CHAPTER – 2

EVOLUTION OF TRADE UNIONS AND TRADE UNIONISM

Before discussing the theories of trade unions there are different perceptions, assumptions with regard to trade unions which are associated with evolution of trade unions along with the evolution of industrial society.

“The trade unions historically passed through various stages from criminality to reluctant federation, acceptance, and encouragement and finally to a full recognition reflected in the view that union involvement in industrial relations should be actively promoted by legislative means\(^1\)”. But the role of law in industrial relations has become controversial issue because of different perceptions about the legitimate function of trade unions and to what extent law should control or regulate internal affairs of trade unions.

Different views are held about the role of trade unions what sociologists term as “Frames of Reference” in which classification is made according to their different approaches.

2.1 Frames of reference

a) Unitary Approach: “Essentially the unitary view sees the industrial enterprise as one, where management and workers strive to achieve common objective\(^2\) in spite of the fiction or conflict between management and workers. This is usually attributed to factors such as poor communications, inefficient management or disruptive or politically

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2 Ibid pp.16-18.
motivated workers. The supporters of this approach further say that unionism may be justified for manual workers to improve their economic conditions and standard of living in case they are denied their legitimate demands.

b) **Pluralist view:** “The pluralist view differs from unitary view in holding that conflict in industry is inevitable, as the interests of the employees inevitably differ from those of the employers and that trade unions have an important role to play in representing those interests by regulating both market and managerial relations.

This approach does not deny the common long term objective of employers and workers for the survival of business which unitary approach advocates, but it emphasizes inevitable and inherent conflict between employers and workers. The employers are more concerned about their profit and investment, whereas workers are concerned about their wages and standard of living. These different kinds of interests lead to traditional conflict between employers and workers.

c) **Radical approach:** This frame of reference rejects both the above analyses. It denies that there is reality in a system of checks and balances reconciling the conflicting interests of employers and workers. Rather it asserts that fundamentally capitalism is the system of exploitation of the property less classes by the propertied. According to this view a balance of power between employer and worker is an illusion which helps legitimize a system of gross inequality and privilege. No arrangement or system can alter the fundamental imbalance of control. The process of collective bargaining provides a mechanism for resolving marginal disputes only but it cannot eradicate the roots of imbalance of capital and labour. The
imbalance between capital and labour will be removed only by replacing capitalism with socialism.

The important point to emphasize here is that the frame of reference adopted will inevitably influence the approach of the extent to which labour relations should be regulated by law. The historical development of statutory regulations of unions indicates a movement by governments away from an extreme version of unitary approach denying any role to trade unions at all, towards a pluralist analysis. The common law has broadly followed the same type of development. In Britain evolution in the industrial sphere tended to mirror that in political sphere.

After studying the various approaches, there are some questions to be answered. How far unions and employers should be controlled? If the employers are to be controlled in the public interest, how to strike some balance between the power of capital and labour in situations of industrial conflict or how fully the law should regulate internal union affairs. Moreover the law will too often be too blunt an instrument to achieve the objectives which may be thought desirable in principle. But clearly laws which reflect unitary approach will be received with hostility by a union movement.

Recent labour laws are a reflection of pluralist approach. Therefore provisions with regard to strike and lockout have been legally recognized and approved.

2.2 The theories of Trade Unionism

There are certain theories of the Trade Union Movement that have been contributed by many like Marx and Engels, who were identified as revolutionaries. Some of them were Civil Servants like Sydney Webb, academics like Common and Hoxie and labour leaders like Mitchell.
Before we discuss the theories of trade unionism, one has to understand the difference between trade union movement and Labour Movement. The Term “labour movement” is a broader concept in which the term “trade union movement” was born.

The origin of the labour movement can be traced back in the pre-industrial revolution period where as the concept of trade union movement is a later development which is connected with post industrial revolution period. Carl Landau writes “Labour organisations too sure exist even in the middle ages, but only in a clandestine manner or under camouflage, and as long as they could not operate openly, they had to be kept small and could be effective only in a few places”\(^3\).

These labour organizations of the middle age were of serf labour but their protest made labour movement all the same. The labour movement gets started when the question of exploitation comes into the picture.

Because of this exploitation the society got divided in to classes. To illustrate it further even in the present phase of capitalism there is to be found strong trade union movement among the Industrial labourers. Even the agricultural labourers do make protests for the redress of their grievances inspite of their weak labour movement.

G.D.H. Cole distinguished these two terms, labour movement and trade union movement thus “Its Labour Movement” most universal and spontaneous form is the trade union, the association of wage workers for the protection and improvement of the standard of life”\(^4\).

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To conclude the above aspect the trade union movement and the labour movement, the labour movement prepares the ground where in the seed of trade union grows.

2.2.1 Marxist Theory

Marxist Theory is known as “Political Revolutionary Theory” of labour movement. The theory goes around the concept of class struggle. According to Marx “Large scale industries concentrate in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss unites them in a common thought of resistance combination”.

According to him there are two classes. One class represents bourgeoisie while the second kind are free labourers or the class of proletariat. Here free labourer means free from owning the means of production and money. After the industrial revolution when machines were used for production, labourers or working class came under one roof as a measure of job security. Their frequent gathering under the same roof starts automatically bringing them closer and closer. They concentrated on the sale of their labour power, thus the unity started among labourers. Its short run purpose is to eliminate competition among labour and the ultimate purpose is to over throw capitalist business men.

In order to understand Marx’s ideas we have to go-through following writings from the theory of trade union point of view. In his books Poverty of Philosophy (1847) and the Communist Manifesto (1848)

\[5\] Ibid., p.6
his outlook with regard to trade unions had strict conformity with his materialist dialectical outlook. “The proletariat goes through various stages of development”. With its birth it begins to struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers then by the work people of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeoisie who directly exploit them⁷.

The proletariat increases in number with the development of the industry. The collision between Individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collision between two classes. There upon the workers begin to form combinations which we can call trade unions against bourgeoisie.

“This organization of the proletarians into a class is continuously being upset again by competition between workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer mightier”, such is the birth of trade union because of the struggle between two classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat⁸.

Marx also believes that every trade union or proletariat class consciously or unconsciously has to involve in political action which is indispensable for achieving economic equality.

The trade unions by the very nature of their economic demands are compelled to take to political action; the political activities themselves become the means to strengthen the trade union movement. One is dependent on the other. The politics and the economics of trade unions are basically one and inseparable.

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Trade Unions hitherto concentrated their attention too exclusively on the local and direct struggle against capital. They have not yet completely realized their power to attack the very system of wage slavery and present day methods of production.

This is why they kept away from social and political movements. However, lately they have awakened and understood their great historical mission. For example they have participated in several political movements in England. The ultimate aim of trade unions is the capture of political power.

“The political movement of the working class naturally has as its object, of course, the conquest of political power for the working class”9.

Marx is of the opinion that trade unions should aim not only for abolition of wage system but for gaining political power through revolutionary watch work which means the trade union shall not remain as bargaining agent for wages but shall aim at political power so that there will be equal society.

Marx theory of the trade union movement is the theory of class struggle. According to him the conflict between bourgeoisie who are the owners of the money and proletariat who are known to be free labourers is inventible and finally out of class struggle classless society emerges without the help of the outside intellectuals.

The ambition of Marx is that working class by achieving political power would abolish classes in the society.

Marx aimed at political power rather than achieving temporary economical gains. Marx’s vision is to establish classless society through class struggle in which trade unions have to play a role.

“In his Poverty of Philosophy Marx has emphasized that the Trade Unions are the school of socialism. The trade unions should lose their structural identity and should be merged with the political party. Both should maintain their separate structural identities but must have functional unity in the struggle against bourgeoisie\textsuperscript{10}.”

2.2.2 Lenin’s Theory

Lenin says “The economic struggle is a collective struggle of the workers against the employers for better terms in the sale of their labour power, for better conditions of life and labour. This is inevitably a trade union struggle because the conditions of labour differ greatly from trade to trade…… to lend a political character to economic struggle means consequently to strive for the realization of these same trade union demands by way of legislative and administrative measures”\textsuperscript{11}.

