



**A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF THE EMPLOYEES ON POLITICISATION OF TRADE
UNIONS**

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The origin of trade unions can be traced back to 18th Century in Britain, where the rapid expansion of industrial society then taking place, drew woman children, rural workers and immigrants into the work force in large numbers and in new roles. This pool of unskilled and semi skilled labour spontaneously organized in fits and starts throughout its beginnings and would later be an important arena for the development of trade unions. Different authors expressed their views and described trade unions at their own. According to Karl Marx in order to overcome the exploitation of the proletariat by the capitalist class the workers would make spontaneous efforts to unite themselves into what we call protest organisations. In the words of Frank Tannenbaum, the trade union is not a mechanism that is deliberately created by the working class as a result of their commitment to any particular ideology. According to Webbs, the trade union is an organisation meant for improving the working conditions of industrial labour. Mr. S.D. Punekar conducted a survey of trade union leaders in Bombay and studied the variations among leaders of various central trade unions like INTUC, AITUC in terms of age, education, abilities etc. A.S. Mathur conducted a study on trade union leadership in Rajasthan, U.P and Delhi. The conflict experienced by union leaders between their loyalties to trade unions and their obligations to kith and kin formed the subject matter of the enquiry made by Mohan Das. The study of E.A. Ramaswamy highlighted workers attitude towards and participation in the unions. From the review of the abovementioned literatures and/or study it can be said that a Trade Union is an organisation of workers, acting collectively, to protect the interest of the workers through collective bargaining as well to achieve common goals such as protecting the integrity of their trade, higher pay and working conditions. The role of Trade Unions are considered essentially reformist organisations and economic institutions based on sarvodaya principles of truth, non violence and trust ship. Trade Unions have there cardinal principles e.g. unity of strength, equality of pay for equal work, security of employment. An individual employee possesses very little bargaining power as compared to that of his employer. If he is not satisfied with the wage and other conditions he can

leave job but it is not possible to leave the job frequently. To come out from this situation, it is better to join a union for protection. A stable and strong Union in each enterprises is very much essential for maintaining good industrial relations. In our country most of the Unions are affiliated and/or connected with a political party and each and every political parties have their own ideology and objectives. In a democracy, political influence of Trade Unions cannot be avoided. The dis-advantages of political influence are dependence on outside leadership who are not committed to the organisation as well as not conversant with the actual problems faced by the workers but for such influence and/or interference of political parties, the movement for resolution of the problems of the workers is hampered like anything. Moreover, for such political interference the course of action on the part of the management are also changed and as a result of which the workers are suffered anything. Ironically in many cases, the political leaders possess little knowledge of the background of labour problems, fundamentals of trade unionism, the techniques of industry and even little general education. Naturally Unions cannot be expected to function properly and on a sound basis under the guidance of such leaders.

This paper presents an analysis of the trends in political unionism in India. It proposes a paradigm shift to a tradition of services based trade unionism which would be moved suitable for adopting new employment relationships and developing industrial relations. Political unionism in India evolved during the process of the struggle for independence, state construction and industrial development. It grew into a mechanism that for a time, defended workers rights from suppression while influencing society and politics – even proving instrumental in achieving the political ambiguous of union leaders.

However, in today's working environments, a trade union aligned with a political party does not best serve the interests of union members and workers not only in India but elsewhere in the world. Too many unions with too little unity, political dependency, low unionration rates, non representation of massive informal workers, non compliance of labour rights, weakened bargaining power and insufficient investment for training and education define India's contemporary labour movement. Hence service based unionism would be a more optimal recourse to regain collective bargaining power and offer a more useful vision to workers and society. Multi Unionism and political manipulation characterize the labour movement in India and the Indian Trade Unions serve as an instrument of manipulation by competing political parties. India experienced serious labour indiscipline and inter union rivalries after its independence clashes between supporters of the ruling party and other opponent unions were rampant in Bangladesh.

Trade unions traditionally performed different roles in their relations with individual employers, employer associations, the state and the public at large. Unions directly or indirectly played an economic role of facilitating production and distribution in society. Unions played this role largely by promoting cooperation between capital and labour in production and in enterprise restructuring, to secure sustainable growth consistent with social equity, employment opportunities, improved living and working conditions. The above mentioned changes have had not only profound impact on the political and economic environment, but have also negatively influenced the position and role of trade unions.

