kin kham lit. to search in the morning [in order to] eat in the evening]. Within Thai society this commonly used expression is used to refer to people whose social experience is marked by a constant battle to survive and eke out a daily living. For many workers this constant battle to survive often ended in failure. For example, during the construction of the railways, thousands of workers were reported to have died from malaria and other jungle fevers [Skinner,1957:115]. A similar fate also befell many wage-labourers who were employed in the mining areas where it was claimed that even 'bars and bolts' could not prevent Chinese workers from fleeing some areas where the death rate among new arrivals exceeded 60% and

Concrete data on the specific background to these disputes are very scarce. More often than not workers protests went largely unrecorded and it is only those which led to strikes which attracted the attention of newspaper reporters and government officials and other contemporary observers. The reports which we do have of these strikes only contain minimal amounts of information. See, for example various editions of Bangkok Times Weekly Mail 14/10/1919; 21/3/1932; 25/12/1933; 29/8/1925; 30/4/1927; 14/2/1920; 2/5/1921; 12/3/1923; 26/3/1923; 23/7/1928; 6/5/1929; 20/5/1929; 25/11/1929; 9/6/1930. Also see Bangkok Times 28/3/1901; 15/7/1925; 12/7/1925; 14/7/1926; 9/12/1926. Also see reports cited in Skinner [1957:109-117] and comments contained in Zeeponsekul [1987:34] and Hewison [1986c:92-95].
where those who did manage to survive suffered from chronic illnesses [Skinner, 1957:110-111].

Although the battle to survive was bleakest outside Bangkok, workers within the city faced a daily struggle to reproduce both themselves and their families. It has been claimed that, due to the general shortage of labour which existed prior to 1932, the wages of urban workers were, in fact, comparatively higher than those in neighbouring economies [Skinner, 1957:117]. Evidence suggests, however, that wages paid to Bangkok workers only allowed for the securing of a basic level of subsistence and, during times of economic crisis, often fell below this level. During the economic downturn of 1918/1919, for example, there were numerous reports that rises in the prices of basic commodities such as rice, flour, lamp oil and meat were having an enormous impact on urban workers [BTWM 6/5/1919]. With price rises of between 100% and 300% it was argued that the cost of living was now far beyond what the 'poor' were earning, a situation which led one commentator to suggest that 'perhaps the Bolsheviks would put things right' [BTWM 12/5/1919]. Apart from struggling to afford the cost of food, urban workers also faced problems associated with housing. As they were only able to afford basic accommodation, urban workers were often confronted with overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions in buildings which were often structurally unsound and where fire was a constant threat. Under such conditions workers and their families were often the first victims of water borne diseases such as cholera which often swept through Bangkok claiming hundreds of lives [BTWM 21/4/1919; 5/5/1919; 12/5/1919; 16/6/1919]. Children were the most badly effected by these conditions. In 1919 it was stated that a third of all infants born in Bangkok died within their first year of life [BTWM 14/7/1919], a situation which was hardly surprising given that disease was said to be rampant in the city with one doctor concluding his report stating that 'on the whole we find it [Bangkok] to be one immense rat's nest' [BTWM 6/3/1922].

While the tramway workers were perceived to belong to that category of people who lived a hand to mouth existence they were comparatively better off than the vast majority of urban industrial workers. Although rates of pay varied, it was claimed that the average wage paid to the men was 76 baht 58 satang per month. [YM 18/1/1923]. Apart from this regular wage, workers were also paid bonuses as well as travel and food allowances. The company had also established a 'Workers Reserve Fund' which provided the men with a small pension upon retirement. The fund was also used to pay workers who were either injured on the job or faced some special expense [YM 18/1/1923]. Employees were also provided with relatively low cost housing, a benefit which very few urban workers enjoyed at the time [BTWM 27/9/1920]. Yet despite these advantages the tramwaymen still faced a daily battle to
make ends meet with it being reported that most were obliged to work a 16 hour day without being given a break for meals [Poonpanich, 1988:32].

From the above, it is clear that the actual experience of wage dependence was one which was marked by a constant battle to survive and make ends meet. However, dependence on a regular wage not only carried with it a particular social experience but it also entailed confrontation with an unique set of work experiences. Data on the daily work experience of wage-labour prior to 1932 is difficult to obtain. For less skilled workers it is clear, however, that work was labour intensive. In the rice and saw mills, on the docks and in the southern tin mines the daily effort of carrying out routine tasks must have posed constant problems and it is not surprising that the consumption of opium was considered to have been a 'virtual necessity' among the labouring Chinese [Skinner, 1957:121]. For skilled workers in the more modern sectors of the economy the work experience must also have been difficult for as Poonpanich [1988:33] has pointed out these workers were faced with:

...the collective process of production, with its restrictive rules and regulations, and insistence of punctuality and steady output with work and rest determined not by task but by clock [circumstances which were] in sharp contrast to the decentralised system of agricultural production and the pattern of peasant time.

This focus on the experience of work relations has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years. Before moving to examine some of the data relevant to understanding aspects of the tramwaymen's daily work experience it will be appropriate to discuss briefly some of the relevant theoretical debates.

3.3.2 Capitalist Control

Within Thai labour studies the problems of relations within the workplace have been largely analysed in terms of what may be termed 'orthodox industrial relations theory'. Influenced by Dunlop's [1958] 'system theory' the main thrust of writing on workplace relations has been directed toward explaining the causes of industrial conflict and how such conflict may be resolved. Stated boldly, it is argued that conflict within industry is the result of the absence of a commonly accepted framework or system of rules through which disputes between labour and capital can be settled. As Mabry [1979:114] observes:

...conflict of interest in all industrial settings between employers and employees seem to be a fact of life, and where work rules have not been developed delineating the legitimate
interests and roles of the respective parties, industrial conflict seems to result.

Two observations need to be made with regard to this view. First, while it may be true that industrial conflict is a 'fact of life', such conflict is not the product of transhistorical necessity but is rather the product of the historically contingent and contradictory nature of the wage-labour/capital relation itself. Second, having accepted that industrial conflict is simply a given, writers such as Mabry have proceeded to delineate the ways in which conflict can be managed and contained. In other words, rather than providing an explanation of the historical genesis of industrial conflict these writers simply provide a description of the problem of managerial control [Cf. Hyman, 1975:11]. The problem of control has been at the centre of recent debates over the nature of the capitalist labour-process and some brief comments are necessary.

The way in which the labour-process and the organisation of work shape the development of working class struggles has been the subject of a great deal of theoretical attention in recent years [Braverman, 1974; Littler, 1982; Thompson, 1983; Burawoy, 1985; Cohen, 1987; Munck, 1988 and Gutkind, 1988]. Lying at the core of these debates is the attention which has been given to the problem of capitalist control. Briefly stated, it is argued that while 'economic compulsion' ensures that the workers will turn up at the factory gates each morning, capital still faces the problem of ensuring that, during the course of the working day, the worker actually produces a surplus. There now exists a rich and plentiful body of literature which contains descriptions of the various forms of control or 'regimes of production' [Burawoy, 1985], which capital has exercised over wage-labour. One of the most important aspects of the tramwaymen's struggle is that, at least as far as scholarship is concerned, archival and newspaper accounts of the dispute provide us with some important data which allow some comments to be made about the nature of control which existed within the SEC and the implications which this control had with regard to structuring both the day to day work experience and the development of struggles within the company.

In order to ensure that the tramwaymen produced both product and profit the SEC had established a system of control which broadly corresponds to that which Burawoy [1985:88] terms 'market despotism'. The general characteristics of this particular regime of production were first identified by Marx in his descriptions of the nineteenth century English textile industry, then the most advanced capitalist industry of the time.

In the factory code, the capitalist formulates his autocratic power over his workers like a private legislator, and purely as an emanation of his will, unaccompanied by either that division of responsibility otherwise so much approved of by
the bourgeoisie, or the still more approved representative system. This code is merely the capitalist caricature of the social regulation of the labour process which becomes necessary in co-operation on a large scale and in the employment in common of instruments of labour, and especially of machinery. The overseer's book of penalties replaces the slave drivers lash. All punishments naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages, and the law giving talent of the factory Lycurgus so arranges matters that a violation of his laws is, if possible, more profitable to him than the keeping of them [Marx, 1976:549-550].

One of the distinguishing characteristics of market despotism is, therefore, that the actual securing of surplus is achieved through force rather than through the eliciting of consent. This certainly seems to have been the case within the SEC where the men were subjected to a hazy and ill-defined system of rules and regulations which governed the day to day work activities. It appears that the men had little input into both the content of these work rules and the manner of their enforcement. In other words there was no mutually acceptable framework through which work was to be organised and conflicts settled. From the men's point of view the system of rules and fines was imposed arbitrarily and they seemed to have never been quite which rules would be enforced, or even when they would be enforced. In the absence of consensus, control within the SEC was therefore reinforced by fear. Those in charge of enforcing the company's rules: Nai Hui, his assistant and the European traffic manager were depicted as being heartless, cruel, evil and lacking compassion and the men were said to be more afraid of these three than they were of wild tigers. The fear which the men experienced as a normal part of their working day was reflected in the fear and violence which pervaded the entire strike. This is a significant point for received views of the Thai social order depict a society marked by cultural continuity, peace and stability and an innate abhorrence of violence. Yet throughout the dispute there were continual acts of violence. The tramwaymen fought each other and were themselves the victims of attacks carried out by company employees and hired thugs. Trams were blown up and passengers were injured. This climate of fear and violence also became part of the public consciousness as witnessed by the belief that the 'coolie class' may revolt. Moreover, the government contributed to this atmosphere of fear by suggesting that strikes by Thais were far more serious than strikes by workers of other nationalities for when a Thai strikes, it was claimed, people could be killed. Despotism and fear, therefore, did not remain confined within the factory but soon spilled into the public domain.

As Marx and subsequent scholars have recognised, one of the most important features of market despotism is its ability to constrain the development of working class struggles. It is not difficult to appreciate the various ways in which this regime of
production set limits on the ability of the tramwaymen to resist managerial domination. Within the SEC dependence on a wage entailed having to cope with the daily subordination to company rules. The 85 work regulations noted above closely governed routine work practices. The slightest breach of these rules resulted in the imposition of fines and possibly dismissal and resultant unemployment. Apart from these rules, each worker was forced to lodge the considerable sum of 50 baht with the company as a bond which, in the words of the vice-manager, was to 'ensure that the men carry out their work as strikes in the past have caused the company to suffer large losses' [NA R. 6 N 13/4]. According to company rules, workers could be dismissed for arguing with or disobeying a superior. If an employee had been fined more than 10 baht over two consecutive months he became subject to immediate dismissal [YM 15/1/1923]. Of course, this system was open to all sorts of abuses and from the evidence it appears that the foreman in particular was using company rules to get rid of troublesome workers while also supplementing his own wage by fining workers for the slightest misdemeanours [Kammakon 10/2/1923].

The aim of the preceding discussion has been to illustrate some of the social and work experiences encountered by the earliest Thai wage-labourers in general and the tramway workers in particular. It has been suggested that the tramwaymen, while considerably better off than many, nevertheless faced a daily struggle. An attempt has been made to explicate something of the character of their daily work experience, an experience marked by the despotic and arbitrary exercise of company rules, the fear of fines, arbitrary dismissal and at times outright physical assault [Poonpanich,1988:32]. One of the most intriguing aspects of the strike is that for the first time we have the data which permit some insight into the way in which the men themselves interpreted their experience and here the language which was used to register their protests is important. The men described their conditions as 'unjust oppression' [kotkhimaichoptham ], 'squeezing and exploitative' [ritkhaen ], 'having their blood sucked' [supluad ], and being 'disadvantaged' [siapriap ], with the company being described as 'monstrous' [nayak ], 'inhuman and vulgar' [sat maidai mi khwamrusuk yangtuamanut ], and those in charge of enforcing the rules held to be 'extremely cruel' [mi namcai hotrai ] and 'evil, uncompassionate and inhuman' [mi khwam phraprut chuarai meta cit tophoonmanut ].

As noted above Marx [1976:340,416] argues that under capitalism struggles over the working day inevitably present themselves as 'struggles over the limits of that day' and the first historically significant aspect of the 1923 strike is that for the tramwaymen a limit had been reached. They had arrived at the 'end of their tether' and they were determined to attempt to establish what they considered to be a new and more acceptable norm for their working day. Given the fact that previous authors have
tended to stress the apparent inability of Thai workers to break free from traditional cultural constraints and dominant ideologies it should be stressed that the men's struggle was not merely confined to economic matters alone for there was also a clear moral dimension to their protests. This is an aspect of the strike which demands further comment.

In his work on the beginnings of collective action among industrial workers in Indonesia during the colonial period Ingelson [1986] has drawn on the work of Barrington Moore who has argued that:

...when ordinary people's moral sense of justice is outraged by rulers, employers and others whose authority is normally accepted, then the legitimacy of that authority is called into question, which in turn can lead to collective disobedience or revolt.[Barrington Moore, cited in Ingelson,1986:7].

These comments are particularly relevant for understanding the events of 1923. By rupturing their normal subordination to capital, by being prepared to risk further fines and unemployment and through the struggle to overcome divisions within their own ranks the men were not only concerned with securing a higher wage but were also protesting against their treatment as mere 'factors of production'. It might even be argued that the issue of more money was, in fact, secondary and that the most important thing for the men was to ensure that the company began to treat them with both justice and dignity. Throughout the strike the men continually attempted to assert their value as human beings, an assertion which was directed against the various ways the company sought to deny them their own humanity. The petty rules and regulations and their arbitrary enforcement by the foreman, were, in the eyes of the men, seen as dehumanising symbols through which their value as human beings was being denigrated. In the process of resisting their treatment the men were therefore challenging a set of relationships which outraged their own specific moral sense of justice and self respect.

The 1923 strike was significant, therefore, not because the men's actions corresponded to an ideal-typical or proper form of struggle, but rather because it entailed a challenge to the domination of capital. Although this challenge ended in defeat, the result of the struggle should not detract from the significance of the attempt which was made to change the existing state of affairs. The significance of the strike should also been seen in the light of the system of control maintained by the SEC. An effort has been made to tease out the implicatons which this despotic form of control had with regard to structuring the daily work experience of the tramwaymen. Also some comments have been made with regard to the way in which this system served to shape the concrete form which the men's struggle actually took on this occasion.
Under conditions where control was maintained by fear rather than by consent we may appreciate the overall thrust of the men's actions in their attempt to secure some sort of voice in the organisation of work -- that there be a greater clarification of the rules and regulations. The arbitrary imposition of these rules was perceived to provide a direct challenge to the men's own sense of justice and self respect and it was in response to this challenge that the men launched their attempt establish a new norm for the working day.

The discussion thus far has been restricted to an analysis of the events as they unfolded at the point of production. At this point it will be appropriate to widen the analysis and examine the impact which this strike was to have at the level of the state.

3.3.3 The State and Struggles Over the Working Day

In the last chapter it was demonstrated that, through its policy of encouraging Chinese immigration and through the steps taken toward dismantling the system of corvee, the absolutist state had played a leading role in ensuring that a class of 'free' workers actually became available within Thai society. By 1923, however, strikes and other forms of protest by wage-labourers employed in key sectors of the economy had come to pose a real threat to the economic and social stability of late sakdina society. As early as 1848, for example, riots involving Chinese workers erupted in Nakhon Chaisi and Sakhonsi and shortly after further riots ultimately led to the overthrow of the officially appointed governor of Chachoensao. Further episodes of rioting and violence among Chinese workers took place in 1869, 1883, 1885 and 1889 with a number of lesser conflicts also being reported [Skinner,1957:144]. The economic dislocation caused by these conflicts became the subject of considerable comment at the time. For example, the British Consul [cited in Skinner,1957:117] stated that a strike by dock workers over a pay issue which had taken place in 1888 'lasted for several days...causing an entire cessation of business [with some steamers] obliged to leave the port for a want of hands to load the cargo'. As demand for labour continued to outstrip supply, workers were in a position to press for better pay and conditions. Strikes continued to erupt throughout the 1890's and in 1901 it was reported that Chinese labourers were in a position 'to impose their terms on employers' [Skinner,1957:117]. The most serious strike to have occurred prior to 1923 was the general strike of 1910. The strike broke out on 1 June and was reportedly the result of changes which had been made to the collection of the head-tax. In 1909 a royal decree had been issued which effectively ended the payment of a triennial tax and henceforth
all Chinese were to be taxed at the same rate as the rest of the population. While there is some doubt whether or not the central issue was in fact the head-tax, it is noteworthy that rickshaw pullers, dock workers, cargo and rice mill coolies, fisherman and construction workers all took the opportunity to strike [See BTWM 31/5/1910, 1/6/1910, 4/6/1910, 5/6/1910, 10/6/1910]. Importantly the strike underlined the growing importance of wage-labour to the overall functioning of the economy. As one observer noted at the time:

It must be remembered, however, that the strike might have lasted longer had the participants been sufficiently organised, for the fact that the Chinese labourer is a commercial factor of the utmost importance in the trade of the port has just been brought home to the most unthinking [BTWM 6/6/1910].

The problems which these strikes posed for officials of the absolutist state were not unique. In all societies where capitalist relations are, or are becoming vital for the total process of production and reproduction, state officials will become increasingly obliged to guard against the economic dislocation and social instability caused by strikes. Thus, while officials of the absolutist state had played a major role in securing some of the general conditions for the rise of capitalist relations of production they were, as the above discussion suggests, being faced with the problem of maintaining relations between wage-labour and capital. It is argued that the task of maintaining and defending the relations of domination and exploitation which exist between wage-labour and capital is achieved through the process of 'mediation'. This concept refers to the myriad ways in which the state acts to ensure that the working class 'both submits to the established social order and contributes to its functioning' [Therborn, 1979:217]. One way in which the state is able to mediate the relations between capital and labour is through repression.

Although scholars have been aware of the existence of state sponsored repression of Thai workers and their organisations, the socio-historical significance of repression has never been properly appreciated. To some extent, this failure may be due to the fact that, like Mabry and Srisermbhok [1985:625], the exercise of 'totalitarian power' has been seen as largely 'alien to the benevolent and paternalistic rule' of the Thai ruling classes. This thesis will demonstrate that, rather than being an exception to the rule, violence and repression were consistently directed against industrial workers throughout the pre-1957 period. It will be argued that the historical significance of state repression lies in the way in which it was used to limit and constrain the forms which working class struggle could take during these years and thus ensure that these struggles did not threaten the process of capital accumulation.
By 1923, there had already occurred numerous examples of state repression of workers struggles. The 1848 riots, for example, had been ruthlessly crushed by the Thai military with thousands reported to have been killed [Terweil, 1984:150; Battye, 1974:23-24]. Subsequent riots had also been repressed through military intervention. Another example of violent repression followed in the wake of the 1889 rice mill riots. The British Consul reported that 900 workers had been sent to trial with punishments ranging from fines and whippings to imprisonment. Deeming such action to have been 'highly satisfactory' the Consul continued his report stating that:

The action of the Siamese government on this occasion has certainly given the coolie class a lesson which they will not forget; but at the same time, one might expect that precautionary measures would have been taken against a recurrence of such outbreaks in the future [British Consul report cited in Skinner, 1957:144].

Precautionary measures were not made and the state continued to deal with strikes as they arose. In 1892 troops were once again used to 'deal with labouring people who were not prepared to respect private property' [report cited in BTWM 2/12/1936].

The first legal measures to control strikes and other forms of protest by workers were made with the promulgation of the 1898 Secret Society Act. Under the provisions of the Act all organisations had to register with the government and any meeting or gathering of five or more people was deemed to be illegal if the purpose of the meeting was 'thought to be a source of trouble to the people' [Prarachabanyat Waduyang Yi R.S. 116 in Prakat Phraratchabanyat, ND:120]. With penalties ranging from one to five years imprisonment, the Act provided the state with a useful weapon which could be used to suppress any form of collective action among workers. Further constraints on freedom of association were taken when amendments were made to the Civil Code. Under section 232 of the code strikes and lockouts were declared to be illegal [Kammakon 17/2/1923]. Yet another way in which the state dealt with strikes, particularly among Chinese workers, was through deportation. Those deported had a symbol tattooed on their left wrist, which along with their prison serial number prevented them from returning to the country. The leaders of the 1910 strike were dealt with in this way and throughout the period of absolutism numerous Chinese 'undesirables' were deported [BTWM 14/7/1919; 17/6/1919]. Additionally, the state had initiated measures to build up information on those who were considered to be potential sources of trouble. In 1907, a special branch within the Bangkok police began to fingerprint 'professional Chinese criminals'. The Bangkok police had also entered into an agreement with the police in the Straights Settlements to exchange
information about Chinese who had been deported for 'criminal' activity' [Skinner, 1957:145].

Against this background it is clear that, in coping with the economic dislocation caused by strikes, the absolutist state had relied principally on repression. However, as Munck [1988:128] has pointed out, while the state can act to repress all signs of labour unrest, in the long term, more 'subtle measures are called for'. In this context it is important to recognise the way in which state mediation of the wage-labour/capital relation may also be effected through 'displacement', that is, 'finding safe channels for, the welter of contradictions' amid which rule is exercised [Therborn, 1980:224]. One, among a number of displacements processes, is 'the provision of intra-systemic alternatives'. As Therborn [1979:226] explains:

> Every state offers the ruled a system of institutionalised channels for the presentation of grievances. These may become blocked as a result of malfunctioning of the state, and they may be burst by a rising flood of discontent. Nevertheless to the extent to which they are in service, they involve petitioners in the existing structures; people who present claims, keeping to the established forms, times, and spheres of competence, thereby perpetuate the system of domination, against aspects of which they themselves are protesting.

Apart from examining the ways in which both the pre-1932 and post-1932 Thai state managed to mediate the relationship between wage-labour and capital through repression, this study will also trace the various attempts made by state officials to displace industrial struggles into a more permanent system of institutionalised channels within which workers' grievances could be dealt. In adopting aspects of this task, this study will focus attention on examining the historical development of industrial and labour legislation. It will be argued that, while the development of industrial legislation was premised on a recognition of the legitimacy of workers' struggles, its principal effect was to displace these struggles, keeping them within acceptable bounds and ensure that they did not threaten the process of capital accumulation.

