

Organizing For Justice

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FOREWORD

In February 2011, MAP Foundation organized a meeting between migrant workers from Burma and trade union representatives from Thailand, Cambodia, India and Malaysia. “Migrant Movements Consultation”: a report inspired by the meeting was subsequently published and distributed. “Organising for Justice” is the second in this series, exploring the history of the workers movement and the different forms of associations and actions that workers can take to improve their working conditions. MAP Foundation has had the privilege to work with migrant workers from Burma since 1996 and we never fail to be impressed by the resilience of the migrant communities. Many workers have dared to use the legal mechanisms available to make complaints against exploitation even though the opportunities available are very limited and they often face harassment or deportation when they do try. Nevertheless, decent work is a right not a privilege and migrants are not excluded from this right. We hope that these two books, Migrant Movements Consultation and Organising for Justice will provide migrants with information which is useful to their workers struggles, will inspire workers to join together to demand their rights and be a useful resource for all who work and respect labour rights.

WE would like to use this opportunity to thank Jay Kerr, a member of NO SWEAT and a volunteer at MAP, for all his hard work in compiling this report

MAP Foundation, January 2012

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Workers Solidarity: Past & Present

The workers struggle has been going on for centuries. All around the world people have worked to earn a living, to feed, house and clothe themselves and their families, much of this work has been performed for someone else, an owner or employer. People who work for others, the workers, receive pay for their work which is their means to live. For the employers to make the most amount of money for themselves, they pay workers very little, make them work very long hours and spend as little as possible on the working conditions. For the worker this work life can be hard and unjust. This act of working in poor conditions for long hours and low wages is called exploitation and it is the fight against this exploitation that is called the workers struggle.

Workers across the world and throughout history have joined together and demanded better treatment from the employers. The worker is the producer and what the worker produces makes money. In the same way that without farmers, crops cannot be grown and there will be no food to sell or eat, without workers factories cannot function, machines cannot work and things cannot be produced. Without the worker money cannot be made. This is where the strength of the worker lies and by coming together the workers act as one; they act in solidarity with each other.

The struggle in the workplace for fair treatment and decent conditions goes back hundreds of years. In the in-

dustrial revolution almost 200 years ago, small craft work was replaced by big factories in Europe and America, gradually spreading across the world, and the workers struggle intensified. In Europe, people began to travel from the countryside to the cities, giving up life on the farms to earn more money in the new factories that were being built to supply the mass production of goods. Some people in Europe chose to try and find work overseas, travelling from countries such as Ireland, Spain, Italy and Russia

The Lawrence Strike 1912

The town of Lawrence in the United States had many textile factories that employed thousands of migrant workers, mainly women but also men and even children, who had to work at a fast pace in dangerous conditions on looms for up to 60 hours a week. The workers lived in crowded apartment buildings, with many families sharing each apartment.

In January 1912 a new law was introduced that said women and children could only work 54 hours a week. The employers decided to reduce the wages in accordance with the reduction of hours, meaning the workers in the factories, already earning little would earn even less. They could no longer buy enough bread to feed their families.

When Polish women weavers at Everett Cotton Mills realized that their employer had reduced their pay they stopped their looms and left the factory, shouting "short pay, short pay!"

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Workers at other mills joined the next day; within a week more than 20,000 workers had stopped work, they were now on strike.

Meetings were organised and many women from the factories took leading roles. Demonstrations outside the factories were held daily against the factory owners and the workers faced much violent intimidation from the police. The strike lasted two months before finally the factory owners backed down and increased workers' wages and improved working conditions.

to countries such as the United States, Argentina and Brazil in search of work and a new life. In these countries too, people had moved from the countryside to the cities in search of work creating a swell of people from different cultures working in the big factories.

Work in these factories was often dangerous. In one factory there would often be hundreds of workers crammed in for over twelve hours a day with little air getting in for ventilation. Workers had to operate large, dangerous machines, with no safeguards. There were many accidents. The factory buildings themselves would often be dangerous too, with hazardous materials that could cause huge fires, with no way for the workers to escape. For all this the workers would earn a small wage, more than the farms they left behind but barely enough to survive in the big city.

Workers began to organise themselves because of these terrible conditions, organising to fight for justice. Realising that as individuals they could not make much difference, but together they were strong.

As factories and businesses have spread across the world so too have the conditions faced by workers of a hundred years ago spread but of course the desire for justice has also spread. The struggle taken on by the workers then, such as those of Lawrence textile factories above, has become the struggle of workers across the world today.

Around the world workers have stood up for their rights demanding justice from employers and governments. Here are just a few examples:



In Indonesia, the Centre for Indonesian Labour Struggle (PPBI an independent union led by a young woman called Dita Sari) was established in 1994 during the time of the Suharto regime which had allowed the slaughter of at least half a million people in anti-communist pogroms. The PPBI organised and took part in a huge number of workers struggles including a sit-in at

parliament house of 5000 workers and a 12,000 worker strong demonstration of garment workers against the exploitation by the employers of the garment company Great River Industries. Dita and other PPBI members faced constant intimidation, arrest, and imprisonment by the government, but despite this, through relentless industrial action, the PPBI played a vital role in bringing down the Suharto regime of Indonesia.

