Chapter IV

Trade Union – Functions, Policies, Rivalries, Multiple Unions, Social Responsibilities, Recognition and Workers participation in Union Activities

Functions of Trade Unions

Trade Unions are intended to protect the rights and enhance the welfare of the members, in particular, and of the working class, in general. According to the National Commission on Labor (N.C.L.), the important functions of the trade union are:

1. To secure fair wages for workers;
2. To safeguard security of tenure and improve conditions of service;
3. To improve opportunities for promotion and training;
4. To provide educational, cultural and recreational facilities;
5. To improve working and living conditions;
6. To co-operate in and facilitate technological advance by broadening the understanding of workers of its underlying issues;
7. To promote identify of interests of the workers with their industry;
8. To offer responsive co-operation in improving levels of production and productivity, discipline and high standard of quality; and generally,
9. To promote individual and collective welfare.

Trade Union Policies

The general policies of unions may seek to prescribe broad practices/programs towards the accomplishment of their objectives such as maintaining strong organization, Proper management of union resources, the economic status and welfare of union members. Participate in the collective bargaining effectively. Specific policies may be established in respect of specific issues such as hiring, Promotion, Wage and salary administration, employee benefits etc. However, union practices or programs tend to change much more rapidly than their basic policies.¹

The trade union wage policy in our country, in particular, has commonly been criticized on the grounds that it has often exerted an upward pressure over prices through the constant demand for wage increases. But in under developed countries, the trade unions are generally weak and therefore wage rises usually follow the rise in the cost of living and in the upward movement also, the money wages usually very often ‘lag behind the rises of cost of living.’²

2. Ibid.
The necessity of higher wages in developing economy cannot however, justify the pursuit of each an irresponsible wage policy on the part of trade unions that may jeopardize the national economic and social development by sudden and immoderate rise in wage costs or by creating widespread disturbances in vital industries. It is therefore, essential that trade unions must take in view the needs of the economy as one of the major criteria for formulating the wage policy.1

Thus every union will formulate the policies, procedures to carry the organization on sound and enlightened grounds.

**Rivalries**

The fragmentation of the central trade union organizations at the organizational level had led to division of the movement, at lower levels and added to the proliferation of unions at different levels. The dominating feature of the trade union score in India is inter-union rivalry can be described to various factors like multiplicity, outside leadership', absence of statutory bargaining agent etc. Multiplicity of trade unions, intense politicalization of union leadership, the sheer need for survival in situation of

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1. Ibid.
competitive 'free enterprise' in union activities, the absence of any legal requirement in the greater part of the country to 'recognize' any union as the sole bargaining agent, are some other important factors which generate wide-spread and bitter inter-union rivalry.1 Despite various efforts, trade union disunity has continued, union rivalries have adversely affected industrial production, peace and harmony in many industrial organizations. Allen Flanders has commented in this regard thus: "Most trade unions split off a dissident section of a union to form a new organization as one of the deadly sins against trade unions". 2 The N.C.L. recommended that intra-union rivalries should best be left to the central workers' organizations concerned to settle and that the labor court should step in at "the request of either group or on the motion by the appropriate government in cases where a central organization was unable to resolve the dispute.3

**Multiple Unions**

The emerging problem of multiplicity of unions at both the plant and industry levels has posed a serious

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threat to industrial peace and harmony in India. "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. 1 A situation of multiple unions is said to prevail when two or more unions in the same plant, industry, or occupation resort to rival claims over each other, and function with overlapping jurisdiction. Usually, three kinds of multiple unions are evidenced. Firstly, existence of different occupational groups within the same organization, such as clerks, technicians etc., having separate unions of their own. In such a case, each union enjoys bargaining rights on behalf of a particular group of employees. Secondly, any given occupational group, say clerks, may have more than one union each running into competition for more membership. Thirdly, employees of the same establishment working in different plants or places may form different unions. The second and the third types of multi-unions have more demanding effects on industrial relations than the first.

Multiple unions is not a phenomenon unique to India. Even developed countries like Great Britain and the United States face this problem, but the intensity

1. Ibid.
is not that acute in these countries as it is in India. Moreover, while Britain and the United States have to some extent, been successful in developing suitable measures to minimize the adverse effects of multiple unions, India is yet in search of possible ways and means to overcome or avert such multiplicity.

**Social Responsibilities of Trade Unions**

Either the members or leaders of trade unions have to know that they have to feel the responsibility and duty 'not only in protesting workers' interest but also towards the different sections of the society. Further, they should also realize that protesting workers' interest should not be at the cost of the society. The unions have no right to use their organized might to deny legitimate rights of the unorganized and innocent public.

