

**ABSTRACT**

**Title of Research Paper :** Thai Worker Leaders' Attitude toward World Trade Change

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**Degree :** Master of Art ( Social Development)

**Year :** 2001

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This qualitative research served the following purposes: 1) to study the development of labour movement and the link between the labour standard and international trade , 2) to find out the Thai worker leaders ' attitude toward the impact of world trade change on workers and the labour organization in Thailand , and 3) to make recommendations in adjusting the local labour organizations in Thailand to be in line with world trade change.

The sample group consisted of Thai worker leaders and labour officers as follows : 9 presidents or vice presidents of the labour organization councils , 3 presidents or vice presidents of the labour federation , 22 presidents or vice presidents of the labour unions , and 3 labour officers. There were 37 samples in total. An interview schedule was constructed for in-depth interview. The interview schedule was composed of the two parts. The first part contains questions about the background of the Thai worker leaders and the second part dealt with their attitude toward six aspects : knowledge and understanding of world trade change , interest in economic and labour news , acceptance of production technology , labour skill development , adjustment of the role of the labour organizations in Thailand , and relationship between local labour organizations in Thailand and international labour organizations.

**The findings were briefly stated as follow :**

1. The labour movement emerged in the Industrial Revolution during the eighteenth century in Europe and The United States. Britain was the first country where a labour organization was set up in 1851. But it was unofficially formed and was later more recognized at the end of the nineteenth century. Also , Britain was the first country

that passed a law to endorse labour organizations in 1871. In Thailand, the first labour organization formed was The Streetcar Labour Association with the aim to provide their members with social welfare, not to negotiate with the employer. After the administrative change in 1932, workers rallied to negotiate with their workers more often. But the largest labour rally was to set up United Professional Works of Thailand in 1947 to act as the labour representative in a labour management conflicts. The member of this organization were 75,000 workers in total. Two-fifths were Chinese workers. Later the government headed by Field Marshal Por Phibulsongkhram ended its role by establishing Thai National Trade Union Congress in 1948 and The Liberal Labour Trade Union of Thailand in 1953 in order to counteract and not to renew the license for United Professional Works of Thailand. Although this organization was officially closed down, it still carried out The operation secretly.

The first labour act was The 1956 Labour Act which granted workers to form a labour union and had the employers accept the labour union as workers' representative in negotiation with The management. However, this Act was cancelled and labour unions were not permitted to be formed when the revolution occurred in 1958. In 1972 the revolution government passed The Declaration No.103 dated March 16, 1972, permitting the establishment of labour unions. Later the 1975 Labour Relations Act was enacted and has been used until present.

In addition to having a labour organization to protect their right in their own country, labours can rely on The International Labour Organization (ILO) established in 1919 to protect their right outside the country. This organization set labour standards to create fairness in employment and to raise the labours' living standard. Most developing countries still lack labour standards, and developed countries were afraid that they will have a disadvantage of production cost; therefore, they have pushed the link between the labour standard and international trade through GATT and WTO. However, many WTO members, including Thailand has opposed the idea.

2. Most Thai worker leaders were males, ages 31 – 40. They completed high school or vocation school. Most had work experience of 11 – 20 years, followed by 21 – 30 years. They experienced the labour movement for 11 – 20 years. They were members

and played on active role in labour organizations at the high level. Beside , they played a role in more than one labour organization.

3. The Thai workers leaders were found to have a poor knowledge and understanding in world trade change. They were interested less in economic and labuor news than in political news. They thought most labourers could not adapt to change in production technology and their skills did not match modern production technology. Because of their poor education ( elementary school) , they found it difficult to learn and practice new things and to adapt themselves to change. Beside , they thought that labour organizations ' role did not match world trade change. The organizations should increase their role in promoting and supporting skill development , in participating in national policy planning and in creating a good relationship with international labour organizations. The organization should use this relationship to have a network for supporting their demand from the government.

### **Recommendation**

The government should arrange workshops to find some measures to handle world trade change. It should have a strategic plan to develop national manpower , do research on the labour market , promote labourers to further their studies and develop their skills continuously and systematically while still in employment. It should encourage skilled labour to train less skilled labour. Academics should serve in all committees set up by The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Top-level worker leaders should play a role in setting up any national policy that affects the quality of life of labourers.

The labour organizations most be united in urging the government and employers to develop labourers ' skills and to accept worker leaders to play a part in setting policies. They should increase their labour relations with employers and help increase production efficiency and competitiveness.