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Democratization and Autonomous Unionism in Taiwan: The Case of Petrochemical Workers

MING-SHO HO

In the study of the Taiwanese labor movement, the prevailing consensus holds that democratization empowered the working class in Taiwan, while worker impact on democratization was minimal. While largely agreeing with this consensus, this paper seeks to offer some revisions by analyzing the rise of unionism in the China Petroleum Corporation (CPC). First, this paper argues that grass-roots militants played an important role in the making of autonomous unionism. Second, the worker activists themselves mediated the impact of democratization on unionism. Thanks to their workshop-level organizing, CPC workers cultivated a common anti-Kuomintang (KMT) outlook. This mentality served as a valuable mobilization framework for the union movement, building on the general resentment caused by KMT clientelism in the CPC. Third, the rise of autonomous unionism helped to clear away the KMT's authoritarian infrastructure within the CPC. Therefore, workers certainly made their contribution to democratization, no matter how local and indirect it might have been. This paper closes by putting these findings in a broader perspective and suggesting directions for further research.

KEYWORDS: Taiwan; democratization; union movement; workers; activists; party-state; opposition movement

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After a long period of silence, Taiwan has—since the mid-1980s—witnessed a great labor movement surge. Aggrieved workers began to claim their legal rights after years of exclusion from their share of the benefits of economic growth. Concomitantly, the authoritarian regime moved to relax control over civil society and initiated steps toward political liberalization. The lifting of martial law in July 1987 was an important trigger of subsequent labor activism. This was because, under the draconian regime that existed before 1987, martial law outlawed any act or speech that might "violate the national anti-communist policy, confuse public opinion, demoralize the populace, or disrupt public order";¹ military commanders were empowered, when necessary, to disband any public meeting; and strikes were strictly prohibited.² Understandably, the liberalized atmosphere lowered the costs of collective action by labor, and was largely responsible for the labor movement in the late 1980s.³

By the early 1990s, some visible signs of exhaustion of the labor mobilization process began to appear. First, well-enforced policing ruthlessly crushed militant unions and strikes. Many labor activists were round up for trial and imprisoned. Second, both the Workers' Party (工黨, 1987) and the Labor Party (勞動黨, 1988), founded by unionists and intellectuals, failed to meet the electoral challenge and were unable to play the role of labor's political advocate. Third, the state began to revise the Labor Standards Law (勞動基準法), Union Law (工會法), and Labor Dispute Mediation Law (勞資爭議處理法) in an attempt to restrict industrial citizenship. In response, labor activists turned their attention to legislative

¹Ming-sho Ho, *Minzhu zhuanxing guocheng zhong de guojia yu minjian shehui: Yi Taiwan de huanjing yundong weil* (State and civil society in democratic transition: The case of the environmental movement in Taiwan) (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2000), 74.

²Ibid.

³For an overview of the labor movement in the 1980s see Walden Bello and Stephanie Rosenfeld, *Dragons in Distress: Asia's Miracle in Crisis* (San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1990), 215-30; and Shuet-yin Ho, *Taiwan: After a Long Silence* (Hong Kong: Asia Monitor Research Center, 1990).

defense and were forced to forgo grass-roots union organizing.⁴ Thus, the labor movement lost energy and was further removed from the ongoing process of democratic transition.

Taken together, the above-mentioned phenomena have led scholars to formulate the following proposition: democratization empowered the working class in Taiwan, yet worker impact on democratization was minimal.⁵ While largely agreeing with these judgments, this paper puts forward some qualifications by taking a close look at a case of autonomous unionism by petrochemical workers. Aside from some exceptions,⁶ the relationship between democratization and labor has rarely been examined in the localized setting of the union. This paper aims to make up for this lacunae in the research literature by viewing labor activism from the shop floor. First, the paper argues that worker activists themselves made possible the impact of democratization on the labor movement. Opposition politicians and pro-labor intellectuals did not play a significant role in initial organizing. Second, organized labor largely obeyed the leadership of the opposition movement, rather than asserting their own agenda in the ongoing political transition. Still, autonomous unionists fought against Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) domination within the factory, and thus helped to dismantle authoritarian vote-mobilizing machines. In the main, this paper argues for the importance of grass-roots-level union activists in studying the labor

⁴For these trends see Jenn-hwan Wang and Xiau-ding Fang, "State, Labor Policies, and Labor Movement," *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* (Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies) (Taipei) 13 (November 1992): 1-29; Chao Kang, *Gaobie duhen: Minzhu weiji yu chulu de tansuo* (Farewell to resentment: Exploring the crisis of democracy in Taiwan) (Taipei: Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikanshe, 1998), 1-34; and G. S. Shieh, *Chun laodong: Taiwan laodong tizhi xulun* (Labor only: Essays on the labor regime in Taiwan) (Taipei: Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, 1997), 265-300.

⁵Chang-Ling Huang, "The Politics of Reregulation: Globalization, Democratization, and the Taiwanese Labor Movement," *The Developing Economies* 40, no. 3 (September 2002): 307; Yin-wah Chu, "Labor and Democratization in South Korea and Taiwan," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 28, no. 2 (1998): 185-202; and Jenn-hwan Wang, "Contesting Flexibility: The Restructuring of Taiwan's Labor Relations and Spatial Organization," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 2 (June 2001): 354-55.

⁶See, for example, Chao Kang, "Taiwanese Union, State, and Labor Movement in 1987: The Case of the Far Eastern Chemical Union," in *Taiwan de guojia shehui* (State and society in Taiwan), ed. Michael Hsin-huang Hsiao and Cheng-kuang Hsu (Taipei: Dongda, 1996), 115-50.



movement during the island's political transition.

This paper focuses on the Local One chapter of the Taiwan Petrochemical Workers' Union (TPWU, 台灣石油工會),⁷ which is made up of China Petroleum Corporation (CPC, 中國石油公司) employees in refineries, petrochemical plants, and power stations under three Kaohsiung (高雄) plants.⁸ Downsizing in the recent decade has reduced the membership of Local One from more than 7,000 to less than 6,000. The TPWU proudly proclaimed itself as "the locomotive union" of the Taiwanese labor movement for being one of the best-organized, persistently militant, and earliest worker-controlled unions. The strength of TPWU came from the Local One chapter.

This paper is organized as follows. Section one deals with labor control prior to worker mobilization, with special attention paid to the KMT machine within the factory. Section two goes on to analyze the rise of *dangwai* (黨外, literally "outside the party") supporters in the CPC around the late 1970s. These politically active workers later turned their attention to job issues, and successfully wrestled union control from the KMT. The third section describes the political behavior of worker-controlled union in the 1990s—i.e., how they continued to fight the remnant KMT forces and mobilize for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) electoral campaign. The paper closes by discussing the implications that can be drawn from this idiosyncratic case.

In terms of methodology, this research is qualitative and historical in nature. Since KMT clientelism is a highly individualistic and localized control device, the only way to understand how this machine works was to ask CPC workers to relate their life experiences. Aside from a few published materials, data collection heavily relied on field interviews and

⁷According to the Union Law (last revised in 1975), industrial union organization is restricted to a single factory and administrative region. However, the state-owned CPC was liberally interpreted as being a public utility enterprise; thus, it was possible to organize all the CPC workers into the TPWU, and factory workers in three Kaohsiung plants into Local One.