Throughout the course of the 1923 tramway strike the Minister of the Interior was continually urged to step in and settle the dispute. It is important to note that it was the tramwaymen themselves who first turned to the Minister for assistance. However, as the economic dislocations caused by the strike began to be felt, members of the public, journalists as well as SEC company officials all agreed that it was the responsibility of the Minister to resolve the matter. Crucially, the Yomarat argued that, in fact, the government had neither the power nor the responsibility to become directly involved in relations between employers and employees. In practice, however, the Ministers own actions contradicted this position. In general terms, the steps which the
Minister did take were a reflection of the state’s commitment to ensure the continued
growth and expansion of capitalist relations of production. By allowing police to ride
on the trams, by relaxing the rules which governed the licensing of drivers and
through both the public and private support given to the company the effects of the
Minister’s actions promoted the interests of the company above those of the men.
Nevertheless, publicly at least, the comments of the Minister can be taken as the first
clear announcement on the government’s position toward regulating relations within
industry. Disputes between labour and capital, it was argued, lay outside government
responsibility. It was up to the two parties involved to settle their own disputes. In
becoming involved in the strike the Minister constantly repeated he was simply
bestowing a favour on the workers and that his actions should not be seen as being part of his official responsibilities.

The purpose of this section has been to comment on the way in which state
officials were becoming obliged to maintain and defend the relations of exploitation
and domination which existed between wage-labour and capital. By 1923, strikes by
workers employed in key sectors of the economy had become the source of serious
concern to the state. It has been shown that the state had relied largely on repression to
restrict, control and constrain attempts by workers to struggle for better wages and
conditions. The reliance on repression is reflected in the absence of any attempt to
establish some sort of institutionalised framework through which conflicts between
labour and capital could be mediated in a more formal and stable manner. The events
of 1923 highlighted the entire issue of precisely what role the state should play in
mediating relations between capital and labour. Reflecting the overall laissez-faire
stance toward production, it was argued that state officials did not possess the right to
enter into disputes between employers and employees and that such disputes were
private not public matters and therefore outside the state’s official responsibility. The
strike not only raised the issue of the role of the state in industrial relations. It also
raised some issues of wider political significance. It is to a discussion of these issues
to which I now turn.

3.3.4 Wage-Labour and Politics

In her discussion of the relationship between class struggle and politics, Wood
[1988:183] has drawn attention to the way in which:

...‘merely economic’ class struggles, even when their
objectives are limited have a unique capacity to alter the
political terrain and to unmask and confront the structure of
capitalist power, the state, the law, the police, as no other
social force can do.
Although, in the first instance, the 1923 strike was the product of a conflict between the tramwaymen and the SEC it also raised issues of wider political importance. In order to appreciate some of the wider political implications which emerged from the strike it will be appropriate to briefly comment on the political debates which were taking place during this period.

Thailand presents a unique case within Southeast Asian history in that it was the only country which managed to avoid direct European colonisation. While neighbouring traditional political systems were disintegrating under the weight of European imperialism, the Thai monarchy, although certainly constrained by external pressures, was able to embark on an ambitious program of internal reforms. Some of the most important reforms carried out during the last decades of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century include: the reorganisation of traditional government structure into twelve functionally defined ministries; the restructuring of the government financial system; changes to the system of provincial administration through the replacement of semi-hereditary elites with officials appointed by Bangkok; the introduction of railways and other modern forms of communication; the abolition of the *corvee*; the establishment of modern armed forces and the beginnings of a modern system of education.[Batson, 1984:8-9]. Two points need to be made with regard to these changes. First, as Hewison [1989:54] notes these reforms, while not carried out at the 'behest of the emerging capitalist class...[were however]...all more or less important for the development of national capitalism'. Second, and in the present context most importantly, this process of reform had led to a massive centralisation of political power, with the monarchy, 'traditionally absolutist in formal claims...[becoming]...closer than ever to being absolutist in practice [Anderson, 1985:15]. Nevertheless while leading to a massive increase in the political power of the monarchy the basis of legitimacy of absolutism was undergoing subtle but important changes. As Batson [1984:9] explains:

...Chulalongkorn justified absolute monarchy not by 'divine rights' but by its suitability to the conditions of Siam and the benefits it conferred on the people. In the fifth reign there was little objection to these arguments, but they opened the door to counter arguments of a later generation that the absolute monarchy had become an anachronism no longer benefitting the country.

The earliest proposals to alter the political structure of the country were made in 1887 when a group of senior princes and officials submitted a petition to the king canvassing the idea of establishing a constitutional monarchy. The document:
...criticized the excessive centralisation of political authority, the lack of clear-cut ministerial responsibility, and the anachronism of absolute kingship. It argued that only a more broadly based political structure could successfully save Siam from being colonized by the imperialist West. An elected parliament was also proposed, although the petitioners felt that parliamentary democracy was not yet an immediate issue [Morell & Chai-anan, 1981:13].

Although Chulalongkorn rejected the proposals the debate over the political future of absolutism continued throughout his reign [See Kullada, 1984]. In fact, just prior to his death, Chulalongkorn appeared to have also reached the conclusion that the time had arrived for the implementation of political reform when he stated that:

I entrust unto my son Vajiravudh a gift for the people and that upon his accession to the throne he will give to them a parliament and constitution [cited in Brown, 1983:32].

However, whatever hopes Chulalongkorn and others may have had for political reform were soon to be dashed with the accession of Wajirawut [r.1910-1925] to the throne. A highly unpopular monarch who not only faced two coup attempts during the course of his reign, but who was also confronted with sustained criticism over his profligacy and cronyism, Wajirawut seems to have epitomised the danger inherent in an absolutist system of rule. In the context of the present discussion it is unnecessary to provide a detailed political history of Wajirawut's reign. It is appropriate to note briefly how, in the face of continuing political criticism, Wajirawut attempted to legitimise the continuation of his rule.

Central to Wajirawut's attempt to legitimise his rule was his development of what Raymond Williams terms a 'selective tradition'.[see, Barme, 1989:26]. As Turton [1984:49] explains this is a concept which refers to the:

...process and the product, of attempts by the agents of the 'effective and dominant' culture' to select, co-opt, reinterpret, dilute, neglect, exclude, subordinate and prohibit, historical cultural elements from various regions, traditions and classes. Thus there is produced what comes to be regarded, and has to be accepted, as the national tradition, the significant past [emphasis in original].

Barme [1989:26] has recently pointed out that in Wajirawut's case, the development of a selective tradition basically 'involved a delineation of the nature of 'Thai' identity, together with an explication of the slogan Nation, Relegion, King'...'. While I will have more to say on the development of Wajirawut's official nationalist discourse [see section 3.2.7 below] it will be particularly important here to
briefly comment on the notion of 'duty' [nathi] which is contained in the king's writings.

In defining what it meant to be a member of the 'Thai' nation, Wachirawut placed great emphasis on the notion of duty. In a speech titled 'The Individual Duty of Every Person' he stated:

Anyone born human has a duty to country and nation. One is never free from this duty. It lasts from the time one first becomes aware until death. Whether male or female, each has an individual duty to perform for the benefit of the nation [translated in Brown, 1983:77].

During the course of the speech Wajirawut went on to outline in considerable detail the nature of the duties which he expected each individual to perform [see, Brown, 1983:71-80]. Barme [1989:29] provides a succinct outline of the king's views as follows:

Vajiravudh emphasized that while he, as king, possessed great power and wealth he had a duty to use this for the benefit of all his subjects rather than for the purpose of indulging himself. He also stressed that all other Thais had specific duties, these being determined by their social position. Overall, Thai society was described as having two classes, the Phuyai and the Phunoi, literally the big people and the little people. The former group included royalty, noble officials and the leading figures from the business class, the latter group comprising the remainder of the population. While the duty of the Phuyai was to supervise and direct their underlings in a just and fair manner, the Phunoi had the duty of complying with the demands of their superiors. In Vajiravudh's mind, those individuals who understood their place and who carried out their duties were deemed to be good citizens...

In the preceding pages the aim has been to outline something of the nature of the political environment as it existed during the early decades of the twentieth century. It has been argued that while there had occurred a massive increase in the political power of the throne the basis of the legitimacy of the monarchy had been undergoing important changes. In the attempt to shore up his position Wajirawut had began to elaborate what has been termed a selective tradition. One aspect of the king's discourse has been examined: that of the views he expressed with regard to the duties which all 'Thais' owed to the nation. Having discussed these matters we will now be in a position to appreciate the political ramifications which flowed from the tramwaymen's struggle.

As described, when they were unable to receive justice from the SEC, the tramwaymen approached the Minister of the Interior for assistance. In taking this
action the men were acting in accordance with what was then deemed to be an appropriate form of behaviour for dealing with a superior. As one contemporary observer noted:

The men had felt proud that Thais are fully united. The *phuyai* shows consideration toward the *phunoi*, whilst the *phunoi* is respectful of the *phuyai*. This is appropriate for prospering nations and shows that there is no disadvantage in being born a member of the Thai nation...[I]n truth the Yomarat has his hands already full. The workers should not have depended so entirely upon him. However, their plight has led them to momentarily forget their status...but they could no longer restrain themselves [SR, 16/1/1923].

In acting the way they did the men were simply following the procedures which the system of absolutism made available to them. The key issue for the men was whether or not the Minister would, in fact, be able ensure the success of their actions. Initially, the situation appeared to be hopeful. Once he had been approached the Minister made it clear that he would in fact take up the men's case, declaring that he would help them to 'the best of his ability'. Yet as the strike wore on it became increasingly clear the Minister's actions were not in the men's best interest. By allowing police to ride on the trams, through the relaxation of the law which governed the licencing of drivers and his general lack of taking any effective action against the company, the overall impact of the Ministers actions were directed at the attempt to ensure that the SEC was in a position to resume its tram services. In taking these actions the Minister clearly put the interests of the company ahead of those of the tramwaymen.

Prior to the 1923 strike the opinions which workers may have held with regard to Thailand's political future remain obscure. Yet during the course of the strike it is possible to discern evidence of the development of a political consciousness among the tramwaymen. By approaching the Minister the men were in effect putting the ideology of absolutism to the test. During the course of the strike, however, a contradiction arose between the Minister's statement that he would, in accordance with traditional practice, provide assistance to the men and the steps which he actually took, actions which were clearly inimical to the men's interests. This contradiction between the theory and practice of absolutism was not lost on either the men or their spokesmen. The Kammakon launched a scathing attack on the actions of the Minister, accusing him of simply 'abandoning the striking workers', of ignoring the plight of the poor and of generally putting the interests of the SEC and those who held shares in the company ahead of the men. While the attack was lodged in highly personal terms it was not only the ability of an individual which was being brought into question. The entire system of government which the individual represented was also being
questioned. At this point we will leave this discussion of the wider political ramifications of the strike and turn to a consideration of another aspect of the struggle: that of the call for organisation among workers.

3.3.5 Organised Labour

If there is one point upon which previous writers have agreed it is the date of the establishment of the first legally recognised labour organisation in Thailand. Indeed the year 1897, when it is claimed that a group of tramway workers registered their association in accordance with the law, has formed the starting point for all subsequent analyses of the development of a labour movement in Thailand [Mabry, 1979:38; Chaiana, 1982:79; Thanet, 1982:20; Morel and Chai-anan, 1981:182; Sangsit, 1986:59; Damri and Carun, 1986:25 and Zeponsekul, 1987:39]. Apart from being inaccurate this view also clouds the fact that it was to take a further 35 years of struggle after 1897 before workers were able to win the legal right to establish their own organisation.6

One of the significant aspects of the 1923 strike is that it affords us an insight into a very important moment in the history of this fight by workers to establish their own organisation.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels [1986:42-43] outlined some of the main stages in the process of working class formation:

The proletariat goes through various stages of development.
With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by workpeople of a factory, then by operatives of one trade, in one locality...But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows...the workers begin to form combinations.

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6 Bizarre as it may seem, the confusion which surrounds the establishment of the first legally recognised labour organisation stems from from a simple misreading of Virginia Thompson's 1947 study. In this study [p.239], Thompson states correctly that the first legal labour association was established in 1932. She notes, however, that the history of the Tramway Association dates back to 1897 and here she is obviously referring to the report carried in the Bangkok Times Weekly Mail [25/12/1933] which I cited on page 40 above. It is clear, however, that while the tramwaymen may have attempted to establish some form of organisation at this time this organisation must have been short lived. On the basis of the evidence provided by the 1923 strike it is clear that there was no formal organisation among employees within the SEC. Indeed, one of the main problems which workers faced during the strike, lay in precisely building up an organised and united front against the company. In addition, it should be noted that a check of the relevant archival documents shows clearly that no labour organisation had attempted to register in accordance with the law in 1897 [Sec, NA R. 5 N. 20/28]. The confusion which surrounds this entire issue is symptomatic of the scant attention which writers have generally paid to the empirical evidence in tracing the development of the labour movement in Thailand.
As described, isolated struggles by wage-labourers in Thailand date back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. The extent to which workers began to establish some more or less stable form of organisation at individual workplaces and/or across certain trades is difficult to discern at the present stage of research. However, from the evidence, it is clear that some attempt to build up an organisation was made by tramway workers as early as 1896-7. The system of control which was exercised within the SEC placed enormous constraints on the ability of workers to organise and certainly at the time of the strike there was no organisation within the SEC [see fn. 4 below]. In sum, while strikes and other form of protest were taking place there was no organisation which might have acted as a co-ordinating point for workers in their struggles against their employers. It is in this context that the emergence of the Labour Group is of great historical significance.

While I will have more to say on the importance of the Labour Group in section 3.3.6 below, it will be appropriate to point out that, as far as we know, the emergence of this group represented the first attempt to organise workers along class lines. As noted the Labour Group placed great stress on urging workers to come together and act in a united fashion, 'we workers must help each other to recapture our freedom so that it remains stable and fixed. Our freedom rests on unity...'. For Thawat and his fellow organisers the lack of organised and united action was perceived to be the major barrier which workers had to overcome if they were to realise their aims. However, as Isaacs [1987:136] has indicated, organisations among workers only emerge if 'workers can develop a sense of collective identity and solidarity'. This point immediately brings into question the entire issue of ideology and it is to a discussion of the ideological aspects of the tramway strike and the emergence of the Labour Group to which I now turn.

3.3.6 Ideology

For many scholars it has been the persistence of traditional modes of behaviour and forms of thought which impeded the emergence of a proper industrial working class in Thailand prior to 1957. For those influenced by modernisation theory, it is the traditional behavioural characteristics of deference to a superior and a cultural reluctance to become involved in the affairs of others which prevented workers from forming themselves into a class. Radical authors, on the other hand, have claimed it was the dominance of ideology, a complete subjection of the workers to the ideas of the Thai ruling classes that inhibited them from attaining the level of a fully conscious proletariat. The claim that workers in Thailand had an innate cultural reluctance to form themselves along class lines is impossible to sustain on empirical grounds. From the
data presented in this chapter it is clear that, even as early as 1923, the tramwaymen and many other workers were already engaged in the process of developing new forms of behaviour designed to meet the daily challenges which confronted them. In the discussion which follows it will be shown that, along with these new practices, new beliefs were also emerging which provided a radical challenge to ideas which were dominant at the time.

Hall [1988:44] provides a succinct statement of the way in which certain ideas may be thought to achieve 'dominance':

Ruling or dominant conceptions of the world do not directly prescribe the mental content of the illusions that supposedly fill the heads of the dominated classes. But the circle of dominant ideas does accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire not only the constraining power of dominance over other modes of thought but also the inertial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted; what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes. Ruling ideas may dominate other conceptions of the social world by setting the limit to what will appear rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable, within the given vocabularies of motive and action available to us. Their dominance lies precisely in the power they have to contain within their limits, to frame within their circumference of thought, the reasoning and calculation of other social groups.

As noted above the 'circle of dominant ideas' were undergoing significant transformations during the period under discussion. It has been shown that as part of the attempt to legitimise and justify the continuation of his rule, Wajirawut had taken important steps toward the development of a 'selective tradition', a project which precisely aimed to establish, or perhaps more correctly, re-establish a dominant conception of the Thai social world. At the core of this attempt was the king's elaboration of a discourse on the nation. It will be appropriate to discuss further certain aspects of Wajirawut's 'official nationalism'.

In a recent study Barme [1989:12-15] has demonstrated that the idea of nation [chat] which he defines as a 'singular political entity with which the populace at large identified' had developed within educated circles by the end of the reign of Chulalongkorn. Closely linked with the development of the idea of 'nation' were the notions of 'civilisation' [khwam sivilai] and 'progress' [khwam charoen]. Initially, the idea of 'civilisation' carried with it notions of both 'an achieved state versus barbarism and a continuing process of development'. Later, it was particularly the latter notion combined with the linear concept of 'progress' which came to form the 'basis of a reformist ideological discourse which was strongly identified with the
monarchy' [Barme, 1989:17]. By the time that Wajirawut came to the throne the basis of legitimacy of absolute rule was threatened and it was through a reformulation of these ideas of 'nation', 'progress' and 'civilisation' that the king was to argue for the continuation of absolutist rule. As Barme [1989:30] observes:

...the discourse of Nation, Religion and King developed by Wajirawut was a well-conceived rejoinder to such critics. The interrelationship he drew between these three elements was based on a simple form of logical argument with the emphasis, naturally enough on the centrality and necessity of the monarchy. On the one hand the king was identified as the embodiment of the nation (as the people's 'representative'), and also as 'chief warrior' whose task it was to defend 'Thainess' or independence, and Buddhism, the moral basis of the nation.

While Wajirawut had managed to forge a combination of ideas on nation, progress and civilisation into 'an overarching discourse which became the conceptual basis of Thai socio-political reality' he was unable to totally control this discourse as 'different social groups struggled to control, define, redefine, this discourse in order to assert their own particular political/economic interests' [Barme, 1989:12]. This situation should not be seen as surprising for as Hall [1988:58] stresses:

...ideological contestation does not take place between fully formed, competing world views-theirs and ours. The field of ideology is not divided in this way. Its a field in which there are many different discourses and social forces in play at the same time. Contestation often has to do with the engagement around existing ideological symbols and slogans, winning them away from the connotative chains of association they have acquired, which build them into languages that seem to construct topics so that they deliver an answer that favors one end of the political spectrum. The language of nationhood, for example, is not a language we speak but a language which speaks us...People's social identity is going to depend on the way they negotiate themselves in relation to the nation. Consequently, I think the ideological struggle takes place precisely over what the nation means. What are the values associated with it and what are the excluded values? And what is the way in which those powerful symbols can be detached from their entanglement with one set of historical associations and rearticulated in a different direction? Now this is not only a question about what is happening in the field of discourse but also about the way in which social groups, social movements or social classes come to locate themselves inside one or other ideological configurations-how they come to see themselves as authored, addressed, hailed by those statements.

Having made these comments we will now be in a position to appreciate the historical significance of the views which were expressed by Thawat Rittidet in
Kammakon. As noted above, one of the essential ingredients for the emergence of working class organisations is that workers develop a sense of collective identity and solidarity and it is this aim to which Thawat was to direct his efforts.

As Therborn [1980:116] observes, any form of ideological mobilisation involves the following three stages, first, 'setting a common agenda for a mass of people...that is to say, summing up the dominant aspects of a crisis', second, 'identifying the crucial target, the essence of evil' and third 'defining what is possible and how it is to be achieved'. From the available evidence it is possible to trace both the way in which Thawat was attempting to mobilise workers along ideological lines and how this process carried with it implicit criticism and reformulation of Wajirawut's official nationalist discourse.

In the first place it should be recognised that at the time of the 1923 strike industrial workers did not have a voice within social discourse. As we have seen when responding to the League of Nations request to initiate measures to protect labour, the Thai government had argued that workers in Thailand enjoyed a satisfactory standard of living, their wants were secured with a minimum of labour and that 'they have not yet raised any demands for a material change in their working conditions'. Such assertions are contradicted not only by the events of the strike itself but also by the numerous other examples of protests by workers which had occurred prior to 1923. Nevertheless, despite these struggles workers did not yet possess a 'public' voice. It is in this context, of struggling to have their voices recognised, that we may appreciate the profundity of Thawat's comments that 'we raise our voices, we speak up like workers from other countries but we are ridiculed by the reply 'you are only an employee, you don't need to have a voice'. In essence, the first problem Thawat faced was to argue that workers be allowed to air their grievances publicly. Having argued for this right, Thawat then moved on to delineate those particular people who were to form the subject of his discourse. Thawat emphasised that his views were directed toward the newly emerging class of wage-workers--'We are members of the labouring class we must look to our own group rather than to others'. After identifying the subjects of his discourse Thawat then outlined the 'essence of evil' which confronted workers, that is their shared conditions of slavery. Finally, Thawat identifies both the goal to which all workers must strive, that is, the aim to 'destroy slavery among workers and replace it with freedom' and the way in which this goal is to be achieved; through united and collective action 'we workers must help each other to recapture our freedom so that it remains stable and fixed. Our freedom rests on unity...'. In developing the above views Thawat was encouraging industrial workers to develop a sense of collective identity, to recognise that they faced similar challenges and problems in their daily lives and that they must act collectively and unitedly to
overcome these challenges. It is important to also note how these ideological appeals also entailed a reformulation of dominant discourse.

As Barme [1989:31] has noted, through the efforts of Wajirawut it was official or state nationalism which became established as the 'dominant form' in Thailand rather than the 'more popular type of mass nationalism that was developing in the neighbouring colonial states. Barme stresses, however, that in promoting nationalism, 'it was a discourse that he [Wachirawut] could neither monopolise or totally control'. This is an observation which is clearly borne out by the alternate conception of nationalism contained in Thawat's discourse. For example, I have already noted that the terms civilisation and progress had become key elements within dominant ideological discourse. In Thawat's thought, however, these terms were subject to a process of redefinition. By claiming that the actions of the tramwaymen were appropriate for the times, Thawat argued that this was because 'our country has set itself on the path toward civilisation'. Here the meaning of the term civilisation is not restricted to refer to economic development as it was in dominant discourse but is being reformulated to encompass developments in the sphere of politics. For Thawat, civilised countries are defined as those states where people possess the right of freedom of association. From this point he then attempts to argue that as 'Siam has now entered a civilised era...it is appropriate that we be allowed to have a labour leader'. Here then, we find that Thawat is cleverly manipulating some of the key terms of dominant ideological discourse and bending these to promote the interests of workers. Another example of the way in which Thawat attempted to change existing ideological slogans and symbols and win these away from their 'acquired connotative chains of association', lies in his use of the concept of 'freedom'. For Thawat workers exist in a state of slavery and it is only through collective action that workers will be able to attain their freedom. Here the notion of freedom [khwampenthai ] is being given a new meaning. In official discourse, the idea of 'Thai' to mean free was being used as a key component in marking out that which distinguishes members of the Thai nation from the people of neighbouring nations who lived under the yoke of colonial rule. For Thawat, however, 'freedom' is not something which has already been achieved but remains a goal to be realised--'we workers must help each other to recapture our freedom so that it remains stable and fixed'. In short, while Thawat may have used terms and concepts drawn from the 'official nationalism' of Wajirawut, it would be incorrect to suggest that he was simply dominated by these ideas. Rather, through his attempt to instill a sense of class belonging among workers, he was developing an alternative and highly radical discourse in which dominant conceptions of the Thai social world were being reformulated.
In her assessment of the role played by Thawat and the Labour Group, Poonpanich [1988:53] has argued that they were unable to 'produce a comprehensive ideology with the explicit and long-term aims of advancing workers' interests'. Such a view must, however, be rejected for two reasons. First, such an assessment is based on an implicit comparison with an idealist historical projection of what a 'true' working class ideology should be, and second, it fails to appreciate the extent to which Thawat's discourse actually served to transform and rearrange existing ideological elements and how, in reworking dominant discourse, Thawat was forging the beginnings of a specific working class discourse. In other words, Thawat's discourse was not worked out as a coherent philosophy but rather was formulated as a response to the challenges which both the tramwaymen and other workers faced in daily struggle to survive [Cf. Metcalfe, 1988:135]. It is, however, important to appreciate the limitations of Thawat's ideas and it is this issue to which I now turn.