Here Lenin differs from Marx and says that the working class by their very nature of their needs will get trade union consciousness but in order to have political consciousness some outside help is needed. He further says that the sphere of trade union consciousness is different from political consciousness. So for making the workers politically class conscious the contributions of the intellectuals are needed. He directs that the intellectuals must “lead the struggle of working class not only for better terms for the sale of labour power but also for the abolition of the social system which compels the property less class to sell itself to the rich”\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p14.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p15.
Lenin is of the opinion that the workers aim shall not be economical struggle or the abolition of the very wage slavery. But its scope shall be extended to political power in order to have a favourable legislation. He was very much impressed by Sidney and Beatrice Webbs’ work. History of Trade Unionism, and translated it in to Russian language.

Lenin characterized the trade union not only a mere labour organization but an educational organization, a school of administration, school of economic management and a school of communism.

2.2.3 British School

From British school we have Sydney and Beatrice Webb, G.D.H. Cole and Harold J.Laski. Their theories of the trade union movement are nearer to that of class struggle as described by Marx and Lenin.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb

According to Webbs, trade unionism is an extension of democracy from political sphere to industrial sphere. Their work on trade union is, The History of Trade Unionism (1894)\(^1\). The impact and influence of The History of Trade Unionism was so much that Lenin himself translated it into Russian language during his first Siberian exile around 1897-1900. Here according to Webbs the goals of trade unions are not merely increase of wages and reduction of working hours but reconstruction of society by elimination of capitalist society. He rejects the concept of profit making but encourages the system of profit sharing.

The goals of workers are not only economical but also Political. According to Webbs as in the Marxist theory the trade unions have two

goals - short run and the long run. The short run is in the day-to-day struggle for maintaining wages and the reduction of working hours and the long run aim of trade unions is the abolition of the very capitalist system. The trade unions have to organize functionally and for long run aim they have to organize politically. Whereas Webbs as a socialist explains equal sharing of the national product. In order to achieve this object he advocates the “genuine democratic control of industry”. He further explains trade union emerges not from any institution but from every opportunity for bringing together of wage earners of the same occupation.

With regard to wages, Marxist theory says in order to maintaining their interests as wage earners the workers have to be united in a union. Thus class struggle starts. Whereas Webbs is of the opinion that it is the haggling of market which depends upon chain reaction in making the wage earners bargain. He says because of pressure from the customers who always seek good quality goods pressurizes the employer to maintain quality and inorder to maintain quality he spends more and always tries to lower the wages because of which workers would start bargaining. According to Webbs trade union may be defined as “a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving of their working lives”.

According to the above definition the trade union is a continuous association and this element of continuity gives shape to the trade union movement. He also says the birth of capitalism produces a kind of labourers who are free in the two ways, of being free from owning the means of production and free in selling their labour power, “But in the beginning they are in an amorphous stage and they got baptised as the trade union movement when they maintain continuity from struggle to struggle.
The industrial revolution just added more stability to this factor ‘continuity’.

He also says in socialist society the system of wage slavery will be abolished and the trade unions will undergo a qualitative change.

He finds a democratic society which is inevitable because of element of continuity of trade unions. He feels that the capitalism is based on three methods the doctrine of vested interest, the doctrine of supply and demand and the doctrine of a living wage. Corresponding to these, the trade unionists are guided by their philosophies of social reconstruction, conservatism, individualism, and collectivism.\(^\text{14}\)

He believes all elements of capitalism will disappear and he emphasized the need of enactment for enforcing living wage.

“By living wage Webbs meant a definite quota of education, sanitation, leisure and wages for every grade of worker in every industry”\(^\text{15}\).

He named living wage a national minimum and it is the primary duty of the trade unions in the democratic state to achieve national minimum and for that the states intervention is imperative.

The fundamentals of trade unionism that we find in the Marxism are to be found in the theory of Sidney and Beatrice Webbs, but the difference lies in application. Webbs believes in parliamentary method whereas Marxs believes in struggle and revolution.


\(^{15}\)Ibid, p 21.
G.D.H. Cole

This theory can be known as ‘union control of industry’ theory. Cole’s theory of the trade union movement is the same theory that of class struggle as discussed above. It was in 1913 in his book “The World of Labour” that he gave a systematic shape to his theory.

He argues that unionism is class struggle and the ultimate is the control of industry by labour and not revolution as predicted by Marx\textsuperscript{16}. Cole’s approach is syndicalist approach which advocates workers shall not aim at merely wages but also get the control of industry in partnership with state. Cole wants that the trade union has to play economic role coupled with political activity which is control of industry. According to him the main role of trade unions is how to run the industry rather than how to maintain state.

According to Cole under capitalism class struggle is the indispensable and irrefutable whether we like it or not. He says the class struggle is preached not on the ground that it is desirable but on the ground that it is monstrous and irrefutable fact.

Harold J. Laski

It is from his work “Trade Unionism in the New Society” (1950) that we get his ideas on Trade Unionism. He wants that the Trade Unions must be guided by long-run philosophy in their struggle against capitalists.

According to Laski, “The supreme duty of trade union is raising the standards of workers and therefore of their leaders is to set economic policy in the political perspective that makes its fulfillment possible”. For this the political philosophy is needed.

Trade unionism in the hands of Laski is much more political trade unionism. By political trade unionism he does not mean that the trade unions shall affiliate themselves to political parties but he means the trade unions themselves grow as political party. For him bread and butter unions will be halting camps for the workers in their massive mobilization against capitalism. He wants that the capitalism must be replaced by the philosophy of socialism. Therefore in order to face the strong capitalism, the workers need the philosophy of socialism.

2.2.4 American School

Among the exponents of American school of trade unions, Professor John R. Commons and his student Selig Perliman are prime contributors. With regard to ten volumes of “The History of Labour in the United States” Professor Commons believes that the labour movement is always a reaction and a protest against capitalism. “He wants to say that as a major part of the labour movement trade unionism comes into being simultaneously with the birth of capitalism”. Commons argues that the class struggle theory of European and other countries does not work in American environment. The factors like free land, expanding frontier etc. of the American environment provides “Job conscious” rather than “class conscious”\textsuperscript{17}. His theory has been called as environmental theory of trade unionism. He finds some of the peculiarities of the American environment such as absence of feudal restrictions, free land, class fluidity, democratic political institutions prevented American worker from becoming class conscious. “Thus whereas class consciousness served as the unifying principle of the labour movement of Europe, job consciousness according to the Commons Wisconsin School took its place in the labour movement

\textsuperscript{17} Shiva Chandra Jha, the Indian Trade Union movement, K.L. Mukhopadhyay Pub, Calcutta, 1970, p28
in America\textsuperscript{18}. Therefore we can conclude that according to Commons labour movement is an experimental process of building unions and adapting their policy to ‘environment’. He agreed that collective bargaining was an instrument of class struggle, but he summarized that ultimately there will be partnership between employers and employees.

**Pearlman**

According to him the European workers sensed scarcity of labour which led them to form trade unions. Later when they sensed abundance they became job conscious and then again became class conscious whereas American workers, first sensed abundance and became job conscious than scarcity conscious because of which they formed trade unions but ever remained job conscious.

According to Pearlman “the genuine trade unionists are “bread and butter” trade unionists and the genuine trade unions are inherently bread and butter trade unions. If they go beyond that it is not what their constitution intrinsically demands but because some outside influence either some intellectual, ideogist, or some social reformer wants them to do so\textsuperscript{19}.”

He argues many workers in Europe have stepped beyond this ‘job conscious” bread and butter unionism into “class conscious” political trade unionism. It is only because of outside influences, whereas American unions have demonstrated how free they are from those outside influences. He believes the future of any trade union lies in sticking to genuine bread and butter trade unions.

\textsuperscript{18}B.D.Singh, Industrial Relations emerging paradigms, Excel Book Publications, p.37.
\textsuperscript{19} Shiva Chandra Jha, The Indian Trade Union Movement, K.L.Mukopadhya Pub. Calcutta (1970) p.34
This theory is also known as “scarcity conscious” of manual workers. He rejected the idea of class consciousness as an explanation for the origin of the trade union movement but substituted it with what he called job consciousness\textsuperscript{20}.

**Hoxies functional classification of unionism**

His theory of the labour movement first came out in 1920 in his work. “Trade unions in the United States”.