In Mexico,

in 2001, at the Kukdong garment factory, workers walked out of work one day in protest against harassment from factory foremen, against finding maggots in the canteen food and against the ineffectiveness of the corrupt employer-controlled union that was meant to support them. Five of their fellow workers had just been fired for demanding better treatment, so, over 800 factory workers, mostly young women, left their workstations and stood outside the factory in protest. For the next three days they camped in the factory's front patio, protesting against the sackings and the working conditions. Late on the third

night, the riot police, led by the company union's secretary general, marched into the area wielding clubs and guns. 17 workers were badly injured and needed medical treatment, many were knocked unconscious. Despite this violence the protests continued and grew. Friends and family members joined the workers in their protest outside the factory. As news spread support came from overseas. It emerged that Kukdong was a major supplier of the big sports company Nike. Many groups around the world lent their support to the workers and put pressure on Nike to listen to their demands for better conditions. The workers themselves decided that they had had enough of the employer controlled union and formed themselves into a new, independent union. Through the solidarity of the workers in factories all over Mexico and the support of groups around the world the Kukdong workers were able to force the company to revoke its contract with the corrupt union and acknowledge the new independent, workers controlled union. New contracts were signed and negotiations were arranged that led to many of the changes that the workers demanded.



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In South Africa,

in 2008, workers took action to stop a shipment of weapons from being unloaded and transported through the country to Zimbabwe. A shipment of arms from China arrived in the port of Durban, in South Africa, bound for Zimbabwe, which included powerful AK 47 rifles, rocket propelled grenades and mortar bombs. Many workers feared that the weapons would be used by the ruling regime of Robert Mugabe to crush political opponents. In an act of solidarity with fellow workers in Zimbabwe, workers in South Africa refused to unload the cargo. The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union announced that its members would not unload the arms and were joined by another union, the United Transport and Allied Trade Union in refusing to transport the weapons. This led to an international organisation that represented transport unions around the world, the International Transport Workers Federation to call on its members throughout Africa to follow the South African work-



ers example and refuse to unload the ship should it arrive in their port. The call was heard as workers in other countries refused to unload the arms. For weeks the ship sailed around the area looking for a friendly port until finally they were allowed in to a port in Angola. But, local trade unionists reported that only a shipment of cement was unloaded, not the weapons. The International Transport Workers Federation then monitored the ship as it returned with its deadly cargo back to China. African workers, united in solidarity, were able to make a serious impact on the lives of the people of Zimbabwe and demonstrated the power that workers have when they act as one.

SYSTEMS OF SOLIDARITY: DIFFERENT TYPES OF LABOUR ORGANISING

Solidarity among workers dates back centuries. There are several different forms of workers organisations that have emerged over the years, some are associations formed to protect workers' interests generally, while others are associations that bring workers together for cultural activities.

Workers around the world have always joined together to protect their interests, creating welfare systems for the benefit of themselves and their families and presenting a united front against untrustworthy employers who might cheat them. Workers have also organised their own clubs, associations and educational groups as a means of making the most of enjoying leisure time together away from hard work, or to come together to take part in recreational activities together and even to develop their own education. These different ways of organising have one thing in common, they are all part of a workers culture that has existed in different countries around the world for many years.

PROTECTION OF INTERESTS

Guilds:

Guilds are one of the oldest forms of workers solidarity. In Europe they date back over 1000 years to a time where craft workers would band together to protect their common interest. As guilds grew in members they became a powerful unit and would often get patronage from a city or monarch as recognition of their position in the society. A guild of a particular trade, such as carpenter or stonemason, within a particular city, would have control of all the work of that trade in that city, they would have a monopoly. Anyone wishing to perform a specific trade would have to become a member of the guild, or be employed as a labourer for a member of that guild. Over the centuries the guilds grew in power and influence in many cities and countries across Europe. They held great political power and played an important role in the functioning of the economy. With the onset of modern production methods and the spread of industrialisation and free trade the power of the guilds began to decline. Although to



Medieval Guild

this day some guilds in Europe still exist, they often function in ceremonial roles rather than with any influence on a particular trade. In places where guilds still exist as active organisations they often play a role similar to that of a trade union.

MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES:

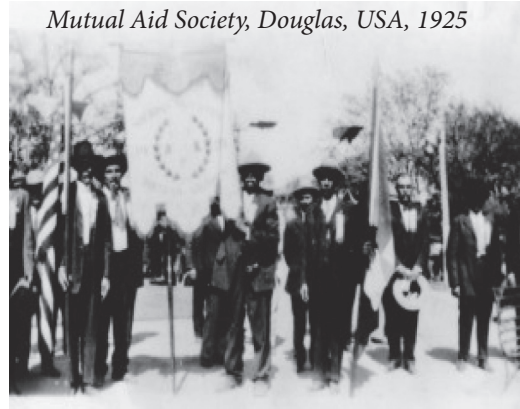
A mutual aid society is similar to a guild in that it is an organisation composed of workers that join together for mutual benefit and protection. Generally speaking, mutual aid societies are the original form of workers association and guilds themselves are a form of mutual aid society. However, in the 1800s formal organisations calling themselves

mutual aid groups spread across the world, particularly in Latin America. Mutual aid societies were more democratically organised than the old guild system and did not rely on patronage from any authority. They came in to existence as workers, facing hard conditions, banded together to protect their interests and provide some degree of