⁸More than one-third, but less than one half, of the CPC workers belonged to the three Kaohsiung plants. In fact, the greatest majority worked in the gas stations scattered island-wide. This essay only deals with the petrochemical workers in the Kaohsiung area. For the sake of brevity, they are referred to as "CPC workers."

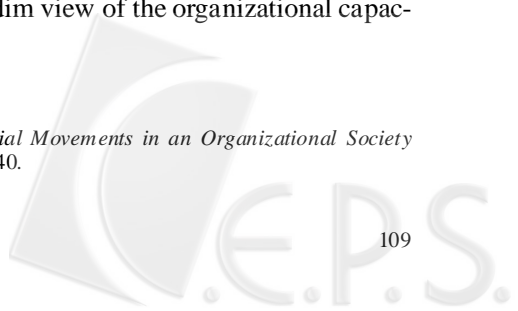
participant observations. The author came to know some CPC unionists in 1999 when he came to Kaohsiung to work on the union campaign publications. These union cadres helped the author to meet additional workers when he began to conduct field research in 2002. Among the existing literature on the Taiwanese labor movement, most works are cast in a macro-structural fashion. Few have studied the everyday world of the workers and its relation to their collective action. The historical method employed here helps make up for this deficiency by enabling a closer look at how workers actually experience injustice and how their perceptions further shape subsequent mobilization.

Grass Roots or Elites: Who Organized the Organizers?

A common understanding is that there is no social movement without organizers. Organizers raise consciousness and help pool resources, activities which lower the initial threshold of collective action. Leadership is also vital for the continuance of the movement, preventing it from degenerating into formless crowd behavior. Still, the question remains: Who are the first organizers and who organizes the organizers? In the context of democratization and the union movement, this question is about the relationship between opposition activists and union activists. Who learns from whom and how?

Researchers of resource mobilization theory take a rationalist account of social movement by stressing the importance of leadership and resources. Arguing against the classical perspective of the "hearts and minds of the people," such scholars attribute the rise of the movement to favorable external conditions—such as donations from affluent people, voluntary participation of professionals, and organizational support.⁹ In particular, resource mobilization theory takes a dim view of the organizational capac-

⁹John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *Social Movements in an Organizational Society* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1987), 340.



ity among the aggrieved grass roots. These people are viewed as being often "powerless"—i.e., without the necessary resources to change their lot by spontaneously engaging in collective action.¹⁰ Thus, "social movement entrepreneurs" are vital for the beginning of the movement. From this perspective, protest arises not because of accumulated grievances, but rather out of the successful intervention of external elites.¹¹

Similarly, research on social movement in democratic transitions stresses the contributing effect that political oppositions have on social movements. Many studies have confirmed the "inverted V" mobilization curve that occurs during regime transition. Social protests tend to rise in the initial period of liberalization, and then gradually decline in the later period of democratic consolidation.¹² Some scholars have sought to explain this phenomenon by the shifting attitudes of opposition elites. In both the Chilean urban squatters' movement¹³ and the Spanish workers' movement,¹⁴ left-wing opposition cadres were the main organizers in the incipient period of mobilization. The influx of political resources accounted for the very rise of these protests. In the later period, however, as the opposition parties were more comfortably accommodated into the new regime, the political sponsorship was withdrawn, with the movements literally de-mobilized as a result. In Taiwan, a study on earlier social movements also looked at the opposition elites as the natural organizers of political consciousness and network resources.¹⁵ The popular view also

¹⁰Craig J. Jenkins and Charles Perrow, "Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Worker Movement (1964-1972)," *American Sociological Review* 42 (1977): 249-68.

¹¹Craig J. Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movement," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983): 531.

¹²Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

¹³Patricia L. Hipsher, "Democratic Transitions and Social Movement Outcomes: The Chilean Shantytown Dwellers' Movement in Comparative Perspective," in *From Contention to Democracy: Social Movements and Their Potential for Change*, by Marco G. Giugni, ed. Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 149-68.

¹⁴Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracy: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 126-27.

¹⁵Jenn-hwan Wang, *Shei tongzhi Taiwan* (Who governs in Taiwan?) (Taipei: Juliu, 1996), 67.

identified the DPP's transformation as the main cause of the decline of social movements in the 1990s.¹⁶

There are many criticisms of this elitist theory. Scholars who have a greater confidence in mass spontaneity tend to stress the self-organizing capacity of the general populace. In addition to resource provision from without, the "indigenous resources"—such as local networks and organizations—are vital for the initial mobilization of protests.¹⁷ The formalized and bureaucratized movement organizations are often the result—rather than the precondition—of grass-roots protests. Thus, these scholars view elite sponsorship as being reactive to grass-roots initiatives, sometimes even with a disguised purpose to control.¹⁸

Indeed, as Larry Diamond argues, "in the burgeoning theoretical and empirical literature on democratization, few issues are more central and diffuse than the question of elite versus mass influence."¹⁹ Scholars also are divided over the origin of social movements in democratic transition. Rather than simply taking side with one camp or the other, this paper proposes a more sophisticated and dialectic version to account for the rise of autonomous unionism in the CPC. First, the union activists were indeed inspired by the *dangwai* movement through different channels. These union activists were politically mobilized prior to turning attention to their job issues and union. Second, although the early *dangwai* was mainly a political movement lacking explicit social critiques, the worker followers applied their anti-KMT message in the workplace, and thus planted the seeds of autonomous unionism. In sum, the opposition elites were enlighteners but not direct organizers. The anti-authoritarian criticisms of the grass-roots activists became a stimulus to action by re-interpreting, re-framing, and broadcasting the opposition consciousness. Before sub-

¹⁶See, for example, *Zhongguo shibao* (China Times) (Taipei), February 15, 2001, 15.

¹⁷Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 31-32.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 122-24; and Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1977), xxi.

¹⁹Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218.

stantiating these theoretical claims with empirical data, the following section examines the life of the average CPC worker prior to autonomous unionism in order to better understand their grievances.

Before moving on with the analysis, however, the term "autonomous unionism" requires additional discussion. The first labor movement wave, occurring in the late 1980s, has characterized itself as "autonomous" since inception. In that context, being autonomous meant independence from KMT control, and this qualification was intensively drawn in order to distinguish themselves from the KMT-supported candidates in union elections at that time. In 1988, radical unionists in northern Taiwan formed an alliance, the "National League of Autonomous Labor" (全國自主工聯), with the intention to replace the KMT-fostered Chinese Federation of Labor (全國總工會).²⁰ From then on, this name became the common denominator for all independently organized labor. Thus, the opposite of autonomous unionism was not "pure and simple" business unionism, as prevailed in American labor history.²¹ Autonomous unionists might seek short-term material benefits, yet they do not shun political action. In fact, as the following analysis will show, many autonomous unionists had joined the DPP, or were its sympathizers, since the late 1980s. This essay follows indigenous usage in characterizing the CPC unionism as "autonomous," while noticing the fact that unionism is neither nonpartisan nor radical in the sense of advocating any version of socialism.

Workers under KMT Control: Beneath State Corporatism

Previous scholarship on the KMT control of labor stressed the corporatist arrangement.²² The authoritarian state took the lead to organize

²⁰Ho, *Taiwan: After a Long Silence*, 88.

²¹H. M. Gittelman, "Adolph Strasser and the Origins of Pure and Simple Trade Unionism," in *The Labor History Reader*, ed. Daniel J. Leab (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 153-65.