He classified unionism on the basis of its functions and psychological factor. His classifications were “business unionism” for protecting the interest of various craftsmen, “uplift unionism” for the purpose of contributing better life such as association of sales engineers etc. “Revolutionary unionism” which is eager to replace existing social order and “predatory unionism” which rests on the support of others\textsuperscript{21}. He believed that the trade unionism grew out of social psychological environment of the workers.

**Frank Tannenbaum Theory**

Frank Tannenbaum technological theory of trade unionism came to light in his philosophy of labour 1921. According to him “The original organizer of the trade union movement is the shop, the factory, the mine and the industry. The agitator or the labour leader merely announces the already existing fact.

He believes that the trade union movement is the result of the machine. He emphasizes that mode of production where machines are used either in factory, mine or the industry, is responsible for the birth of trade unions. “Institutionally the trade union movement is an unconscious effort


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p.38.
to harness the drift of our time and reorganize it around the cohesive identity that men working together always achieve”.

Frank Tannenbaum says that the trade union is the organized expression of the socially inevitable grouping of men in modern industry. The machine will break the society into pieces according to their job. In his words, the union returns to the worker his society which he left behind him when he migrated from a rural background to the anonymity of an urban industrial location. The union gives the worker a fellowship and a value system that he shares with others like him\textsuperscript{22}.

2.2.5 Indian School

Mahatma Gandhi

The Ahmadabad Textile Labour Association served for him his laboratory to test his ideas he had held during the time of independence. The political leaders needed the massive support. For that reason politicians established trade unions according to their ideology in order to gain support for the struggle of independence. He expressed his view in his writings “Young India” and “Harijan” etc.

Truth (Satya) and non-violence (ahimsa) are basis of Gandhism. According to him absence of these two in any walk of life is injustice. These two are means as well as ends, In order to understand trade unions we have to understand his trusteeship theory of trade unions.

His attitude towards capital and labour was paternalistic. He believed them as members of the same family. Capital being the trustee for the good of the workers\textsuperscript{23}.

\textsuperscript{22}B.D.Singh, Industrial Relations emerging paradigms, Excel Book Publications, p.38.
\textsuperscript{23}Shiva Chandra Jha, the Indian Trade Union movement, K.L. Mukhopadhyay Pub, Calcutta, 1970, p28
For removing injustice he supports strike in economic and industrial sphere whereas in political sphere he believes in “Satya graha (truth)”. Much has been debated that Gandhiji was against the use of machinery as such, but there was nothing of the sort. He was opposed only to that machine by which unemployment is caused in the society. Otherwise, he wrote that he would permit”\(^{24}\).

He divides his theory of trusteeship into two parts (i) Extra- mural (ii) Intramural. He says that the employers have to sacrifice their private rights and shall act like trustees but not as owners or employers. The theory of trusteeship postulates, writes R J Soman, “an enlightened recognition of the new social need and required readiness on the side of the private owners to part with their private rights”.

With regard to extramural role there are three steps (1) Persuasion or conciliation failing (2) State legislation or compulsory adjudication (3) Dispossession and nationalization.

With regard to the intramural role of trade unions he said “Practice self-control, self-discipline and self-imposed simplicity, only then you will earn confidence of others and you will be able to work for a social order based on confidence”.

We can conclude that the theory of Gandhiji is ideal which associated with truth and morals. He seems to be against the theory of class struggles of trade unions. Unless the employer as well as workers reach moral and intellectual heights, it is difficult to put it in to practice.

\(^{24}\) Ibid, p42
Asoka Mehta

Asoka Mehta started working as a socialist under Marxist Jayaprakash in the Indian Nationalist Movement. From his writings ‘The Role of the Trade Union in Under Developed Countries’ and “The Mediating Role of Trade Unions in Underdeveloped Countries” (1957) we can get his theory of trade unionism.

There was the impact of Gandhism on Ashok Mehta. He argues that workers working in developing countries shall not demand higher wages, which will lead to inflation. In the same way Gandhi also advocates self-imposed simplicity which means the reduction of wants rather than satisfaction.

All these arguments that in a developing country the trade union should be more productionist than consumptionist form the “under consumptionist” theory of trade unionism by Asoka Mehta.

He was Deputy Commissioner of the Planning Commission and Planning minister of India. Hence his approach with regard to trade unions reflects the economic aspects like strong economy and inflation. His theory of trade unions revolves around inflation and savings of the workmen.

Mehta further continues: “Capital accumulations and development of industry are the order of the day. Union should co-operate with the state in such a production effort, particularly in view of the fact that a great part of the development will be in the public or socialized sector. For increasing output the unions should act to increase”. According to Asoka Mehta, “the labour productivity through propaganda”, educate “their members to give
up extra-spend thrift habits of the labour class” and encourage “small savings among the classes”

“Mehta begins by noting that trade unionism as practiced in the west with its emphasis upon raising wages and protecting the workers against employers is not possible in the developing countries. He also rejects the use of unions as purely political party adjuncts”\(^{25}\).

By the above opinion of Mehta it is understood that trade unions shall not stick or attach to the political parties as some trade unions affiliated to the left parties always demand higher wages.

2.3 Functions of Trade Unions

a) Militant or protective or intra-mural functions: These functions include protecting the workers' interests, i.e., hike in wages, providing more benefits, job security, etc., through collective bargaining and direct action such as strikes, gheraos etc.

b) Fraternal or extramural functions: These functions include providing financial and non-financial assistance to workers during the periods of strikes and lock-outs, extension of medical facilities during slackness and casualties, provision of education, recreation, recreational and housing facilities, provision of social and religious benefits, etc.

c) Political functions: These functions include affiliating the union to a political party, helping the political party in enrolling members, collecting donations, seeking the help of political parties during the periods of strikes and lock-outs.

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\(^{25}\) Shiva Chandra Jha The Indian Trade Union movement, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay Pub, Calcutta, 1970, p42
d) **Social functions:** These functions include carrying out social service activities, discharging social responsibilities through various sections of the society like educating the customers etc.

### 2.4 Problems of Trade Union

#### a) Small size of the unions

The small size of the unions is due to various factors, namely,

i. The fact that any seven workers may form a union under the Trade Unions Act of 1926, and get it registered, a large number of small unions have grown.

ii. The structure of the trade union organization in the country is in most cases the factory or the unit of employment. So whenever employees in a particular factory or mine are organized, a new union is formed.

iii. Unionization in India started with the big employers and gradually spread to smaller employers. This process is still continuing and pulled down the average membership. Though the number of unions and union membership are increasing, average membership is declining.

iv. Rivalry among the leaders and the central organizations has resulted in multiplicity of unions, thereby reducing the average membership.

#### b) Inadequate funds

Because of the small size of the unions, they suffer from lack of adequate funds and they find it difficult to engage the services of experts to aid and to advise members in times of need. Further, they cannot face the challenge of employers for long because of their weak bargaining power.

The trade unions suffer from financial weakness for the average yearly income of the unions has been rather low and inadequate.
Under conditions of multiplicity of unions, a union interested in increasing its membership figures, usually keeps the subscription rate unduly low and does not collect even that subscription regularly.

Insufficiency of funds is the main reason for the deplorable conditions of many a small union. The poor financial position adversely affects their entire working. They can neither undertake any welfare activities for their members nor can undertake successful conduct of strikes, or publication of periodicals.

To improve the financial condition of the unions, the National Commission on labour recommended that the minimum subscription should be raised to a rupee per month.

Another method that is usually advocated is the introduction of the “check-off system,” under which an employer undertakes, on the basis of a collective agreement, to deduct union dues from the workers’ pay and transfers the same to the union.

c) Multiplicity of the Unions & Intra-Union Rivalry

Multiple rival unionism is an important feature and one of the great weaknesses of the Indian trade union movement. Multiple unions are mainly the result of political outsiders wanting to establish unions of their own, with a view to increasing their political influence, albeit in urban areas. The existence of different conflicting or rival organizations, with divergent political views, is greatly responsible for inadequate and unhealthy growth of the movement.