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welfare for themselves and their families. Workers would pay a fee in to the communal pot that would then be used to provide support for workers who became ill or were injured or during times of high unemployment. Mutual aid societies would be formed on the basis of a trade or of a nationality. In countries in South America, such as Argentina, mutual aid societies became very popular among migrant workers arriving from Europe. Thousands of migrants from Italy arrived in Argentina every year in the late 1800s, finding conditions little better than those they had left back home. These migrant workers started to form mutual aid societies based on different trades for the mutual benefit of workers of that trade. Some migrants formed mutual aid societies based on

Mutual Aid Society, Douglas, USA, 1925



their nationality, particularly Italians, forming Italian mutual aid groups of workers from many different trades. As well as providing mutual benefits, these groups would maintain their customs and traditions from their home countries and celebrate national holidays and festivals, providing some unity and kinship in a foreign country.

TRADE UNIONS

The Trade Union is the most widespread form of workers association in the world. They emerged over 150 years ago in Europe and America. Similar to guilds and mutual aid societies they are based on workers joining together to protect their interests, charging a fee from members to pay for actions of solidarity among the members. Unlike other forms of workers association trade unions are more confrontational with employers in their approach to protecting workers rights. Trade unions do not control a trade or industry as a whole but work as a body that represents workers interests. Often a trade union will negotiate with employers or owners over issues that affect workers, often to

get better pay and conditions, when negotiations fail trade unions call on their members to take action in stopping the workplace from running, most usually in the form of a strike in which the workers stop work and stand in protest outside of the workplace. Of all the workers associations' trade unions are the most successful at representing and defending workers' rights. Trade unions exist in almost every country in the world, often joining together inside a country under a congress of different unions and also joining together across nations in international confederations of trade unions. Trade unions exist in Thailand and have struggled for the right to organise against many oppressive governments

for over seventy years. In Burma too the trade unions began to emerge after the Second World War and gained a lot of support among workers, but they were suppressed in 1962 by the military regime. In October 2011 the Thein Sein Government in Burma passed a new law allowing workers to form unions, the Labour Organisation Law, however at the time of print this law was not yet in effect in Burma. In Thailand, migrant workers are allowed to join existing unions but cannot form their own unions



because the Labour Relations Act B. E. 2518 (1975) says only people of Thai nationality at birth can be on the Board of Directors of a union.

CULTURAL INTERESTS

Workers Clubs:

Workers clubs or centres appeared at around the same time that the trade unions began to grow in numbers and still exist in many countries to this day. Originally Workers clubs were opened near where workers lived to provide recreation and leisure activities. On most evenings it would be a place for workers to meet and relax after work, newspapers and books would be provided and in some cases food would be served. At weekend's events would be organised such as dances, plays, book readings and, in the summer, picnics in the countryside. Most of these workers clubs were very conservative and only be open to men, women were excluded or only allowed in on special occasions, they would be seen as a place for men to drink and socialise before going home to their families. Other workers clubs were more radical. These clubs were open to all workers, men and women, and would have a strong political element. At these workers clubs many

of the workers would discuss issues they faced in the workplace, as well as larger questions about rights in society and the oppression of workers as a group by politicians and wealthy business men. In these clubs radical ideas would be discussed, demonstrations planned and much of the organising work of trade unions would take place, well away from the managers, employers and owners. Today workers centre provide services such as language classes to migrant workers helping them learn the language of the host country, workers rights education classes to help workers understand their rights, support in accessing health clinics and other social services that workers are entitled to or simply advise workers in performing tasks such as setting up a bank account or a pension fund. Workers centres will sometimes document labour abuses that they are made aware of and help workers report abuse to the right authorities and lobby the government over laws that affect workers' rights.

STUDY GROUPS

A workers study group is a small group of workers who get together to improve their general education. Subjects covered can vary from social issues to maths and science. In the past workers study groups would be formed in workers centres either as part of the centre or separately by the workers themselves. The education system in Europe and America in the past was often very ineffective for working people and children would leave school at a very young age to go to work and earn money for their families, if they were able to go to school at all. So workers organised lectures from people with a good education to teach them basics such as reading and writing to more complicated

subjects such as maths and science, or even history and politics and other subjects that interested them. These education groups would often help workers understand the world better and lead to greater interest in current events with lively debates taking place on important issues of the day. Study groups still exist around the world today often organised independently by modern workers centres or NGOs or in more formal settings at community colleges and night schools where a fee is charged. Some are women only educational settings to provide women with opportunities they may have missed when younger because of their gender.

WORKERS UNITED: COLLECTIVE ACTIONS FOR JUSTICE

Workers collective action is when workers unite together in calling for an issue to be addressed. Collective action usually takes place when workers have a grievance in the workplace that affects all the workers. However, an issue that only effects one person might result in other workers taking collective action with that one worker, as it is common in a workplace that what happens to one worker can happen to others. This action of uniting together as a collective group is what we call **solidarity**.

