

# Human Resource Management and Trade Unions (HRMTU)

Sudhansh Kumar Sharma and Beena Sharma

**Abstract**—In this paper an attempt is being made to concentrate on the problem of managing human resource, mainly the outside interference in the affairs of trade unions. Questions regarding the politicization of trade unions and problems arising thereof are also discussed. Though the activities and operational methods of trade unions in India have always been affected by the political thoughts and preferences, today's trend is alarming. Trade Unions are now generally linked to political parties, hence now they can seldom take decisions entirely by themselves. A big factor that contributes to the politicization of trade unions is inadequate education and training. Many labour leaders cannot understand the technicalities and intricacies inherent in the system and it is not unnatural on their part to fall into the hands of crafty politicians. Hence providing proper education and training to the workers and their leaders is very necessary. Moves to restrict and reduce the proportion of outside leadership in trade unions may be another constructive measure. It is also pointed out that though the politicization of trade unions cannot be stopped completely, it can be considerably checked. Such a measure would not only ensure better labour-management relations, but would also facilitate healthier industrial relations.

**Index Terms**—Human resource management, trade unions, politicization, unionism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Highlight a “Manpower” of “Human Resource” may be thought of as “The total knowledge, skills, creative abilities, talents and aptitudes of an organization's work-force, as well as the values, attitudes and benefits of an individual involved..... It is the sum total of inherent abilities, acquired knowledge and skill represented by the talents and aptitudes of the employed persons,” [1] of all the co-ordinates in the mechanics of management (i.e. the management of men, machine, money, materials and methods) the element of manpower or human resource occupies a seminal position. One may even say that if the human resource factor does not work properly in an organisation, industrial or otherwise, it may not achieve its goals as its productivity factor is supposed to be adversely affected by any mismanagement of the former. Extracting the best of human resource, its skills and competence, has always been a complex issue. Only a few decades back it was thought that this may be achieved by keeping human resource contented through various measures

(such as providing them better welfare facilities and high degree of job satisfaction), by applying the tactics or motivation and by improving the state of supervision and administration. But today's trend says that only this much may not be sufficient unless the worker's associations and trade unions cooperate to management in doing so. It is realized today that if the trade unions and/or their leaders are motivated, supervised and administered suitably, it would be easier to deal with human resource. It seems to be true too. In the last few decades trade unions have played an unprecedented role in the maintenance or otherwise of industrial relations affecting, in the process, the productivity of organisations. It has been felt on many occasions that trade unions have over played their role. Unpopular trade unions were seen operating popular and successful strikes and work stoppages while recognised and representative trade unions were found unsuccessful in persuading workers regarding many matters. All this was not without reasons. One of the important reasons behind such development was the interference of outsiders in the affairs of trade unions for their personal and/ or party gains. As long as this interference operated at an individual level, it did not harm as much as it did when this interference was institutionalized. In other words, when certain political parties and other organised groups started interfering in the affairs of trade unions, the position became worse.

In this paper an attempt is being made to concentrate on the problem of managing human resource vis-a-vis outside interference in the affairs of trade unions. Questions regarding the politicization of trade unions and problems arising thereof will also be discussed. Though the activities and operational methods of trade unions in India have always been affected by the political thoughts and preferences, today's trend is alarming. It is an established fact that the trade union movement in this country, even in its primary stage was not untouched by political prejudices; in the later stages too the thrust of the entire movement got split mostly due to differences among the leaders of the movement. This split can be attributed more to the political alignments of the leaders than to economic or other factors. But then the political parties were hardly in a position to dictate the terms to the trade unions or their leaders. The reasons are not very difficult to identify, though. It was perhaps because of the fact that there were certain guiding principles and ideologies on the basis of which the unions and the political parties had to operate. Unlike the present trend, where leaders of political parties and trade unions are more important than the promotion of their ideologies, principles were more important than the person at the initial stage. Though the instances of trade unions split, in the beginning, are on record, it is due

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mostly to ideological differences and not to personality cult – a most common factor today.

It is fact that prior to independence Congress (Indian National Congress) was the only influential forum for the political leaders of this country. In the field of trade unions the most popular forum of that time was All India Trade Union Congress. But there was a growing scheme within the Congress between hardliners and soft liners as early as the 1940s. This gap had surfaced in AITUC too due to growing differences between 'Rightists' and 'Leftists'. However, till then the differences were confined to approaches, modes of functioning and ideology, and not the ego issues which later become dominant. Socialists, at this stage, decided to stay away from AITUC and INTUC by forming the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat (later Hind Mazdoor Sabha) as their political bosses had formed Praja Socialist Party. Further splits in socialist party led to corresponding splits in socialist party led to corresponding splits in the trade unions aligned with them. In the late 1950s, the communist Party was divided followed by a division in its labour wing. A few other trade unions had come into existence by this time – Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh, for example, which had its secret affiliations with the erstwhile Jansangh. Thus a growing trend of affiliation of trade unions with political parties was clearly discernible. Another noteworthy feature was that apart from a few divisions in the socialist trade unions, the divisions came mainly on the basis of differences of approach and ideology. This indicates that a trend of division of trade unions on the basis of the factors, other than operative and ideological had got its roots already by now. And socialist trade unions became the trend setters.