Multiplicity of unions lead to inter-union rivalries, which ultimately cuts at the very root of unionism, weakens the power of collective
bargaining and reduces the effectiveness of workers in securing their legitimate rights.

d) **Intra-Union rivalry**

Another vexing problem is that of intra-union rivalry. Trade union rivalry is acute and pervades the entire industrial scene in India. In practically every important industry or industrial center, there exists a parallel and competing union.

e) **Leadership Issue**

Another disquieting feature of the trade unions is the ‘outside’ leadership, i.e., leadership of trade unions by persons who are professional politicians and lawyers and who have no history of work in the industry. This is ‘leadership by intellectuals’ rather than ‘by workers’. It applies at the local as well as at the national level. There are several reasons for this phenomenon namely, for avoiding victimization of worker-office-bearers of the trade unions, and at times for lack of financial resources to appoint whole time office-bearers.

f) **Politicalisation of the Unions**

One of the biggest problems the country’s trade union movement faces is the influence of the political parties, i.e. the most distressing feature is its political character. Harold Crouch has observed, Even to the most casual observer of the Indian trade union scene, it must be clear that much of the behavior of Indian unions, whether it is militant or passive behaviour, can be explained in political terms.

2.5 **Trade Union Movement in Britain**

England is the country where actually the trade union movement was created and developed, "In Britain, the trade union movement created its own political party. Sometimes it is alleged that the trade unions control
the Labour party and at other times that the Labour party controlled the trade unions. In fact, neither proposition is true\textsuperscript{26}.

In England the movement started nearly two hundred years ago. In United Kingdom the working class movement began with petitions to Parliament. In the early period workers were not allowed to form unions. “It was only in 1824 after the repeal of Combinations Act that it became lawful to organise unions.

They developed as friendly associations and looked after the immediate demands of workers regarding wages, hours of work, and other conditions of work. The unions that were formed were called, “new model unions”, which were open to workers on an industrial basis and not on craft basis. Then it was necessitated for trade unions to establish close contact with the Government and Parliament. “The main reason of this new development was that in 1870 the Government introduced the first Trade Union Bill with a view of defining the rights and responsibilities of trade unions. The trade union movement had to take up the responsibility of considering the bill and suggesting amendments. That compelled them to direct their attention to the Government and Parliament.

In order to secure representation in Parliament the unions established in 1869 the labour representation league. Through the league some candidates were set up for election and with the use of the labour vote some of them were elected to Parliament … … until about 1867 most British workers did not have right to vote. With the broadening of the franchise many of them became voters. As workers became voters, they began to attract the attention of politicians. As years went by politicians became more interested in labour vote. The League became the Labour

\textsuperscript{26} Allan Flander, Management and Unions (1976) p. 43.
Representative Committee in 1900 which later became, the Labour Party-1905\textsuperscript{27}. By 1912 more than half of the total trade union membership was affiliated to the Labour Party\textsuperscript{28}. Thus trade unions established Labour Party and began to carry on through it political activity in support of their industrial demands. “Taff Vale Railway Company Limited vs. Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (1901 Ac 426) the union was held liable for damages of £ 23,000 which have been incurred during strike. With the continued development of liability of tort the freedom to strike was further shackled and the unions realized that there was a need for effective political action\textsuperscript{29}.

Thus political activity was necessitated to safeguard trade union rights and demands. So this type of decisions could be reversed only through legislation. The unions needed their own representative in Parliament. So "in Great Britain the need to influence legislative activity persuaded trade unions to develop the Labour party\textsuperscript{30}.

Once the Labour party was formed, trade unions took a keen interest in building it up. They have all along contributed to the party, the major part of its membership as well as its funds. For several years trade unions have sponsored their own candidates for elections to Parliament. They always contested as candidates of the Labour Party. The election expenses of the candidates are paid out of the political funds. But in Amalgamated society of railway servants vs. Osborne(1910) A.C. 87, the House of Lords held that a union could not levy money for political purposes. Thereafter, the trade union fund was divided into the political fund and general fund.

\textsuperscript{27} V.B. Karnick, Trade Unions & Politics (1968) p. 31.
So it is left to the discretion of worker to contribute or not to contribute to the political fund. By the above decision the protection was given to the worker from exemption of compulsory payment to the political fund, as the political fund sometimes maybe exploited by the trade unions. In United Kingdom trade union organisations have sponsored the Labour Party and continue to support it as they regard the same as the Crusader of the cause of working class\textsuperscript{31}.

In 1945, the Labour party was not only in office but also in power. Trade unions had a big say in the formulation of policies and also in their implementation. They had a number of their leaders in important positions in the Government. Several others were associated with various aspects, of the work of the Government as members of various committees, Boards and Commissions. In the field of nationalization, the Government fulfilled its pledges, and quickly. Acts nationalizing the Bank of England and the mines were passed in 1946\textsuperscript{32}.

Trade Unions had to take interest not only in day to day economic difficulties of workers but also in long term economic and political problems of the country as a whole. In spite of the fact, that their own party was in power, British trade unions did not lose their sense of independence nor did they lose sight of the importance of building up independent industrial organisations.

Political activities of unions take place mostly through the Labour Party, but that does not mean that they have diverted themselves of all political work.

\textsuperscript{31} B.S.Murthy, Profiles of Indian Trade Unions ~A study in Orissa (1986) p. 165.
“The party is dominant and the unions subordinate in the One-party countries. But the relation in the Labour Party Union is conceived as an association of equal partners, with each organisation, performing its own functions under its own leadership…………. In 1969, the strikes did considerable loss to Britain’s export trade, and Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson wanted to ban unauthorized strikes. His proposed action was opposed by the union officials of whom more than hundred sit as Labour members of Parliament. As a result, the Government withdrew the proposal in order to avoid serious intra-party strife33.

There have been many occasions where there were differences of opinion between the trade unions and the Labour Government. The latest has been the difference of opinion on issue of price, profit and wage freeze.

On each occasion the trade union movement boldly expressed its own point of view regardless of the inconvenience or embarrassment that it may cause to the Labour Government. This is an example worthy of emulation by trade union movements in democratic countries34. The study about unions in United Kingdom shows that though the Labour Party was in power during the course of time the labour representatives in the Parliament never neglected the problems and demands of the workers. Sometimes they have taken decisions against their own party. Opposing the proposal of Prime Minister Harold Wilson with regard to ban of unauthorized strikes is the best example that the labour representatives thought independently whenever they happened to take decisions.

34 V. B. Karnick, Trade Unions & Politics (1968) p. 35.
2.6 History of Indian Trade Union Movement

The history of Indian trade unions is closely related to the history of the nationalist movement and various political parties that participated in the movement. The leaders of trade unions were often leaders or at least supporters of one political group or another. ‘The Swadeshee Movement’ the ‘Khilafat Movement’, the ‘Non-Cooperation Movement’, 'The Home Rule Movement’, and 'Civil Disobedient Movement', were all conducted under the leadership of the Indian National Congress and motivated by a strong nationalist sentiment. The Indian working class could not remain aloof from the nation's struggle for freedom\textsuperscript{35}.

Trade Unions are the natural outcome of the modern-factory system. In India the seeds of industrial development were sown in 1851, when the first cotton textile mill was set up in Bombay. The progress of industry was, however, slow and unsatisfactory during the initial stage. By 1872-73, there were only 18 cotton mills in Bombay Presidency and 2 in Bengal. The number increased rapidly thereafter. By 1879-80, 58 mills had been set-up. Jute industry had also by then taken firm roots in the country. There were 22 mills by 1879-80\textsuperscript{36} in the Bengal Region.

The workers who were for the most part villagers endeavouring to improve their position by temporary allegiance to industry were submissive and un-organised; and there were no organised unions, and yet, there was a certain type of solidarity amongst workers.

“In September, 1884 two public meetings of textile workers were organised in Bombay, one on the 23rd and the other on 26th, to protest against deteriorated conditions of workers in factories. A resolution was

\textsuperscript{35}G.K. Sarma, Labour Movement in India (1982) p. 46.

adopted at the meetings demanding a weekly holiday, half an hour midday recess, regular payment of monthly wages', and compensation in cases of accidents. The petition was signed by five thousand workmen and presented to the President of the Factory Commission, which was appointed to make recommendations regarding the improvement of the Factories' Act. This can be regarded as the beginning of the Labour Movement 37.