Workers solidarity is usually associated with workers acting together, taking collective action. The reason why workers take collective action is usually

because of a problem in the work place or unethical business practices.

Such issues can be:

Wages:

The most common issue is over wages. Sometimes employers do not pay the full amount that the worker should be getting for the work they have done. Sometimes the employers don't pay the workers at all and withhold the wages for long periods. As well as this, there is the problem of wages not increasing over a long period. The cost of living will often go up over time as food and other things become more expensive. Wages should go up alongside the cost of liv-

ing. If the wages stay the same, workers are actually earning less than they used to for the same work. *Workers have to take collective action to get the wages they have earned and make sure it is a decent wage that they can live on.*

Hours and Days:

Another common issue that workers face is the length of time they have to work. Often the employers will want workers to work for long hours and pay them as little as they can for the hours they work. Long hours mean less time for workers to spend with their families and less time to live a decent life. For over a hundred years workers have struggled to have their long hours reduced without losing the amount of money that they earn in a day. Eight hours became the rallying cry of workers, a call to make the working day eight hours long with a decent wage for them to live on, giving them enough time for them to rest and spend time with their families. Eight hours is now the normal amount for workers in many countries. Any more than eight hours is over-time and extra pay should be given for extra hours worked. *When employers try to make workers work longer than eight hours for the same amount of money, workers need to take collective action.*

Conditions:

The working conditions of the workplace are the third main reason why workers have to take collective action. Health and Safety is an important issue in the workplace. Workers have the right to work in safe conditions that will not cause them to become ill or risk

injury. If a factory has no ventilation workers can get sick, if a construction site has no safety harnesses or protective clothing workers can get injured, if an agricultural worker uses dangerous chemicals without the right protection they can die. It is the responsibility of the employer to make sure that the work place is a safe environment for workers to work in, it is the responsibility of the employee to follow safety regulations *If workers have to work in unsafe or unhealthy conditions then the workers have to take collective action.*

Corporate Social Responsibility:

A modern issue that affects workers organising for justice is the development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This is where large companies, corporations, monitor their own production to make sure it meets the law, ethical standards and international regulations. Companies will often develop a code of conduct that represents their commitment to providing workers with decent conditions and maintaining environmentally sustainable production. Although CSR has been criticised for being a way for companies to improve their reputation and distract the public from ethical concerns by indicating socially responsible practice while continuing socially harmful business practices, CSR can benefit workers organising for justice. By taking note of a company's statements and intentions of Corporate Social Responsibility workers can hold employers to account over unjust treatment of workers and other unethical business practices. This can strengthen the workers position and help support the workers struggle.

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Environmental Issues:

A growing concern for everyone, but especially for workers and farmers in the impact of climate change. Global warming is having an impact on the environment in many way from extreme weather conditions, rising sea levels and changing ecosystems. Some of the responsibility falls on workplace practices. Many businesses across the world have been responsible in the past for not being environmentally friendly and workers have had to perform jobs that have damaged the environment, today this is thought to have had a major impact on climate change and people are

increasingly being called upon to be environmentally aware. This is now an issue that has become part of the workers struggle. In solidarity with people across the world, with an understanding that we must all do our best to look after the environment, workers can call on employers to improve environmental conditions in much the same way that they call on them to improve working conditions. By uniting together and demanding decent environmental work place practices workers contribute to the global struggle of protecting the environment.

WHAT FORM DOES COLLECTIVE ACTION TAKE ?

Collective action is when workers unite together as one and make a demand on the employers to address the issues that they are concerned about. There are two forms of collective action that workers can take, one usually comes before the other in approaching the employers with an action.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective Bargaining is when workers elect a small group from among themselves (or bring in someone from a trade union) to represent them and negotiate with the employers about the grievances they have. Through collective bargaining workers can present the reasons why they are not happy and explain why they think that the issue must be addressed by the employer. If negotiations are successful then the demands of the workers will be met either in part or in full, if the negotiations fail then workers are left with taking another form of collective action.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Industrial Action: Industrial action is when workers use their labour to affect the employer's profit. There are two ways that workers can do this, either by minimising the productivity of their

work or by withholding their work all together.

◆ **Minimising production:** There are two common ways that workers are able to minimise production and make an impact on the profits of the employer.

These actions need to be taken collectively to make an impact. The first action is called '**Go Slow**' where workers together reduce the speed of their work and minimise the output throughout the day. The second action is called '**Work to Rule**' where all workers ensure that they do no more than the bare minimum of work that is expected of them or that is stated in their contract. No additional tasks are undertaken by any workers other than their specific role. This action reduces the amount of production and frustrates employers who often rely on workers flexibility and desire to undertake more than one task.