²²Frederic C. Deyo, "State and Labor: Modes of Political Exclusion in East Asian Develop-

workers in both state-owned enterprises and large private companies in order to preempt autonomous union representation. Various legal devices excluded unionism rivalry and secured the KMT cadres at the top of the union hierarchy. Under state corporatism, union leaders—co-opted by the KMT regime—were not accountable to the rank-and-file workers. Unions in such a situation were often called "token" or "vase" unions.²³ Still, few scholars have ventured inside the factory to witness firsthand the actual workings of KMT labor control. KMT state corporatism was a structural device designed to keep labor from organizing, to co-opt labor leaders, and to present a pro-labor façade—yet only slightly touched upon the everyday life of the average worker. To understand the real extent of labor control and subsequent worker resentment against the KMT, a closer look inside the CPC is required.

The CPC was established in 1946 by incorporating a large petrochemical complex created by the Japanese navy. In the very beginning, the KMT set up three branch offices within the CPC. Veterans who retired from the army were reallocated to KMT positions within the CPC. In 1961, three offices merged into a party branch, with the general director of the Kaohsiung plant as its chairperson.²⁴ The KMT officials nominally belonged to the CPC workforce and were on its payroll, but these individuals had the special tasks of propagating ideology, recruiting new party members, mobilizing votes, and monitoring dissent.

This KMT branch cannot be found in the published catalogues of

ment," in *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism*, ed. Frederic C. Deyo (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 182-202; Cheng-kuang Hsu, "From Alienation to Autonomy: Basic Characteristics and Trends of Labor Movement in Taiwan," in *Taiwan xinxin shehui yundong* (New social movement in Taiwan), ed. Cheng-kuang Hsu and Wen-li Soong (Taipei: Juliu, 1989), 103-26; and Yung-chieh Lee, *Taiwan gonghui zhengce de zhengzhi jingji fenxi* (Political economy of union policy in Taiwan) (Taipei: Juliu, 1992).

²³"Vase" refers to their decorative rather than useful function. See Michael H. H. Hsiao, "The Labor Movement in Taiwan: A Retrospective and Prospective Look," in *Taiwan: Beyond the Economic Miracle*, ed. Denis Fred Simon and Michael Y. M. Kau (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), 156.

²⁴China Petroleum Corporation (CPC), *Gaoxiong lianyou zongchang changshiji* (History of the Kaohsiung refinery plant) (Kaohsiung: CPC, 1981), 471.

CPC divisions, although there was a period of time when the KMT insignia hung directly under the sign of the CPC Kaohsiung refinery plant.²⁵ In order to avoid criticism, however, the KMT officials later were regrouped under several operational units given innocent titles. The first was the so-called "Employee Relations Committee" (員工關係委員會, *yuangong guanxi weiyuanhui*). This Committee was set up in 1971, with three bureau divisions. Aside from KMT partisan affairs, this unit was also in charge of certain company personnel policies. Within the CPC there was also a monthly publication, *Lijin* (勵進, Encouragement). *Lijin*, also manned by KMT officials, was a company-supported periodical distributed to all employees. In addition to "providing food for thought," these publications were aimed at disseminating partisan ideology and company policy among workers. The KMT also organized a "Women's Mutual Help Society" (婦女互助會, *funü huzhuhui*) in the residential neighborhood. Usually, the wife of the general director/party branch chairperson was the head of this society. The women's society administrated some aspects of company welfare and mobilized votes for KMT candidates during elections.²⁶ Finally, the union was under the KMT's firm control. Legally, the union positions were periodically open to popular election among members. Prior to the pressure from below that sprang up around the mid-1980s, however, every CPC employee's personal seal was kept in the custody of his/her superiors and used for casting his/her ballot during the union election.²⁷ By rigging the electoral process, the KMT secured a docile union. Small wonder that the average worker cared nothing about the union. For them, the union meant no more than the monthly automatic deduction of membership dues from their wages—a cost they had no choice but to bear. It was in this context that many workers mistook the union as an administrative office belonging to the company.²⁸ Thus, the KMT machine was rather like a

²⁵Interview K08, July 16, 2002.

²⁶CPC, *Gaoxiong lianyou zongchang changshiji*, 480-82.

²⁷Interview K38, October 4, 2002.

²⁸As late as 1992, autonomous unionists complained that some members still had the habit of addressing the union as the "union bureau" in written correspondence. See TPWU Local

gigantic parasite feasting upon the resource-laden state-owned enterprise—a party-state in miniature. In this regard, the KMT regime did not differ much from the Chinese Communist Party, for both set up party branches and officials within factories.²⁹

With all the party's organizational and ideological paraphernalia of control, it is still meaningful to ask how the workers actually felt about the KMT. My field study suggests that KMT influence was only limited to partisan members and loyalists. Some of the interviewed workers held KMT membership before working in the CPC, yet were never contacted or mobilized by KMT officials within the company.³⁰ In fact, for most non-partisan workers, the KMT officials and enthusiastic members formed a privileged inner circle.

Being a KMT loyalist was very rewarding in many ways. First, the KMT branch often held meetings during office hours, which meant their members could leave their workplace with authorized absence. Second, KMT members enjoyed advantages in promotion, job transfers, and company welfare priority. In the past, the CPC had a rather haphazard personnel policy, with many decisions made according to the personal wishes of the superiors.³¹ In this highly individualized competition to win favors from above, KMT membership was a valuable asset. In this regard, union positions were quite useful for they provided abundant chances to meet higher officials in the CPC and thus provided better career prospects. Thus, one TPWU president in the 1960s was promoted first to general manager of the CPC in 1987 and later to chairman of the board of one of the CPC

One, *Ershisi ji huibian zengkan* (Collection of twenty-four issues of union papers) (Kaohsiung: TPWU, 1994), 33.

²⁹Andrew G. Walder, "Organized Dependency and Cultures of Authority in Chinese Industries," *Journal of Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (November 1983): 51-76.

³⁰Interview K40, November 26, 2002.

³¹Mei-chuan Huang, "Qugehua neibu laodongli shichang, shequ yu gonghui de zizhu yu zhuanxing: Yi Gaoxiong lianyouchang weili" (Segregated the internal labor market, community, and union's autonomy and transformation: The case of the Kaohsiung refinery plant) (M.A. thesis, Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan, 1991), 56; and Ming-sho Ho, "Status Politics and Origin of Workers' Protest" (Paper presented at the Third Conference on Social Stratification in Chinese Societies, Chinese University of Hong Kong, November 28-30, 2002).



subsidiaries in 1994. The last group of KMT union cadres (prior to the workers' takeover) also enjoyed career benefits. They were all rewarded with promotions as a result of union participation.³² The annual model worker award was originally designed to boost workplace morale. In reality, "model workers" were often selected on the basis of KMT membership or whether they had dutifully canvassed for KMT candidates.³³

Finally, since the KMT members were entitled to use company resources, there were many possibilities for making private profit. For example, the KMT-controlled Employee Relations Committee would use procurement contracts to reward their followers who had certain investments in related business.³⁴ In some incidences, the behavior of KMT officials was in fact outright corruption. One report held that the *Lijin* monthly became the personal profit-making instrument for one editor, who had retired from the army as a political warfare officer. That KMT editor used a variety of pennames or family member names to capture a handsome share of the monthly honorariums. He would sometimes even resort to plain plagiarism by including monthly installments of a novel already published under his name.³⁵

In sum, KMT officials and members formed a privileged clique within the CPC. Rather than simply mobilizing their followers via ideology, the KMT branch took up a substantial share of company resources and redistributed them as a kind of personal favor. A previous study on the state-owned Taiwan Power Company (台灣電力公司) characterized this reward system as clientelism.³⁶ In the CPC, a similar patronage mechanism could also be found. Material benefits were exchanged for conformism

³²Interview K21, August 12, 2002.