In responding to the challenges faced by workers, Thawat adopted what could broadly be described as a labourist position, that is, 'an attitude which in theory (always) and in practice (mostly) emphasized the fundamental unity of capital and labour' [Saville,1988:14]. In developing his views Thawat was not advocating the overthrow of the wage-labour/capital relation but was rather arguing for the more equitable treatment of workers within this relation. Thus, he argued:

We should follow the correct method, that is, when we are dissatisfied with the regulations or oppression of employers, we should all stop work. Having ceased working, we should all vote one of our members, who we think capable of discussing the issue with the employer, to be our leader. We should work out an agreement with the employer to the satisfaction of all concerned. When the employer has agreed and we think that the proposal is acceptable...our leader should make the contract by which we accept to work. The contract should be made so that both sides have a solid and stable base [Kammakon,27/1/1923].

Clearly then, Thawat is here working out a position that is unintentionally reinforcing the power of capital, for its emphasis lies on reforming conditions within existing relations rather than the transformation of these relations. For Thawat, the wage-labour/capital relation is simply accepted as a 'fact' of life' and the struggle which he advocates is premised on the belief that workers will be able to attain their freedom and dignity within capitalist relations. While it can be argued that the adoption of these views placed limits on the potential successful realisation of workers's interests, it will be demonstrated that they did, however, contribute to the development of a powerful tradition within the Thai labour movement which has led to an improvement in the lives of industrial workers.
3.4 Summary

In opposition to those who have ignored the role of human agency and tended to perceive classes as emerging on the historical stage already fully formed, E.P. Thompson [1978:147] has drawn attention to the fact that:

...people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways...they experience exploitation...they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class consciousness are always the last, not the first stage of the historical process.

Although largely ignored by previous scholars, the aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate that the 1923 tramwaymen's strike was, nevertheless, a highly significant historical event in that it represented one important moment within which one group of Thai workers were involved in this process of 'discovering themselves' as a class. It has been shown that dependence on wage was associated with conditions within which both the tramwaymen and other industrial workers faced a daily struggle to reproduce both themselves and their families. It has also be demonstrated that wage-dependence entailed a confrontation with a new set of work relations and, in the case of the tramwaymen, a despotic system of control where there existed a constant fear of being fined and dismissed through the arbitrary decision of a superior. We have also seen how the tramwaymen 'experienced' these conditions as 'unjust exploitation', being 'disadvantaged' and having their 'blood sucked', an experience in which their own specific sense of self-esteem and dignity was perceived to be under threat. It was, therefore, in response to this experience of exploitation and challenge to their moral worth that the men began to struggle, and it was during the course of this struggle that they were beginning to overcome divisions within their own ranks and forge a sense of unity of purpose and collective identity. Significantly, however, the men's struggle did not remain confined to the arena of production alone, it also served to condition wider economic, political and social debates. This is a point which was, in fact, recognised by a contemporary observer who wrote:

Strikes by Thais are not new, they are not the product of 'civilisation' or the 'new times' as some believe. However, previous strikes were limited to a particular place and only a few were involved and therefore no-one took much interest...If the strikes are small nobody gives them a second thought...But the strike by the tramwaymen is much more
serious than previous strikes [Khrungthep Daily Mail, 20/1/1923].

In considering the wider impact of the strike, some emphasis has been given to demonstrating that this struggle was but one example of a growing number of similar events which were presenting state officials with considerable problems. It has been argued that, the economic dislocations caused by strikes had resulted in pressure being exerted on state officials to institute measures to guard against these outbreaks of labour unrest. It has been shown that the state had responded to these pressures largely through the use of force. Nevertheless, it is suggested that by appealing to the Yomarat for assistance, the tramwaymen raised the question of precisely what role the state should play in regulating and managing relations within industry. The Yomarat, however, not only rejected the idea that the state should directly intervene in relations between labour and capital he also, as did the king, failed even to recognise the legitimacy of the men's claims, arguing that they were acting 'irresponsibly' and 'irrationally'.

Apart from highlighting the question of what role the state should play in regulating relations within industry, the strike also raised questions of fundamental political importance. It has been argued that, in seeking assistance from the Minister, the tramwaymen were implicitly putting the system of absolutist rule to the test. The failure of the Minister to settle the matter in the men's favour and his seeming indifference to their plight, must have created some doubt in the minds of the men as to whether both the Minister, and the system of government which he represented, would, in fact, help them in their struggle for justice and dignity. The wider political implications of the strike must also be considered in light of the emergence of the Labour Group. As far as we know, the emergence of this group represents the first example in Thai history of an attempt to organise workers specifically along class lines. Some effort has been given to showing how, in his attempt to promote and foster a sense of collective identity and unity among workers, Thawat was developing a discourse which presented a radical challenge to some of the dominant ideas which were being officially promoted at the time.

Finally, some mention should be made of how this long and violent struggle brought the problem of labour into public view. The fact the men worked in an important area of the economy meant that the strike and the consequent breakdown of tram services had an immediate and widespread public impact and the extensive press coverage given to the strike is a reflection of this. Many questions were raised and

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7 Even fifty years later, the popular author Yulisthian [1971:64-68] was still able to remember the excitement, interest and great controversy which the strike generated among the population in Bangkok. Equally significantly, in the draft of his controversial Economic Plan Pridi Phanomyong, used the tramway strike as an example of the type of industrial
debated: why were there struggles between employers and employess? what were the causes of these disputes? who were this new class of workers? what role did they have in society? what responsibility did employers have toward their employees? what role should government officials play in settling these conflicts? what did the existence of these struggles bode for the future development of Thai society? These and many other questions were raised during the course of the strike. In subsequent chapters it will be demonstrated that, as the process of class formation developed further, these questions continued to become a more permanent part of public debate.

conflict and social discord which he claimed would be inevitable if the private ownership of manufacturing plants was allowed to continue in Thailand.[Pridi’s plan, cited in Landon,1968:284].
Chapter Four

CLASS FORMATION:
1923-1944

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was argued that the 1923 tramway strike was a highly significant historical event. In terms of scholarship, the strike is particularly important because for the first time contemporary archival and newspaper reports provide a firm empirical starting point from which it is possible to begin to provide an informed discussion of the process of working class formation as it was to develop in the Thai context. The purpose of the remaining chapters of this study is, however, to move away from a micro and synchronic examination of the process of class formation, and adopt a more macro and diachronic view. More specifically the principal aim is to trace the further development and growth of an organised labour movement and examine the role played by the state in shaping and constraining this development. In this chapter the focus is on the period 1923-1944. To facilitate the discussion this period is divided into three sub-periods; 1923-1932, 1932-1934 and 1934-1944.

Period One 1923-1932

4.1.1 The Thai Labour Movement 1923-1932

Struggles over the establishment of a norm for the working day continued to erupt throughout the remaining years of absolutism. Those involved in such actions included; pawnshop clerks [1923], construction workers [1925], hotel workers [1926], labourers employed in the Bangkok waterworks [1926], port workers [1928], tramway workers [1928], women workers employed at the military arsenal [1929], weavers [1929], match factory workers [1929] and railway employees [1930].\(^1\) While very little is known about the immediate background to these disputes it is clear that the existence of these struggles convinced Thawat and his fellow organisers that the changing nature of Thai society required greater attention be given to improving the conditions of wage-labourers and it was toward the realisation of this goal that the Labour Group was to direct its efforts.

The contributions which the Labour Group made toward promoting and advancing the interests of industrial workers during the last years of the absolute monarchy have been ignored by the majority of past writers. Indeed, the works which are usually cited as the main source of reference for the period make no mention of the existence of the Group [Thompson, 1947, Mabry, 1979]. In recent years, however, two Thai scholars have begun the process of recovering the history of the activities of the Labour Group and it is appropriate to discuss some aspects of this recent work.

In her short study, Kanchada Poonpanich [1988] has argued that the Labour Group provided the 'basic nutrients' for the development of the Thai labour movement. She argues that its contribution was threefold; first to draw public attention to the plight of workers, second, providing basic 'welfare services' and third, emphasising the need for organisation and solidarity. Each of these three contributions will be discussed.

As indicated in the last chapter, one of the basic problems faced by industrial workers was that, despite the many attempts to redress their grievances, they were accorded little if any right to speak within public discourse. This denial of the right to be heard represented a major barrier for Thawat and his group and throughout the remaining years of absolutism they continually argued that industrial workers indeed possessed a basic right to speak and have their problems debated and discussed publicly. The Labour Group attempted to win public acceptance for the voice of labour in two ways. In the first place they argued that the problems which confronted workers also involved issues which were of fundamental public concern. For example, in February 1923 Thawat wrote:

...some people ask why a newspaper called Labour does not concern itself only with labour issues but also speaks about wider social and political matters such as laws and regulations. It is claimed that such topics are not at all appropriate for labourers [Kammakon, 17/2/1923].

Thawat went on to justify the linking of labour issues with wider social issues by declaring that the problems which workers faced, such as their search for justice and equality in the workplace, were necessarily of interest to the general public for workers, he argued, were not the only ones who experienced unjust and inequitable treatment. The misuse of power, Thawat argued, threatened all those things which Thai respected most, namely their Nation Religion and King. To discuss and debate these issues was therefore essential not only for improving the conditions of workers but was fundamental for the future progress of the country. Additionally, it was argued that the discussion of various laws and regulations was necessary because one of the main disadvantages which workers faced in their relations with employers was
their ignorance of their rights and obligations under the law. Once again it was argued that this was an issue which not only concerned workers but was one which all the people [phonlamuang] should be aware. In drawing attention to these matters Thawat emphasised then that the aim of the Labour Group was 'not only to benefit workers but also to be of use to all the people' [Kammakon, 17/2/1923]. In sum, one of the principal ways in which Thawat attempted to achieve recognition for the voice of labour was to argue that the various problems which workers faced were, to some extent at least, problems which were shared by all the people.

Apart from attempting to link the interests of labour with wider public interests, perhaps the most important way in which Thawat attempted to secure a voice for labour was through documenting the various hardships which confronted workers. In the pages of Kammakon and later the Pakka Thai [The Thai Pen] there were continual reports and articles on the problems faced by workers. Workers were encouraged to write to the papers and provide details of their opinions and grievances. In some cases this public airing of grievances secured government attention and intervention in disputes. For example, in the case of a dispute involving pawnshop employees who were protesting against the requirement that they work a seven day week, coverage of the conflict in Kammakon attracted the attention of the Police Commissioner who was apparently successful in ensuring that the workers be given one day off a week [Kammakon, 17/2/1923].

The second major contribution made by the Labour group was its provision of some basic welfare services for workers. In 1926 Thawat established an organisation called 'Place for the Masses' [Sathan Tuai Rat]. Financed largely by Thawat, the stated aim of this organisation was to 'eliminate trouble and distress as well as care for the basic happiness of the people' [Poonpanich, 1988:44]. Offering its members death, unemployment and sickness benefits and free legal advice, the Place for the Masses was reported to have been 'very popular' among wage-labourers and the urban poor. According to members of Thawat's family, workers would visit the organisation on a daily basis in order to discuss their problems [Poonpanich, 1988:44-45]. Although the number of members is unknown, there is little doubt that the provision of concrete assistance to workers would have proved important both in developing organisational and administrative skills and demonstrating the practical advantages of collective action.

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2 The Kammakon Newspaper was first published on 23 January 1923. Despite attempted interference [see, for example comments in the edition 28/4/1923 in which it was stated that the previous edition had not appeared due to the 'misuse of dark power'] the paper remained in publication until 21/6/1924 at which time the Chaiyapoom Press which published the paper was closed and faced libel charges [BTWM 9/6/1924. The Kammakon was briefly re-opened on the 26/6/1926 and its final issue was published on 17/7/1926. Thawat and his fellow organisers subsequently established the Paka Thai [The Thai Pen] which remained in publication for three years [Sangsit, 1986:129.}
and unity. This latter point leads on to a discussion of the third important contribution made by the Labour Group, that of actively encouraging a sense of collective identity and solidarity among workers.

As shown in the last chapter the Labour Group sought to actively encourage and promote a sense of class belonging among workers. All workers, it was argued, shared a common situation and it was suggested that if they were to free themselves from exploitation and oppression it was imperative that they work toward overcoming their inclination to act individually and develop a sense of collective identity and solidarity. In 1924 Thawat published an article in Kammakon in which he stated:

Currently all of us are still of high individuality. We still love to pursue life separately from each other. This does not match the basic principle of civilisation. So long as we, all Siamese workers, individually think of ourselves, don't even expect to escape from the immorality which the wicked employers use in oppressing us. Don't you ever think of the saying 'In union is there strength?' The union can generate our power which others will have to respect and fear. Nobody can dare treat us as a stupid laboring buffalo anymore [Kammakon 22/3/1924 cited in Poonpanich,1988:47-48].

In the same article Thawat not only emphasised the need for a union but also sketched out a basic strategy through which workers could help each other to form such an organisation:

...we labourers and workers should come and join together to build up a union according to different vocations such as tramway workers, motorcar workers, horse-cart workers, loading coolies. After that we should elect a person who is intelligent enough to be our leader. By this way, in times of crisis, we could help each other far better than before...to have a leader would bring us a lot of advantages. For example, we can make good contact with our fellow workers in a more convenient way. Furthermore, when there is a dispute between us and the employers, our leader can be our representative in negotiating with the employer [Kammakon 22/3/1924 cited in Poonpanich,1988:48].

While Poonpanich has pointed to the contributions which the Labour Group made with respect to developing a sense of class among workers, providing basic welfare services and ensuring that the problem of labour received public attention, Sangsit [1986] has focused his attention on teasing out the wider political implications contained in the work of the Labour Group. Before discussing these contributions it is appropriate to comment briefly on the political debates which were taking place in Thailand during the latter half of the 1920's.
By the end of Wachirawut's reign, the reputation and prestige of the monarchy had been severely damaged. In 1925 Prince Damrong stated that King Prajadhipok [r.1925-1932] received a 'deplorable inheritance...because the authority of the sovereign had fallen much in respect and confidence, the treasury was on the verge of bankruptcy and the government was corrupted and the services more or less in confusion' [cited in Batson,1974:38]. King Prajadhipok was not unaware of the situation and shortly after coming to power he noted that '...movements of opinion in this country give a sure sign that the days of Autocratic rule are numbered' [Batson,1984:130]. In the attempt to alleviate a worsening economic situation the new administration initiated budget cuts and reduced the number of public employees by ten percent. These moves appeared to be effective and by 1926 the government accounts were no longer showing a deficit [Barme,1989:56]. Apart from these economic measures, Prajadiphok also took some halting steps toward political reform by establishing first a Supreme Council of State and later a Committee of the Privy Council [Batson,1984:130-140. This gradualist approach to the implementation of political change, however, 'proved to be illusory as there was no tangible indications that Prajadiphok would relinquish his supra-legal status and grant his subjects a constitution' [Barme,1989:56]. It is under these conditions of a political system which was becoming 'an increasingly isolated and anachronistic relic of the past' [Batson,1984:129], that the political implications of the work carried out by the Labour Group must be located.

Sangsit [1986] has argued that the writings and activities of the Labour Group contributed to the critique of absolutism in three basic ways; first by challenging received notions of power and individual worth, second, by criticising the economic policies of absolutism and finally, questioning some of its basic ideological tenets.

In his writings Thawat was highly critical of those officials who continued to exercise their authority on the basis of traditional notions of power. In a long article titled 'Power of the Lords' he argued that in former times the power of the royal family was underpinned by ideas pertaining to the supernatural rather than being derived from the law. Thawat went on to state that with the progress of mankind these traditional ideas of power had necessarily undergone certain transformations and that the power of royalty had been transferred to public servants and governments. Despite these changes he suggested that certain members of royalty and the nobility, nevertheless, continued to attempt to exercise traditional concepts of power over the people and workers. This he argued was not only in contravention of the wishes of the Thai monarchs themselves but represented a serious impediment to the progress of the country. [Kammakon 27/1/1923]. Over subsequent years Thawat continued with this criticism of those who refused to give up their traditional ideas of power, arguing that
this was a fundamental cause of corruption within Thai society. Two government officials were to come in for special attention namely, Police Commissioner Athikon Prakat and the Minister of the Interior Chaophraya Yomarat, both of whom who accused of unjustly using their power. Accusations against the Yomarat who had been so roundly criticised for his abandonment of the tramway workers, were made following the misappropriation of funds from the Siamese State museum. After accusing the Minister of corruption Thawat was subsequently arrested on libel charges and spent some time in prison where he was refused both bail and visitors [Sangsit,1986:79-80].

Apart from arguing for the development of greater equality between citizens and an end to corruption Thawat also wrote widely on economic matters. For example, he was particularly critical of the Treasury for charging high rental rates both in the city and in the countryside, accusing it of 'severely exploiting' the people [Sangsit,1986:80-81]. In an article published in 1931 Thawat also argued for the implementation of more sustained policies of agricultural and industrial development. The Thai elite were criticised for not investing their money in productive investments and living a life of ease to the detriment of the nation. He went on to argue that all wealthy Thais should join together and 'establish agricultural co-operatives and factories, thus producing jobs, goods and a greater circulation of money' [cited in Batson,1984:98].

The final contribution made by Thawat and the Labour Group concerns their efforts to encourage people to think about some of the basic ideological bases of absolutism. In an article published in 1925, for example, readers were invited to provide an answer to a number of questions such as; how should one love the Nation, Religion and King?, how are the Nation, Religion and King related, can they be separated and if so, what would the consequences be? How are the government and the people related, can they ever be separated and, if so, for what reason? As Sangsit [1986:83] observes, the purpose of these question was to encourage people to think critically about dominant ideas and values. This attempt to encourage people to challenge received ideas represents an important aspect of Thawat's work. As noted in the previous chapter, the ideas of progress, civilisation and nation were reformulated by Thawat into an alternative nationalist discourse. This refashioning of ideas is also clearly indicated in an article published in 1926. Commenting on the then recently appointed Supreme Council of State, Thawat asked whether the time had arrived for Thailand to have a 'people's leader' [huana ratsadon ][Kammakon 17/7/1926]. It was argued that if the nation was to 'progress and flourish' then 'it was necessary that people have direct access to an advisor'. Once again the concept of progress is being used to signify development in the political rather than simply the economic sphere.
The need for the development of a new political form was considered by Thawat not only to be essential for the progress of the country, it was also considered to be inevitable. At the conclusion of this article he wrote:

Finally, we wish to leave the government with the following proverb. 'When something has reached a stage where it must change, change it must. Those who seek to resist [change] will be unable'. Remember the world is changing quickly [Kammakon 17/7/1926].

In sum, from the above discussion we see that the contributions made by Thawat and the Labour Group in advancing the interests of labour during the last years of the absolute monarchy were considerable. A number of points have been noted with regard to the nature of these contributions; first considerable effort was made to ensure that the problems of workers became a concern of general public debate, second, in the absence of state assistance some basic welfare services were offered to workers, third, a great deal of attention was given to the attempt to instil a sense of collective identity and unity among wage-labourers. Finally, the Labour Group attempted to deal with matters which touched upon wider political debates. Problems of corruption and the misuse of power, the future economic development of the country and questions over the continuation of absolutist rule were all issues which were debated during the latter half of the 1920's. By entering into these debates Thawat and the Labour Group sought to offer their own specific input and in doing so expanded the range of issues which were held to be of direct concern to workers. In the above discussion the focus of attention has been placed on tracing the hitherto largely neglected process of class formation as it was occurring among Thai industrial workers. It is now appropriate to comment briefly on the emergence of a labour movement among Chinese workers.

4.1.2 The Chinese Labour Movement

As Zeeponsekul [1987:35-38] has observed, many writers have argued that Chinese workers in Thailand lacked a sense of class belonging with speech group, religion and traditional practices being regarded 'as obstacles to the realisation of working class identity'. However, while it must be recognised that the existence of these ties certainly complicated the process of class formation, it is also necessary to recognise that there is clear evidence that does indicate some degree of class related organisation and struggle among Chinese workers. Thus, while Skinner [1957:138]

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3 This statement was contained in what appears to be the final edition of Kammakon. Given that the paper had only reappeared one month earlier it seems reasonable to assume that the publication of this none too subtle warning was the reason which lay behind the permanent closure of the paper.
may be correct in suggesting that 'horizontal class solidarity was largely absent from Chinese society' it was not totally absent. Indeed, as we have seen, the earliest evidence of strikes taking place among Chinese workers date back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. Given the existence of these struggles one may well agree with Zeeponsekul [1987:34] that it is possible to speak of an 'incipient form of class consciousness and action among urban Chinese workers albeit a consciousness which existed in an uneasy relation with other forms of group identity. This view is supported by developments which occurred during the latter half of the 1920's.

