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THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

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The Role of Trade Unions in Industrial Relations

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Abstract – A trade union is an organization based on membership of employees in various trades, occupations and professions, whose major focus is the representation of its members at the workplace and in the wider society. The primary purpose of a trade union is collective bargaining. The main objective of this paper is to study the different role of trade union.

Keywords: Trade Union, Worker, Employers

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INTRODUCTION

Trade unions have been around since the 1930s to resist through equal bargaining power the domination of employers over employees and to represent workers' interests in the employment relationship. It is through union efforts that workers benefit from better pay and working conditions, and that they are treated with dignity and respect at work. The importance of trade unions cannot be overstated even though membership has been on a steady decline.

CLASSIFICATION OF TRADE UNIONS

- **Classical:** A trade union's main objective is to collectively protect the interests of its members in given socio-economic-political system. Trade Unions are the expressions of the needs, aspirations and wishes of the working class.
- **Neo-classical:** It goes beyond classical objectives and tries to improve up other wider issues like tax-reliefs, raising saving rates etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Trade Unionism has made its headway owing to growth of industrialization and capitalism. Trade Unionism asserts collectively the rights of the workers. In industrially advanced countries trade unionism has made a great impact on the social, political and economic life. India, being an agricultural country, trade unionism is restricted to industrial areas and it is still in a stage of growth. The earliest known trade unions in India were the Bombay Mill hand's Association formed in 1890, the Amalgamated Society of railway servants of India and Burma formed in 1897, Printers' Union formed in Calcutta in 1905, the Bombay Postal Union which was formed in 1907, the

Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha Bombay formed in 1910. P.C.Tiwari [4] (1992) in his study concluded that the unsatisfactory labour relations and consequent adverse impact on the economy were not adequately captured by the data on mandays alone. B. Gopal Singh [5] (1992) carried out a study of a two wheeler automobile factory employing 2000 workers. The study reveals that management is reluctant to give details and figures. It is not due to working pressure, but due to the mismanagement, inter rivalry of trade unions, and to obtain benefits from Central and State Government posing as a sick factory and also to evade the taxes that the factory declared lockouts. Mathew George [6] (1993) conducted a study on the "Impact of Trade Unionism on Industrial Relations in the Textile Mills".

ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS-

Collective Bargaining

Labor unions developed to grant employees equal bargaining power with their employers, who traditionally had the ability to exclusively set the terms and conditions of work and pay. Unions represent workers within a given industry in negotiations with their employers. Since the union comprises a group of workers, it has a greater voice than if employees were dealing with employers individually. For example, unions are credited with abolishing sweatshops and child labor in the United States because they pushed for these practices to end. The National Labor Relations Act guarantees employees' right to bargain collectively through their chosen labor union representatives. Unions can organize strikes, boycotts, go-slows and sit-ins to get employers to consider their proposals.

Employee Welfare

Unions have successfully fought for better terms and conditions for workers. They represent workers' interests and have secured a variety of benefits, such as higher wages for unionized employees, work-life balance characterized by reasonable work schedules, job security and protection from arbitrary action by employers. In a September 2012 essay on the CNN website, Democratic strategist Donna Brazile asserted that is also due in part to union activity that discrimination in the workplace was outlawed and that workers have access to health care, safe working conditions and guaranteed Social Security. Unions not only have given workers dignity in the workplace, but they also consistently facilitate enhanced welfare and standards of living for American workers.

Unfair Practices

Labor unions check the unfair labor practices of employers. The NLRA declares that it is unlawful for employers to dominate a union, discriminate against workers engaged in union activity, and victimize workers who file charges against them with the National Labor Relations Board or interfere with employees engaged in concerted union activity. If the employer does any of these prohibited acts, the union can take it up with the board on behalf of the employees. For example, the union representing Boeing Co. engineers and technical workers filed charges against the company for interfering with employees engaging in concerted union activity. The board investigates charges and may take a variety of actions, including issuance of cease-and-desist or reinstatement orders to remedy unfair treatment against employees. Unions ensure that employers comply with the law and can lodge appeals in federal court if employers do not respect board decisions.

Legislation

Unions also play a key role in developing labor laws and regulations for effective worker protection. The unions initiate the push for regulation in areas that concern employees in the workplace. They lobby for the creation of laws and regulations and disseminate information to the employees about them. Measures such as the NLRA, the Social Security Act, the Family Medical Leave Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act exist as a result of union efforts for better terms and conditions for workers. Unions monitor the status of implementation of employee welfare laws and regulations to ensure they are properly enforced.

S. Derry, Erwin P. and Iverson R. [1] (1994) opined that a co-operative industrial relations climate had some positive effects on organizational commitment, but negative effects on union loyalty. R.A. Mittal [2] (2001) has found that a closer communication of interests between the labour and the management would lead to a culture of high performance.

For that, the workers should be fully informed about the company, including investment, size, the nature of its business, the products, the services, labour policies, and the profit or loss position, etc. Aparna Raj [3] (2003) observes that the establishment of a sound or harmonious industrial relations system is a central theme for Governments, employers, workers and their representatives, in their endeavor to achieve economic and social development.

CONCLUSION:

Trade unions faced major economic and political change, the kind of jobs that people do and the type of industries they work in have changed dramatically. The manufacturing sector, which used to be one of the most important industries, has shrunk dramatically and new sectors - like the finance and voluntary sectors - are becoming more important to the economy.

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