³³TPWU Local One, *Sizhoumian huibian zengkan* (Collection of four-year union papers) (Kaohsiung: TPWU, 1996), 223.

³⁴Interview K39, November 25, 2002.

³⁵TPWU Local One, *Ershisi ji huibian zengkan*, 232-33, 302-3.

³⁶Tsung-hong Lin, "Taiwan guoying shiye laodong guocheng de lishi bianqian: Yi Taiwan dianli gongsi wei anli de fenxi" (Historical change of labor process in Taiwanese state-owned enterprises: The case of the Taiwan Power Company) (M.A. thesis, Tsinghua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan, 1999), 72-75.

within a narrow circle, while the larger part of nonpartisan workers were excluded. Beneath the edifice of state corporatism, multiple and minute favor-for-loyalty exchanges were a common occurrence in the everyday life of CPC workers. Clearly, this kind of labor control bred both formalism and cynicism among aspiring followers, while also leading to resentment among the excluded. The latter would jeeringly call the former "slaves" or "henchmen."

It is true that not all of worker grievances originated directly from KMT domination. The CPC workers used to complain that their wages were lower than those of Telecommunications Bureau (電信總局; currently Chunghwa Telecommunications Company, 中華電信公司) workers. Given that the Ministry of Economic Affairs (經濟部) set a uniform wage rate, however, such grievances were common for all shipbuilding, steel, electricity, and sugar workers in state-owned enterprises. Still, the KMT was an easy and visible target. The salience of the KMT branch in the CPC also had an unintended consequence: workers were easily persuaded to believe that their grievances came from the biases of the KMT regime. For the workers, this kind of politicized interpretation had greater "narrative fidelity"³⁷ for it was commensurate with their everyday experiences. Thus, by instituting a clientelist mobilization infrastructure in the CPC, the KMT branch opened up the gate to politicized criticism, which later turned into an equally politicized union movement.

Between Politics and Unionism: The Story of Yang Ching-chu

The 1970s witnessed a period of intellectual and political awakening in Taiwan. With Chiang Ching-kuo's (蔣經國) liberal reform experiment, the public sphere was slightly opened. The opposition made use of the limited electoral opportunity now available to voice political criticism

³⁷David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization," in *International Social Movement Research*, ed. Bert Klandermans et al. (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1988), 210.



of KMT authoritarianism. After the 1977 Chungli (中壢) incident, the *dangwai* movement was formed and presented a collective challenge to the KMT regime.³⁸

The CPC workers were not immune from this great transformation. Among the early predecessors, the worker-novelist Yang Ching-chu (楊青矗) was a notable example. When Yang began to work at the CPC refinery in 1960, he also wrote short stories about the conditions of the industrial proletariat. Many of his stories focused on the problems of authoritarian management, underpayment, discrimination, and favoritism rife in modern factory life. The early CPC, of course, provided ample material for his writing. Basically, Yang was a humanitarianist: he wanted to improve worker living standards and social status. Yang advocated a version of "factory to the toilers" by actively promoting a scheme of partial employee ownership.³⁹

In order to voice his ideals, Yang wrote two collections of stories on workers in 1975 and 1979, which earned acclaimed attention from literary circles.⁴⁰ In addition, Yang also decided to run for political office in order to champion workers' issues. In 1975, he wanted to join the supplementary election for legislators representing worker constituents. The KMT-dominated TWPU Local One deliberately delayed the registration process, however, and therefore disfranchised all CPC employees in Kaohsiung as voters for worker groups.⁴¹ In 1978, Yang successfully obtained the candidacy, but the election was suddenly suspended by governmental decree on the grounds of the recent severance of Taiwan's diplomatic relations with the United States.

Yang's political activities drew himself closer to the *dangwai* move-

³⁸Peter R. Moody, Jr., *Political Change on Taiwan* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 78-84; and Thomas B. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1988), 116-20.

³⁹Yang Ching-chu, *Gongchangren de xinyuan* (Wishes of factory people) (Kaohsiung: Dunli, 1979), 104-6.

⁴⁰Yang Ching-chu, *Gongchangren* (Factory people) (Kaohsiung: Wenhuan, 1975), and *Gongchang ernü zhuan* (Daughters of factory) (Kaohsiung: Wenhuan, 1979).

⁴¹Yang turned his personal experiences into a story. See Yang Ching-chu, *Chenyanyxia* (Under the smokestack) (Kaohsiung: Dunli, 1978), 71-96.

ment. When the *Meilitao* (美麗島, or *Meilidao*, Formosa) magazine was formed in 1979 as a result of a successful realignment of opposition forces, Yang served as one of the editors and the manager of the magazine's Kaohsiung city branch. Three days after the Meilitao Incident on December 10, he was arrested and imprisoned until 1983.⁴²

Yang's story raises some interesting questions. First, why did he surpass the factory-level struggle and directly join the electoral campaign and *dangwai* movement? Would it not have been easier for Yang to have begun at the local level? In 1975, Yang and his six friends made a bid to campaign for the nine director seats of TPWU Local One. During the election, their efforts were both ridiculed and sabotaged by KMT officials in the CPC. As a result, only Yang was elected in this highly rigged process. Angered and frustrated, he gave up his seat immediately in protest.⁴³ Clearly, opportunity for labor activism looked dimmer within the factory. Many of his co-workers in the CPC would have liked to vote for him as a citizen, but were afraid to do so as a union member. Retrospectively, Yang attributed the problem to the KMT's domination in the factory, which made the union an appendage of the party branch. To improve union function, he felt that it was necessary to "purify union members" and to prevent the KMT's illegitimate influence.⁴⁴ Thus, union activism was not sufficient to fight for workers' rights. Understandably, Yang chose a politicized path away from the local union to which he belonged.

Second, how significant was Yang's personal influence for the autonomous unionism that appeared a decade later? Based on the author's field interviews, none of the autonomous unionists in the TPWU knew Yang on a personal basis, although Yang's novels on the situation of workers did inspire many people at that time.⁴⁵ Many of Yang's early

⁴²Biographical information mainly comes from Yang Ching-chu, *Duanpian xiaoshuoji* (Short stories of Yang Ching-chu) (Taipei: Qianwei, 1992).

⁴³See Yang, *Chenyanxia*, 97-134.

⁴⁴Yang Ching-chu, "Current Union Organizations and Their Functional Shortcomings," *Meilitao*, November 25, 1979, 55-56.

⁴⁵Interview K06, July 12, 2002; K17, August 11, 2002; and K21, August 12, 2002. Much to the author's surprise, none of the informers knew of Yang's union campaign in 1975.

stories were modeled on CPC life without directly mentioning the company name. Yang painted a vivid picture of pent-up sufferings, low pay, and undesirable status among the state-owned enterprise workers. Undoubtedly, workers reading these pieces would find many similarities to their daily lives. Thus, Yang's writings, rather than his campaigning, enlightened the would-be unionists by inviting them to adopt a new perspective on their grievances. After Yang's political imprisonment in 1979, he lost all direct contact with CPC workers.