◆ **Stopping Production:** Stopping production is the most effective means of industrial action and also the most radical. The common word for work-

ers collectively stopping production is **Strike**. When workers go on strike they put down their work tools, turn off machines and leave the work place, standing outside the workplace in groups, blocking the entrance so that no other worker can enter. This act of a group of workers standing outside the workplace entrance is called a **Picket**. Workers will often make signs to hold while they picket the workplace that have slogans explaining why they have stopped work or calling on employers to listen to them or take action on their grievances. This is the most direct and effective form of industrial action as it makes an immediate impact on production, and the employers profits, and demands that the employer negotiate with the workers to get production going again.

CHART I: THE PROCEDURE OF DEMANDING TO HAVE A CHANGE OR AN IMPROVEMENT OF CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT ACCORDING TO THE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT 2518

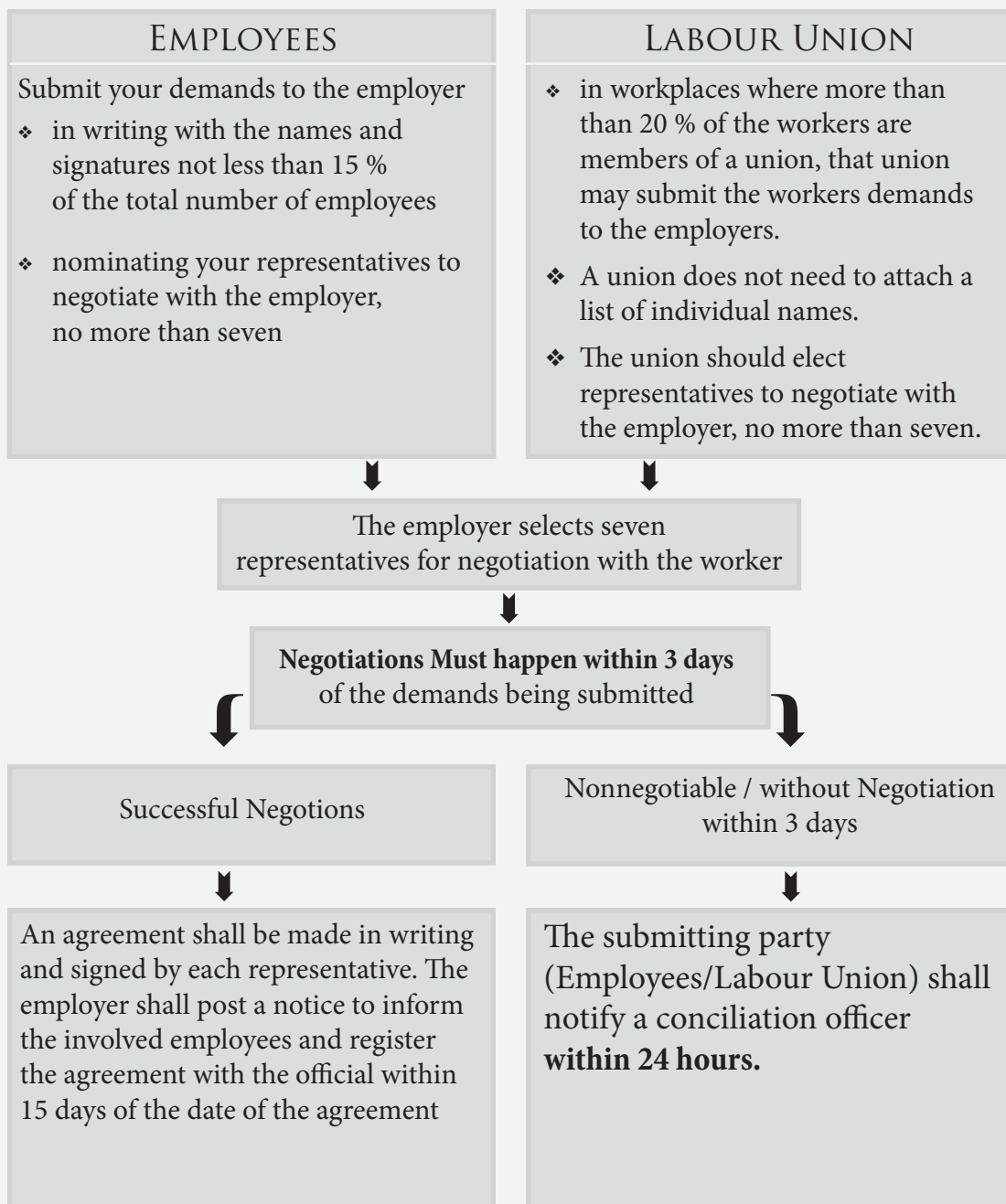


CHART II: THE PROCEDURE OF CONCILIATION ON LABOUR DISPUTE

Employees/Labour Union notify a conciliation officer within 24 hours



The conciliation officer **makes an appointment with both parties to conciliate within 5 days** from the date of being notified



Negotiation

During the process of negotiation, both parties should not strike or lock out.