The founder of organised labour movement in India may be said to be Mr. N.M. Lokhande, who was a factory worker himself and who organised an agitation and called for a conference of workers in Bombay to make representations to another Factory Commission appointed in 1884. As no redress was effected by Government, Lokhande convened a mass meeting of about 10,000 workers in Bombay on April 24th, 1890, and drew up a memorandum containing demands for limitation of hour of work, weekly rest-days midday recess and compensation for injuries. In response to these demands, a weekly holiday was actually granted by mill owners of Bombay. A new Factories' Act was passed in 1891 which introduced several amendments. Encouraged by the success, Mr. Lokhande organised the Bombay Mill Hands Association of which, he was elected as the President 38.

The first Indian trade union on organized lines was formed in Madras in 1918 by Mr. B.P. Wadia. Mr. Wadia was a political leader. He was a colleague of Hrs. Annie Besant, the champion and leader of the movement for Home Rule. While working in that movement, she came across the difficulties and problems faced by workers. The Madras Labour Union was organised in order to deal with those problems like

37 V. B. Karnick, Indian Trade Union - A Survey (1966) p. 3.
maltreatment of workers by European supervisory officers. Due to the steps that Mr. Wadia took to find a solution to the problem of maltreatment that brought into existence the Madras Labour Union... No doubt, there were economic demands also like increase in wages and longer mid-day recess, but the demand for redress against the ill-treatment brought a large mass of workers under the fold of the union.

The following is from a speech of Mr. B.P. Wadia, the founder leader of the Madras Labour Union - "Without the masses, there can be no true democracy. We want to bring the masses into line with educated classes. Much lecturing work has been done already, and what seems now necessary is to combine them. It is very necessary to recognize the labour movement as an integral part of the national movement. The latter will not succeed in the right direction of democracy if the Indian working class are not enabled their forces and come into their own. Unless this is done for all classes of labourers, peasants, plantation workers, factory hands and miners-even the Montague Reforms will only succeed in transferring the power of bureaucracy from foreign to native hands\(^3\). By the above message of Mr. B.P. Wadia, it is understood how much concentration he showed on the working masses in order to strengthen the national movement for winning the freedom.

The Indian National Congress started taking interest in workers' organizations right from 1919. At its thirty-fifth session held at Amritsar in 1919, it adopted a resolution which said "This Congress urges its Provincial Committees and others affiliated associations to promote Labour Unions throughout the country with the view of improving social, economic, and political conditions of the labouring classes and securing for

\(^3\) V.B. Karnick, Trade Unions and Politics, Bombay (1968) p. 4.
them a fair standard of living and a proper place in the body politics of India". Next year, at Nagpur, it adopted a more specific resolution and appointed a committee consisting of Lalalajpat Rai, C.R. Das, Ansuyaben Sarabhai, and others to implement it. The resolution stated: "This expresses its fullest sympathy with the workers of India in their struggle for securing their legitimate rights through the organisation of trade unions, and places on record its condemnation of the brutal policy of treating the lives of Indian workers as of no account under the false pretext of preserving law and order.

The Congress is of opinion that Indian labour should be organized with a view to improve and promote their well-being and secure to them their just rights and also to prevent the exploitations (a) of Indian labour, (2) of Indian resources by foreign agencies; and that the All India Congress Committee should appoint a Committee to take effective steps in that behalf. In 1922, the Gaya session of the organization went a step ahead and decided to render assistance to the All-Indian Trade Union Congress in the task of organizing workers. This is clear from many resolutions on political issues that were passed from time to time by the All India Trade Union Congress. Hence, the trade union movement in India was brought along with politics.

The Indian National Congress in the early years after its formation in 1885 was essentially a middle-class organisation. The struggle of industrial workers was of little importance to the congress in those days. When in 1908 Tilak was sentenced to eight years jail term for sedition, workers in Bombay went on strike for one day. This was one of the first occasions that the workers were drawn into national politics.

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41 Harold Crouch, Trade Unions & Politics in India (1972) p. 40.
The political leaders of the day realized that if they were to win freedom for the country, they would have to carry along with them the working class. Leaders like Lokamanya Tilak, Annie Besant, Mahatma Gandhi and Lala Lajapath Rai, nurtured the sapling in the initial stages so well that it blossomed to full maturity before long. In 1911, the number of factories and the average number of workers employed in factories in India rose to 2,403 and workers 791,944 respectively, although part of this increase was the result of extended definition of a factory under Factories Act, of 1911\textsuperscript{42}.

The Indian National Congress had shown its feelings towards the trade unions by extending financial help and by passing sympathetic resolutions at its sessions in 1919, 1920, and 1922. Strikes were conducted on industrial issues and sometimes on political issues.

In the meanwhile, several associations emerged. They were variously called as associations, societies, unions and sabhas. Important ones were, The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma (1897), The Printers' Union, Calcutta (1905), The Bombay Postal Union (1907), The Karmga Hitvardhak Sabha (1910) and the Social League (1910). These Organisations though essentially well organized, did not last long and could not also claim having done any continuous work\textsuperscript{43}.

During this period, between 1918-1924, the first attempts at trade union organisation were made systematically all over India. Though there is a trade union of the workers in the Ahmedabad cotton mills, forming a Union in 1917 under the leadership of Shrimati Anasuya ben, the credit of forming the first, industrial union on a systematic basis goes

\textsuperscript{42} Chamanl Revri, The Indian Trade Union Movement (1972) p. 40.
to Hr. B. P. Wadia an associate of the theosophist, Hrs. Annie Besant, who founded the Madras Labour Union in 1918.

At Ahmadabad, under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi, occupational unions like ‘Spinner’s Unions and Weavers’ unions were established, which federated into the industrial units known as the Textile Labour Association, Ahmadabad. The Amendment of Indian Penal Code in 1913 had made trade unions practically illegal bodies. It was in the year 1920 that the High Court of Madras in a suit filed against the officials of Madras Textile Labour Union by Binni & Company granted injection restraining the union officials to induce certain workers to break their contacts of employment by refusing to return to work\(^44\). The issue of injunction and considerably heavy damages-granted against Mr. Wadia, President of Madras Labour Union, 1921, had raised the question of Indian Trade Union Legislation as, till then no legislation existed\(^45\).

"After the War in 1920, a strike did take place which was followed by a Lock-out following the issue of Mr. Wadia. It is obvious at an early stage; the movement was threatened with the penalties to which, in absence of a protection statute, certain trade union activities are exposed under English Common Law. Following the suit against the leaders of the Madras Labour Union, 1920, the Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution for registration and protection of trade union\(^46\). The resolution became the Act only in 1926. The Madras Labour Union was the first trade union of modern type in India. Its progress was mostly because of the spirit and sacrifice of the president, B.P. Wadia\(^47\).

\(^{45}\)ChamanlalRevri, The Indian Trade union Movement (1972) p. 117.
\(^{47}\)Dr.V.G.Ghoswamy, Labour and Industrial Laws (2008) p.192
The Madras Labour Union received a set-back in 1924 after six years of useful work. The setback was the result of dissensions amongst outsiders, that is, non-employee public men who had volunteered to help employees to organise and conduct the union\textsuperscript{48}.

In Ahmadabad, Mahatma Gandhi took charge of a strike in 1918 and turned it into Satyagraha. After the strike a union was formed which grew into the Textile Labour Association.

It is, however, noteworthy at the Ahmadabad Textile Labour Association, which drew its inspiration from Gandhiji for a number of years, kept itself-aloof from any Labour Federation\textsuperscript{49}.

However, the Madras case brought the issue of Government Policy to a head. Labour as well as political leaders, and social reformers, carried on a loud agitation for a fair deal for labour. A resolution was sought to be introduced in the Indian Legislative Assembly, calling on the Government to enforce legally the guarantee of freedom of association and protect trade unionists from civil and criminal liabilities for bonfire trade activities\textsuperscript{50}.

The year 1920 was of crucial importance in the history of Indian trade union movement. It saw the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). The first session of the AITUC was held in October, 1920 at Bombay, under the chairmanship of Lala Lajpat Rai, who was at that time also the President of the Indian National Congress. According to the first Session of AITUC there were 107 unions affiliated or sympathetic to the organization. Out of these, 64 unions claimed a membership of 1, 40,854.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} V.B. Karnick, Indian Trade Unions - A Survey (1966) p. 25
\textsuperscript{50} N.Pattabhiraman, Political Involvement Indian Trade Unions (1967) p. 140.
The very first trade union federation was founded by the Indian National Congress which had to be concentrated on the freedom than workers. This central organisation grew in strength in the course of time and came to occupy a crucial position in the movement until it was shaken by a split in 1929. The above federation was started by not only Indian National Congress Party, but also all parties which took active part in freedom movement, as well as mass movements like trade union movement.