From Political Activists to Autonomous Unionists

For almost a decade, Yang Ching-chu's combined activism in politics and unionism was a lone example. His followers were *dangwai* sympathizers before becoming unionists. When Yang joined the inner circle of *Meilitao* magazine in the late 1970s, some younger workers were also active supporters of the *dangwai* movement. The current director of TPWU Local One, Wang Jyi-yeong (王吉永), claimed to have "joined" the opposition movement when he was still a high school student. Wang was even involved in one violent clash with police prior to the *Meilitao* Incident in December 1979. Wang and his CPC co-workers were present on that eventful night, and witnessed and experienced the state crackdown personally. After the incident, the KMT officials in the CPC interrogated Wang and other *dangwai* supporters, warning them to "stay away from the opposition."

From the late 1970s, these vanguards also frequented the *dangwai* public speech activities during the electoral seasons. There they learned the freshest anti-KMT criticisms and received their first lessons in politics. In the past, it was rumored that the KMT officials went to these *dangwai* gatherings and secretly monitored the activities of CPC workers.⁴⁶ Before the lifting of martial law in July 1987, the *dangwai* magazines were im-

⁴⁶Interview K43, December 14, 2002.

portant channels for spreading the views of political dissents among CPC workers. At that time, daring criticisms and exposure of KMT irregularities were the chief attractions of these magazines, providing sensational news that could not escape KMT attention. Quite often, the *dangwai* supporters would bring these materials into the factory operation rooms where workers, having finished their tasks, would discuss the issues. Through this method, anti-KMT ideas were brought into the factories.⁴⁷

It is important to emphasize the proselytizing efforts of these would-be unionists. These individuals were often the opinion leaders in the workshop, diligently propagating the new political gospels either by inviting their co-workers to hear *dangwai* speech, or providing them with dissent magazines. One unionist the author interviewed spent extra time in the factory after his shift in order to just "talk about politics and criticize the KMT" with co-workers.⁴⁸ Applying Tilly's typology, these CPC political enthusiasts could be described as "zealots," who cared more about collective goods that could be acquired than the resources that could be expended.⁴⁹

If Yang Ching-chu was drawn into politics because of his humanitarian concerns about the situation of the workers, the younger activists were politically mobilized by the *dangwai* before they became interested in union activities. Why did these activists first choose to spend their organizing energy on political issues rather than on the more immediate problems workers face in their everyday life? It has been pointed out that the opposition movement in Taiwan mobilized along the social cleavage of ethnicity rather than of class; the *dangwai* movement (and later the DPP) tended to avoid the issue of class and social problems.⁵⁰ During the *Meili-*

⁴⁷Interview K17, August 11, 2002. Also see Yu-hsien Wu, "Paixi/fenlei yu zhengzhi yundong: Taiwan shiyou gonghui wei ge'an de yanjiu" (Factions/classification and politics: The case of the Taiwan Petroleum Workers' Union) (M.A. thesis, National Taiwan University, 1996), 48.

⁴⁸Field note, January 8, 2000.

⁴⁹Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 88.

⁵⁰Lin Chia-lung, "Oppositional Movement under an Authoritarian-Clientelist Regime:

tao period of the *dangwai* movement, Yang was one among the few who were eager to bring class issues onto the political agenda. In contrast, the mainstream opposition elites were not so interested in social problems, preferring to challenge the KMT regime on political grounds by raising such issues as legitimacy, human rights, and freedom of speech. Linda Arrigo, one of the *Meilitao* left-wing activists, documented the opposition leaders' aversion to such "sensitive issues" as abortion and union recognition—issues that were "unnecessary" and would scare away their small and medium-sized business supporters.⁵¹ Clearly the opposition was a political movement, not a social one. During that time, a politically-minded CPC worker was certainly a *dangwai* zealot, but typically did not care about the class issue. An interesting question is why workers paid more attention to high politics, which was quite remote from their daily concerns.

Here, the problem is somewhat similar to the classical Marxist one of how the proletarians formed into a class.⁵² Simply put, these *dangwai* zealots did not pursue their interests as a class, and the opposition movement—led principally by the middle class—did not care about the plight of the workers. Can we, however, use "false consciousness" or "low class consciousness" to explain away this phenomenon? To resort to this kind of explanation would commit the following two errors. First, this objective determinism reduces the complexities of social relations. Class experience is simplified into the question of correspondence or non-correspondence between subjective consciousness and objective condition. Second, there is no pure, ideal-type class situation in empirical reality. Class domination is always mixed up with other "zones of categorical inequalities."⁵³ Therefore, there exist possibilities of "conflict displacement," where one set of antagonism is expressed through another set.

Social Base of the Democratic Progressive Party," *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 117-43.

⁵¹Linda Arrigo, *Jidang! Taiwan fandui yundong zongpipan* (Commotion: Toward a total critique of the Taiwanese opposition movement) (Taipei: 1997), 151.

⁵²For a classical formulation of this question see Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 47-98.

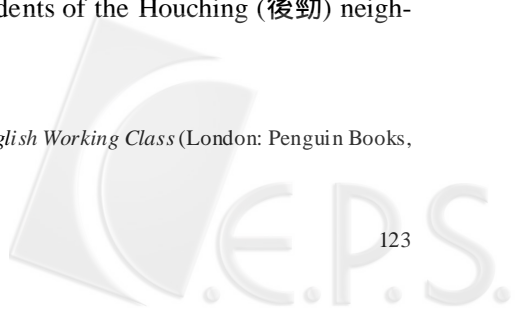
⁵³Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 24.

As suggested by Edward P. Thompson, structural determinism is weak in accounting for class movement: experience of a class is never a passive reflection of objective reality.⁵⁴ Thus, one key to solving this apparent puzzle lies in the actual experiences of CPC workers themselves. As mentioned above, the KMT regime built a parasitic party branch within the CPC. Inside this narrow circle of KMT cadres and followers, such resources as company benefits and career chances were all redistributed as handsome rewards for party loyalty. The KMT's factory clientelism conferred privileges for the select few, while excluding the great majority of CPC workers. It was in this context that the *dangwai*'s anti-KMT message found a sympathetic audience. Those politically enlightened workers were apt to believe that their grievances resulted from the undemocratic nature of the KMT regime. Thus, in the everyday world of CPC life, the socially vague criticisms proffered by the *dangwai* met social realities. The KMT's high-handed monitoring of these *dangwai* supporters only bred additional alienation and distrust. Finally, it is fair to say that the *dangwai* movement inspired the later CPC unionists not in words, but in deeds. Through campaign speeches, demonstrations, and dissent magazines, the *dangwai* demonstrated that the KMT could be publicly challenged. There was at the time a heightened sense of efficacy among the CPC *dangwai* zealots, which provided a much needed morale boost for later union activism.

Unionism as Anti-KMT Movement

The mid-1980s was the takeoff stage for Taiwan's autonomous union movement. Various kinds of social protests emerged in this critical period, and there was a widespread zeitgeist for change. Two weeks after the lifting of martial law in July 1987, the west gate of the CPC Kaohsiung refinery plant was blockaded by residents of the Houching (後勁) neigh-

⁵⁴Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1963).



borhood staging a protest against further construction of a naphtha cracker. The blockade lasted until 1990.