- If the workers strike, it may cause termination without any payment
- If the employers lock out, it may result in a criminal penalty



Labour dispute can be settled

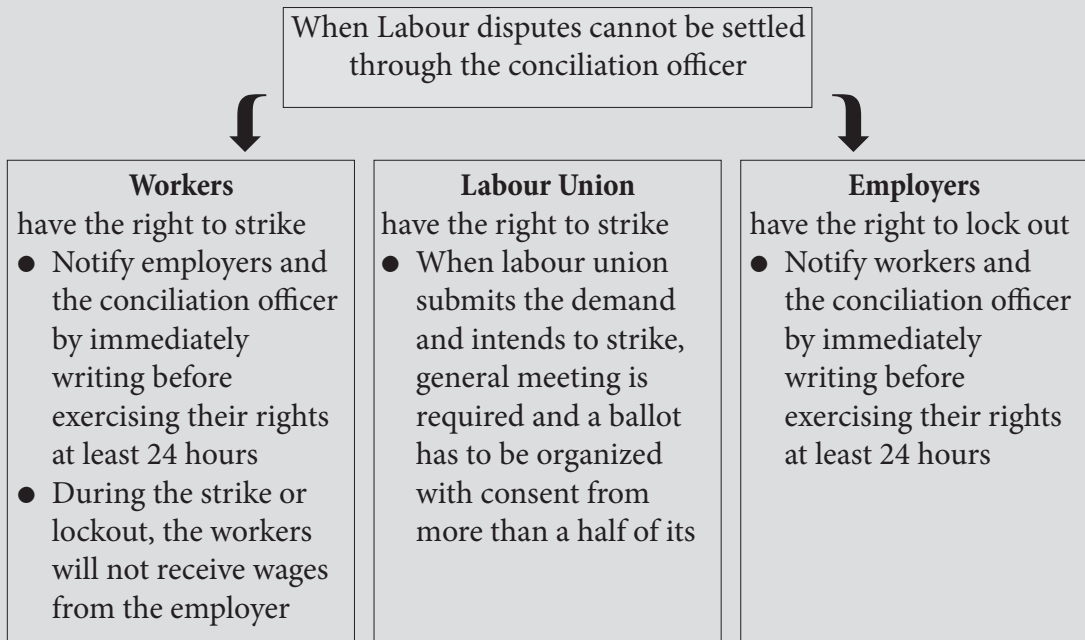
- Agreement shall be in writing.
- The employer must register with the authorized official within 15 days.



Labour dispute cannot be settled

- Conciliation officer submit the unsettled labour dispute to the Labour Relations Committee for consideration. (When the parties do not agree with the decision of the committee, they can appeal to the Minister of Labour. The Minister's decision will cease the case. Both parties must conform to the said decision)
- In an essential service, e.g. production or refinery of oil fuel, waterworks) both parties shall not strike or lock out.

CHART III: THE PROCEDURE OF STRIKE OR LOCKOUT



SOLIDARITY ALLIANCES: USING EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Coming together to unite in solidarity is very important for workers in organising for justice, but solidarity doesn't only exist among the worker themselves. It is important for workers struggling for better wages, hours, conditions and calling for other rights to work with groups outside of the workplace for advice, support and to gain publicity. There are many different groups that workers can turn to, some that will unite together with workers in solidarity and others that workers can request support.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS)

NGO are organisations set up not to make a profit but to either protect or promote the interests of a specific group or cause. Many NGO's aim at benefiting society in some way, with different groups focusing on different areas such as ending poverty, protecting the environment, promoting rights, and providing relief in times of crisis. There are many NGO's that focus on workers' rights. These organisations advocate workers' rights among governments and the general public and provide support in many different ways to workers around the world that are exploited by their employers and by big companies. Unlike trade unions, NGO's are not membership based organisations that workers join but independent organisations that support the rights of workers and act in solidarity. ...

MAP FOUNDATION



An example of an NGO is the MAP Foundation in Thailand. MAP works in support of migrant workers from Burma., MAP Foundation promotes the rights of migrant workers in many ways, including providing legal support to workers being exploited by employers, raising awareness of health and safety in the workplace to keep workers safe, lobbying the government to act on labour abuse and create more laws to protect migrant workers and helps empower migrant communities in Thailand to stand up for their rights. MAP Foundation is not an organisation that workers need to join but a group that workers can call upon for support in the workers struggle. MAP has a long history of supporting workers in taking employers to court for compensation over various labour abuses, , distributing information on workers rights and health and safety in the work place and generally facilitating migrant workers to have a voice in Thailand. For over 14 years MAP has built up a solid relationship with migrant communities and reaches out to migrants in the work place, training workers to defend their rights and act in solidarity with each other. MAP now has a strong network of volunteers who are well informed and can provide support and referrals in migrant communities around the country.

SOLIDARITY GROUPS

Solidarity groups are voluntary organisations set up by people who want to make a difference on social issues. These groups have emerged in the last 20 years in countries in Europe and in America. They include concerned citizens that join together over a particular issue and want to raise awareness among the public. There are many solidarity campaigns for many different causes, and workers' rights are just one of them. Workers solidarity groups campaign to raise awareness of the plight of workers in different countries that are being mis-

treated, especially when the workers in question are producing goods for large international companies that sell the products in the countries where the solidarity groups exist. Workers solidarity groups raise awareness among shoppers of goods made by workers that are being exploited, organise protests of companies responsible for the workers situation and lobby governments of countries around the world to hold companies to account and demand better conditions for the workers. These groups are an example of international solidarity.