In the first place it should be recognised that Chinese workers also continued to be involved in struggles over the establishment of a norm for the working day. For example, in 1929 a group of Chinese weavers were reported to have gone on strike in demand for a wage increase [BTWM, 20/5/1929]. There were reports of other similar struggles and it appears that by the late 1920's Chinese workers had managed to forge some form of co-operative organisation with the Bangkok Times reporting that Chinese labour was 'well organised' [BT 23/7/1927]. Organisation among wage-labouring Chinese was particularly evident in a wave of boycotts which were directed against Japanese trading interests. Boycotts had taken place in 1919 and 1926 with the most serious incident taking place in 1928. This followed in the wake of the bloody battle which had occured between Japanese and Chinese Nationalist forces at Tsinan in May of that year. The boycott was led by a group called the 'Chinese National Association in Siam for Opposing the Japanese'. All Chinese businesses were urged to refrain from handling Japanese goods. At least two Chinese who had refused to comply with the associations demands were murdered with another person reported having had his fingers severed. [N.A. R 7 M 18/6]. Japanese residents asked for police protection and over two hundred Thai troops were ordered out to patrol the streets. In August Thai workers, under police protection, were employed to work on the docks and the boycott was finally broken the following month [Skinner, 1957:239]. According to an archival report, a meeting of the boycott society was attended by representatives from a labourers union [N.A. R 7 .18/6] which suggests that Chinese workers saw themselves as occupying a distinct place within the Chinese commnity and that their support for the boycott could not have been simply assumed but was rather the subject of negotiation.

Apart from their participation in struggles for higher wages and trade boycotts, another significant development to have taken place within the ranks of Chinese workers during this period concerns the spread of communist ideas. As Batson [1984:165] has observed it was during the early years of the Seventh Reign that the activities of 'various Marxist, communist and 'Bolshevik' organisations first became a cause of serious concern to the government'. Wedel [1982:367ff] has stated that the
first attempt by communists to establish an organisational base in Thailand occurred during the 1920’s when six members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were sent to Thailand to enlist support for the party. This initial process of organising was apparently co-ordinated through the South Seas General Labour Union which later became known as the South Seas Communist Party. The development of communist ideas received further impetus following the Nationalist (Kuomintang)-Communist split in 1927. Thousands of leftists fled China and many were reported to have emigrated to Thailand. In the same years it is claimed that 'Marxist orientated students' established the 'Association of Communist Youth'.[Zeeponsekul, 1987:41]. Most students of this early emergence of communist thought in Thailand have stressed that, for the most part, the influence of communist ideas was restricted to non-Thai nationals, principally the Chinese and Vietnamese. Most of the 'marxist' analyses were written in Chinese and dealt with the discussion of events which were taking place in China, India and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless some documents did concentrate on the analysis of conditions within Thailand. For example a document dated 1st May 1930 and signed by the 'Communist Workers Committee of Siam' carried with it a fourteen point program which called for the 'overthrow of the monarchy, the imperialists and the establishment of a democratic Siam' [Batson, 1974:64 fn.13]. Another document dated the same year titled 'Draft Statement Analysing the Government and Economy of Siam' covered such topics as imperialist intrigue in Thailand noting how this had led to the 'impoverishment of the labouring classes'.[Batson, 1974:66-71]. Although the impact which communist ideas was to have on Thai workers during this period remains a topic for future research it is worth noting that in January 1930, during a period of unrest within the state railways, a Thai was arrested for handing out pamphlets signed by the 'Labourers of Siam' which urged workers to strike [BTWM, 20/1/1930; 9/6/1930]. Two years later another Thai was reported to have been arrested for handing out Thai language communist propaganda [BTWM, 14/11/1932].

In the previous sections the purpose has been to focus attention on certain aspects of the process of class formation as it unfolded during the last years of the absolute monarchy. Specific emphasis has been given to showing that both Thai and Chinese workers were involved in class related organisation and struggle during this period. In the section which follows attention will be given to an examination of the way in which the state responded to these developments.
Struggles over the working day, workers participation in trade boycotts, the activities of the Labour Group and the spread of 'communist' ideas among some sections of the Chinese workforce presented state officials with significant problems during the last years of the absolute monarchy. One of the principal ways in which the state dealt with these problems was through repression. As noted above, The Kammakon was closed and Thawat was arrested and spent a short time in prison following the publication of his views on corruption. Over the following years there were numerous other instances of workers being arrested and, in the case of Chinese workers, deported. In 1927 three Chinese who had recently arrived from Canton with the intention of establishing a fitters union were arrested and charged with engaging in 'Bolshevik' propaganda [BTWM 7/5/1927]. Subsequently, the leader of a group of Chinese weavers was labelled a 'communist' and deported after leading a strike for higher wages [BTWM 25/5/1929, 13/1/1930]. In May 1930 sixty-six Chinese were arrested for planning a strike [BTWM 5/5/1930]. In the same month members of the police special branch arrested three Chinese who had been involved in the organisation of an unregistered seafaring men's union. The arrests had followed the discovery of pamphlets which had called upon members of the union to 'observe May Day...as their communist brothers were doing in foreign parts'. It was also reported that a former head of the union had been deported two years previously [BTWM 5/5/1930].

In October 1930 Chua Kiam Seng, reportedly the leading 'communist' in Thailand, was arrested after pamphlets had been seized which urged labourers, peasants, soldiers and 'all oppressed people' to act against the Thai government. At the same time another leaflet had been seized by the police. Signed by the 'Siamese Labourers' Party', the document called for solidarity among workers in order to oppose the great powers who had caused 'untold hardship and suffering [which was caused by influencing] capitalists to lower our pay; to add longer working hours and causing us to be without employment' [BTWM 20/10/1930]. These examples of repression were not limited only to Chinese 'bolshevik' agitators. An example of police being used to harass and intimidate Thai workers is that of the Min Sae Match Company which was granted the right to hire police to patrol their newly opened factory so as to 'keep order in the factory and to see that 'secret societies' do not carry out their activities' [BTWM 25/11/1929].

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4 As Sangsit [1986:129] notes, in an effort to circumvent state interference in the publication of their views, Thawat and other members of the Labour Group wrote under pseudonyms. Fictitious names were also used on the official newspaper registration forms which had to be lodged with the government. See, for example, N.A R. 6. N 20/122.
These overtly repressive measures were backed up by the introduction of new laws. Batson [1984:141] has noted that 'for reasons which are not altogether apparent' there was a relative hiatus in coverage which the Bangkok press gave to political issues after 1927. The reasons for this are, however, not difficult to identify. In 1927 a comprehensive piece of legislation was introduced which, as a British Consular official noted, aimed to 'stifle' any criticism by the vernacular press [F.O 371/13264].

Attacks against freedom of the press had in fact been launched as early as 1924 when in June of that year the Chaiayapoom press, which published Kammakon was closed for libel. Another piece of repressive legislation was that which placed restrictions on the right to strike. In 1927 revisions were made to the Civil Code. Under the terms of the law a person could face execution or life imprisonment if found guilty of having attempted to:

...urge any person through fear, threat or violence to become a member of any organisation or to become engaged in a strike or the withdrawal of employment or trade activities...or helping any organisation, or aiding in a strike...if such activities are deemed part of a wider plan to overthrow the government, or to change economic or political policies [Sathian,1934:151-172].

Although these repressive measures proved effective in keeping a lid on labour discontent, there was a growing recognition that longer term solutions were required. In 1927 the King established a committee which comprised the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Commerce and the Interior. These senior ministers were assigned the specific task of examining what was now being termed the 'Labour Problem' [panha kammakon]. The committee met for the first time on 15 February 1927 in order to discuss the ILO draft conventions for the protection of labour. Once again, however, the ministers reaffirmed earlier decisions that the adoption of the ILO draft conventions would be premature, arguing that the relative underdevelopment of industry, the cheap cost of living, the independence and conservatism of the workers and the generally easy conditions of life meant that 'there was still no need for labour legislation in Siam' [N.A. R 7 Ph 13/1].

While the official policy was to deny the need for the introduction of labour legislation, government officials were, however, beginning to recognise that there existed a need for the state to take some steps toward stabilising relations within industry. The Minister of Commerce, for example, argued that there was a need for legislation which would give the government the power to inspect factories. He stated that 'numerous' industrial accidents had been reported some of which had occurred in enterprises in which the state was involved. It was claimed that in the case of private industrial establishments, accidents where workers had either been killed or severely
injured had been 'hushed up'. It was argued that such occurrences meant that 'we should think about protecting the lives and health of workers in order to benefit the country's economy' [N.A. R 7 ph 13/1]. Nevertheless, it was argued that some caution should be shown toward developing factory legislation, and that it should be restricted mainly toward clarifying the responsibility of the factory owners and to give government officials the power to inspect factories. It was stressed, however, that such legislation:

...should definitely not be seen to represent an attempt by the government to help the side of the workers for this would serve to encourage them to establish trade unions or workers' organisations [N.A. R 7 Ph 13/1].

This response reveals a fundamental contradiction which existed within government policy at this time. On an official and public level, it was argued that labour legislation was simply not required, a situation which, it was argued, was the result of a unique set of economic and socio-cultural circumstances. Yet it is also clear that the government was beginning to realise that workers did in fact possess some legitimate grievances. Thus, state officials found themselves in something of a bind with regard to the introduction of measures to protect labour. While all members of the labour committee accepted that something must be done, it was emphasised repeatedly that whatever concrete steps were taken should not be seen to be offering workers special rights. This situation led, in turn, to a discussion over what the term 'protecting labour' [pongkan kammakon] actually meant. Although this question of semantics appears to have remained unresolved, the committee did eventually manage to produce a series of draft laws, the final version of which were completed and submitted to the Prajadhipok in January 1931. Known as the Draft Factory Act, the document contained provisions which compelled factory owners to register their premises and provide full details of the type of work performed, the machinery used and the number of workers employed. Factories were to be kept clean and free from injurious materials and all accidents had to be reported to the government. The Act also gave government employees the power to enter premises for the purposes of inspection. At a meeting held in September 1931, however, it was decided that due to the general state of the economy and the cost of establishing an effective system for administering the Act, it would be inappropriate to proceed with the introduction of the legislation [N.A.R 7 Ph 13/4].

In sum, the state responded to the growth of class related activities among workers largely through repression. The arrest, deportation and police harassment of workers and the introduction of new laws which placed restrictions on freedom of the press and on the right to strike are examples of repressive measures. Archival
documents show that state officials were also beginning to recognise that some form of state regulation of industry was necessary. There was a reluctance to initiate such measures, however, for fear that it would encourage workers to form trade unions.

4.1.4 The 1932 Coup

On the 24 June 1932 a small conspiratorial group calling itself the People's Party [khana ratsadon] removed the King in a swiftly executed coup thus bringing an end to the world's last surviving absolute monarchy. The significance of the coup, however, has been the subject of some debate within Thai historical studies. For example, it has been argued that:

This group [the People's Party] was comprised of members from three bureaucratic groups; 23 of them in the army, 14 in the navy and 24 in the civilian bureaucracy. It executed the coup without any mass support and was essentially a counter-elite group against that of the princes and senior bureaucratic elites which ruled Siam under the absolute monarchical system. Thus, the coup merely brought about a significant shift in the alignment of power within the urban based elite groups without the radical changes in class relations that are normally associated with revolutions in Western history [Samudavanija, 1982:6].

This perception of significance of the events of June 1932 is untenable for two main reasons. First, in arguing that the coup represented merely a realignment of power within the urban based elite, Samudavanija fails to appreciate the longer term implications of the overthrow of the monarchy, that is, the defeat of sakdina economic and political principles with the logic of capitalism being more fully brought to bear on the operations of the state apparatus [Hewison, 1989:60,64]. As noted, the absolute state had played a leading role in securing some of the basic historical conditions for the emergence of the capitalist mode of production in Thailand. Yet the emergence of capitalism had brought with it numerous economic, political and social contradictions. In the economic sphere, the absolute monarchs had been rocked by a series of financial crises in 1913, 1919 and 1927 with the effects of the depression beginning to be felt from 1930 onwards. Export earnings had begun to decline in 1929-1930 with peasants being most immediately effected. With a drop in income and unable to repay loans, many peasants were forced off their land. Urban residents were also effected as prices and unemployment began to rise. While initiating budgetary and staff cuts, the government appeared unable to cope with the growing crisis with Prachadhipok admitting that he had no knowledge of economic matters and lamely asked that his mistakes be excused by the Thai people [Barme, 1989:57]. As well as facing questions
pertaining to its management of the economy, the monarchy also had to face calls for political change. As we have seen, calls for political reform had been made since the last decades of the nineteenth century and had become most acute during Wajirawut's reign as the king's luxurious lifestyle had, by the mid 1920's, led the country to the brink of economic crisis. Although, Prachadhipok had initiated a number of reforms such as the appointment of a Supreme Council of State, he had nevertheless shied away from adopting measures which might have led to more fundamental changes to the political system. In short, as Hewison [1989:60] has indicated, the onset of depression had by 1932 'served to highlight the contradictions inherent in an economic and political system based on anachronistic principles and the stage was set for its overthrow'.

Apart from failing to appreciate the longer term implications of the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, Samudavanija also fails to acknowledge the fact that within the complex array of political forces who were engaged in the struggle against absolutism were members of the industrial working class. As we have seen, from the 1923 strike onwards it has been possible to trace the ways in which industrial workers, under Thawat's leadership, gradually came to perceive that their interests would not be advanced by a continuation of absolutism and, indeed, that the absolute state had actually contributed to the continuation of their oppression and exploitation by employers. In the attempt to advance workers' interests, Thawat struck up a relationship with Pridi Phanomyong who, since his return from Europe, had been forging together a coalition of civilian bureaucrats and junior and senior military figures out of which the People's Party was formed [Barme, 1989:56]. Although we know little about the relationship between Thawat and Pridi it appears that they both felt that the future development of the country would best be served by the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. This became apparent when Thawat and members of the Labour Group as well as tramwayworkers actively participated in the events of June 1932. While numerous historians and political scientists have ignored the role played by labour in the change of government, their contributions were, however, not forgotten by Pridi who some fifty years later remembered:

...at the time of Thawat's involvement [in organising the tramway workers] I was still a student in France and before I had returned the tramwaymen had struck. Thawat was the organiser. He had done a good job in establishing the workers. In both the change of government and during the Borawadet rebellion the tramway workers played not an inconsiderable part, the tramwaymen were well aware of themselves [cited in Sangsit, 1986:89].
During the period immediately following the change in government there was an outpouring of grievances among workers. In August 1932, 6,000 rickshaw pullers struck for five days in the attempt to secure a reduction in the rents charged for their vehicles. In the same month women workers in a Thonburi textile factory protested over a reduction in their wages. In September the long running dispute within the tramway company erupted once again [see below]. This was followed over subsequent months by strikes involving cement workers, railway workers, construction labourers, workers employed at the military arsenal and rice-mill workers.[BT 4/8/1932, 28/9/1932, 1/10/1932 Lak Muang 2/10/1932, 5/10/1932, 18/10/1932, N.A R7-R8 2k/20, R7-R8 2k/30 R7-R8 2k/60, BTWM 21/8/1933, 18/9/1933, 5/10/1933, 21/12/1933, 20/12/1933, see also, information contained in Thompson [1947:239-240], Mabry [1979:40], Damri and Carun [1986:30-31] and Hewison [1989:65]. It was during this period of heightened industrial protest that the first legally recognised working class organisation was formed in Thailand.

The Thai Tramwaymen's Association (T.T.A.) was formed during the course of yet another strike within the Siam Electric Company. As we have seen, disputes within the company over wages, bonuses and the rules and regulations date back at least to the late 1890's. It appears that the company had been able to keep a lid on its employees protests through the latter half of the 1920's; however, in September 1932 another dispute arose following the company's dismissal of four employees. The company was apparently well prepared for trouble as it had hired police to guard the workshops and had recruited former employees to ensure that tram services would be maintained [Lak Muang 2/10/1932]. Thawat formed a committee and attempted to negotiate a settlement with the company. The directors of the SEC refused to recognise the workers and claimed that, in fact, there was no real dispute and that Thawat and others were simply inciting the men to strike [BT 28/9/1932]. Thawat immediately asked that the government intervene in the dispute. He also approached the Police Commissioner and asked for permission to have the tramwaymen's association legally registered. Amidst growing public speculation the newly formed government made two important decisions. First, it gave the men permission to establish their own
association and second, it encouraged them to look to the government for assistance in future disputes [Thompson, 1947:240].

Amidst great pomp and ceremony the T.T.A. was officially opened in October 1932. During the festivities a message from the Minister of Interior was read out in which he stated:

The ideal of this society is to promote harmony in the ranks of Siamese nationals. It is the first association of Siamese workers and hence all the members are asked to preserve the ideal stated above. Co-operation is a very important thing in effecting success in an undertaking. Please remember that we are Siamese and have established a permanent association in Siam. We should behave ourselves well and with good intentions to our party, nation and country. We should not do anything unjust or against the public peace.

In reply Thawat outlined what he saw to be the principal aims of the association as follows:

This tramwaymen's association is the first labour association to come into lawful existence in Siam. Its aims lie in the training of the good moral character of the members; in exchanging knowledge; in promoting happiness, pleasure and health; in assisting aged and crippled members; and teaching members to exercise economy. The results to be expected from such ideals will also go to benefit the country at large. This association is one for those who have little and has been newly born into this world with such tears and endeavours combined. There are many things to show unity of heart on the part of members who brought about the success of the enterprise by sheer sacrifice on their part. The wives of a good many tried to commit suicide but were timely saved. Such a rash action on their part was brought about by worry and anxiety. Some of the wives ran away from their husbands when they thought they would not receive happiness should they continue to live with them. There was an occasion when a tical was badly required to pay for something in regard to the association...There are many more instances of sacrifice on the part of the promoters. Their endeavours were crowned with success, and the government sanctioned their application to have the association registered. They all thoroughly appreciate the kindness of the government in this respect [BT 17/10/1932].

Of the 1,000 workers employed by the SEC, 700 applied for membership of the T.T.A [Lak Muang 12/10/1932]. Thawat was elected president with Klin Thong and Chaeom Antrasen elected vice-president and secretary respectively. In addition, an administrative committee of twenty five members was also appointed.5

5 Another important figure present at the opening ceremony of the T.W.A. was Prince Sakol (Momchao Sakol Wanakon Warawan) [1888-1953]. Popularly known as the 'Red Prince',
Over subsequent months the T.T.A. played a leading role in representing workers' interests in both the industrial and wider political arenas. In the area of industry the association offered support and advice for workers who were involved in struggles for better wages and conditions. Most significantly, Thawat emphasised that the association was formed to represent all workers regardless of their ethnic background. This point requires further discussion.

Past writers have generally simply accepted as fact that ethnic differences between Thai and Chinese workers impeded their mobilisation along class lines. As Skinner [1957:238-239] notes, strikes and other forms of protest were either 'solely Chinese matters, or else solely Thai'. Although it is true that ethnic barriers did serve to complicate the process of class formation, scholars have generally failed to reflect upon the ways in which first, the ethnic identities of 'Thai' and 'Chinese' were historically constructed and second, how the differences between Thai and Chinese were actively encouraged and promoted in ways which were precisely aimed toward limiting solidarity along class lines. These points require further clarification.

Generally speaking, past writers have regarded 'Thai' and 'Chinese' ethnic identities to be innate rather than subject to historical transformation. As Stanzon [1985:2] has stressed, however, 'ethnicity is not a constant ascribed trait inherited from the past, but is rather the result of a process which continues to unfold constantly being reformulated by all the agents involved'. Some attention has already be given to the construction of a specifically Thai ethnic identity. As part of the development of a 'selective tradition' we have briefly touched upon the role of Wajirawut in elaborating what it meant to be a member of the Thai nation. In essence, to be a Thai it was necessary to display loyalty to the King, Nation and Religion. All Thais, it was argued, possessed certain rights and duties, which if performed correctly, would ensure that the Thai nation would survive and attain the status of other civilised and progressive nations. Significantly, as an aid in helping him define what it meant to be a Thai, Wajirawut sought to contrast certain specific characteristics of Thai identity with characteristics of people from other nations. In doing so he often sought to provide clear contrasts between Thai and Chinese.

As Anderson [1983:94] has indicated the target of Wajirawut's nationalism was:

...neither the United Kingdom which controlled 90% of Siam's trade, nor France, which had recently made off with

Sakol was educated at Cambridge where he says became a socialist after joining the Fabian Society [Bangkok Post,20/3/1950]. Over subsequent years, he held a number of senior positions within various government department and did much to promote the interests of labour [Bp 23/6/1953].
Anderson [1983:94-95] suggests that there were three main reasons for Wajirawut's attack on the Chinese. First, as noted previously, just prior to his coronation in November 1910, the growing economic power of the Chinese had been abundantly clear with the outbreak of a general strike; second, with the fall of the Celestial Monarchy in Peking the following year, the Chinese 'appeared as harbingers of a populat republicanism profoundly threatening to the dynastic principle'; and third, through his British education, Wajirawut had 'imbibed the particular racism of the English ruling class'. However, it should be noted that the distinctions which Wajirawut was fostering between Thai and Chinese were not entirely new. For example, during the reign of Mongkut any Thai caught smoking opium was punished by having to wear a queue and pay the Chinese poll-tax 'on the theory that by picking up the Chinese vice he forfeited all claims to good standing as a Thai' [Skinner,1957:121]. Another example of the way in which distinctions between Thai and Chinese were manifest was in the process of registration. While all Thai males were tattooed, the Chinese, on the other hand, had to pay a head tax, the collection of which 'carried an aura of contempt and degradation'. Upon payment of the tax the Chinese immigrant was obliged to wear a sealed cord attached to the wrist which had to be shown to the police on request. Apparently any Chinese who did not display this seal was arrested and it was stated that 'there is nothing the Siamese policeman so much enjoys as leading some unfortunate Chinaman to pay the tax' [Skinner,1957:147-148]. As Skinner [1957:148] observes 'All in all the tiennial tax, in the details of its collection and enforcement, was hardly designed to develop mutual respect between Chinese and Thai'.

Significantly, there also existed a class dimension to the treatment of the Chinese in Thailand. This is reflected in the fact that the leading members of the Chinese community were given the opportunity to participate 'at the court and in government administration to a surprising degree during the nineteenth century' [Skinner,1957:148]. This is not the place to detail the various ways in which the Thai ruling class through intermarriage, co-operation in business ventures and enobling certain Chinese, managed to contain the challenge which the most powerful members in the Chinese community may have posed to their rule. Here it will merely suffice to point out that by the end of the nineteenth century the selective treatment of the immigrants had led to a distinction being made between two categories of Chinese in
Thailand, that of *cek* or lower class Chinese, and *ciin* or gentleman Chinese. It is important to recognise this distinction for it was the former category of Chinese against whom Wajirawut launched his most scathing attacks. In his infamous article 'Jews of the Orient' the King, writing under the pen name Asawaphahu, stated:

For the sake of money the Chinese are willing to suffer starvation and every form of hardship, as anyone could see for himself. Anyone who takes the trouble to watch Chinese coolies at their meal could not fail to be amazed, for their fare would not tempt a hungry street cur. As for their lodgings, it is most amazing to find what a large number could pack into a tiny place. No other people on earth could live in such lodgings and not suffocate. There is really no wonder at all that Chinese coolies could easily monopolise all labour, for they are satisfied with ridiculously small pay and thrive on it because they have discovered the art of living on nothing...There is absolutely nothing the Chinese will not do for the sake of money. No labour is too mean or degrading for them to perform providing they get money for it. Where money is concerned, the Chinese are utterly without morals, without conscience, without mercy, without pity. They will cheat with a smile at their own cleverness, and rob and murder with utter callousness for the sake of getting a few more dollars. In the pursuit of money, the Chinese are fiendishly clever at devising schemes, be it fraud, robbery or piracy [Asawaphahu, 1985:79-80].