"There seems to have been no actual Communist Party in India at this time. Nevertheless, there were Communists though they do not appear to have been organised in a single organization with a membership and office-bearers. The Communists were in fact also members of Indian National Congress. The dominating figure among them was M.N.Roy". It was only in Cawnpore Conspiracy case against a number of Communists in 1924 which resulted in some leaders including S.A.Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad within the Indian National Congress, Communists, with Roy’s approval, formed the Labour Swaraj Party, which was later re-named as the Workers and Peasants Party. It is the form of a Leftist pressure group within Indian National congress. The passing of Indian Trade Unions Act 1926 is an important land mark in the history of trade union movement. The Trade Unions Act, greatly enhanced the status of trade unions in the workers imagination and in the public minds. Before 1926 trade unions were treated as illegal bodies.

"In 1927, at the annual session of Trade Union Congress held at Kanpur, it became apparent, that the labour in the country was going in two

directions, one Communists und the other moderates. In 1928, at the Jharia Session, the conflict developed between the two groups still further and at the Nagpur session in 1929 a split took place in the All India Trade Union Congress". The moderate section, under the leadership of Messrs. N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, B.Shiva Rao, R.R. Bakhale and Diwan Charnanlal seceded from the Congress and set-up a separate organisation under the name of the Indian Trade Unions Federation (ITUF), for co-coordinating the activities of non-Communist trade unions\(^5^4\). Militant nationalists like Subhas Chandra Bose, remained in the AITUC.A Communist, by name S.V. Desh Pande, was elected as General Secretary of AITUC.

"The differences between those who remained in the AITUC and those who left it were not only in their ideological goals, but also in the means to be adopted for their achievement. The group that had captured the AITUC consisted chiefly of communists, whose programme called for proletarian revolution leading to the dictatorship of the Proletariot\(^5^5\). In July, 1931, there was another split when some communists left the AITUC and formed their own separate Red Trade Union Congress. This split however, did not weaken the AITUC appreciably, because, "the RTUC was not very strong having only twelve affiliated unions. At this time, the communist party had very few supporters and even when the Government of India made it an illegal organisation in July, 1934, the party had only about 150 members. Red Trade Union Congress and other communist organisations were included under ban. However, in that year, the Communists began to return to AITUC\(^5^6\).

In April 1933, the Indian Trade Union Federation and a number of unaffiliated unions formed the National Trade Union Federation. Thus,

\(^{54}\) Dr.T.N. Bhagoliwal, Economics of Labour and Social Welfare (1981) p. 47.
\(^{55}\) N. Patabhi Raman, Political involvement of Indian Trade Unions (1967) p. 6.
\(^{56}\) Herold Crouch,' Trade Unions & Politics in India (1966) p. 66.
almost within a decade of its establishment, the Central organisation of labour became a prey to political machinations and personal ambitions\textsuperscript{57}.

“Efforts to bring about unity with in the AITUC had begun soon after the 1929 split, but it was only in 1940 that some unity was achieved. The National Trade Union Federation agreed to merge itself with the AITUC. N.M.Joshi, who was the General Secretary of the Congress at the time of the split, was once again elected to the same office. The unity thus achieved after persistent efforts, was broken again by the situation created by the Second World War.

“In the meanwhile in 1934, a group of Leftists in the Congress led by Jayaprakash Narayan, formed the Congress Socialist Party, which became a kind of pressure group within the congress. Asocialists it was natural for them to associate with organisation of the proletariat and some important trade unionists such as Hariharnath Shastri and Sibnath Banerjee joined the C.S.P. In 1934, there was a wave of strikes, sweeping the industrial centres of India. On 23rd July 1934, the Government of India declared the Indian Communist Party as unlawful\textsuperscript{58}.

In 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru was elected President of Congress, an election that was welcomed by the Trade Unions. The relations between AITUC and Congress became closer under Nehru's leadership and AITUC even passed a resolution expressing its desire to affiliate with the congress. When in 1937 elections took place to the new assemblies, Congress and A I T U C, co-operated with each other and a number of trade unions were elected to Legislature on Congress tickets. Meanwhile, in1937, an organisation called Hindusthan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh (HMSS) had been

\textsuperscript{57} K.N.Subrahmanyam, Labour Management Relations in India p. 84.
set up in Ahmedabad by a Welfare Organisation of Gandhi. Consisting chiefly of trade unionists from the Ahmedabad TLA the HMSS set out to organise in trade unions along Gandhian lines. The unions so organised, like the TLA remained outside the AITUC\(^59\). Because of ideological differences, M.N. Roy and his followers departed from A I T U C supported the war effort and established the Indian Federation of Labour (IFL), in 1941; the objectives\(^60\) of which were:

1. Mobilization of Indian labour for conscious and purposeful participation in war efforts;
2. Securing for the workers the bare minimum of wages and amenities which the war time conditions demanded and without which the main tenancy of workers' morale was an “impossibility”.

The above objectives show how the then trade unionists gave importance to other things like war which was unnecessary to the workers.

\[a\] Post-Independence

In the year 1947, on August 15, India got independence. In order to restore normal conditions some trade union leaders gave importance for greater production.

The Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh which was the off-spring of the Labour Sub-committee set-up by Gandhi Seva Sangh in 1937, 'to organise labour throughout on Gandhian Principles called upon its various member unions to affiliate themselves to the All India Trade Union Congress, and to promote through that body, the policy and programme of the Indian National Congress Party. But All India Trade Union Congress did not agree to change its policies. Then the labour leaders in Congress

\(^{59}\) N. Pattabhi Raman, Political Involvement Indian Trade Unions (1967) p. 12.
\(^{60}\) Herold Crouch, Trade Unions & Politics in India (1966) p. 74.
Party felt the necessity to form a new central organisation. Thus the Indian National Trade Union Congress was formed in May, 1947. After the setting up of I N T U C the communist dominated AITUC suffered considerably both prestige and membership.

The INTUC has now been the largest federation of trade unions and, therefore, the most representative organisation of workers in the country. Recently BMS claims 331 lakhs of union members\(^6^1\).

At the time of its inception the INTUC had a following of more than 200 unions from all parts of the country with a total membership of more than 5,75,000\(^6^2\).

When INTUC was set-up in May, 1947, the communists and socialists remained together in AITUC. In practice the approaches of both to the basic labour issues of the day, such as compulsory adjudication, were much the same. However, from the organizational point of view, the socialists particularly felt a little uneasy as a minority in an organisation that was controlled by a party that had a reputation for acting in a very disciplined and self-interested manner whenever it suited them.

In 1947 when the socialists adopted their own philosophy against AITUC Gandhi had tried to tie them more closely to Congress, but this was refused by Patel. After Gandhi’s assassination in 1948, All India Congress Committee altered Congress constitution regarding the qualifications for membership. Due to the amendment membership to the workers belonging to the other political parties was not given.

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Following the amendment socialists severed their ties with Congress and became known as Socialist Party. Socialists thought that the trade unions should be kept away from government, employers and politics. So, they established Hind Mazdoor Sabha (H.M.S) in 1948. Later, it was identified as a third force. The Indian Federation of Labour formed by Royist group in 1941, merged into this body. In 1949, some splinter groups from the H.M.S., and the AITUC, set-up a separate organisation, the United Trade Union Congress. Besides the four central organisations some other federations have come into existence after the fifties. With the emergence of Jana Sangh the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (B.M.S) in 1955, has come into existence. With the emergence of S.S.P., the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat (H.M.P) came into existence in 1962. 1970 witnessed another split at the national level in AITUC. The decision of left communist group which decided not to remain within the AITUC resulted in the formation of a separate organization namely Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

A further split took place in 1972 in the United Trade Union Congress and another organization namely the United Trade Union Congress Lenin Sarani was formed63.