The official data clearly reflects the rise of industrial disputes. There were 921 and 907 cases of such disputes in 1983 and 1984, respectively, with the figures skyrocketing to 1,443 and 1,485 for the following two years. In 1987, the total cases amounted to 1,609.⁵⁵ It was in this context that these CPC *dangwai* zealots made the crucial decision to run for union positions. In December 1987, current TPWU President Huang Ching-hsyen (黃清賢) and five co-workers in the CPC Linyuan (林園) plant entered the election for TPWU representatives. During the election campaign, they used the label "Labor Link" (勞方聯線, *laofang lianxian*) to demarcate themselves from the KMT-supported candidates. Huang and his comrades were all successfully elected, and the "Labor Link" became a common identity for the pro-DPP unionists in subsequent elections for higher positions in TPWU.⁵⁶ Through skillful coalition building, Kang Yi-yi (康益義) of the Local Two chapter was elected as the first non-KMT TPWU president in March 1988. Kang was the younger brother of *dangwai* veteran Kang Ning-hsiang (康寧祥), and was supported by the Labor Link. In the meantime, the Labor Link became the collective appellation for the anti- or non-KMT unionists, especially in the precinct of Local One. In 1989, the Labor Link finally beat the KMT candidates and took the leadership of TPWU Local One. Ever since 1990, moreover, Local One has been in control of autonomous unionists.

Quite obvious is the salience of partisan stand in early organizing efforts. Before running for a union seat, Huang Ching-hsyen already possessed DPP membership and was active in the picket team. Instead of covering his partisan identity, Huang included the DPP icon on his election handouts.⁵⁷ Other Labor Link candidates also emphasized their

⁵⁵"Zhonghua minguo Taiwan diqu shehui zhibiao tongji" (Statistics of social index in the Taiwan area, ROC) (Taipei: 1996), available online at <<http://readopac.ncl.edu.tw/cgi/stat/login>> (accessed on December 31, 2002).

⁵⁶Huang, "Qugehua neibu laodongli shichang," 66-67.

⁵⁷Interview K06, July 12, 2002.

DPP membership, either by sending out "recommendation letters" from local DPP politicians or displaying a *dangwai* flag in front of houses in CPC residential areas.⁵⁸

Apparently, these activists thought that the DPP image stood for a clear alternative to the KMT-controlled union. Judging from the final results, this strategy certainly worked for the majority of CPC workers. However, there is evidence that the DPP symbol was more than instrumental. These activists even considered their unionizing efforts to be an extension of the political struggle between the DPP and the KMT. First, when they recruited new cadres for the Labor Link, one of the main criteria was partisan identity. The DPP members or supporters were passed easily, while those who possessed KMT membership would be put under careful scrutiny.⁵⁹ Second, the Labor Link activists considered their initial electoral victories synonymous with the growth of DPP power. Thus, after finally wresting the control of Local One from the KMT, these labor activists invited many DPP politicians to be special guests at the inauguration ceremony in 1990.⁶⁰ Third, one of the interviewed activists unambiguously cited Kang Yi-yi's DPP background as the main reason why the Labor Link activists decided to support Kang in the election for TPWU president. This interviewee said that as the CPC worker movement was about to begin, they needed political support from the opposition party to challenge the KMT.⁶¹ Lastly, when the Labor Link was finally institutionalized as a kind of political machine of the autonomous unionists in Local One, most of its cadres were pro-DPP in political outlook. There was one article in the constitution of the Labor Link that recommended its members to join the DPP.⁶² All in all, in the eyes of these worker activists, the struggle to control the union was much like the political struggle between the DPP and the

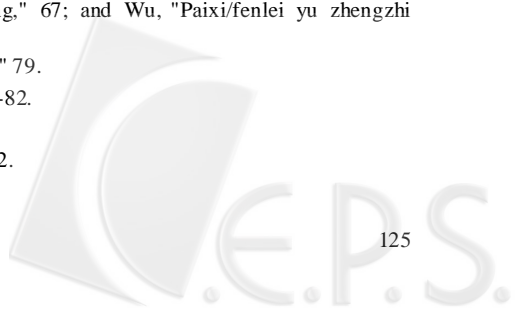
⁵⁸Huang, "Qugehua neibu laodongli shichang," 67; and Wu, "Paixi/fenlei yu zhengzhi yundong," 55.

⁵⁹Huang, "Qugehua neibu laodongli shichang," 79.

⁶⁰Wu, "Paixi/fenlei yu zhengzhi yundong," 81-82.

⁶¹Interview K38, October 4, 2002.

⁶²Wu, "Paixi/fenlei yu zhengzhi yundong," 152.



KMT. Their campaigning for union positions was modeled on the political elections in the real world, with the KMT as the privileged incumbent and themselves and the DPP as the challenger. In a word, making an autonomous union was no less than promoting an anti-KMT movement.

Here, it is of certain theoretical interest to discuss the role of the *dangwai*/DPP in the formation of autonomous CPC unionism. The Taiwanese Legal Assistance for Labor Association (TLALA, 台灣勞工法律支援會) was formed in 1984, claiming to be the first labor movement organization in the postwar era. At first, the TLALA was mainly composed of *dangwai* intellectuals. Most of the TLALA activists became cadres of the DPP, while a minority turned to the Workers' Party and then to the Labor Party. Therefore, the TLALA was viewed as one of the affiliated movement organizations of the *dangwai*/DPP. During the crucial period of the late 1980s, however, the TLALA only played an insignificant role in the island-wide grass-roots worker protests. One study on the workers' movement in the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Plant in Hsinpu (新埔) showed that the TLALA intellectuals did not know much about the unions even as late as 1987, let alone any meaningful contributions that they had made.⁶³ This was roughly the same case for the CPC unionists in Kao-hsiung. Only after the worker activists successfully broke the KMT's control over both Local One and the TPWU did some of them join the TLALA. In the 1990s, the Labor Link and the TLALA (later renamed as the Taiwan Labor Front, 台灣勞工陣線) developed a close working relationship, with the former providing ideas and the latter membership and dues.⁶⁴

In fact, after the initial successes made by the autonomous unionists in the CPC, various anti-KMT political forces sought to provide assistance. In 1990, the World United Formosan for Independence (WUFI, 台獨聯盟),

⁶³Chao, "Taiwanese Union, State, and Labor Movement" 129.

⁶⁴With assistance from outside intellectuals, CPC unionists came to know some basic tenets of social democracy, welfare, and industrial democracy. Oppositional class consciousness was formed at least among the union cadres. One can consult their union papers, where they applied these movement ideas to criticize government policies and management practices. For example, the unionist view of the issue of privatization can be seen in TPWU Local One, *Ersishi ji huibian zengkan*, 131.

then an overseas pro-independence group, arranged a training program for twelve unionists in Taiwan, including two from the Labor Link.⁶⁵ Some of the trainees later became cadres in WUFI. Likewise, the Workers' Party had sought to absorb unionists ever since its founding in 1987. Kang Yi-yi, the first non-KMT TPWU president, later joined the WP and participated in the legislative election in 1989 as a WP member. Although WP founder Wang Yi-hsiung (王義雄) was well known among the Labor Link activists, none of them ended up joining the WP. For them, Wang's defection from the DPP to become the WP chairperson was unforgivable.⁶⁶

As scholars critical of elitist theory suggest, the influx of external resources often comes after the initial protests are made by the grass roots.⁶⁷ The TLALA, WUFI, and the WP became interested in CPC unionism only after the rise of the Labor Link. The left-wing intellectuals and the *dangwai*/DPP were not directly involved in the process of organizing. The credit of making autonomous unionism in the CPC should go to the worker activists themselves.