While this passage is interesting for the light it sheds on the conditions under which Chinese lived and worked, two points need to be noted. First, it should be recognised that the principal target of the king's attack is on the Chinese labouring classes and second, despite the crucial contributions which they were making to the development of the Thai economy, it is important to appreciate the way in which this category of Chinese are being depicted as being a threat to the Thai nation. It was this image then, of the immoral, dirty, money hungry, theiving, murderous, scheming and totally undesirable Chinese which was presented to the Thai audience. Clearly, this highly selective stereo-typical description of 'Chinese' would have promoted feelings of great antipathy if not outright hatred between Chinese and Thai. Such divisions were further promoted when, for example, Thai workers were brought in to help break up the 1928 boycott of Japanese goods.

In the above discussion it has been shown how the Thai state contributed to the development of an ideology of ethnicity and how ethnic differences were fostered and promoted in ways which were precisely aimed toward limiting solidarity along class lines. Having made this points we will now be in a position to appreciate the

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6 In fact, in 1919 a proposal was made to separate Chinese *cek* from other passengers (including *ciin*) on public transport. It was stated that *cek* are 'unseemly and have a host of bad habits' [BTWM 8/9/1919].
significance of Thawat's commitment to struggle for the interests of all workers, an
commitment which he put into practice during the course of the 1934 rice mill strike.

In early January 1934 a major strike erupted among Chinese rice-mill coolies. Previously the men had been by paid by the mill owners after they had transported the paddy to the mill. This payment was known as tail or book money and represented a sum over and above the amount the men received in regular wages. The mill owners claimed that, due to a fall in trade, they could no longer pay the coolies the standard rate of three baht per kwien and promptly reduced the rate to 60 satang. The workers protested over the reduction but the mill owners remained firm. A strike ensued which led to the closure of mills all over the Chaophraya river. The police intervened and attempted to keep some of the mills in operation. The workers appealed to the T.T.A for assistance and Thawat immediately sent letters to Prime Minister Pahol and the Director General of Police questioning the legality of police interference. The police were subsequently instructed to refrain from becoming further involved in the strike. [BTWM 3/2/1934]. The strike remained unresolved and continued through March and April, becoming increasingly violent as the millers hired gangsters to attack the striking workers. Eventually, the government moved to restore law and order [BTWM 1/4/1934]. Seven of the strike leaders were arrested an subsequently deported and Thawat was charged for allowing the premises of the T.T.A to be used for meetings of the striking workers [F.O 371/19375]. Although ending in defeat, the strike represents the first clear example of an attempt by Thai and Chinese workers to overcome ethnic barriers in order to co-operate along class lines.

Following the coup, the People's Party took a number of initial steps aimed toward the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in Thailand. Originally, the party nominated a National Assembly of seventy members who in turn chose Phraya Manopakon [hereafter Mano] as their leader. Mano appointed fourteen assembly members to act as an executive committee with a cabinet of seven also being appointed [Terweil,1983:332-333]. A constitutional committee was also formed, and by December 1932 a draft constitution had been produced. Initially, the assembly was to consist of half-elected and half-appointed members, and a fully elected representative government was to come into existence within ten years [Wyatt,1984:246]. However, by early 1933 these halting steps toward the establishment of a parliamentary democracy were already under threat as the rift between the constitutionalist and the conservative pro-royalist forces began to widen. The differences between the two groups became further exacerbated in the wake of the presentation of Pridi's economic plan which advocated the nationalisation of the economy. Faced with what they

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7 A kwien represents a weight of approximately 1,000Kgs.
8 See, Barme [1989:59-82] for a detailed account of the politics of this period.
perceived as an increasingly restive group of members, Mano, with the king's approval, prorogued the National Assembly in March 1933 [Terweil,1983:333]. Shortly after, the Assembly was dissolved and political parties were outlawed [Wyatt,1984:247]. In June 1933 the junior military faction within the People's Party staged another coup. However, the conservative forces were not to be thwarted and in October 1933 a full scale rebellion broke out which was only defeated after three weeks of intense fighting [Terweil,1983:334-335; Wyatt,1984:248; N.A. S. 0701, 1/4].

Throughout this period of political turmoil the T.T.A. fully supported the pro-constitutionalist forces. As noted, Thawat had forged particularly close links with Pridi's civilian faction of the People's Party. Pridi was described as the 'natural leader' of workers and when he left for Europe following the furore over his economic plan, large numbers of workers were reported to have seen him off [BTWM 25/9/1933; 28/8/1933]. Indeed it was Thawat's open support of Pridi which may have produced the spark which ignited the Borawadet revolt. Incensed over the king's criticism of Pridi's economic plan, Thawat and three others brought a libel action against the deposed monarch [BTWM 28/9/1933; 2/12/1933]. The action was reported to have '...greatly embittered the king [and] infuriated his followers' [F.O 371/18210:25]. The rebellion broke out a few weeks later on 11 October 1933 and workers were quick to demonstrate their support for the government. Apparently at a meeting held the day the revolt began, law students together with workers from the government aircraft factory, rail workers, docks workers, cement factory labourers, tramway workers and taxi drivers voted to pledge support for the government and offered to act as volunteer troops [N.A. S. 0701.1/4]. In all, it is claimed that 3,000 workers volunteered to fight the rebels [Sangsit,1986:130]. This support came at a crucial time for the government as it faced not only growing public concern over the intensity of the fighting but also charges that it supported 'communism' and that it intended to rid Thailand of its monarch. Prime Minister Pahol acknowledged the workers' support as follows:

The government is extremely thankful that these volunteers of law students and workers have shown their clear support

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9 It was reported [BT 2/12/1933] that later Thawat had apologised to the king for his actions. It was stated that Thawat 'assured his Majesty that the idea of his taking up the leadership of the labourers was not based on any idea of selfish gain on his part. His real intention was to exert himself to the utmost toward assisting the poor and needy to find employment...the constant anxiety of the poor to find rice and curry did not allow them any leisure to embark on political movements...it was possible that these poor folk might have displayed some anger on certain occasions but that was due to the fact that the limit of their endurance had been reached...Nai Thawat was further of the opinion that if assistance could be rendered to farmers it would be a popular policy. What the farmers really wanted was the removal of the middleman and to be placed in direct relationship with the capitalists'. The king accepted Thawat's apology and all charges were subsequently withdrawn.
for the nation, the constitution and the government. The government will seek to ensure that their support is utilised as will benefit the nation [N.A. S. 0701 1/4].

Although some workers asked to become involved in the actual fighting, they were used primarily to help keep public order in Bangkok. Sun Kitcamnnon, who was one of the leading members of the T.T.A., took up a position on one of the bridges which spanned the Chaophraya River where it was said he kept the local population informed of events and urged them to continue to support the government. He was later awarded the Constitutional Medal for services to the nation [Sangsit, 1986:173].

4.2.2 The State and Labour 1932-1934

The activities of industrial workers under the absolute monarchy, their involvement in the 1932 coup and their subsequent struggles in both the industrial and political arenas in the months immediately after the change in government meant that the voice of labour could no longer be simply ignored. The recognition that labour was, in fact, a social force which was and would become an increasingly important part of Thai society is reflected in the way in which state officials responded to workers' struggles during the period 1932-34.

In the first place, the state took some further steps toward a greater involvement in regulating relations within industry. Three points require discussion; first, measures which were taken to relieve unemployment; second, moves which were adopted toward the promulgation of a law for the protection of labour; and finally, the establishment of a administrative mechanism which was to be used to settle disputes between labour and capital.

As noted, unemployment had been growing steadily throughout the last years of the absolute monarchy. State officials had, however, failed to adopt any concrete measures to alleviate the problem. During the period immediately after the coup representatives from the unemployed made numerous appeals to government for assistance [BTWM 18/9/1933; 5/10/1933]. The newly formed government responded to these appeals by enacting legislation which led to the creation of Labour Bureaus. Established under the auspices of the Minister of the Interior, it was reported that by March 1934 almost 2,500 had registered of which 1,828 subsequently found employment [BTWM 21/3/1934]. The government also attempted to exert greater control over private labour bureaus. All private agencies and their records were to be opened to government inspection. In addition, attempts were made to ensure that contracts between employers and employees were made on the basis of free market principles, and the Act prohibited the establishment of employment agencies in hotels,
coffee houses and other places where intoxicated workers may have been lured into signing long term contracts.[Sathian, ND 266-282].

Another important development which marked a growing involvement of the state in regulating relations within industry concerned the renewed discussion over the need for labour legislation. As we have seen, there had been a growing recognition of the need for some form of legislation during the late 1920's. As part of its overall policy to encourage industrial development, the post-1932 government announced that 'it intended to promulgate a labour law on the employment of labour with reference to hours of work and the health and safety of employees'. It was stated that due regard would be paid to both the interests of labour and capital [BTWM 21/9/1933]. Apparently a draft of the proposed legislation was sent to a newly formed labour committee, but there is no further mention of any steps being taken toward promulgation of the law until the later part of the 1930's [FO 371/19375].

The third important development to take place during the immediate post 1932 period was that of the establishment within the Ministry of Economic Affairs of a permanent committee, the aim of which was to 'seek to bring about a reconciliation between employers and employees whenever trouble arises' [BTWM 30/4/1934]. The establishment of the committee followed in the wake of what was reportedly the first major strike to have taken place within the state railways. In January 1934, 800 men employed at the Makasan rail workshops presented the railway authorities with a log of claims demanding wage increases, welfare payments, the provision of free transport to and from work as well as the removal of certain officials from their position [BTWM 20/1/1934; 25/1/1934]. By April the situation had reached a flashpoint and a strike was called. The rail workers seized signal boxes and rail carriages, closed the Yomarat bridge, attacked railway offices and held some officials. The strike only lasted half a day as Prime Minister Pahol quickly moved into settle the dispute.10 The strike served to highlight yet again the economic dislocation which could be caused by striking workers employed in key sectors of the economy, and the government acted quickly to establish a committee which would be given the task of mediating future disputes. Chaired by the Governor of Bangok, the disputes committee was made up of representatives from government, business and labour [FO 371/19375]. As one commentator pointed out:

One may well ask whether a biased body of politicians without any experience in practical administration are qualified to advise the government in future labour disputes. But important though this side of the question is, it is not the main point at issue. The important implication of the

10 The leaders of this strike were Prayong Suthisawang, Hai Suphaphongdon, Yuan Tolaklam and Hoi Cantaprasoet [Damri and Carun,198:32].
appointment is that the government accepts as a fact the existence of a genuine labour problem in Siam [BT 2/5/1934].

The comment is an important one for it captures a significant shift in attitude from the policies and views expressed by the absolute monarchs to those which were beginning to be adopted by the post-1932 regime. As we have seen, during the period of the absolute monarchy, state officials continually denied that any labour problem existed. Although archival documents demonstrate that some state officials were gradually realising that issues such as health and safety in factories did in fact require some attention, the overall thrust of official policy was to push the entire issue of labour away from open public debate. This was a stance which the post-1932 regime rejected. The many struggles which had taken place within industry, labour's participation in the 1932 coup, and the Bowadet rebellion meant that their grievances could no longer be ignored. This recognition of labour representing a force in its own right was also amply demonstrated by the government allowing Thawat and his supporters to legally establish their own organisation. Again this represents a significant change from the days of the absolute monarchy where the entire thrust of state policy was designed to repress attempted organisation among workers. Within the new political environment, however, labour was granted the right to openly organise and, as the events of October 1933 demonstrate, the support of workers was eagerly sought after by the pro-constitutionalist elements within Thai politics.

In sum, the 1932-34 period was an important time for labour. After being severely repressed under the absolute monarchy, the immediate post-1932 period provided workers with new hope as they participated in struggles for better wages and conditions, attempted to overcome ethnic barriers, and struggled for the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. This period of open industrial and political militancy was, however, short lived. As noted above, in his attempt to bridge ethnic differences, Thawat's involvement in the 1934 rice mill strike had ultimately led to his arrest on charges of violating the rules of the T.W.A. In May 1934 the association was officially dissolved [FO 371/19375]. Almost immediately another association was formed, The Association for Support of Labourers [Samakhom Anukun Kammakon]. With membership drawn from tramway workers, rickshaw pullers, cargo boat coolies, rice mill workers and barbers, the aim of the new association was reportedly to have been to 'provide a broader base for the activities of the labour leaders than that which existed in the Tramway Worker's Association' [FO 371/19375]. This new organisation also became embroiled in the rice mill strike and, following the deportation of 7 of the strike leaders, the reputation of the association as being able to effectively represent the interests of workers was said to have been badly undermined. It too was dissolved shortly thereafter.[FO 371/19375].
4.3 Labour Under Military Rule 1934-1944

Following the brief period of intense industrial and political militancy which occurred during the period June 1932-June 1934, workers' struggles, for reasons to be discussed in more detail below, tended to disappear from public view for the remainder of the 1930's. Strikes, did, however, continue to take place [BT 29/9/1938, 2/8/1939] and there were additional attempts made to co-ordinate struggles by labour. For example, following the demise of the T.W.A and the Labour Support Group, a group of Thai, Chinese, Sino-Thai and Vietnamese workers attempted to re-establish a labour organisation in 1935 [Damri and Carun, 1986:33]. Moreover, in 1937, a group of transport workers attempted to sponsor their own candidate to run in elections for the National Assembly [BTWM 11/9/1937]. Nevertheless, as far as scholarship is concerned, the activities of workers during the 1930's and early 1940's remains largely a topic to be examined on the basis of future empirical research. In this section, however, the aim will be to discuss some important developments which took place during this period. First, the state's further entry into regulating relations within industry and second, the steps taken by the state which laid the foundations for changing the ethnic composition of the industrial workforce.

4.3.2 The State and Industrial Relations

While industrial conflict tended to recede from public view from the mid 1930's onwards, some important developments did occur with regard to the state's growing involvement in regulating relations within industry. As we have seen, in the period immediately after the June 1932 coup, the state adopted measures to regulate

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11 The report stated that, 'In recent months there has been a growing up among the labouring population in Siam—particularly in Bangkok—a political consciousness which has found expression in the desire to be represented in the Assembly. And, for this purpose, there has sprung up what has been euphoniously termed the "Winged Wheel Group", comprising the drivers of public vehicles in Bangkok, who have collected funds from among themselves in order to support a candidate of their own choice, one to be sponsored by them at the forthcoming election. The surprise, however, does not lie in the fact of its occurrence, but rather in the awakening of labour to a sense of its own importance and responsibility, thus showing that in Siam, as elsewhere, the democratic principle has been well established [BTWM 11/9/1937].
employment, establish a formal mechanism to handle disputes between labour and capital as well as stating that it intended to promulgate a series of labour laws. Starting from the mid-1930's onwards there were renewed discussions over labour legislation. In 1936, in a speech to the National Assembly, the member from Nong Khai argued that there existed a pressing need for the promulgation of a law which would cover such areas as working hours, annual leave, the employment of women and children and the provision of compensation for sick or injured workers. He argued that this legislation was necessary in order to prevent:

...capitalists holding money to be their god, or to be more precious than human life, or the welfare of human beings. [to prevent them from utilising] money as a means of indirect power brought to bear on labourers who are placed in a position of having to obey orders, because if they do not do so they will have nothing to subsist on. To force them to work outside the proper time or to put them to excessive work till their health becomes affected, such as sick people or pregnant women who should be allowed to rest...if...labourers do not work they won't have anything to eat...because their employers do not pay them any allowance on days that they fail to attend to their duties, or perhaps they are discharged altogether and new hands are engaged as their substitutes...that being so they are obliged to work although sick, or about to give birth to a child. That is going against human nature and moreover when labourers unnecessarily over exert themselves in that manner such trends tend to endanger their offspring...The capitalist constitutes a strength in effecting progress of the country and if, through their assistance and kindness, the labourers under them are encouraged to consider their occupations as a veritable pillar of support, they will become strong of heart and render a higher ration of service to their employers...[The labourers]...constitute a backbone to the capitalists in bringing economic wealth to them and when capitalists are rich in economic wealth such wealth is also derived by the country. Once the country is wealthy it may utilise its wealth in bringing about progress and advancement in other directions as well. It is up to the country, therefore, to promote the status and welfare of the labourers as much as possible so that the capitalists and the country may reap more benefits through the actions of the labourers [BTWM 18/9/1936].

The proposed legislation called on the government to ensure a decent standard of living for workers, the provision of compensation and limiting the working week to forty hours. In his response the Minister for Economic Affairs stated that, while he generally approved of the proposed legislation, the government was not in a position to pass the Bill because 'it might not be right in Siam to enforce rights such as were adopted in some other country. If unsuitably applied, such things might generally affect the national economics' [BTWM 18/9/1936]. The Minister went on to add that
before any comprehensive labour legislation could be passed, it was necessary that the government have a more thorough knowledge of the present state of Thai industry and the various conditions of workers. He added that the government had, in fact, recently established a committee which would begin investigating these matters. A vote was promptly taken and the proposed Bill was defeated by 45 votes to 7.

The following year the government introduced its own Labour Bill which aimed to give it the authority to collect data on labour conditions which could be used for the development of future policies [Nikom, 1983:20; Damri and Carun, 1986:28]. In introducing the Bill, the Minister of economic affairs stated that:

...the Bill was merely intended to give the government authority to obtain statistics concerning the number of people employed as labourers all over the kingdom, their average earning capacity, the standard of living, housing conditions and other data which would be useful to the government in assisting labour to be raised to the same level and status as labour in other parts of the world. It was the government's intention to appoint a committee to make these investigations because employers would not provide such statistics, unless legally impelled to do so [BTWM 1/3/1937].

After some further debate the Bill was passed and by the middle of the same month it was reported that the government had set in motion the necessary machinery to obtain the required information [BTWM 19/3/1937]. Over the following years there were other attempts to have labour legislation passed in the National Assembly, however, on each occasion the proposed Bills were defeated [Damri and Carun, 1986:142; BTWM 10/1/1938]. In 1939 a Factory Act was finally promulgated [Democracy 17/11/1946] but due to the lack of adequate administrative support and staff to police the Act, workers continued to remain largely unprotected within industry. Although nothing substantial was achieved, these developments were significant in that they were indicative of a growing, albeit rather haphazard, state involvement in entering more directly into industry and regulating relations between labour and capital. Apart from this growing involvement in industrial relations, another important development to have occurred during the later part of the 1930's relates to the steps which were taken to promote the greater participation of Thais within industry. In order to understand the background to these changes, it will be appropriate to comment briefly on developments which were taking place within the sphere of politics during these years.
4.3.3 Labour and Hypernationalism

As Hewison [1989b:61] observes, the 1932 coup marked a 'curious period in the class history of Thailand' in that no single class or class fraction was able to achieve political dominance. As a result, the period from 1932 onwards was a time of 'intense manoeuvring amongst political powerful groups and class fractions, as they attempted to further their own interests through the agency of the state, in the quest for dominance'. Girling [1981:106] has written that the Pahon years [1934-38] was a period of 'stabilisation'. Barme [1989:90] notes, however, the stability of Pahon's administration was based on 'control over the modern weapons of war such as tanks and machine guns rather than consent' Censorship was legalised, communism was banned and political parties were outlawed. These restrictive conditions had an immediate impact on labour. As noted, after the demise of the T.W.A and the Labour Support Group, another attempt to foster the development of an organised labour movement was made in 1935. All those involved were arrested and charged under the 1933 Anti-Communist Act. Henceforth, organised labour was forced underground [Damri and Carun,1986:33].

The severe constraints placed on open political activity were reinforced further with the rise to power of Phibun Songkhram [hereafter Phibun]. Coming to political prominence following the key role he played in crushing the Bowadet rebellion, Phibun had served as deputy commander-in-chief of the Thai army during the Pahon years. Assuming the position of Prime Minister in mid-December 1938 Phibun was to take Thai politics in new directions. With his admiration of the authoritarian regimes of Germany Japan and Italy widely known, Phibun initiated steps toward the creation of a similar type of authoritarian order in Thailand in which the state was to become increasingly involved 'in all aspects areas of Siam's economic, social and cultural life' [Barme,1989:117 see also, Terweil,1980; Girling,1981:106-107; Batson,1985:221-25]. In the attempt to legitimise his rule, Phibun launched a massive program of 'hypernationalism' [Barme,1989:117-156]]. Taking over and selectively redefining the official nationalist discourse first developed by Wajirawut, Phibun with the assistance

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12 Thailand's first anti-communist law came into force on 2 April 1933. Under the law communism was defined as 'Any doctrine which supports or promotes the nationalisation of land or industry or capital and labour'. Directed in the first instance against Pridi and those who supported his Economic Plan, the Act stated that 'Any person who is the head, or manager or official of any association, whether secret or otherwise, the purpose of which is to support or promote communists or communism will be decreed in breach of the law and will face a penalty of not more than 10 years imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 5,000 baht. Any person who is a member of such an organisation will be decreed to be in breach of the law and will face a penalty of not more than 5 years imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 1,000 baht [Sathian, ND:9-11]. From 1933 to 1946 991 people were arrested under the terms of the law [BP 19/10/1946].
of Luang Wichit Wathakan, sought to promote 'nation-building' and emphasise the 'Thai-ness of Siam' [Batson, 1985:227]. In the present context it would be impossible to give a detailed account of this period of massive ideological mobilisation. It will be appropriate, however, to examine some of the measures which the state adopted which aimed to oust the Chinese from their dominance over wage-labour.

The dominance which the Chinese exercised over the Thai economy in general and over wage-labour positions in particular, had long posed problems for state officials. Although the absolute monarchs had been able to derive huge benefits from Chinese immigration, the growing hold which the immigrants came to exercise over the Thai economy, combined with the development of Chinese nationalism, had led to a situation where the Chinese were perceived to represent a threat to the state. As noted, the danger which this economically powerful and increasingly ethnically aware community posed to the stability of the Thai political and social order was clearly revealed during the course of the 1910 general strike, an event which Skinner [1957:155] argues effectively launched the 'Chinese Problem' in Thailand. By the end of Wachirawut's reign the Chinese population in Thailand approximated ten percent of a total population of 8.3 million [Barme, 1989:23] With an increasing number of Chinese women immigrating to Thailand, the further development of republican and communist ideas and a demonstrated willingness to implement trade boycotts the Chinese 'began to appear to Siamese eyes not only as transient profitees but as an increasingly unassimiable bloc in the country' [Thompson, 1947:227].