As the National Commission on Labor observes, it is imperative that unions keep the well-being and progress of the community constantly before them, even in the midst of their endeavors to help the working class-unions have to take the interest in the success of the national plans for economic development. Unions have to adopt themselves to changing social needs, like removal of poverty, illiteracy, anti-communal activities,
price rises, language, religion etc. Some important social responsibilities of trade unions are:

i) Promotion of national integration;

ii) Protecting the socio-economic interest of the community; and

iii) Safeguarding the interest of the industry and the community.

Recognition

One of the burning problems in industrial relations is to evolve a satisfactory and commonly acceptable way to settle the competitive claims of rival unions for being declared as bargaining agents. A trade union may be stable and strong but until it is given recognition - legally or voluntarily - it will hardly have any impact. In fact, collective bargaining cannot exist or begin, until the union is recognized by the management. As there is no central law for compulsory recognition of trade unions, the employers are not bound to recognize any union and are free to recognize a union of their choice. As soon as one union gets recognition, rival unions step in. Even if an employer seeks to recognize a union, he finds himself in a dilemma as to

1. Ibid., p.287.
which one to recognize and so is generally guided by his own whims and the political affiliations of the union. This makes collective bargaining very difficult. What is done by one union is sought to be undone by the other. No sooner than the ink is dry on an agreement, fresh issues are raised by the rival unions. The workers also do not know which union to join; because they are not sure which one represents their collective interests. Therefore, some workers choose to become members of more than one union. Undoubtedly, recognition will confer representative character on a union to which most of the workers of an organization can look forward to promote their interests. Efforts were made both at the Central and State levels, soon after independence, to bring about legislative measures for compulsory recognition of unions. Some of the state acts like the Bombay Industrial Relations Act 1946, the Madhya Pradesh Industrial Relations Act, 1960; and the Industrial Disputes (Rajasthan Amendment) Act, 1958, provide for the registration of unions as representative unions subject to their fulfilling certain conditions.

The National Commission on Labor examined all the aspects of trade union recognition and recommended that: (i) it would be desirable to make recognition compulsory under a central law in all undertakings
employing 100 or more workers Dr where the capital invested is above a stipulated size; (ii) A trade union seeking recognition as a bargaining agent from an individual employer should have a membership of at least 30 per cent of workers in the establishment; (iii) The minimum membership should be 25 per cent if recognition is sought for in an industry in a local area; (iv) The minority unions should be allowed only the right to represent cases of dismissal and discharge of their members before the Labor Court.¹

There is no consensus among the parties on the method of according recognition to a union. The bone of contention is whether secret ballot, or check off or physical verification is to be used for the purpose of determination of the representative character of the rival unions. Those in favor of verification of membership, according to the NCL base their preference on the premise that: (i) It is the support of fee-paying, stable membership of a registered trade union that alone should entitle it to the representative status. (ii) A regular check by a competent authority can satisfactorily determine whether or not the membership claims are genuine.²

¹ Ibid., p.XXIV. p.329.
² Ibid., p.329.
Workers' Participation in Union Activities

The importance of trade unions participation in the process of economic and social development of the developing countries cannot be denied. In a free society, trade unions are an organized expression of the fundamental rights of workers to organize themselves in order to protect and promote their interest by collective action. In a democratic set up like ours, no organization, including trade unions, can be recognized as democratic if the participation of its members is lacking. Further, it is necessary to identify to what extent trade unions are democratic organizations it has been pointed out by some scholar that while the form of a trade union is democratic, its practices are undemocratic. For instance, many persons who get in to positions of union leadership through the democratic process of election develop, in course of time, a vested interest in retaining such positions and hence use their existing authority to weaken the interest and influence of others. Several studies have shown that, contrary to expectation, the affairs of a union are run by a minority rather than by a majority.

The term "participation" has become very popular in the field of industrial relations. In this context,
It refers to mental and emotional involvement of workers in union activities, and it is more behavioral rather than an attitudinal concept. The aim of such participation is to work for the realization of union goals and objectives.

The different indicators of participation are: (a) attending union meetings; (b) participation in union elections; (c) membership enrolment and subscription; (d) membership on union committees; and (e) involvement in union's welfare and social responsibility functions. Some of the factors which influence workers' participation in unions are: (a) the type of leadership available in a union; (b) the history of labor-management relations in a plant; (c) the age, experience, skill, education, caste, employment of workers; (d) the style of supervision, motivation, morale, wage structure obtaining in the industry, welfare measures and fringe benefits available to workers.

The participation of members in union activities gives solidarity and strength to the unions, helps in developing leadership from the rank and file and ensures a strong bargaining power. It checks the tendency on the part of selected leaders to become all powerful by a vigilant and participative membership. It is essential not only from the viewpoint of betterment of union members, but for the very success of trade unions.