The Labor Link vs. the KMT

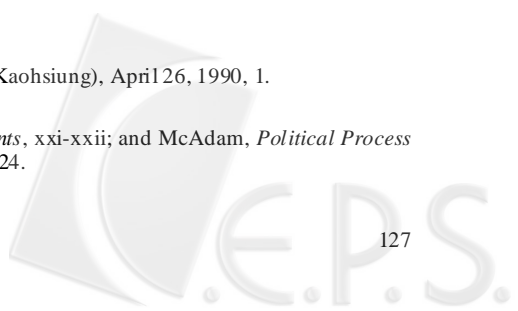
After the Labor Link consolidated its footing in Local One, autonomous unionists staged many protests to defend workers' rights, correct unfair labor practices, and seek better compensation. Aside from these job-related struggles, Local One was also known for their political participation.

As stated above, these *dangwai* zealots-cum-unionists did not differentiate between workers' and political movements. In the late 1980s, when the nascent DPP sought to employ street politics to pressure the KMT into reform, many of the Labor Link activists took part in various demon-

⁶⁵*Minzhong ribao* (Min Chung Daily News) (Kaohsiung), April 26, 1990, 1.

⁶⁶Interview K34, August 27, 2002.

⁶⁷Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, xxi-xxii; and McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 124.



strations in Taipei—such as the famous peasants' protest on May 20, 1988.⁶⁸ Some unionists even participated in the local branch of the DPP. Wang Jyi-yeong, the current director of Local One, was chief secretary of the DPP's Chiaotou (橋頭鄉) branch for two years. Wang's partisan work was voluntary, with duties including fund-raising, campaign mobilization, and member recruitment.⁶⁹

With Local One in control, these Labor Link unionists also used organizational resources to fight against the KMT party-state within the CPC. At first, they demanded that the CPC remove all KMT officials from the company, or at least allow the DPP to appoint their own counterparts. The management denied the existence of the KMT branch office, and re-asserted their "neutrality" in party politics.⁷⁰ Frustrated, the unionists began to criticize the disguised KMT offices by mobilizing opinion, protests, and DPP politicians. In June 1993, the Employee Relations Committee was formally disbanded, with related business being moved to the Personnel Office.⁷¹ The Labor Link adopted two strategies of protest against the KMT's mouthpiece, the *Lijin* monthly. First, they exposed the plagiarism and corruption among the editors. Second, they conducted a plant-wise opinion poll on the future of *Lijin*, which unsurprisingly revealed an overwhelming number of negative views. Thus, in September 1994 *Lijin* was suspended for good after forty-three years of publication.⁷²

With these efforts, Local One succeeded in dismantling part of the KMT machine in the CPC. Although the Women's Mutual Help Society still existed, its functions were greatly reduced. In past union elections, the Labor Link had to fight an uphill battle against the greater resources of the KMT; now, the weakened KMT was even unable to present a list of their candidates, and the Labor Link has since assumed a hegemonic role in Local One. In the election of TWPU representatives in January 2000,

⁶⁸Interview K08, July 16, 2002.

⁶⁹Interview K39, November 25, 2002.

⁷⁰Interview K21, August 12, 2002.

⁷¹TPWU Local One, *Ershisi ji huibian zengkan*, 222.

⁷²TPWU Local One, *Sizhounian huibian zengkan*, 49-50.



the Labor Link scored a knockout victory by securing all thirty-two seats. Likewise, the KMT capacity to mobilize votes within the CPC was also undermined. In the past, the KMT officials used many methods to publicize their candidates. Accompanied by higher management, the KMT candidates went into the factory and met their voters in every workshop. After these changes, however, the original KMT officials kept a much lower profile when canvassing for votes.

It has been argued that the KMT regime's longevity has owed a great deal to its consolidated infrastructure of power. The KMT used a variety of organizational forms to penetrate deeply into every layer of civil society.⁷³ In earlier times, this organizational infrastructure served to forestall rebellion and dissent. When the *dangwai*/DPP rose as a challenger to the authoritarian incumbents, these social bases further became powerful vote-mobilizing machines. In the CPC case, the withering away of the KMT's machine was not an automatic result of democratization, but rather involved collective action efforts from below. More than a decade of autonomous unionism was needed to dismantle the KMT party-state structure within the state-owned enterprises. True, the workers' movement in Taiwan was not a significant force pushing democratic transition. Still, autonomous unionism per se presented a grass-roots-level challenge to the KMT and helped to erode remnant authoritarian legacies. In this way, workers made their indirect contribution to the process of democratization.

After the Power Turnover

In March 2000, Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) won the presidential election, enabling his DPP to finally become the ruling party. This event was certainly one of the great milestones in Taiwan's political development in the postwar era. The DPP's coming to power marked an important step in

⁷³Kung I-chun, "Wailai zhengquan" yu bentu shehui: Gaizao hou Kuomintang zhengquan shehui jichu de xingcheng (Émigré regime and native society: Formation of the KMT's social basis after reform) (Taipei: Daoxiang, 1998).

the consolidation of democracy in Taiwan. However, the impact of this turnover on social movements in general and CPC unionism in particular was rather gradual. A quick glimpse would seemingly reveal that nothing was changed in the case of the CPC. The management continued to carry out downsizing and to freeze benefits in preparation for the coming privatization. The unionists still took part in various protests to defend workers' interests. The TPWU president claimed that the union would forever be an opposition party⁷⁴—a prediction that holds true even today. Like other unions and labor movement organizations, the CPC union continued to protest the issues of working hours, privatization, and pension.

There are reasons to account for this seeming continuity. First, at least since the mid-1990s, the KMT machine in the CPC was much weakened owing to growing union power. Many partisan activities—such as the recruiting of members and the canvassing for votes—were stopped or at least went underground. In the union elections, the KMT party branch was even unable to present a list of candidates, let alone successfully campaign for them. In January 2000, the Labor Link was able to take all of the thirty-two seats in the TPWU representative election. This electoral landslide marked the zenith of autonomous unionism and, consequently, the fall of the KMT forces within the factory.

Second, despite the media's alarm against the "greenifying" of the state-owned enterprises, the DPP made only minor changes to the CPC's managerial echelon. After the power turnover, the former president of the CPC remained in his position until June 2002. At best, the DPP could only replace a few directors of the board, while leaving the old managerial structure intact. Unlike the KMT, the DPP simply lacked the infrastructure of power within the CPC. Thus, the impact of the power turnover on the internal workings of the CPC was minimal.

Last but not least, the DPP followed the KMT's policy to privatize the CPC and to liberalize the gasoline market. In one sense, privatization has

⁷⁴"The Union is a Pressure Group and Forever an Opposition Party," *Shiyou laogong* (Petroleum Workers) (Kaohsiung), no. 324 (April 2000): 3.

been a political consensus in Taiwan. There has been evidence, however, that the DPP would rather carry out privatization more forcefully. Examples of this include the sale of Chunghwa Telecommunications Company stocks in 2000 and the closing of the Taiwan Busing Company (台灣汽車客運公司) in 2001. In August 2002, the DPP even announced an earlier schedule of privatization for the remaining state-owned enterprises, including the CPC.⁷⁵ Whatever their political motives might be, the DPP's policy orientation disillusioned many keen supporters in the CPC.