Liberalisation and privatization which followed closely the process of globalization have gradually reduced the role of public sector which was the main stay of trade unions in most countries. At the same time, technological innovations and organisational re-structuring led to what is often referred to as “job-less growth”. Political parties and governments are no more able to support either protected economies or redundant manpower, and without support from political parties and governments organised unions could do precious little. Unions have largely confined themselves to traditional demands. Their ability to adapt to a changing environment by organizing new constituents, addressing new concerns, developing new perspectives, and enhancing their image as major social actors are issues of great concern.

In recent years, the position of unions in traditional strongholds such as the public sector and in labour-intensive (manufacturing) industries has been severely affected. Unions have been called upon to meet the pressing concerns of their traditional constituents, while anticipating those of their potential membership. Unions do not appear to have made much progress in relation to issues relating to employment, conditions of work, training/career development, needs of the knowledge worker and those in the services sector.

Unions may have to develop expertise to enter into multi-employer agreements on employment, wages, working conditions, hours of work, and non-wage benefits of workers, and inter-sectoral coordination of collective bargaining. The unions may have to do much more in the areas of employment security, unemployment insurance, and special benefits on termination of employment; and social security systems providing healthcare and pension schemes. Union involvement in the design and administration of active labour market policies, and union ability to influence economic and social policies through consultation and dialogue with employers and public authorities are likely to become key indicators of their appeal and relevance. The public

image of unions is a powerful force in determining attitude or workers in general to trade unions and in the degree of influence unions have in social and political process. Trade unions do not appear to have achieved much success to gain the confidence of women and young workers, in particular, who constitute an important segment of the new work force. The styles and qualities of union leadership could play an important role in this regard.

Since 1991, employers and management (including the public/ government sector) in India have taken several initiatives in terms of introducing professional management systems and practices, particularly streamlining "Human Resource Management". Performance/merit-based rewards productivity-linked wages, team work etc are becoming more and more popular. Managers are trained in people management skills, which in turn, have improved direct communication with the workers, subordinate development programmes etc. Employers are concerned to build a work force with close identity and greater commitment to the company and its goals.

Union leadership is often criticized for pursuing limited goals (self-interest and politically motivated behaviour) even sacrificing the larger interests of the members. Moreover, the larger society often perceives unions as institutions which only protect the unproductive work force, hence characterized as institutions with no social responsibilities. Unions are increasingly seen as mere pressure groups confined to narrow interests of small sections of the workers in the organised sector, while the millions in the unorganized sector remain neglected. Dayal and Sharma in their study concentrated on the management of unions by internal leaders. They observed that besides the leaders influencing and negotiating abilities, the union as an organisation requires administrative leadership for its own stability and growth.

In our country most of the trade unions are affiliated to certain political parties, who are only interested in making any labour problems a political issue to achieve political gains. For such activity on the part of the political parties, the actual problems of the workers gets wide publicity but the objections of the labour movement remains unsolved. Sometimes the strikes and/or labour movements goes against the workers who may loose their wages. The method often employed by the unions and the management in resolving disputes, the system of give and take called collective bargaining does not always obtain the desired results. In this context it is suggested that influence and/or interference of the political parties in the labour movement and/or disputes should be avoided by trade unions for the benefits of the workers for which the trade unions have been created. Government policies regarding affiliation of the trade unions with the political parties may be changed. Moreover, restriction be imposed on the trade unions

not to indulge the political interference with the labour movement and to set a particular goal i.e. welfare of the workers be implemented in the consideration of the trade unions and if required the Trade Unions Act, 1926 be amended and/or modified accordingly. There is a provision in the Trade Unions Act, 1926 regarding appointment of office bearers of a union should be actually engaged or employed in the industry with which the trade union is concerned and the remaining 50% or less can be outsiders such as lawyers, politicians, serial workers etc. The provision for appointing politicians as office bearers be changed and/or removed by way of amendment of the Act by which the interference of the political parties in the trade union movements be controlled. Furthermore, it is observed that most of the trade unions are headed by the political leaders who used the unions for their own interest as well as for different activities of the political parties, this practice be stopped. Leader of the trade unions be selected from the members of the union i.e. workers representatives be given importance as because the worker's representatives are more conversant with the actual difficulties and/or problems of the workmen than the political leaders. Workers participation in the management as well as in the leadership of the trade unions is very much necessary in the present context.

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