From the early 1920's onwards, state officials were urged to initiate measures which would eventually lead to a replacement of Chinese workers by Thais. For example, in 1923 the Bangkok Times Weekly Mail stated that:

'It has been proved repeatedly that in the saw mill or the rice mill here the Siamese workman has no chance of fair treatment. There is, in fact, a great lack of proper work for the Siamese workmen [BTWM 13/8/1923].

The following year the same paper suggested that the state should act to curb Chinese immigration 'in order to protect the national interest' [BTWM 17/3/924]. At the beginning of the Seventh Reign one commentator, in outlining some of the future policies which he thought the new monarch should adopt suggested that, 'an attempt must be made to encourage Thais into commerce and manual labour' [BTWM 21/5/1925]. Renewed calls for the replacement of Chinese labour with Thai were made after the 1928 boycott of Japanese goods with the Bangkok Times insisting that:

...real efforts [must] be made to stimulate the growth of a Siamese working class. Such a class would act and react on
the Chinese, who now hold a monopoly of the labour market [BT,28/5/1928]

In an initial response to these appeals, the idea of establishing a Labour Bureau was canvassed. The object of this government instrumentality was to 'promote a gradually increasing participation of Siamese nationals in all activities within the Kingdom' [NA R 7 Ph 13/1]. However, it appears no definite steps were made to create such a bureau. The government did in fact promulgate an immigration law which gave it the authority to impose quotas and set immigration fees at levels which could discourage further large scale immigration. However, as Batson [1984:85] notes 'the law was only lightly applied and appeared to have only a limited impact'. As Batson [1985:85] further notes the 'only argument made against restricting Chinese immigration was the dependence of Siam's economy upon Chinese labour'. Given the fact that no effective measures were taken to limit immigration, it appears that this was an argument which held sway, at least, during the last years of the absolute monarchy.

More concrete steps to restrict Chinese immigration and encourage Thais into wage labouring positions were adopted after the change in government. Not surprisingly, the first attempt to place restrictions on certain occupations followed in the wake of the 1934 rice mill strike. In 1935-36 a series of laws were passed requiring rice mills to employ a minimum of fifty percent Thai workers [Skinner,1957:219]. In 1937 immigration fees were raised to two hundred baht, a move which Thompson notes[1947:228] only stimulated a 'great increase in the number of Chinese smuggled into Siam'. More effective measures to oust Chinese from their grip over the economy came after Phibun became Prime Minister.

As noted briefly above, during his first term as Prime Minister [1938-1944], launched an ambitious program to 'build the nation'. Integral to this program were the steps which the Prime Ministers and his advisors adopted to 'Thai-ify' the economy by placing restrictions on the activities of Chinese and Western business interests. As Hewson notes [1989:71]:

Most restrictions, however, struck at the Chinses petty bourgeoisie, small traders and workers, leaving the larger capitalists relatively unscathed. Occupational restrictions did not severely restrict Chinese capital, but were designed to move Thai nationals into certain occupations.

Between 1939 and 1942 a series of laws were passed which restricted certain jobs to Thai nationals. In April 1939 the Thai Vehicles Act required that taxi drivers be Thai. In the same year private and public industry was required to employ at least seventy five per cent Thai workers. In 1942 another twenty seven occupations were specifically reserved for Thais and through the Occupational and Professional
Assistance Act additional requirements were made to ensure that factories employed Thai labour [Thompson,1947:264].

First, they laid the foundations for a gradual transformation in the ethnic makeup of the Thai industrial working class, thus bringing workers more fully under the political and ideological control of the Thai state.\(^{13}\) Second, by offering Thais greater access to wage labouring positions the government was clearly attempting to win the support of the Thai working class. Finally, the emphasis given to nation building and the construction of Thai identity combined with anti-Chinese rhetoric, further promoted and fostered ethnic differences among industrial workers. As will discussed in the following chapter, the post-war labour movement placed great emphasis on the need to overcome the ethnic differences which had been encouraged during the 1938-1944 period.

4.4 Summary

Two quotations from the work of Virginia Thompson [1947:243] typify hitherto widely held academic perceptions of the historical importance of labour prior to the Second World War.

Apart from white collar unemployment and a few anti-Japanese boycotts, other types of labour problems were virtually unknown under the absolute monarchy. In general the people accepted whatever their superiors chose to deal out to them [Thompson 1947:239].

And, even during the period immediately after World War Two, Thai workers were:

...only beginning to show an interest in the improvement of working conditions in their country and in their status as compared with that of workers in foreign lands. Generally speaking, labor in Siam remains almost wholly unorganised and without political representation or consciousness [Thompson,1947:243]

The data assembled in this chapter has demonstrated that these views cannot be sustained on empirical grounds. Some of the main points to be noted are as follows:

(1) Struggles over the establishment of a norm for the working day continued to develop. Rather than simply accepting whatever their superiors chose to deal out to

\(^{13}\) The occupational restrictions initiated during this period which laid the basis for a change in the ethnic composition of the industrial working class were buttressed further by restrictions placed on Chinese immigration after World War Two as well as additional occupational restriants placed on Chinese during the 1950's [Skinner,1957:177-178; Mabry,1979:45].
them, both Thai and Chinese workers demonstrated a willingness and ability to challenge the authority of their employers in their attempt to secure higher wages and an improvement in their working conditions.

(2) The process of co-ordinating and organising these struggles by industrial workers continued to develop under the leadership of Thawat and the labour group. On the industrial front, this small group of organisers remained committed to advancing the interests of workers by offering advice, support and welfare benefits. In the wider sphere of politics, it has been demonstrated this nascent labour movement joined with other social forces which were struggling for the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in Thailand. The significance of labour's contributions to this struggle is demonstrated by workers' participation in both the 1932 coup and the Borawadet rebellion.

(3) Except for a brief period between 1932 and 1934, the state responded to the development of the labour movement largely through repression. Arrest and imprisonment, deportation, restrictions of the right to strike, freedom of the press and freedom of association are examples of repressive measures which constrained the development of labour. Apart from drawing attention to this pattern of repression, some emphasis has been given to tracing the way in the state was gradually being drawn into regulating relations within industry. Based on a growing realisation that workers did, in fact, possess some legitimate grievances, state officials began the process of developing labour legislation.
Chapter Five

CLASS FORMATION:
1944-1957

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show that industrial workers continued to make significant contributions to Thai, industrial, political and social life during the decade after World War Two. The further development of the labour movement and the various ways in which the state attempted to shape and constrain this development will be examined. For discussion purposes the 1944-1947 period will be divided into three sub-periods, 1944-1947, 1947-1955 and 1955-1957.

Period One 1944-1947

5.1.1 The Labour Movement 1944-1947

The war years had seen not only a growth in the size of the industrial working class, but also a dramatic lowering in the standard of their work and living conditions. As supplies from both Europe and the United States had been cut, there had been a shortage of many goods, prices had risen sharply and black markets had appeared in the wake of the government's attempt to institute rationing. Toward the end of the war allied air raids had damaged many factories, shops and buildings and power supplies had been cut for long periods. Urban residents were most severely effected as they faced food shortages, rampant inflation and a difficulty in obtaining vital commodities such as medical supplies [Batson, 1985:229-230]. Apart from a lowering in the standard of living, workers faced what was described as 'appalling conditions in workshops and manufacturing plants' [BP 13/11/1946] with one I.L.O advisor claiming that overall 'labour conditions in Siam [were] far worse than those existing in Malaya, Ceylon and South Africa [Democracy 2/9/1946]. Under these conditions of economic deterioration, social dislocation and harsh working conditions, there emerged a widespread eruption of struggles over the working day. In early 1945 Thai tobacco workers struck and demanded wage increases and better working conditions, and over the following eighteen months there was a spate of protests and demonstrations among rice mill workers, dock workers, railway workers and oil workers. Between 1946-47, 168 strikes were recorded with 109 reported to have taken place in 1947 alone [BP 21/6/1948]. This renewed radicalism and outpouring of
grievances among industrial workers was, in part, the product of renewed attempts to organise workers, a process which had been going on since the early 1940's.

As discussed in the previous chapter, organised labour virtually disappeared from public view during the mid 1930's. While it appears that small and informal workers' organisations continued to exist at individual factories and manufacturing sites, the demise of the T.T.A and subsequently the Labour Support Group had signalled the end of attempts to mould these isolated labour groups into a organised labour movement. However, this situation began to change when in 1940, a group of students from some of Bangkok's leading schools began to organise a series of study and discussion sessions. Originally, this small group of students met to discuss domestic political issues as well as to keep abreast of events which were taking place in Asia and Europe. When, toward the end of 1941, a Japanese invasion of Thailand appeared to be imminent, the students decided to establish a number of 'labour associations' [samakhom kammakon ], the aim of which was to mobilise workers against the Japanese. A number of these associations were established at the Bangkok docks, in various tobacco factories, at the Makasan railway workshop, in breweries and the largest rice and saw mills. [Sangsit,1986:147-155].

In 1942 Si Anuthai, one of the students from the original study group, established a Labourers' Welfare Association [Samakhom Songkhro Kammakon ] at the tobacco factory at Bangkhaen . The association aimed to provide assistance for sick or injured workers. Apparently, this became a model form of organisation and similar associations were established among water transport workers, rice mill workers and tramway and railway workers.[Sangsit,1986:147-155]. By the end of the war 23 of these associations had combined to form themselves into a larger body called the Workers Welfare Associaton of Bangkok (W.W.A.B.) [Samakhom Kamakon Songkhro Krungthep ]. After registering with the Office for National Culture in late 1945, this new organisation expanded its activities and began organising other groups of rice and saw mill workers, dock and port labourers, railway workers and printers. In the middle of 1946 the W.W.A.B.changed its name and became known as the Association of United Trade Workers of Bangkok (A.U.T.W.B) [Samakhom Sahachiwa Kammakon Nakhon Krungthep ]. Aiming to improve wages and working conditions, this new association applied for and received permission for registration in November 1946. The A.U.T.W.B held its first major rally on 1 January 1946. In an article titled 'Striking Proof of Unity' a journalist from the Democracy newspaper described the scene as follows:

Over ten thousand workers, men and women, attended a rally at the Pramane ground. The rally was held under the
auspices of the United Trade Unions of Bangkok. The hammer and sickle, signs of the communist party, were prominently displayed on flags in a sea of old Siamese and Chinese flags...As the hour drew near for the meeting, the crowd of workers became so great that even the road around the ground itself was filled...The president of the UTUB called for unity among all the workers to fight against capitalism. He warned them to be aware of inciters and instigators who would cause trouble and disagreement among them...Prince Sakol was then invited to address the crowd and was received with loud and enthusiastic applause. Even though he used rather classical language which was difficult for the workers to understand, they gave loud 'chaiyos' all the time he was speaking...Prince Sakol stated that he feared the future path of labour might not be very smooth. He was of the opinion, however, that if they maintained their unity such as they had shown on this occasion there was not much to fear. He warned them against machinations which might cause disagreements and trouble amongst them. The mass rally ended in peace and order, with all the workers dispersing to their factories and working places amidst singing [Democracy 3/1/1947]

A week later the Democracy followed up its account of the rally with an editorial which captured the growing sense of unity and solidarity which was taking place within the ranks of industrial workers at the time:

There was a remarkable unity among all ranks of workers. No one who has the interest of this country at heart can feel anything but gratification at the spirit shown by the workers. There are of course many who cannot think of workers as a class without associating them with communism and the hammer and sickle. It is true communism has been identified with the workers of the world to some extent, but this is because it seeks to establish uniform conditions for all workers. Hence, its appeal to them. The political aspect of communism need not be feared, for after all workers only ask for what they should get by right-fair wages, a comfortable standard of living and adequate safeguards in their old age. The mass rally last week has shown that Bangkok's workers, and we can assume Siam's workers too, are primarily concerned in bettering their lot. It must be admitted that this country is lagging behind very much in the matter of assuring better conditions for workers. So far they have been inarticulate, but it is a good sign that they are approaching their problems in a realistic, and not a revolutionary manner. It would be wise for the government to take cognisance of this and on their own initiative to plan schemes for improving the lot of workers...There is far too wide a gap in this country between the working class and what we may term the leisured class of wealthy people. The

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1 This is a mistranslation. The term sahaphapraegngan [trade union] was not used until after the 1956 Labour Act was promulgated. All workers groups prior to this were known as associations [samakhom].
latter roll along in luxurious ease, entertain on a lavish scale and look down almost with contempt on their less fortunately placed brothers and sisters. The workers are the ones who feel the pinch at the present time most. It is they who have to work desperately hard to make ends meet. They are the ones who have to do much with little. It is high time that they too partook of whatever prosperity there is evident. It does not require political ideologies to prove this. It is pure common sense that the man who produces the goods...should get a fair share of the profits. And the workers of Bangkok have come out with a praiseworthy three point programme. They want improved conditions, they aim at Sino-Siamese amity and the progress of Siam. That is what all of us hope for. And it is a safe bet that Sino-Siamese amity can best be cemented between the workers of both communities. They have much in common. And they have hit the nail on the head when they say they want the prosperity of Siam. It is in their hands and we should recognise this fact. The more satisfied workers are, the better they will work and so guarantee the quickest possible return to normalcy.

The stated aims of the AUTWB was to basically improve working conditions for all workers and, in particular, to forge greater co-operation between Thai and Chinese workers. In April 1947, the AUTWB hosted a conference at which representatives of workers from Bangkok, Thonburi and provincial centres met with a view to establish a national labour federation. As a result of these deliberations there emerged the Association of United Trade Workers of Thailand [Samakhom Sahachiwa Kammakon Haeng Prathet Thai ] which has become commonly known simply as the Central Labour Union (CLU). The CLU, the first labour organisation in Thai history which aimed to represent workers interests on a national scale, immediately began to organise celebrations for Labour Day and on 1 May 1947 over seventy thousand were reported to have attended the festivities:

Nai Thenthai Apichatbutr, chairman of the rally organising committee, opened the rally with a brief address on the need for a more ethical social evolution in which the doctrine of communism, he said, should play a leading role. Karmail Singh of the Bangkok Labour Union spoke on behalf of the 1,000 union members present urging unity between the various elements. Only through united action, he said, could labour succeed in raising its standard of living...Spokesmen for the Sino-Thai labour association and of Indonesian labourers also spoke briefly, emphasising the need for labour to unite in the common cause of raising the standard of living. The various unions carried banners and the Central Labour Union flag, almost a duplicate of the communist flag, were displayed around the ground [BP 2/5/1947]

The stated aims of the CLU were: (1) to cooperate with progressive social forces and promote labour organisations, (2) to provide educational and welfare
assistance to workers, (3) to assist in the settlement of labour disputes, (4) to effect mutual cooperation and aid among member organisations and (5) to act as a representative for workers generally [Mabry,1979:43]. Over the following years the CLU provided assistance to both Thai and Chinese workers in their struggles against employers and made numerous appeals to government to enact a comprehensive law which would give workers, the right to strike, to establish trade unions as well as fix limits on wages levels, working hours and periods of leave etc. Some further comments on the contributions of the CLU will made below. At this point, however, it will be appropriate to discuss the ideological orientaion of this organisation for as indicated in the quotation cited above, there existed a belief within the leadership of the CLU that the ideas of 'communism' should play a 'leading role' in the future evolution of Thai society.

Previous discussions of the rise to prominence of the CLU have noted simply that it was initially sponsored by Pridi's Sahachip Party, that originally the majority of its members were Thai and that Chinese workers later came to form the largest proportion of its membership. It has also been stated that the organisation became 'communist' dominated, a fact which appears to be supported by its affiliation with the World Federation of Trade Unions in February 1949 [Skinner,1957:286-287,323; Mabry,1979:43]. Underpinning these views lies a strong suggestion that the leftist orientation of the CLU was somewhat alien to the mainstream labour movement of the time and its 'communism' was really a product of the actions of Chinese agents who infiltrated and eventually won control of the union [Mabry,1979:43]. Certainly, some sections of the CLU did hold an ideological position which was, for example, in marked constrast to that which was advanced by Thawat and the Labour Group. However, rather than seeing this move to the left as the product of the work of 'alien' infiltrators, it should rather be seen in the light of the influence of a new generation of Thai labour leaders who were developing new modes of class struggle in response to the challenges which workers faced during the post-war years.

As shown in the last chapter, the organised labour movement in Thailand was, at least until the mid 1930's, largely dominated by the ideology of Thawat and the Labour Group. It has been argued that in attempting to advance the interests of industrial workers, Thawat and his associates advocated what has been termed a labourist mode of class struggle--that workers could win their struggle for freedom and realise their interests within the existing relations of production. The labourist mode of class continued to be advocated during the post war years by activists such as Pakop Tolaklam [1928-] whose father had been one of the leaders of the 1934 railway strike. After returning to work at the railways after the war, Prakop became involved in the Association of Makasan Workers which was then led by Wisit Suphatra. After
the latter left his position as head of the railway workers, Prakop was elected president of the of association. Reportedly an excellent public speaker, Prakop played a leading role in struggling for an improvement of wages and conditions within the railways over subsequent years. An ardent nationalist, Prakop opposed the more radical elements within the CLU and later joined and became active in the government sponsored Thai Labour Union (TLA) [Sangsit,1986:198-210]. Another example, of a 'labourist' leader is that of Sang Phatanothai [1915-]. A former teacher who had become well known for his involvement in nationalist plays which were aired over the radio during the war, Sang played a leading role in the formation of the TLU. Sent to Oxford to study labour relations, he opposed the development of 'communism' within the ranks of workers and argued that the TLA by providing assistance to its members would be able to effect a degree of co-operation between labour and capital [Sangsit,1986:212-223]. While leaders such as Prakop and Sang contributed further to the development of labourism, other elements within this new generation of labour leaders began to formulate alternative and more radical solutions to workers' problems. The emergence of this radical wing within the Thai labour movement needs to be seen in the light of the broader developments which were taking place in Thai political thought during this period.

It has been noted that the 'communist' ideologies which were circulating in Thailand during the late 1920's remained largely confined to the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. In 1933 an Anti-Communist Act was passed which proscribed 'communism', deeming it and anyone who held such ideas to be enemies of the Thai nation. After the war this virulent anti-communist stance was eased. In 1946, in return for the Soviet Union's acceptance of Thailand into the United Nations, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), formed in 1942, was legalised and the Anti-Communist Act withdrawn [Insor,1965:90; Reynolds,1987:25]. As Reynolds [1987:25] has observed:

With the CPT operating legally and openly and with the momentum of liberal and democratic expectations generated during the Pridi years (1946-47) only somewhat diminished, there was a distinctly Left orientation in Bangkok public discourse for a decade or so after World War II.

It was during this decade that there developed an enormous interest in Marxist thought, international Communism and the rights of workers. Apart from the publication of Mahachon [The Masses] the official paper of the CPT, the period witnessed the production and dissemination of some of the classic works of Thai leftist literature by authors such as Udom Sisuwan, Supha Sirianond, Samak Burawat and Jit Phoumisak. As Reynolds [1987] has shown, this resurgent leftist discourse which
employed the concepts of class, class struggle, exploitation and modes of production, became part of a 'radical and distinctly non-militaristic nationalism for Thailand' which directly challenged some of the main ideas upon which the legitimacy of the Thai state was based [Reynolds, 1987:26]. It was the development of these alternate bodies of thought which provided Thai labour leaders with new perspectives for meeting the challenges faced by the workers they represented.

A good example of a labour leaders who was to employ marxist concepts in his analysis of the problems faced by workers is that of Damri Ruansutham who was elected as the first President of the Workers' Welfare Association of Bangkok, and later became involved in the Association of United Trade Workers of Bangkok as well as the Samlo Association [Samakhom Trairak]. In his book co-authored with Carun Lasaa, another radical leader who played an active role in organising railway workers, [1986], Damri brings a markedly different interpretation to the problems facing labour than that which was advanced by the adherents of labourism. Basic to his analysis are the concepts of capitalism, class exploitation and class struggle. While providing some very useful empirical data on the development of the labour movement during the pre-1957 period, the significance of the work lies in the emphasis which is given to analysing the problems of workers in systemic terms. This analysis stands in marked constrast to views which were developed by Thawat, for example, who perceived the exploitation and oppression of workers as the product of the personal corruption of individual employers. Damri's main criticism, however, is directed at the system of capitalism itself rather than against the individuals who occupy places within the system. For Damri, it is both the existence of capitalist relations of production and a state which promotes and defends these relations which is the key to understanding the source of the problems faced by workers. Thus, unlike Thawat who argued that workers could struggle for their freedom and self respect within capitalist relations, the basic inference which can be drawn from Damri's work is that these goals will only be realised in the overthrow of these relations. Although offering a very different interpretation to the problems of labour than that which was offered by the adherents of labourism, Damri and others in the CLU who were contributing to the development of a radical mode of class struggle, did argue, however, that, at least in the short term, it was necessary that labour and capital should forge some degree of co-operation. As Sangsit [1986:20] notes:

The leaders of the CLU did not think that capitalism which developed in Thailand was identical to that which had developed in the West. They felt that Thai capitalism could not develop because of the actions and constraints imposed by foreign capital. Capitalists in Thailand were themselves exploited by foreigners and similarly labourers in Thailand were exploited by foreign capital. For this reason it was felt
that labour must join forces with the Thai bourgeoisie opposing foreign capital. In this way local capitalism would be allowed to develop and expand, but at the same time this capitalism would not be pure but would be capitalism based on a new plan which was set toward the achievement of a future socialism. So for the leaders of the CLU, while accepting that in the long term the interests of capital and labour were opposed, in the short term it came to be accepted that capital and labour could work together in order to promote and advance the interests of the nation.

Whatever the substantive merits of this analysis may have been, it is significant to note how this radical analysis of workers problems was becoming part of the development of an alternative nationalist discourse which stood in marked contrast to the official nationalist discourse which had been, and would continue to be, promoted by Thai military leaders.

