

## **Role of Trade Unions in India**

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### **Abstract**

A trade union is an organization of workers, acting collectively, who seek to protect and promote their mutual interests through collective bargaining. The role of trade unions are considered as essentially reformist organizations and economic institutions based on the Sarvodaya principles of Truth, Non-violence and Trusteeship. Trade unions have gradually evolved and have now come to occupy an important place in the modern industrial order, they have now become gigantic associations; they have now become institutions which are interested in the social, cultural and political development of the county. Now-a-days the trade union movement is no longer solely a movement for advancing claims as a movement seeking to increase the material well being of its members but has grown into a force which not only defends the political, social and cultural interests of its members but also carries out special tasks affecting enterprising and intellectual workers especially with regard to their career, jobs, salaries, paid holidays, vocational training, recreational and health improvement programmes etc. The growth of trade unions has been influenced by a number of ideologies, social, economic and even political movements have influenced trade unions in one or the other way.

**Keywords: Trade Union, Collective Bargaining**

### **Introduction**

The trade unions have a crucial role to play in maintaining smooth industrial relations. A trade union (or labor union) is an organization of workers or employees who have combined together to achieve common goals in areas such as in working conditions and protecting and promoting their mutual interests through collective action. A trade union, through its leadership, bargains with the employer or the management on behalf of the union members and negotiates labor contracts etc. The process of negotiating wages, work rules, complaint procedure and workplace safety is called collective bargaining. Historically, union representation and collective bargaining have been the keys to the growth of a stable working population in developed economies and it has made it possible for workers to gain a more equitable share of the wealth that they create; they are able to improve working conditions and help workers gain job security. Changes in the political, social and educational environments regarding awareness of rights –such as the right to organize, the right to bargain and the right to settle the terms and conditions of the employment- have caused workers unions to spring up to protect and further workers interests. Thus, with the establishment of minimum wages, norms for mandatory work hours, provisions for health and safety, and overall improvement in working conditions, unionization has become instrumental in improving the quality of life of workers.

Worker being weaker segment they can get their rights only through collective representation i.e. collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is the backbone for harmonious

industrial relations. Right to collective bargaining is available only to recognized trade union. Recognition of trade union means accepting or conferring right to negotiate on behalf of workers.

The individual employee possesses very little bargaining power as compared to that of his employer. If he is not satisfied with the wage and other conditions of employment, he can leave the job. It is not practicable to continually resign from one job after another when he is dissatisfied. This imposes a great financial and emotional burden upon the worker. The better course for him is to join a union that can take concerted action against the employer. The threat or actuality of a strike by a union is a powerful tool that often causes the employer to accept the demands of the workers for better conditions of employment. The decisions regarding pay, work, transfer, promotion, etc. are highly subjective in nature. The personal relationships existing between the supervisor and each of his subordinates may influence the management. Thus, there are chances of favouritisms and discriminations. A trade union can compel the management to formulate personnel policies that press for equality of treatment to the workers. All the labour decisions of the management are under close scrutiny of the labour union to minimize favouritism and discrimination. The employees may join the unions because of their belief that it is an effective way to secure adequate protection from various types of hazards and income insecurity such as accident, injury, illness, unemployment, etc. The trade union secure retirement benefits of the workers and compel the management to invest in welfare services for the benefit of the workers. The desire for self-expression is a fundamental human drive for most people.

### **Need To Form Trade Union**

Trade Union is an outcome of the factory system. It is based on labour philosophy-“United we stand, divided we fall.” Industrial revolution in India has changed the traditional outlook in the labour management relationship. With the introduction of the modern factory system, personal relationship between employer and employee disappeared and has given rise to many social and economic evils which made it imperative on the part of the workers to devise an effective means to contact employers and to bargain with them. Formation of trade unions has provided an ideal solution.

Some important reasons why workers organise themselves into a trade union are as follows:

#### **To Oppose Management**

Workers often join unions in order to have a method of collectively resisting action of management. When employers cut wages or pay low wages; when working conditions are unsafe or too unpleasant; or when managers interface in workers’ personal lives, workers may resist by joining unions. Through the union workers may petition management for changes and, if unsuccessful, they may resort to a concerted work stoppage- a strike.

#### **To Participate in Union Activities**

Workers may join unions to *obtain* certain health or insurance benefits, to participate in educational programmes, or to learn about their own business and occupation. They may also join to engage in social or community activities.

### **To Exercise Leadership**

Some workers join unions as an outlet for their own ambitions. They may aspire to leadership and find that the union offers a convenient vehicle. They may hope to get ahead by obtaining an office of the union.

### **To Fall in Line with Others**

Many workers join unions simply because other workers urge them to do so. They may be made to feel that they are traitors if they do not join.

### **To Get Employment**

Sometimes workers join a union because it is precondition to their getting employment. This is known as the 'closed shop' system and was prevalent in America till 1947 when it was outlawed.

The worker is motivated toward union membership to the degree that he thinks it will satisfy his wants or reduce his dissatisfaction. The ties are strong when the expected want satisfaction is strong, and vice versa.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that presence of trade union in various industries increased the bargaining power of the workers with their employers and have played pivotal role in improving the living standards of the workers in their respective industries. Trade unions should build additional value to members in the work they perform. Besides bringing security to life and improving working conditions the union should try to put more emphasis into bringing new values to its members. In a democratic country like India, workers unionism is massively required to accomplish their reasonable demands. A well organized labor unionism may change our country's economic as well as political condition. India has the credit of having the largest number of trade unions but their development has been very slow and uninspiring. The major task lies ahead is encouraging the emergence of a new generation of young trade unionists, who consider trade union work to be a mission and not just a job. They must rediscover bottom-up trade unionism and with committed activists who are willing to risk their jobs for the cause of membership. We must not surrender to despair.

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