

The American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center), 2007. The Struggle for Worker Right in Thailand: A report by the solidarity center.

As the only Southeast Asian country that has not been colonized, Thailand has enjoyed regional leadership for a long period. However, the recent economic crisis, disturbing political unrest, and shortfalls in social policies bring uncertainties to Thailand's future development. How to tackle labor issues – to protect the rights of workers or to sacrifice the interests of workers – will have determining effect on the future of Thailand. It may embark on the project of democratization or creeps down to an increasingly unequal society. Being a founding member of the International Labor Organization (ILO), Thailand, nevertheless, hasn't fulfilled its commitments of fully protecting the rights of workers. Though faced with challenges and obstacles in conforming to the principles of the ILO standards, Thailand under the new constitution which has potential for progressive policies can be more politically equal and pro-labor.

In the first chapter, waves of labor protests since the early 20th century are documented. The vicissitudes of Thailand's political regime that has been chronically dominated by the military governments constitute the broader environment in which labor unions, labor associations, and labor unrest unfold. Several periods when labor movements were active include 1933, 1946-1947, 1973-1975, 1980-1990, 1992-1997, and 2004-2005. Labor Unions, both registered and unregistered, in Thailand are also enumerated.

The second chapter describes the legal system on labor issues and its evolution. The constitution has provisions that ratify the freedom of workers to organize, speech freedom, the protection of workers' rights, and equal treatment. A group of major statutes – Labor Relations Act (LRA), State Employees Labor Relations Act (SELRA), Labor Protection Act (LPA), Civil Service Act (CSA), and Labor Court Establishment and Procedures Act (LCEPA) - that stipulate principles in labor relations are introduced. The LRA is more restrictive as it has constraining effect on workers' freedom of speech. It is stipulated by LRA that "a union's explaining or publicizing the facts of a dispute or arranging a rally or strike" (p. 35) can't be "related to politics" (LRA, 1975, ch. 7, sec. 99). The ongoing process of privatization in Thailand has prompted the retreat of trade unions as state-owned companies are transformed into deregulated private ones. It is worth noting that the Labor Courts that are responsible for law enforcement in private sectors have been critiqued for its inefficiency, lack of judicial experts, lack of resources, and non-neutrality.

The issue of discrimination is discussed in the third chapter, including discrimination against women, age discrimination, physical disability discrimination, and discrimination against migrant workers. These different types of discrimination are deeply rooted in the pervasive inequalities in the Thai society. The fourth chapter explicates the issue of child labor and forced labor. Despite the efforts of both domestic and international organizations to eliminate the illegal use of these problems, the number of child laborers and forced laborers is still strikingly high, particularly in the informal economy. As a conclusion, the last chapter offers ways in which

different institutions, including the government, workers' unions, international organizations, and etc., can improve the benefits of Thai laborers and boost equality throughout the society.

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