The split in the Indian National Congress and formation of an organization in Congress resulted in a split in I.N.T.U.C, and in 1971, the splinter group from congress established National Labour Organisation.

Every political party in the country has sought to have under its control and domination as many trade unions as it can. Important central federations, each working in close collaboration with and under the guidance, if not under the direct control of a separate political party. The link between AITUC, and the Communist Party of India, the I.N.T.U.C, and the Indian National Congress, the H.M.S., and Samyukta Socialist

Party and the Praja Socialist Party, the C.I.T.U., and the Communist party of India (Marxist), the B.M.S. and the Bharatiya Janatha Party, and the U.T.U.C., and the small splinter parties of the left is well known

There are as many as 10 central trade union organizations in the country (as against one or two in UK, Japan and USA). The criteria for recognition as central trade union have been that the combined strength should be 5 lacs in numbers with a spread over to at least 4 states and 4 industries as on 31.12.89. Ten such Trade Unions are (1) BMS (2) INTUC (3) HMS (4) UTUC – LS (5) AITUC (6) CITU (7) NLO (8) UTUC (9) TUCC (10) NFITU.

2.7 Political Unionism Vis-à-vis independent unionism

The term “trade unionism” traditionally ascribes to workers organizations with a particular philosophy and function- collective representation to protect and advance the interests of the worker as a producer within the economic system. In practice the predominance of economic system motif has varied, most commonly in proportion to political involvement.

By the above expression, it is obvious that instead of advancing economic interests every trade union influences politics or political parties under pressure group theory and also influenced by politics because of legislation or industrial policies. Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926 does not prohibit political affiliations, which includes affiliating the union to the political party, helping the political party to enrolling the members, collecting donations, seeking the help of political parties during the periods of strike and lockouts.

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64 G.P. Sinha & P.B.N. Sinha, Indian Trade Unions, Political Parties in "Industrial Relations and Labour Legislations" (1977) p.180
65 Bruce H. Millen, The Political role of labour in developing countries (1966) p.1
In fact, trade unions in all countries are more or less political in the sense, they are affected by the decisions of the state and therefore try to affect those decisions.\textsuperscript{67}

V.B. Karnick, an outstanding politician as well as trade unionist after making survey with reference to developing and developed countries, in his work – ‘Trade Unions and Politics’ wrote, “The general conclusion that flows from survey is that trade unions in all countries are influenced by political consideration. They are more or less political unions.\textsuperscript{68}

In most of the developing countries they were born in politics and created by political leaders. “In industrially developed countries, unions were formed for working economic demands. It is in the course of this work, they found it necessary to organize trade unions. For example, unions work for regulation of hours of work, the provision of safety and welfare measures. These can be better secured many a time through legislation realizing this, unions carry on propaganda and agitation for the enactment of legislation. “This is political activity in support of a trade union or economic demand”\textsuperscript{69}. From the above expression, it is understood the relation with politics is inevitable for any trade union according to Karnick’s approach.

B.S. Murthy, in his work “profiles of Indian Trade Unions” described Independent unions neutral unions which are able to maintain a free degree of independence. Accordingly, “neutrality” does not mean independence towards political parties, nor does it mean renouncing

\textsuperscript{67} Herald Crouch, Trade Unions and Politics in India (1966) p.9.
\textsuperscript{68}V.B. Karnick, Trade Unions and Politics (1958) P.46.
\textsuperscript{69}V.B.Karnick, Trade Unions and Politics (1968) p.47.
politics completely. On the other hand, unions belonging to this category too, maintain contacts with political parties”\(^\text{70}\).

The above discussion shows that politics is an integral and indivisible part of trade union work. Despite of this, there were some general characteristics possessed by independent and political unions.

**Meaning of Political and Independent Trade Unions**

Prof. B.Benerjee in his article – “Trade Unions and Politics” wrote that the term “political trade unionism” refers to the pre-occupation of trade unions with political activities, consequently neglecting the legitimate industrial and economic objectives for which, normally trade unions are formed. Decisions in the trade union field are taken by the respective political parties and with the changing political situation, the decision often changes\(^\text{71}\).

The independent union may be described as free and independent of Government and political parties.

**Characteristics of Political Unionism**

According to Bruce Millen\(^\text{72}\) the following characteristics are attributed to political unions.

1. The amount of time and thought invested in direct political unions leaders are directly engaged in political operations and discussion day in and day out.

\(^{70}\)IBID.  
\(^{71}\)Prof. B.Banaerjee, trade Union and Politics, Law Quarterly, June (1980) p.117.  
\(^{72}\)Bruce M.Millen, the Political Role of Labour in Developed countries (1966) p.9.
2. The goals of its leadership are very broad in contrast to the usually circumscribed goals of union leaders in the United States, and may include revamping the major rules governing the society. The political union through its support of “open – end” objectives seeks improved living standards for its members, but may temporarily be willing to go slow in achieving in the hope of winning political power.

3. The frequent use of direct mass action-a demonstration, a strike, or sometimes a staged riot in support of non-industrial objectives, and a propensity for tailoring the performance of economic functions to serve political ends are constant factors. Protest is almost never registered through as a mild method as a “write letters to congress” campaign that unions in the United States might mount.

4. Ideological conformity in the leadership is required, although the tolerable limits of dissent may vary, communist labour movements are the most demanding nationalist movements somewhat less so. Movements that are linked only loosely to a party or government are usually permissive, demanding only general support of ideology.

5. There is a marked tendency towards “movementism” i.e., the continued determination to form or participate in a broad based political force aimed at capturing and maintaining political power.

6. In early stages of a movement building process, a political union often closely resembles a political party and may indeed be a party. It means the political union performs the duty of political party rather than the interest of workers.
Characteristics of independent trade unions

V.B. Karnick in his outstanding work—“Trade Unions and Survey”—indirectly attributes some characteristics of free and independent trade unions. “The dependency of unions on political parties for workers and for advice and guidance will progressively disappear as they develop their own cadres of paid fulltime officers. Some political parties, first loyalty will be to the union and not to the political party. As salaried servants of the union, they will have to devote all their time and energy to the work of their union and not to the work of the political party.” With the increase in their incidental and trade union activities unions will have little time for political agitation and demonstrations.

Characteristics of independent trade unions are
1. Independent trade unions will not depend on others for piece of advice and guidance.
2. Maximum time and energy are devoted by leaders for the cause of workers in independent unions.
3. First loyalty will be to trade union job.
4. There will be no direct action, demonstrations or strikes for political reasons and
5. The trade unions will be organized by workers themselves.

Political Unions
Advantages

Though there was a criticism that political unions exploit workers for they lead the trade union movement to their political ends yet there are some important advantages.

\[73^{V.B.Karnick, Indian Trade Unions – A survey, (1966) p.312}\]
\[74^{Ibid, p.312}\]
(i) **Party Influence**

It was pointed out that the political union leader could play a useful role within the party by representing worker’s interests while his colleagues plan the long term interest of the community. This illustrates how political unionism wherein unions are allied to political party patterns – can block privatization decisions. In November 1993 the Cabinet under the constraints of IMF Budget deficit targets, decided not to finance the modernization of Indian Iron and Steel Company (IISCO) but to privatize it. The 30,000 workers at the plant objected. The Indian National Congress (INTUC) together with the trade union of the Communist Party of India (CPM) and other party affiliated national unions organized a national strike throughout the steel sector. The Parliament Committee was thereby convened to review the privatization decision. The Committee’s Report challenged the government’s privatization plan and recommended that the cabinet decision be withdrawn and that IISCO be modernized with public funds. This shows the ability of political party affiliated unions.

(ii) **Legal advantage**

The legal and administrative superstructure created by the government has obliged trade unions to have lawyers as leaders. That’s why, the former outside political leaders like Nehru and Gandhi were lawyers who served the Indian trade unions for many years. So, the outsiders who are well-versed in legal procedures and formalities are necessary to the trade unions to seek out legal remedy for their trade union employees problems such as the working conditions and service.