In the preceding pages the aim has been to provide an account of the rise of an organised labour movement during the immediate post war years. Some emphasis has been given to showing that, within this resurgence of organised labour, it is possible to discern the beginnings of a radical mode of class struggle which stands in marked contrast to the labourism which had been advocated by Thawat and his successors. It has been argued that, rather than representing an alien ideology, the development of a radical wing within the Thai labour movement must be seen in the context of the rise of leftist discourse within Thai society during the period. While not displacing the dominant labourist mode of class struggle, the circulation of marxist thought allowed some labour leaders to bring new perspectives onto the analysis of the problems which confronted workers. By 1947, therefore, the industrial working class had emerged as an important force within Thai society. Increasingly well organised the labour movement under the general leadership of the CLU demonstrated a clear ability to be able to successfully struggle for the interests of labour in both the sphere of industry and in the wider sphere of politics. As an indication of the success of this frantic process of organising workers along class lines, it was estimated that by early 1949 membership of the CLU stood at sixty thousand and was affiliated with over sixty labour associations [BP 8/2/1949]. Also indicative of the success and political strength of the labour movement are the measures which the military regime implemented to destroy and undermine the power of labour following their return to power in 1947.
The flowering of labour organisation and activity described above was facilitated by the open political environment which existed during the years 1944-47. Successive civilian regimes, badly divided between conservatives and pro Pridi forces had, however, failed to forge a sufficient degree of stability which would have permitted them to continue their rule and create the conditions for the establishment of a permanent system of parliamentary democracy in Thailand. Pridi's implication in the mysterious gunshot death of King Ananda in June 1946, growing economic problems, reported widespread corruption among government officials, the rising power of labour and other leftist forces provided the perfect opportunity for the military to the centre of the political stage. In 1947 the military seized state power and after a brief interim period, Phibun became Prime Minister for a second time in April 1948.

After assuming office Phibun announced he would pursue a pro-Western and Anti-Communist policy [Bumrungsuk, 1985:29], a stance which was to have a dramatic impact on the further development of the labour movement. Over the following seven years the thrust of Phibun's policy toward labour was directed toward smashing the power of the CLU. This aim was largely achieved in three ways: first; through a strategy of 'corporatism', second, through outright repression and third, by fostering and promoting ethnic differences among workers. Each of these three measures will be discussed briefly.

Initially, at least, the attack on the organised labour movement was pursued through the adoption of a strategy of corporatism. As Munck [1988:128] explains:

The strategy of 'corporatism' entails a systematic role for the state in the regulation of labour relations. This may involve the state taking a direct role in actually creating trade unions and subsequently maintaining them under tutelage, through financial dependency...[I]t amounts to a carefully managed, ritualized class struggle which dampens the more exuberant expressions of that process. Corporatism is often associated with authoritarianism and dictatorship.

In May 1948 Phibun took the first steps toward adopting a corporatist strategy when he established the Thai Labour Association [Samakhom Kammakon Haeng Phratet Thai]. Commonly known as the Thai Labour Union (TLU), membership was restricted to Thai nationals and the stated aims of the organisation were to raise living standards for workers, to facilitate and encourage the development of skills and to 'strive for better employer-employee relations without combatting the principle of
private enterprise' [BP 19/4/1948]. The union waived all subscription fees and was fully financed by the government. By May 1949 it claimed to have a membership of thirty thousand. It was this government sponsoring of unions such as the TLA and subsequent labour associations [see below] that has led writers such as Mabry and Fogg to express some doubt whether is possible to speak of the development of a 'real' labour movement during the 1946-58 period. Two points need to be made with regard to this views. First, they lack an appreciation of the ways in which the promotion of government labour organisations were designed to check and constrain the growth in the power of labour by precisely attempting to 'dampen the more exuberant' expressions of class struggle which had been advocated by the left wing of the CLU. The second point which Mabry fails to appreciate is the extent to which workers were able to use these government sponsored unions and turn them to their own advantage. This point requires further comment.

Initially the TLU was led by Chai Wirotsi who was a brother-in-law of Phibun's wife. However, this avowedly right wing and anti-communist leader was soon opposed by more progressive elements within the union who were more intent on promoting the interests of workers within the structure of choices which were available to them. According to Damri and Carun [1986:160], the progressive elements within the TLC were eventually able to wrestle control away from Wirotsi, a task made all the easier following his involment in the sale of rice in Malaya which had originally been marked for distribution to labour groups in southern Thailand. Although the union was later to be led by Sang Phatanothai, who also maintained close links with the Premier, members were still able to use the organisation's resources to provide genuine assistance to workers during periods of injury, illness and childbirth [Damri and Carun, 1986:160].

Although partially successful at drawing away some groups of workers CLU control, the strategy of corporatism was soon to be supplemented by the adoption of more repressive measures. The first hints of what was to become a concerted policy of outright repression of the CLU, came in 1948, when four of its representatives were arrested as they attempted to negotiate a strike settlement. Although representing workers' interests across a range of industries, the CLU had been particularly active in attempting to improve conditions within the rice milling industry. Like many workers at the time, rice mill labourers worked under atrocious conditions. A normal working day consisted of a twelve hour shift. They were given no days off except for Chinese New Year, and there were no benefits for sick or injured workers. Working conditions were harsh, mills were badly ventilated, and the air was thick with dust from the milled rice. Many workers were reported to have suffered from lung disease, and it is claimed that on average at least two workers died each year from lung related illnesses
[Sangsit, 1986:179-187]. From late 1945 onwards, under direction of the CLU, rice mill workers had been engaged in numerous struggles aimed toward improving their pay and working conditions. In late 1947 workers employed by private rice millers presented a list of grievances to their employers and after two weeks of conflict managed to win substantial pay increases, monthly rations of rice, extra payment for overtime, some basic health services and a guarantee that no worker would be dismissed without the case being first examined by a specially formed committee made up of both workers and management. [Sangsit, 1986:179-187; Damri and Carun, 1986:56-57] Shortly after, rice mill workers employed in state controlled mills presented similar demands to management, and it was during these negotiations that the four CLU representatives were arrested, imprisoned for a number of months and subsequently convicted of 'secret society' activity and fined 500 baht each [BP 8/2/1949].

After the arrest of the CLU representatives Phibun stepped up his policy of outright repression of the union movement. Between July and December 1948, 53 'communist' and 'alien' left wing political and labour leaders were reported to have been deported by the government. These actions had followed in the wake of a raid on CLU headquarters in July 1948 where police had seized union documents [BP 3/12/1948]. Despite this harassment, the CLU continued to support workers, and in early 1949 the union officially announced that it had been admitted membership of the World Federation of Trade Unions. In making public the union's admission to the WFTU, Tienthai Apichatbut stated that the union hoped to send a delegate to the Asian trade union conference which was scheduled to take place in Peking. However, he stated that this would depend on the government giving authorisation for union members to travel to the communist controlled zone [BP 8/2/1949]. The CLU's continued association with a left wing politics sparked a more concerted strategy by the government to undermine the organisation. In mid-1949 the Thai police were reported to have initiated a survey on 'How Communism Affects Labour' [BP 22/7/1949]. It was reported that the police were paying special attention to the spread of communism in order to prevent the possible infiltration of communist ideas into the TLU. Apart from stating that the professions, addresses and political affiliations of Chinese workers were now being compiled the report continued:

A campaign to combat the infiltration of communist doctrine into the ranks of Thai labour was opened yesterday at a meeting of the new 25 man executive council of the Thai Labour Union held at the organisation's headquarters near Khao Din Park. The campaign is being conducted at the behest of Premier Phibun...who called TLU leaders to his office at Government House last Monday. Chairman of the unions anti-communist movement is Major-General Swadsi
Swasdiklart, the assistant communications Minister. [The] spokesman is Lieut. Colonel Sawang Thapasut secretary of the Ministry of Defence. At yesterday's meeting the Premier directed that only by education of workers in the way of democratic methods and providing adequate amenities could communism be effectively combated. Committee men and union members were asked to be on the alert to expose those attempting to organise or propagandise Thai workmen in communist doctrine or methods. The committee directed the various members to conduct semi-monthly meetings at which the importance of loyalty to Nation, Religion, King would be emphasised. Union leaders were instructed to report on the health condition of members and preliminary plans were made for the founding of a hospital relief fund for members. Members of the TLU include railway, bus, rice mill and port workers [BP 22/7/1949].

This drive to rid the labour movement from the grip of 'communist doctrine' should be seen as part of what Reynolds [1987:29] has termed the development of an 'anti' communist discursive practice' which occurred in Thailand in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The development of this anti-communist discourse emerged out of a combination of factors, most notably the growing economic and strategic interests of the United States in the Southeast Asian region which with the growth of the Cold War and the Communist victory in China had led to Thailand's being seen as occupying a central position in America's strategy for the containment of communism. With the prospect of receiving increasing economic and military aid from the U.S., Phibun was, as noted above, 'quick to voice his anti-communism in order to strengthen his position by winning American support' [Reynolds,1987:25]. The growing anti-communist stance provided the perfect excuse for initiating further repressive measures against labour.

Despite this increasingly repressive political climate, industrial workers continued to struggle for better wages and conditions, and from 1949 to 1952 samlo drivers, tramway workers, railway workers, rice and saw mill labourers, and oil workers were all involved in strike action [Damri and Carun,1986:68-125]. Some of these disputes attracted considerable public attention. For example, in 1949 tramway workers employed by the Thai Electric Corporation went out on strike and demanded that they be paid for shares they held in the company. Management refused and organised police tanks to be stationed outside the company workshops to threaten the men. The Company also attempted to bring in 'blackleg' labour but the attempt failed as the new recruits were unable to operate the machinery and there was a loss of power generation for 24 hours. Backed throughout by the CLU, the men eventually won after the company agreed to their demands. In 1951 the tramway workers struck again and demanded sickness benefits, overtime payments, permission to establish a union and the right to celebrate May Day. By this time the tramways had become a state
enterprise and, following the intervention of Police Chief Phao Sriyanon, all the men's demands were met [Damri and Carun, 1986:68-71].

By 1952, however, the state was to adopt even tougher measures against labour, measures which were presaged by the events of what has become known as the 'Makasan Revolt'. Since the end of the war the Makasan rail workshops had been a hotbed of labour organisation and activity with the first strike having taken place in 1946. Over two thousand workers went out and demanded that the railway authorities provide accommodation, free transport to and from work, annual holidays and that an election be held so that the men could elect a representative from each of the main workshops. The railway authorities granted all the demands [Damri and Carun, 1986:52]. Rail workers struck again in 1950 and presented a list of seven demands to the government which covered issues such as overtime and compensation payments as well as provisions for sick leave. All demands were met. At the end of the same year the railwaymen went out again in protest over a new set of regulations which had been issued by the Department of Railways. As part of an attempt to restrict labour's organisational activities within the workshop complex, all workers had first to seek their a superior's permission before going to the toilet. If permission was granted the worker's name would then be logged in a special book which was kept by a official who subsequently became known as the 'shit clerk'. Every afternoon another official would come and examine the names of those who had been to the toilet. As Damri and Carun [1986:92-93] point out the reason for the introduction of these bizarre rules stemmed from the fact that the toilet area was often used as a meeting place for rail workers and was colloquially known as the 'toilet assembly' [sphanasium]. Another new regulation against which the men objected was that all employees had to wear uniforms displaying their bureaucratic ranking. This, it was argued, encouraged class differences among the men. The railwaymen went out on strike, and apart from calling for an end to the enforcement of trivial regulations, demanded wage increases, better safety regulations, better accommodation, and the more prompt payment of wages. [Damri and Carun, 1986:92-94].

By 1952 the rail workers had thus accumulated considerable experience in fighting for better wage and conditions and in March of that year they struck once again. Divisions had, however, arisen within the ranks as supporters of the CLU argued that because of the uncertain political climate no strike should be called. Sections under the leadership of Prakop Tolaklam argued, however, that certain actions taken by the rail authorities threatened living standards and that workers should respond immediately. [Sangsit, 1986:202-203]. Those in favour of strike action prevailed and leaders demanded a wage increase of 500 baht per month and an increase in various welfare payments. On the second day of the strike, however, they
added to these claims by demanding that two railway officials be removed from their positions. As Damri and Carun [1986:103] note, this last demand served to step up the seriousness of the situation as the Department of Railways had recently become a state enterprise and the dismissal of officials was a matter which brought the government into the dispute. The government refused to accept the demands and argued that, the act of striking was in serious breach of the law and constituted a 'revolt' [kabot.]. Government officials demanded that the men return to work. The men refused to follow the government's direction and the strike leaders called for unity within the ranks. As the strike entered its third day the police began arresting the strike leaders. The arrest of their leaders sparked a renewed sense of unity among the railway workers and they continued with their work stoppage for another five days. Eventually, the government acceded to the men's demands and moved the two officials to other posts. Charges of inciting rebellion which had been levelled against the strike leaders were eventually dismissed. [Damri and Carun, 1986:103-125].

While the government had backed down, the arrest of the strike leaders presaged a renewed phase in the repression of CLU which reached a peak at the end of 1952. On the 10th November police and military officers carried out widespread arrests of writers, journalists and labour activists who had been involved in the 'Peace Movement'. As Reynolds [1987:27] observes the 'Peace Movement' was:

...born out of genuine disarmament concerns at the dawn of the nuclear age, organized in France in February-March 1948, and quickly exploited by the U.S.S.R. through the Cominform. Peace conferences were held in a number of world capitals, and following the 1950 meeting in Stockholm, organizers claimed they had collected 500 million signatures on behalf of the Stockholm Appeal.

The Peace Movement in Thailand had first earned the ire of the government when it had begun collecting clothes, blankets, food, medicine and money to be donated to alleviate the impoverished conditions of people in the Northeast. [Damri, 1986:99-100]. The movement had subsequently objected to the Thai government's decision to provide material support for American troops fighting in Korea. As Reynolds [1987:27] notes, 'The decision provoked sharp criticism in the Thai press and touched a responsive nerve in a Thai public unhappy with such interference in the affairs of another Asian state'. Among the labour leaders arrested during the November raid was Sun Kitcamnong who, three decades earlier, had been awarded the constitutional medal for his support of the government during the Bowaradet rebellion. He spent the next five years in prison [Sangsit, 1986:176-177]. Three days after the arrests an Anti-Comunist Law was promulgated. According to the Law there were three kinds of communist acts:
...1) overthrowing the democratic system of government headed by the king; 2) altering the country's economic system by nationalizing private property or private means of production without fair compensation; 3) creating instability, disunity, or hatred among the people, and taking part in acts of terrorism or sabotage [Reynolds, 1987:28]

As Reynolds [1987:28] points out, the last of the three represented a 'catch-all' and in effect it prevented the CLU from further openly supporting workers. [Damri, 1986:124-134]. This direct repression of labour was backed up by another attempt to build a government sponsored labour organisation. In 1954 the Free Labour Association of Thailand (F.L.A.T.) (Samakhom Seri Raengngan Haeng Phratet Thai) was established under the patronage of Police Chief Phao Sriyanon. The specific aim of this association is clearly revealed in a letter which Phao wrote to Phibun. The letter referred to the various activities of the CLU which, with its links to international communist organisations, was said to have 'instigated' a number of strikes during the 1948-1950 period. It was claimed that after the massive wave of arrests which had been carried out on 10 November 1952 the organisational had been disbanded. However, following its demise there had been attempts to form workers into a new organisation. Thus:

The police department was of the opinion that if it didn't attempt to lure (cakcungcitcai) these workers to pursue the correct path other groups would have fulfilled this task...it was for this reason that the association was established [N.A. S.R. 0201 k.k.].

The Free Labour Association of Thailand was fully financed by the government and received an initial payment of two million baht and subsequent payments of one million baht per annum [N.A. S.R.0201 k.k.]. The first president of the association was Luen Buasuwan, a wealthy Chinese merchant who was closely connected to Army general Chin Chunhawan. The majority of the association's members were Chinese rice mill, water transport and dock workers who had previously formed a major basis of support for the CLU [Pasuknirunt, 1959:68]. Not all applications for membership were made willingly, however. All leaders of major labour groups were 'invited' to join and if they refused they were ordered to present themselves at the headquarters of the police Special Branch where once again they were 'requested' to fill out the relevant applications forms [Damri, 1986:126].

Apart from the adoption of corporatist and other more directly repressive measures, Phibun's administration attempted to break up the power of the CLU by fostering ethnic differences among workers. As noted, after the war, it was a fundamental policy of the CLU and other labour organisations that ethnic barriers had
to be overcome and that workers should co-operate more fully along class lines. In response to this development Phibun placed great emphasis on promoting once again a sense of nationalism among Thai workers. Membership of the Thai Labour Union was restricted to Thai nationals. To Thais, Chinese workers were portrayed as representing a threat to Thai identity and workers were warned to be on the look out for Chinese communist agitators. The success of the policy of re-opening and promoting ethnic hostilities within the ranks of industrial workers, is demonstrated by the views of influential labour leaders such as Sang Phatonthai and Prakop Tolaklam both of whom criticised the CLU for protecting the interests of Chinese workers who were perceived to be taking jobs away from Thais. [Sangsit, 1986:208].

In the preceding pages the government responses to the growth in the power of labour has been discussed. It has been shown that both through a strategy of corporatism and through the adoption of more violent and repressive means the government sought to 1) destroy the more radical elements within the Thai labour movement and 2) cultivate the labourist mode of class struggle and (3) foster ethnic divisions and differences among workers. By the mid 1950's, however, a number of factors combined which led to a resurgence of labour organisation and struggle and it is to a discussion of this period to which I now turn.

**Period Three 1955-1957**

### 5.3.1 Labour Reorganises

Faced with increasing criticism over the policy of state-led industrialisation and occupying an increasingly precarious position between his two great rivals Police Chief Phao Sriyanon and Army General Sarit Thanarat, Phibun returned from a tour of America and Europe in 1955 and declared that his aim was to 'restore democracy' to Thailand [Insor, 1965:77]. Political parties were to be legalised, press censorship abolished and general elections were called. Significantly, Phibun turned to Thai workers for support and in 1956 established the Labour Party [phakkammakon]. Although initially established as a basis of support for the Premier, 'democratic elements' were able to capture the leadership of the organisation and turn it more fully toward representing workers' interests' [Sangsit, 1986:205]. The commitment by the party to pursue a line independent from the government is reflected in four of its policies; (1) that a labour law should be promulgated and that workers be involved in the development of labour legislation, (2) that the government should trade with all nations, (3) that all nations should have the opportunity to be part of the United
Nations and play a role in the search for world peace and (4) the government should release all political prisoners [Sangsit, 1986:206].

Another labour organisation which attempted to pursue an independent political line was the Sixteen Labour Units [Kammakon Siphok Nuay]. Organised among workers who had previously been associated with first the CLU and later the Thai National Trade Union Congress,² the stated aim of the Sixteen Labour Units was to establish a firmer base for labour activities which was separate from the recently formed Labour Party. The strength of the Sixteen Labour Units was derived from organisations among samlo drivers, the federation of petty traders, railway workers, rice and saw mill workers, tramway workers, water transport and tobacco workers, textile and communication employees and the federation of women workers [Damri, 1986:13-141]. In late April 1956 the Sixteen Labour Units asked for permission to celebrate May Day. Initially the government refused and claimed that to support May Day was tantamount to supporting communism. However, on 30 April the police invited workers' representatives to discuss the issue. The workers stated that they intended to march and the police had no option but to permit the celebration to go ahead. However, a number of conditions were set; first that the march would be peaceful, that there would be no mention of politics and, in particular, there would be no criticism of friendly nations, finally the police insisted that the name May Day be changed to National Workers Day. The workers agreed to these conditions and the government declared that it would contribute 5 baht per worker to help pay for the celebrations. As these negotiations had not ended until 9.30 p.m. on the day before the march was scheduled to take place, workers spent the remainder of the night travelling around the industrial areas of Bangkok with loud hailers informing everybody of the time and place of the march. The following day the march opened with a play which criticised the United States and called on the Thai government to pursue an international policy which aimed toward the establishment of world peace. Moreover, during the course of the march posters were displayed which opposed SEATO and called for the removal of the American presence in Thailand [Damri and Carun, 1986:144-151].

Apart from the process of reorganisation which was taking place among industrial workers, another significant development which occurred was the renewed interest which state officials displayed toward the promulgation of industrial and labour legislation.

² In 1950 the Thai Labour Union had become affiliated with the International Conference of Free Trade Unions. The following year it was reorganised and renamed as the Thai National Trade Union Confederation.
5.3.2 Labour Legislation

One of the most significant steps taken by Phibun during the 1955-57 was the renewed interest given toward the promulgation of a comprehensive labour law. As we have seen, the debates over the role which government should play in regulating conditions within industry continued to be conducted through the latter half of the 1930's. However, apart from the 1939 Factory Act which was never enforced, very little actual progress was made. During the immediate post-war years the government was to come under increasing pressure to renew its efforts to develop labour legislation.

The outpouring of grievances by labour during the immediate post war years sparked an intensive debate within the Thai press, with the government being urged to take more concrete steps toward regulating relations within industry. For example, in November 1946 The Democracy Newspaper carried a long article titled 'Satisfied Labour'. Commenting on official announcements that the government would begin to enforce the 1939 Factory Act, the newspaper stated:

The trend in the world today is to better the lot of the ordinary labourer. This is the surest way of safeguarding against strikes...Labour is just feeling its power today and strikes must not be viewed too seriously, though they certainly cause a great deal of inconvenience and some damage. In the main, however, it is the employer who is entirely without consideration, for it is his labourers who suffer the most as a result of strikes. It should be the aim of every country to satisfy its labour, [in order that] strikes will not even be considered as a means of gaining its ends.

There is the inherent danger that if labour in this country is not organised along the proper lines it will form fertile soil for the growth of certain kinds of social manifestations which are to be deplored. The cry 'Workers of the World Unite' is a praiseworthy one provided it is meant to rally labourers of all countries to a common effort in the interests of peace and prosperity. It can, and in some cases is, deliberately used as a slogan for a class war.

The Factory Act which it is intended to enforce again in Siam should be revised in the light of the prevailing situation. Many of the points of this Act, which might have been considered enlightening eight years ago, today would be considered absolutely necessary. Safety measures must be provided in factories. That is only natural for we are not living in the dark ages. There can be no longer justification for the 'sweated labour'. And the government owes it to labour to see that conditions in factories are healthy. There is nothing new in that.

We think that the government should go further than that. On its own initiative it should study labour conditions here and work out measures that will assure a contented and happy class of workers. In this way it would be cutting the grass
from under the feet of those who would propose to use labour as a bargaining level to secure concessions for their own benefit. Government should lay down laws governing the employment of children, medical attention for labourers and definite periods of annual leave. It should ensure that they have healthy living apartments and plenty of recreational facilities. This is being done in most progressive countries of the world today. Labour is destined to play an ever increasing role in the world of tomorrow. Trade Unions should be encouraged and every effort should be made to see that they are guided by men who really are interested in bettering the lot of labour. Latest developments in other countries should also be studied with a view to their possible application here. It is entirely unnecessary to import lock stock and barrel labour laws of other countries into Siam. We should evolve a labour code that is peculiarly suited to our labour. The sooner this is done the better, as satisfied labour is the surest guarantee of a quick return to prosperity and a stable social system.