NO SWEAT

An example of an international solidarity group is No Sweat, based in Britain. No Sweat was set up by individuals who wanted to protest against exploitation of workers by big clothing companies. The group organises demonstration outside shops that exploit workers to raise awareness of the workers struggle and produces literature about workers struggles around the world, publicising workers strikes and raises money to support workers groups. The activities of No Sweat give an example of how solidarity groups can have a direct impact on the lives of workers in other countries. The 2001 Kukdong strike in Mexico, mentioned earlier, saw solidarity groups around the world supporting the workers struggle in Mexico. No Sweat was one of those groups. No Sweat organised many demonstrations outside the large Nike shop in central London, distributed leaflet to shoppers and asked people to sign a petition calling on Nike to reinstate the sacked workers and improve working conditions. No Sweat coordinated their activities with other solidarity groups around the world also supporting the Mexican workers. After the workers victory, members of No Sweat visited the strikers and were told that workers had overheard a conversation between the Kukdong factory managers that indicated that international pressure from these groups had played a large role in their conceding to workers demands. International solidarity help the workers win a victory in their struggle.

POLITICAL PARTIES

political parties can, in some cases, provide some support to workers that are organising for justice. Political parties are involved in making laws that affect workers, ranging from the minimum wage that a worker can receive, to the basic standard of working condition that workers can operate in, to the levels of compensation that workers should receive in case of injury. Some political parties are very firmly on the side of employers and want to maximise the profits that companies can generate. Other political parties can sympathise with workers and promote the rights of workers. When workers organise for justice it is often in their interest to contact a political party that might lend them some support as this will often strengthen their position in the against employers. However, finding a political party that will support the workers cause is not always an option as political parties have many consideration when choosing their position on issues, most of the time they are guided by popular opinion.

LABOUR PARTY, UK

One example of political parties supporting workers struggles is The Labour Party. This is a political party in Britain that started as a parliamentary pressure group in 1900, set up by workers to represent workers interests in parliament. It was formed by trade unions and other groups interested in workers' rights. Many of the politicians come from a trade union background. For many years it represented workers interests in political debates in Britain until it eventually won an election and formed a government. Although today, it is no longer strictly a workers controlled party and now represents many interests, the trade union movement still plays a key role and still provides financial support, calling on the party to promote the interests of workers in making laws and representing the people.

MEDIA

The media is a powerful tool for workers when organising for justice and can provide great support for workers struggling for their rights. When workers are being exploited by employers, stories about that exploitation in the media highlight their cause and provide bad publicity for the employers and for the governments that allow the exploitation to take place. This will often bring employers around to negotiating with workers and often force them to listen to workers' demands. However, the media can have both a positive and a negative impact on workers struggle and the type of media coverage often depends on who owns or has influence over a

particular newspaper, television or radio station. In some cases, the media can spread lies about workers or portray the workers struggle in a bad way. This can prevent the workers gaining outside support from political parties and the government. In some countries workers have tried to form their own media such as newspapers, radio and television stations in order to spread the message of their struggle for rights and justice as much of the mainstream media is owned by rich men that have many business interests and connections with the government which means the newspapers, radio and television stations that they own will often side with the employers and portray workers in a negative way.

MIGRANT WORLD TELEVISION (MWT)

One example of workers producing their own media is Migrant World Television, a TV channel broadcast in South Korea. MWTV is a television channel that is run entirely by migrant workers and produces programs for migrant workers. Launched in 2005, the current executive director, AungTinhtun, is a migrant from Burma and its presenters include documented and undocumented migrants from many different countries. MWTV broadcasts weekly news programs in nine languages (Bengali, Burmese, Chinese, English, Indonesian, Mongolian, Nepali, Russian and Tagalog), focusing on issues of importance to migrant workers, news from home countries and explanations of Korean news. MWT is an example of migrants organising themselves outside of the workplace, using external agencies to help represent their interests and support their communities.

MIGRANT WORKERS SOLIDARITY - MIGRANTS FORMING ASSOCIATION THEMSELVES

Migrants forming associations themselves Workers travel to find work around the world. Migrant workers come from every country and live in every country and have always done so. Migrant workers are often sought after by employers for many reasons. Sometimes it is because migrants have special skills that are needed in a specific place, sometimes it is because there is a lack of workers in a particular area, but often migrant workers are sought after by employers because they can be exploited.

When a worker travels to a new country, one where they may not speak the language, they will often not have any information about working practices in that country. How much the average wage is in that country? How long is the average work day? What laws exist to protect the worker and what can a worker expect from an employer? These are important questions for every

worker and knowing the answers is the key to knowing how the worker is being treated. When people travel to another country and do not know the answers to these questions then employers are able to pay them less, to make them work longer hours without paying more money and avoid providing decent conditions in which to work. In other words, when workers don't have good information about their rights in a new country the employers are able to exploit them. **So to stop employers from exploiting workers it is very important for migrant workers to organise themselves.**

In Thailand migrant workers do have rights but, as with other countries, when workers don't have information about their rights they can find themselves being exploited. When workers don't stand together they can find themselves being exploited. For this reason workers must come together and organ-

ise themselves for their own protection and find out about the rights they have and the things they are entitled to.