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75 Dr. N.R.Sheth, Seminar on Trade Unions and Politics in India, I.R.L.J. January (1968) p.319
(iii) **Free from fear of Victimization**

In order to be free from fear of victimization, the political support is necessary, as victimization is considered a main threat to the unions. V.B. Karnick narrated how the victimization had taken place. “Victimization and black listing were rampant.” Sometimes, there used to be assaults by hired ruffians on employees and also on trade union organizations. Then there was opposition of the Government, many of whose officers were inclined to regard trade union work as seditious activity.\(^{77}\)

So, it required courage, a keen sense of the social service, and infinite patience to work under these circumstances. Hence, some influenced political party outside leader is warranted in order to meet the situation. Or else, the illiterate and financially poor employees would suffer untold pains in the hands of mighty employer.

(iv) **Strengthens bargaining power**

R.D. Agarwal brought certain positive aspects of political unionism.

“Union leaders who occupy important positions in the hierarchy of political parties, including the ruling party, exercise their influence to securing a better deal for labour from government. They act as an important pressure group in the parliament and the State Legislature”.\(^ {78}\)

Secondly, in view of the inadequate bargaining strength of trade unions, political leaders, in their capacity as union leaders, help in creating a semblance of equality of strength as between union and management. This helps the workers in obtaining better working conditions and employment relationship for their employers.\(^ {79}\)

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\(^{77}\) V.B. Karnick, *Trade Unions – A survey* (1966) p.33  
\(^{78}\) R.D. Agarwal, *Dynamics of labour relations in India* (1972) p.66  
\(^{79}\) Ibid., P.68
(v) **Helps secure favourable legislation**

The history clearly establishes that almost all Labour Legislations meant to protect labour have been the result of sustained political struggles lead by outside political trade union leaders.

Though there had been several advantages, the politicalization of unions had a significant negative aspect to it, as observed by several academicians like Pattabhi Raman and B.S. Murthy.

**Disadvantages**

(i) **Inter Union Rivalry**

Political unionism had brought serious impact on the growth and development of trade unions. Its most important consequence has been the fragmentation of trade union structure. The trade union leaders because of their loyalty to the ideology of the parties are prepared to sacrifice interests of working classes to serve party ambitions\(^{80}\).

“Political parties” in their syndical search for levels of power, sought to control and dominate the trade unions. In doing this, they unleashed divisive tendencies in the union structure by setting up rival unions at the plant and industry and at regional and national levels. The result has been multiplicity of unions. While doing so political leaders never consult or seek approval of the constituent members. They often feel astonished or even confused at the political transactional relationship of their leaders.

The competition among the rival unions may have resulted in a larger membership, but most of their time and efforts are directed towards outsmarting the rivals, rockying for positions, and carrying on jurisdictional conflicts\(^{81}\).

\(^{80}\) Ruder Dutt, Indian Economy, S.Chand Pub. (2005) p.723

So, it is obvious even though there may be increase in membership on account of competition among rival unions on the political lines, it is not useful for the welfare of the workmen. As per as the Indian conditions are concerned, N.C.L. (National Commission on Labour) also remarked “Multiple unions are mainly the result of political outsiders wanting to establish unions of their own”, with a view to increasing their political influences albeit in urban areas.82

(ii) Fractionalism (Intra Union Rivalry)

It is another important negative consequence of the control of trade unions by political parties. Besides the split along lines of political ideology, there has been the factional split in the same trade union professing the same ideology. When factionalism occurs in a political party either on account of personal or group rivalry the same factionalism is injected into the trade unions controlled by the political parties.

Generally intra-union rivalry assumes the form of factionalism. Two or more distinct factions and their respective leaders emerge within the union making its smooth functioning difficult. In most cases, two sets of office-bearers are elected by the rival factions and both the groups are locked up in a contest for the control of the union office and records.83 This factionalism has led not only to the organizational weakness of unions, but also the lack of loyalty among workers towards their unions.

(iii) Part-time union leaders

Another disadvantage of political unionism is that as political union leaders happened to be politicians, they were not in a position to spare full

time for the welfare of the workers and union. The workers are misguided on several occasions according to political goals which resulted in unwarranted consequences. Pattabhi Raman wrote- “The Introduction of extraneous political issues in Labour Management negotiations and the political engineering of strikes, Hartals and demonstrations have both brought results unfavorable to organized labour”

Independent Unions

Advantages

(i) Self – Generating

The independent trade unions work independently for the benefit of the workers, instead of being stooged by political leaders for political ends. This independent unions use the support of political parties, or leaders or Government for the furtherance of their economic interests and which are able to maintain a fair degree of independence. The leadership of these unions is self-generating.

(ii) Economical Importance

Trade and economic interests of workers get precedence over political or other considerations in these unions. So, exclusively workers interests are protected and we treat independent unions as workers welfare oriented unions, whereas political union looks for overall community benefits, neglecting the interests of the worker. Here community is overlooked and emphasis shall be on the workers welfare.

(iii) Free from external pressures

They will be free from political and extraneous pressures and considerations, and they can take decisions, immediately and keeping in view the welfare of the workmen.

84 N. Pattabhi Raman, political Involvement of Trade Unions (1967) p. 170
85 B.S.Murthy, Profiles of Indian Trade Union – A Case Study of Orissa (1986) p.190
(iv) **Development of internal leadership**

It develops internal leadership which is indispensable for strong and independent trade unions which results in removal of outsiders who are mostly political leaders so that the independent union can look after its own economic interests.

(v) **Avoids rivalry among unions**

It avoids multiplicity and consequent rivalry among the unions. This ultimately increases the workers confidence in trade unions.

Despite of the above advantages, generally the office-bearers of the political trade unions hold offices in many unions but in independent unions, it is not possible. The outside leaders are unable to pay full attention to trade union work, not only because of similar or even greater claim of political parties on them but also because of most of the leaders have been holding multiple unions.\(^{86}\) So it is obvious that leaders of the independent union are able to pay full attention to the union work.

**Disadvantages**

Though there are useful advantages in independent unions still there are some disadvantages which we cannot be overcome so easily.

(i) **Fear of victimization**

The problem of fear of victimization still exists everywhere in general and in particular in India, and many employees and trade union leaders are being still put at disadvantageous position. The employers still resort to punishing their workers for the trade union work. Therefore, many workers with a capacity for leadership and capable of exercising a strong influence on other workers, prefer to keep themselves in the background.

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\(^{86}\) R.D. Agarwal, Political Dimensions of Trade Union in Dynamics of Labour Relations (1972) p.67
leaving the field free for outsiders whom the employers can never victimize\textsuperscript{87}. So, in some areas where there is illiteracy and backwardness is more, the independent union will not be effective.

(ii) Corrupt Practices

Party leaders do not sell themselves for selfish and personal ends as there is party check behind very leader and most of the decisions will be taken at party’s office by partymen\textsuperscript{88}. There was no possibility for political leaders of trade unions to take individual decisions, whereas in the independent unions, there will not be any check over leaders and they may be subject to several pressures and temptations. Sometimes, the independent trade union leaders may be attracted towards money and position.

(iii) Lack of permanent ideology

As there is no permanent ideology in the independent leaders, they will not stick on to precise stand. Whereas, in political unions, the unions have to go along with the party ideology and principles.

(iv) Lack of bargaining power in un-organized unions

From the collective bargaining point of view sometimes independent unions are ineffective as they have leaders without influence. But this gap can be filled by politicalisation. “The mutual sharing of interest of the major trade unions and their associated political parties has led to their effectiveness and strength\textsuperscript{89}. It is evident, if the internal leaders are not educated and trained the unions may be ineffective.

\textsuperscript{87}\textsuperscript{87}G.P. Sinha and P.B.N/ Sinha, Industrial Relations and Labour Legislations (1977) p. 200.
\textsuperscript{88} Information is given by LingalaVenkateswarlu, District Organising Secretary Employees union Guntur.
\textsuperscript{89}Dr.Siddique, Affiliation of Industrial Workers – An area study of Kanpur, Research Thesis (1970) p.8.
So we may conclude the relation between trade unions which are economic by nature or political are indivisible and it is difficult to view them as two separate water tight compartments. If the degree of industrialization and degree of literacy among the workers were considerably improved, the outsiders who were mostly political leaders will be pushed out from the union administrative affairs. So the problem of outsiders, as well as political unionism will not arise. At present various trade unions at the plant and also at the industry and national level are under the control of different political parties, which are mostly exploiting them for their party and often personal gains, even at the cost of interest of workers.90.

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