Over the following eighteen months the government was continually reminded that it was obligated to enter into the industrial arena and develop a comprehensive system of regulations which would govern the relations between labour and capital. For example, in early 1947, The Democracy argued that labour legislation was now a 'necessity'. The comments were made following a long strike by workers employed at the Shell Oil refinery. On 17 January 1947 workers assembled outside the fuel depot and refused to commence work. The company sent an official to investigate, and the men demanded wage rises, a later starting time, pay on official holidays, the provision of clothing, the right to purchase paraffin at reduced prices and an undertaking by the company that the foreman would be consulted before any worker was dismissed. At 9 a.m. the general manager arrived and instructed the men to return to work, promising that their demands would be forwarded to the company's head office in Singapore. Not satisfied, the men refused to resume their duties. Later in the day the numbers on strike swelled even further when workers in the company's transport section came out in support. The following day the dispute widened as workers in the company's refuelling section also withdrew their labour. Representatives from the recently formed CLU approached the men and offered union assistance. Company officials met with the men during the afternoon of the 18th and accepted four of the demands. They argued, however, that the issues of wage rises and pay on official holidays had to be forwarded to head office in Singapore. The strike was reported to have paralysed landing and refuelling facilities, and despite company threats to dismiss all the men, they refused to back down. Meanwhile, rice mill workers brought clothing and food to the strikers. By the 22nd the dispute was reported to have been settled after the company had agreed to meet all the men's demands [Democracy 18/1/1947,
On the implications of the strike the Democracy [21/1/1947] stated:

[The strike]...is symptomatic of the changing times and changing mood of the workers of all races and classes. Any government and employer who does not assess the true significance of these straws in the wind is inviting trouble. There is great need in this country for well designed labour legislation. Such legislation should be carefully drawn to strike a just balance between the employer and his employees. The world agrees with the general principle that the workers, however humble his status, is no longer a pawn in the economy of the country. He is entitled to his rights and privileges. The more contented workers are, the less likely are they to resort to a stoppage of work to force a decision. Labour legislation which is just should cut the ground from under the feet of labour agitators who seek to further their own ends by using labourers as their tools. Among the benefits that workers are entitled to are adequate wages, medical facilities, holidays with pay, regular working hours and freedom from persecution by unreasonable employers. These are some of the problems which are common to workers everywhere. But labourers in Siam should, in addition, have their problems viewed against the economic background of the country at the present moment. For example, cloth is extremely difficult to purchase. So is rice. It is the duty of employers of large labour forces, if they want---, to supply their employees at a reasonable cost with these essential commodities. We feel sure that the government will not put any obstacles in the way of any concern which seeks to benefit its employees in this respect. The oil strike may be viewed as a test case. It was conducted quite orderly and though we do not necessarily agree with all the demands put forward by the workers, we appreciate the perfectly legitimate way in which demands were made. Strikes are evil. They do harm both to the strikers and the employers. But they are manifestations of the workers' resurgence of spirit. The latter consider it a weapon against employers. It would be a good thing if employers of large labour forces reviewed their treatment of their employees taking into consideration the present condition, we feel sure that if sympathy is shown to the labourers, they will respond. And it would be a fatal mistake to try to repress strikes, because in the U.S. it has already been amply demonstrated that such action encourages an epidemic of them.

Apart from coming under pressure from the press, the CLU had also launched a campaign aimed to urge government officials to initiate measures to protect labour. In July 1947 two members of parliament, Dusit Boontham and Prasoet Subsunthon, presented a Bill to parliament which lay down the basis for industrial relations legislation. Workers were to be given the right to join unions, negotiate with employers and to strike. In case of the breakdown of negotiations, disputes were to be
settled by a labour committee which would be appointed under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior. In addition the Bill stated that no children under the age of fifteen should be employed, maximum working hours were to be set at eight per day, night work was to be paid at double rates, and work after midnight was to be paid at triple rates. May Day, government holidays and Sundays were to be observed. Provisions were also made for female employees who, after working for more than six months, would be entitled to 3 months maternity leave. Also, every factory employing more than 30 workers was to provide a nurse, with workers employed in mines, rice mills and in forests to be given a free annual medical check. The Ministry of Interior was to appoint a labour board which would consist of two representatives from labour, employers and government, and would act as an arbitor in case of deadlocks over wage negotiations [BP 14/7/1947].

In response to these appeals from labour and the press the government formed a committee within the Department of Public Welfare which was instructed to produce a draft Labour Law by the end of 1948. The Chairman of the committee was later to remember that the:

...drafting of the labour law at that time was due to the fact that there were many disputes between workers and employers which on some occasions had led to strikes...for this reason it was necessary to have a law dealing with these matters so that the problem could be solved. Another reason is that, as Thailand was a member of the I.L.O it was appropriate that a labour law be promulgated which would be in keeping with the principles of that international body [Fun,1980:1]

As an additional indication of the government's intention to became far more involved in regulating the relations between labour and capital within industry, it offered the first scholarships for academics to travel abroad and study social welfare and labour economics [Chandravithun,1983:Preface]. Originally, two laws were drafted, one which dealt with labour protection and other concerned with the formation of trade unions [Fun,1980:2]. The Labour Committee continued to carry out its work until 1954, and eventually in January 1955 a decision was made to establish yet another committee which would examine the proposed law and make its final recommendations. In February the government called on representatives from business and labour groups to examine the proposed legislation. Discussion within labour ranks took place over the following months, and in June 1956, at a meeting attended by over four thousand workers, the draft law was accepted [Pasuknirunt,1959:3; Fun,1980:8]. In September the draft Bill was presented to the National Assembly and was passed by 112 votes to 3. Following a second and third reading, the Bill was finally passed on 20 September 1956 and was to become effective as from 1 January 1957. In a
statement which stands in marked contrast to the views expressed by state officials during the period of the absolute monarchy who had denied that workers needed or desired a voice within Thai society, Phibun wrote:

The government's purpose in issuing a labour law emerges from its recognition of the importance of all workers, as first members of society who are thus possessed of the right to receive protection from the state and also from their position and important role in production. The importance of workers will become increasingly clear as the country enters into the industrial phase. The government has long recognised the importance of workers as members of society as witnessed from the United Nations Law and the internal law on human rights, rights which are considered basic for all human beings. In addition the I.L.O., of which we have long been members, have held similar principles. That is, world peace, is reliant on social justice, the recognition of equal individual rights without thought of dividing or splitting people into employers and employees [Fun, 1980:Introduction].

The law provided for the comprehensive regulation of relations within industry. It regulated wages, contained provisions for a 48 hour week and employers were held liable and had to pay compensation to workers injured on the job. Minimum health and safety standards were set, work standards and overtime and holiday payments were prescribed. For the first time in Thai history, workers were also accorded the legal right to strike and establish labour unions and labour federations. The legislation laid down clear guidelines for the settlement of conflicts between labour and capital. All disputes which could not be settled at the enterprise level were to come before a Labour Relations Committee. If, after twenty days, negotiations still remained deadlocked, both parties were given the right to strike or close down the business provided that seven days notice be given in advance [Phiphat, 1977:1-27]. Commenting on the impact of the Act, Mabry [1979:48] has written:

The reluctance of Thais to challenge authority made collective bargaining an alien procedure, and the inexperience of labour leaders made grievance administration unlikely; hence there were few union victories or accomplishments to bind the workers to a continuing organisation and for which they were willing to make unusual sacrifices.

Although the provisions of the law were complex and, at first, not widely understood, Mabry's rather patronising assessment of workers' inability to exploit the choices made available to them under the terms of the Act, is difficult to sustain. Within the first six months of the law coming into effect the Labour Relations committee handled 37 disputes [N.A. S.R. 0201-kk/9]. Some of the complaints received included such matters as workers being dismissed unfairly without proper
compensation payments being made, employers failure to pay overtime rates, workers being unfairly treated because of poor health, and numerous instances of employers who simply refused to follow the provisions of the law [N.A. S.R. 0201-kk/9]. Indeed, it was employers' intransigence, rather than the ignorance of workers, which contributed to the confusion which prevented the successful implementation of the grievance machinery. It was stated that rather than following set procedures, employers often simply chose to close their businesses as a way of handling workers' objections. In the attempt to overcome such problems, the Department of Public Welfare organised a series of seminars at Thammasat University which aimed to educate both workers and employers as to their rights and obligations under the law [N.A. SR 0201-kk/9].

Now formally protected by the law, workers were in a position to renew their efforts to establish trade unions. In 1957, 136 unions and 2 Labour Federations registered under the terms of the law [Satithi, 1957:65]. These labour organisations had, within the first year, a combined membership of over 16,000 workers employed in the areas of mining, manufacturing, printing, chemicals, construction, electricity and water works, communications and services. [Satithi,1957:79-81].

Although it had taken workers decades of struggle before they were able to force the state to both protect them from the arbitrary decision of employers and permit them to legally strike and form trade unions, these rights were to last less than a year. On 16 September 1957 Phibun's administration was overthrown in a coup organised by Sarit Thanarat. The coup and Sarit's subsequent formal assumption of power in October 1958 marked a turning point in modern Thai history. Implementing an economic policy which was based on minimum government interference and gave free reign to both domestic and foreign capital, combined with the imposition of a vicious authoritarian political order, the Sarit years were to be subsequently referred to as the 'dark ages' [yukmut ]. In abolishing the Labour Act, it was stated that it contained provisions which were:

...inappropriate. They provided the opportunity for those who would use them as a tool to promote conflict between employers and employees and destroy the understanding and co-operation which exists between them. In addition, they also provide communist instigators with the opportunity to lead employees in inappropriate directions...All of these things contribute to the destruction of industry and commerce and endanger the development of the economy and the progress of the country. For these reasons the revolutionary group deems it appropriate that the law be abrogated [Revolutionary Order 19, 31 October 1958, cited in Lae, 1983:1].
The abrogation of the Labour Act was soon followed by a wave of arrests and subsequent imprisonment of labour leaders, intellectuals, journalists and politicians. Henceforth, the 'labour movement was thrust into a period of darkness, as the form of struggle went from one of openness to struggle underground' [Damri and Carun, 1986:170]. It was not until the early 1970's that workers were able to pursue openly their industrial, political and social struggles.

5.4 Summary

Previous scholars have experienced some difficulty in coming to terms with the development of the labour movement in Thailand during the decade after World War Two. Seemingly out of nowhere, the period witnessed a flourishing of activity among industrial workers as they struggled for better wages and conditions, the rapid growth of various labour organisations and the promulgation and implementation of industrial and labour legislation. Fogg [1953:368], for example, responded to these developments by arguing that while labour organisations took on the 'forms' they did not, however, take on the 'substance of trade unionism in the Western hemisphere'. Some years later Mabry [1979:48] also displayed some difficulty in coming to terms with the developments which occurred during this period. In answer to the question of why did a labour movement arise, he was led to ask if one 'really did develop'.[My emphasis]. This chapter has demonstrated the inadequacy of these views. Basically it has shown that developments which occurred during he period represented a continuation of the processes which have been described in earlier chapters. Struggles over the working day, the co-ordination of these struggles into an organised labour movement which sought to represent the interests of workers in both the industrial and political spheres were not new. Nor was the state's involvment in the mediation of the wage-labour/capital relation as it was forced to attempt to ensure that workers struggles and organisation did not threaten the process of capital accumulation.
CONCLUSION

In the introductory chapter of this study criticism was levelled against those writers who have attempted to assess the historical significance of the actions of Thai industrial workers in terms of a pre-classificatory model or historical projection. This approach, it was argued, is theoretically unacceptable for the way in which it removes the role played by human agency in history. Once the search for a real, pure or proper working class is abandoned and replaced with a theoretically informed discussion which seeks to analyse the various forms working class development and struggle actually take in any given society, it becomes apparent that the contributions which Thai workers were making to the historical development of their society during the pre-1957 period were rather more significant than previous writers have been prepared to acknowledge.

Although a great deal of research remains to be completed, this study has demonstrated empirically that industrial workers played a substantial and significant role in contributing to and shaping the flow of socio-historical change in Thailand during the period leading up to 1957. In chapter three, it was shown that the development of capitalist relations of production were accompanied by the emergence of a new social class of producers who, for their social survival, were dependent on the receipt of a regular wage. This thesis has concentrated on that particular fraction of this new wage-labouring class employed by industrial capital. It has been argued that, although small in numerical terms, industrial workers nevertheless came to occupy a strategically vital position within the Thai economy, and through the exercise of their labour-power in producing both use and exchange values, they made significant and lasting contributions to the development of industry during this period.

Particular emphasis, however, has been given to demonstrating that their position within capitalist relations of production had a profound structuring influence over the lives of industrial workers. This argument has been directed specifically against those perspectives which have ignored the effects of class structure and implied that traditional culture, dominant ideology and ethnicity were the most important factors in shaping the role played by labour during the pre-1957 period. In contradistinction to such views, this study has shown first, how dependence on a wage profoundly and unfavourably shaped the lives of industrial workers. While a more detailed social history of the period remains to be written, it is clear that wage-labourers faced a daily battle to survive as they attempted to cope with inadequate
housing, a lack of appropriate medical services and, at times shortages of food and other basic goods. We have also seen how reliance on the receipt of a regular wage demanded that workers cope with labouring in factories which were both unhealthy and unsafe, how they were confronted with the problems of insecure employment, low wages, lack of appropriate rest periods, overtime work for which they were unpaid and how they were treated as mere factors of production. While drawing attention to some of the social and work conditions associated with wage-dependence, the study has demonstrated, however, that although dependence on a wage imposed conditions which industrial workers were unable to alter either individually or cooperatively, its centrality to their lives ensured that it remained a principal focus for their industrial and wider political and social activities. [Cf. Metcalfe, 1988:16-17]. It was through their response to these social and work conditions that workers helped to shape and direct the flow of socio-historical change in significant ways. Within the arena of industry, this study has described the ways in which, from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, wage-labourers were involved in literally hundreds of struggles over the establishment of a norm for the working day. Through their struggle for better wages, safer and healthier working conditions, in their quest for security of employment, higher bonuses, the provision of welfare and medical services, in their appeals to be treated as human beings rather than as mere factors of production and through their forging of new solidarities and forms of organisations, industrial workers did help shape and redirect the course of Thai industrial development during these years.

The contributions which industrial workers made to the development of their society were not, however, confined to the sphere of industry alone. The study has traced how, as part of their overall response to their wage dependence and in their effort to achieve a better life for themselves and their families, Thai workers expanded their struggles into the wider political and social arenas. Using the events of 1923 as a point of departure, we have seen how struggles by wage labourers gradually conditioned the wider process of political change in Thailand. It was shown how, during the course of the 1923 strike, workers sought protection and help from the state as they struggled for their freedom and self-respect. However, both during the events of 1923 and over subsequent years, the absolute monarchy continued to ignore the voice and appeals of workers. Under the leadership of the Labour Group, workers gradually came to see that the continuation of absolutism was inimical to the realisation of their class interests. I have shown how Thawat and the Labour Group, in their attempt to provide the basic nutrients for the development of a labour movement, joined with other forces struggling for political change - the end of absolutism and the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Thailand. Crucially, it has been shown
that when the time arrived for concrete political action, Thai workers were actually involved in the 1932 coup which brought to an end the period of absolutist rule in Thailand. Although a more detailed account remains to be written, some attempt has been made to trace how workers and their organisations continually struggled, during later periods of military rule, for the establishment of a more open and democratic political system in Thailand. These struggles were most clearly apparent during the brief periods of 1932-34, 1944-47 and 1955-57 when open political activity was permitted.

Alongside this political struggle, Thai workers and their leaders entered into the ideological debates as to what exists, what was good, and what was possible for the future development of their society. Against writers who have argued for the persistence of traditional culture and the unbroken nature of dominant ideology, we have seen that, along with Thailand’s incorporation into a world system of production and exchange combined with a domestic based process of capital accumulation, there emerged a profound questioning of received conceptions of what the world was like and what was good and desirable for the future of Thai society. Some emphasis has been given to showing that, rather than simply ‘internalising’ official nationalist discourse, Thai workers and their representatives subjected this discourse to a process of critical transformation out of which developed a very different political theory to that which was held by the Thai ruling classes. For example, I have shown how Thawat, in attempting to encourage and promote a specific working class identity, transformed the concepts of nation, progress and civilisation. In the post-war period some comments were also made with regard to the way in which, with the development of a radical mode of class struggle, dominant interpretations of Thai history were called into question. This radical discourse became part of a rather different nationalist discourse from that which was espoused by Thai military leaders. In short, through their contributions to the development of Thai industry and their participation in wider political and ideological debates, industrial workers played a significant role in helping to shape the direction of social change in Thailand during the pre-1957 period.

This study has also been concerned with examining the way in which working class struggles were shaped by the actions of the Thai state. Drawing on recent work in Thai history, it has been shown that the state played a leading role in the development of a specific form of Thai capitalism during this period. At a structural level, the state played a crucial role in ensuring that a pool of free labour actually became available within Thai society. Emphasis has been given to demonstrating that the development of the wage-labour/capital relation carried with it numerous contradictions and that, as an integral part of their role in maintaining the conditions for the rise of capitalism, state officials were obliged to mediate the relations between
labour and capital. One way in which this process of mediation was achieved was through repression. It has been argued that state repression is absolutely crucial for understanding the various forms which working class struggles actually took during this period. This study has shown how, in attempting to ensure that the working class both submit and contribute to the functioning of the Thai social order, the state consistently repressed workers and their organisations. Through arrests, imprisonment, threat, terror, deportation, surveillance, police attacks, and through restrictions on the right to openly organise and the right to strike, the state placed enormous limits and constraints on the forms which working class struggles could take.

The repression which was directed against workers and their organisations also entailed symbolic violence. As we have seen past authors have constantly argued that no real working class problem existed during the pre-1957 period. In arguing for such views writers have simply reproduced some of the arguments which were often used by Thai authorities during these years, arguments which also played a part in shaping the choices available to workers. This study has also shown how, in their attempt to repress workers the absolute state launched a discourse which denied that workers needed or desired a voice. Over subsequent years this discourse continued to rear its head as Thai workers were depicted as being unique, satisfied with their living and working conditions and generally uninterested in calls for change. It was this ideological image of being traditional, conservative and satisfied that Thai workers had to initially struggle in the attempt to be permitted to air their grievances publicly. The limitations on the right to speak were reinforced through the anti-communist discourse which began under the absolute monarchy and continued throughout the 1930’s, 1940’s and 1950’s. It has been shown how workers and their leaders were branded as 'communist' an accusation which effectively removed them from participating in social discourse. It is also important to note the the way in which the state attempted to limit solidarity along class lines by actively promoting ethnic differences. Through an ideology of ethnicity, Thai workers were presented with images of Chinese as posing a threat to their sources of livelihood and their identity as Thai.

This study, in addition to examining the use of repression, has also attempted to trace the ways in which the state attempted to displace conflicts between wage-labour and capital into some sort of institutionalised framework within which workers' protests could be managed and contained. In this context attention was placed on tracing the development of industrial relations legislation. Again taking the events of 1923 as a point of departure we have seen how initially state officials adopted the position that it was beyond their responsibility to become directly involved in regulating relations between employer and employee. This *laissez-faire* attitude
remained in force until the overthrow of absolutism in 1932. In the post-1932 period, however, it was shown that, as part of the policy to promote industrial development, the state took some initial, albeit haphazard, steps toward a growing involvement in industrial relations, a process which culminated in the promulgation of the 1956 Labour Act. While the Act was in force for only a short period, it did establish the first stable framework within which the wage-labour/capital relation was to be regulated.

Thus it was through a combination of outright repression and displacement that the state acted to constrain, shape, and limit the form which the development of the labour movement actually took during this period. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that despite these constraints industrial workers demonstrated both a willingness and ability to continue to struggle. This is a point which touches on some of the fundamental methodological questions which were raised in the introduction to this study. It was argued that underlying previous work was a vision of workers as passive victims of history rather than as conscious and purposeful human beings who were makers of their own history. While it is important to analyse the objective constraints placed on social life and recognise how, for instance, both wage-dependence and the actions of the Thai state served to limit a range of possible and desired actions, these objective constraints did not exist apart from the historical process, but were subject to a continual process of being formed, reformed and, as the 1932 coup illustrates, occasionally transformed by the actions of industrial workers. In short, this study has shown that industrial workers in Thailand made significant and lasting contributions to the processes of economic, political and social change during the pre-1957 period. While these historical contributions may not have conformed to the abstract theoretical projections envisaged by past writers, it was nevertheless the history that workers made themselves. As Metcalfe [1988:214] writes '...history should not be trimmed to fit abstract formulae that claim a privileged understanding of its meaning...in history people commit themselves, drawing their own portrait and there is nothing but that portrait'.

Suggestions for Future Research

Over the last three decades capitalist relations of production have continued to develop and transform the structure of Thai society. The social scientific analysis of these enormous and profound changes and the implications they carry for the future historical development of labour have only just begun and there exists enormous potential for future research. Some of the questions which might be usefully addressed include how the capitalist class structure has changed over the last thirty years and what impact these changes have had on the process of class formation; and within
industry, what the systems of control currently being employed by capital are. This is a topic which has only been touched on in this study. In chapter three some discussion was given to showing how the despotic regime of control placed enormous constraints on the development of the tramwaymen's struggle. It might reasonably be asked what other systems of control are now in use. How do these systems change both over time and between the different fractions of the capitalist class? What impact do these different systems of control have with regard to the development of struggles at the point of production? Moreover, what role has the state played in both the further development of capitalism and in the development of new systems of control? More broadly, attention must be given to the growth of both the industrial and political wing of the labour movement during this period. What are the policies of this movement and how has its development been shaped both by capital and the state? What is the relationship between labourism and the radical modes of class struggle within the labour movement? What role will workers play in the future political development of their country? How has labour contributed to and how will they continue to shape the future development of a party system in Thailand? How might the ideas of workers and their leaders serve to condition the wider process of ideological debate in Thailand? The list of questions could easily be extended. Attempts to answer these questions, however, can no longer be approached through the imposition of a pre-classificatory framework or historical projection but can only be approached via a concept of research which seeks to provide a theoretically informed discussion of the various forms which capitalist development and working class struggle actually take, a task which can only be achieved on the basis of rigorous and sustained empirical research.
The author wishes to apologise for the omission of the following works from the bibliography.

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