The above three reasons explain why the persistent antagonism has existed within the CPC between the union and the management. After a period of expectations and disappointment, even the most pro-DPP supporter—the TPWU Local One—finally opted for the strategy of confrontation. In May 2002, the union staged a large-scale demonstration against the freezing of wages and benefits.⁷⁶ The following month they resisted the appointment of a new CPC president.⁷⁷ Despite the Labor Link's bona fide efforts to protect worker welfare, many union members felt that their interests have been betrayed by both the Labor Link and the DPP. Huang Ching-hsyen, the current TPWU president, became a visible target of criticism, for he was also recently appointed by the DPP government to the post of national policy advisor. Huang was the original leader of the Labor Link, and his career rise was significantly boosted by the growing power of autonomous unionism. His new appointment came at a time when mass disaffection with the DPP was simmering. No wonder he was much blamed and criticized during the union election in January 2003. Bashing Huang was a strategy employed to discredit the Labor Link, for Huang symbolized both autonomous unionism and a pro-DPP stance. Thus, the Labor Link met an unprecedented setback in this election, receiving only twenty out of thirty-six seats; the remaining sixteen seats went to their opponents, a motley collection of independents, remaining KMT loyalists,

⁷⁵*Zhongguo shibao*, August 21, 2002, 1.

⁷⁶*Shiyu laogong*, no. 346 (June 2002), 14-19.

⁷⁷*Taiwan shiyu gonghui diyi fenhui* (TPWU Local One) (Kaoshiung), July 2002, 1.



and former autonomous unionists.⁷⁸

There were many reasons for the recent electoral disaster, including leadership style and corruption. Nevertheless, grass-roots discontent with the DPP government was an important factor, and the Labor Link likewise suffered from an overly close identification with the DPP. At the time of this writing, the future of CPC autonomous unionism remains uncertain. Certainly, with the coming of the DPP government, the old movement strategy of partisan alignment has entered into a deep crisis. Politicization has only worked to the disadvantage of the Labor Link, who was forced to take responsibility for everything the DPP had done. With the DPP in power, the political topography of the union movement has been drastically altered. No matter how the CPC unionists might view the DPP, they are facing the urgent task of rethinking the meaning of autonomy.

Conclusion: Reflections from an Anomalous Case

To sum up, this paper has analyzed the relationship between democratization and the workers' movement by focusing on CPC unionism. The prevailing consensus has held that while democratization made possible the rise of the autonomous union movement, the movement provided only little impetus for the democratizing push. Unlike their Latin American counterparts, Taiwanese labor did not assume a prominent role in the fight against authoritarianism.⁷⁹

While agreeing for the most part with the above-mentioned consensus, this paper has striven to offer some revisions to improve our under-

⁷⁸Field note, January 17, 2003.

⁷⁹Margaret Keck, "Democratization and Dissension: The Formation of the Workers' Party," *Politics and Society* 15 (1986-87): 67-95; J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Labor Movements in Transition to Democracy: A Framework for Analysis," *Comparative Politics* 21 (1989): 445-72; and Ruth Berins Collier and James Mahoney, "Adding Collective Actors to Collective Outcomes: Labor and Recent Democratization in South America and Southern Europe," *ibid.* 29 (1997): 285-303.

standing of the Taiwanese labor movement. First, this paper argued for the importance of grass-roots militants in the making of autonomous unionism. Opposition elites did not assume a direct organizer's role. Second, the worker activists themselves mediated the impact of democratization on unionism. Thanks to their workshop-level communication and organization, CPC workers cultivated a common anti-KMT outlook. This anti-KMT mentality served as a valuable mobilization framework for the union movement because KMT clientelism in the CPC had incurred general resentment. Thus, there was a visible concurrence of anti-KMT and class protests, at least in the eyes of the autonomous unionists. Third, the rise of autonomous unionism helped to clear away the KMT's authoritarian infrastructure within the CPC. Without the challenge from the unionists, the KMT machine would not have been removed, disbanded, and weakened. Therefore, workers certainly made their contribution to democratization, no matter how local and indirect it might have been.

Even if the preceding arguments are convincing, there still remain questions about the meaning of this highly anomalous case. In no way was CPC unionism a run-of-the-mill type of collective action in Taiwan. The state-owned CPC enjoyed governmental support and a market monopoly for a long time. CPC workers faced a more law-abiding management, and had more secure jobs and better wages. By Taiwanese standards, they were undoubtedly the "labor aristocrats." The costs and risks of staging a protest were naturally lower for these individuals. They could easily receive concessions from the company, moreover, by lobbying politicians who were eager to flatter their constituents. In sum, these activists turned their better endowment into a clear advantage. However, these labor aristocrats had a grievance, which was nearly absent among the workers in private companies. Despite the KMT's intention to control, private business did not welcome any party branch in their factories. KMT clientelism was never implanted, let alone consolidated, in the non-state-owned companies. This does not mean that the unionists in private companies were less anti-KMT than their CPC counterparts. In fact, the DPP had recruited many union cadres from the private sector. Thus, comparing the grievances and mobilization patterns across sectors would be an interesting exercise.

Furthermore, CPC unionism was almost unique even in other state-owned enterprises. There were roughly the same labor conditions, prevalent blue-collar worker discontent, and KMT clientelism in the steel, electricity, and shipbuilding sectors. Many state-owned enterprise workers in Taiwan have staged more radical protests. The railway workers, for instance, once organized a strike. The busing and telecommunications workers were more daring in their protests against the privatization policy. Many of the union activists were as pro-DPP as their CPC brethren. Among state-owned enterprise unionism, the CPC was particular in two aspects. First, it was the first to become "autonomous" and to stage a protest in 1988. Second, while other union movements rose and fell quickly, only CPC unionism was sustained over a decade. There are ecological reasons to explain this persistent radicalism. Contrary to other state-owned enterprise workers in Taiwan, CPC petrochemical workers in Kaohsiung were highly concentrated in company residential areas and neighboring communities. In addition, they also shared a variety of company benefits—such as schools, clinics, consumer cooperatives, parks, libraries, and sports facilities.⁸⁰ Understandably, this factor amplified the effect of KMT clientelism and aroused greater discontent among the disfranchised majority. Other state-owned enterprise workers—even CPC gas station workers—were able to shake off their identity when they were away from the workplace. The logic of KMT clientelism did not encompass every aspect of their daily life. In this sense, the CPC petrochemical workers were a highly crystallized case that best demonstrates the effects and reactions to KMT domination in the factory.

Thus, it would be fruitless to uncritically generalize from this single case of CPC unionism. The simple truth is that the CPC case is highly atypical in Taiwan. Still, the value of an anomaly consists exactly in its outstanding difference. By closely analyzing these distinguishing features, a fresh perspective helps to re-situate the workers' movement in Taiwan in a new light. This study has argued for the significance of grass-roots

⁸⁰Ho, "Status Politics and Origin of Workers' Protest," 10-12.

worker activists. These individuals were the linchpins of autonomous unionism, mediating between democratization and worker protests; without them, CPC unionism would have been unthinkable. McAdam claims that macro questions in social movement can be answered by micro study of movement activists. It is in this intersection of biography and history that sociological imagination becomes most useful.⁸¹ Therefore, future studies of the Taiwanese labor movement should seek to bring the grass-roots activists back in.

⁸¹Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11.