In Thailand migrant workers have the right to organise. Migrant workers have the right to join a trade union, but they are not allowed to hold a position of leadership or form their own trade union among themselves. It is important for all workers to stand together in order to protect themselves against exploitation and the most effective way for workers to stand together is to join a union. When all the workers in a workplace join a union they stand together as one and they stand together with other workers in other workplaces. Even when an employer is a good employer and does not cheat the workers it is still important for the workers to join a trade union, because the employer has the ability to exploit the worker and it is only by standing together that the worker protects themselves from being exploited in the future.

However it is not always possible for workers to join a union. Sometimes there is no union branch in their area to

contact and in other cases there is tension between migrant workers and native workers, fuelled by negative media coverage. In this case it is important for workers to organise themselves. Although according to the Labour Relations Act, the committee members of a union must be Thai, migrants still have the right to organise. This means they can still come together and form their own associations.

Migrant worker associations have emerged to fill the void in labour organising. Migrants are forming their own groups to help represent their interests. Working with migrant communities and various community based organisations and NGOs, these associations are working to help workers hold their employers to account for abuses in the workplace. These associations also play a role in bringing migrant communities together, to build relationships among people from the same country living and working abroad. Through these associations people can share experiences, learn from each other and support each other in maintaining a decent life both in and outside of work.

WORKERS SOLIDARITY ASSOCIATION

One example of a migrant workers association is the Workers Solidarity Association (WSA) based in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand. The WSA was set up by migrant workers to help protect their interests. It emerged from Labour Exchanges of migrants organised by an MAP Foundation. The WSA receives small payments from members and uses the money to provide some welfare support as well as organise cultural activities or migrant communities and provide advice and support to migrant workers suffering from exploitation and abuse at work, including taking employers to court. The WSA has been growing for the last four years and is an important means of support for many migrant workers. It is also a great example of what workers can achieve when they get organised!

Contact Detail of Useful Organisations in Thailand

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) AND CBOs

- 1. MAP Foundation**
63/30 Umong Soi 4 Moo 8 A.Moung
Chiangmai 50200 THAILAND
Tel/Fax: 66 53 811 202
- 2. Try Arm Workers Cooperative**
425/2 Sukumvit 115 Tambon Samrong Nua,
Amphur Muang Samutprakarn
10270 THAILAND
- 3. State Enterprise Workers Relations Confederation (SEWRC)**
44 NikomRodfai KM.11 Viphavadee Soi 11
JatuJak Bangkok 10900 THAILAND
Tel. 02-537-8973. Fax. 02-936-2450
- 4. Thai Labour Solidarity Committee (TLSC)**
503/20 Nikom Rodfai Road
Makkasan, Rajthevee, Bangkok
10400 THAILAND. Tel: 02251-3173
- 5. Foundation for Education and Development (Grassroots HREDC)**
P.O Box 13, Takuapa Office, Takuapa, Phang
Nga 82110 THAILAND. Tel: 076 486 351
- 6. Worker Solidarity Association (WSA)**
63/30 Umong Soi 4 Moo 8 Amphur Moung
Chiangmai 50200 THAILAND
Tel/Fax: 66 53 811 202
- 7. Workers Center Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS)**
P.O. Box 107, Mae Sot Tak 63110
THAILAND. Tel: 055 546 694
- 8. Young Chi Oo Workers Association (YCOWA)** 21/21, Mae Sot -
Mae Tao Road, A. Mae Sot, Tak, 63110
THAILAND

- 9. Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN)**
25/17-18 Mahachai Muang thong Village.
Sahakorn Road, Tambon Bang Ya Praek
Muang, SamutSakhon 74000
Tel: 0-34434-726, 08-6163-1390,
08-4121-1609
- 10. Empower Foundation**
57/60 Tivanon Road
Nonthaburi 11000 THAILAND
Tel: 02-526-8311. Fax: 02- 526-3294
- 11. Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF)**
111 Soi Sitthichon, Suthisarnwinichai Road
Samsen Nok, Heuy Kwang Bangkok 10320

GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

- 1. Labour Relation Bureau**
Department of Labour Protection
and welfare Ministry of Labour
Mitrmaitree Road, Kwaeng
Dindaeng Khet Dindaeng, Bangkok
10400 THAILAND
Tel: 02 246 8393, 02 246 8993
Fax: 02 246 8393
- 2. Social Security Office**
Ministry of Labour
88/28 Moo4 Tiwanon Road
Muang, Nontaburi 11000
THAILAND. Hot Line: 1506
- 3. Department of Employment**
Ministry of Labour
Mitrmaitree Road, Kwaeng
Dindaeng Khet Dindaeng, Bangkok
10400 THAILAND
Tel: 02 247 9423, 02 248 4743
- 4. Labour Court Of Region 5**
Chotana Road Changpueng Muang
Chiang mai Thailand
Tel: 053-890742-3 Fax: 053-112007