Further, the trend of unions emerging as the labour wings of political parties became a dominant factor. Labour wings became necessary flowerpots in the drawing rooms of the political parties. Following the trend, Lokdal, BSP, and Samajwadi party in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, AI-ADMK in Tamil Nadu and A.G.P. in Assam, launched or boosted certain labour forums. Only a few trade unionists like Dr. Datta Samant of Maharashtra, Shankar Guha Niyogi of Madhya Pradesh and Swami Agnivesh of Haryana could be exceptions to the trend.

Whereas, Human Resource Management and Trade Unions in the United Kingdom are concerned, it presents a different picture in comparison to India. Human Resource Management (HRM or simply HR) is the management of an organization's workforce, or human resources. It is responsible for the attraction, selection, training, assessment, and rewarding of employees, while also overseeing organizational leadership and culture and ensuring compliance with employment and labour laws. In circumstances where employees desire and are legally authorized to hold a collective bargaining agreement, HR will also serve as the company's primary liaison with the employees' representatives (usually a labour union).

HR is a product of the human relations movement of the early 20th century, when researchers began documenting ways of creating business value through the strategic management of the workforce. The function was initially dominated by transaction's work such as payroll and benefits administration, but due to globalization, company

consolidation, technological advancements and further research, HR now focuses on strategic initiatives like mergers and acquisitions, talent management, succession planning, industrial and labour relations, and diversity and inclusion.

In startup companies, HR's duties may be performed by trained professionals. In larger companies, an entire functional group is typically dedicated to the discipline, with staff, specializing in various HR tasks and functional leadership engaging in strategic decision making across the business. To train practitioners for the profession, institutions of higher education, professional associations, and companies themselves have created programs of study dedicated explicitly to the duties of the function. Academic and practitioner organisations likewise seek to engage and further the field of HR, as evidenced by several field-specific publications.

Stephanie Tailby, Mike Richardson, Martin Upchurch, Andy Danford and Paul Stewart have written in their paper entitled, "Partnership with and without trade unions in the UK financial services: filling or fuelling the representation gap." (2007), that the representation gap has grown in the UK with the decline in trade union recognition and density, union revitalisation and the development of alternative institutions for worker representation. Obviously, there is much diversity within each category. Nonunion employees representation (NER) in principle can be categorised by type, according to whether its initiation is by an employer, the state or a voluntary organisation. Debates on whether NER in some forms can replace trade unions and on whether it can complement unions and assist their revitalization have been invigorated by the UK's transpositions of the employees union Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Directive. Kim and Kim (2004) point out that the onus is on proponents to demonstrate that NER can perform traditional union functions as effectively as unions or can add something distinctive. NER was not a major focus of UK industrial relations research until recently, for reasons discussed by Hall and Terry (2004). Public policy formerly relied on employee representation via the 'single channel' of trade unions voluntarily recognised by employers. NER was considered anomalous and its incidence was limited. It was most common in industries with structural characteristics associated with unionisation and consequently was assumed to be largely cosmetic, the employer's principal objective being union avoidance. One takes its inspiration from statutory works councils in north European states and proposes the arrangements can be emulated in order contexts, to provide a model of employee representation in the nonunion sector that is complementary to trade unions and supportive of employer's organizational efficiency objectives. The argument is that workers' representative participation in a company consultation structure assists employee-management communications, responsiveness and reciprocity. Workers are more receptive to workplace change because they feel their interests are represented and that the new management practices advantage them as well as employers.

Another view is skeptical that nonunion works councils and like arrangements can provide an effective substitute for trade unions in voluntarist and decentralised industrial relations.

NER lacks' legally provided tools of bargaining power [2], and is 'enterprise confined'. Without industrial action 'immunities' it cannot make credible threats of sanctions in support of employees demands, or even to hold management to its commitments to consult. Because nonunion employee representatives have not had legal protection from employer's victimisation they have been inclined towards caution. The provisions of the ICE Regulations may modify some among the limitations. But the conclusion is that effective employees' representation in organisation-based consultation arrangements requires the support of strong trade unions that can provide 'expertise, coordination and mobilising potential' [3]. The issue, therefore, is how trade unions can insert themselves in to the workplace. The argument that statutory participation can assist unions in this respect is dismissed. Therefore, works councils as a threat to union renewal, because they are conveyors of the 'demobilising' ideology of partnership at work [4].

The unions risk becoming more like NER in the eyes of their members and potential members and less able to perform traditional union functions [5].

Without greater success in reversing austerity at the source, unions are in danger of being run ragged fire-fighting at the workplace or regional bargaining level. As in [6], a few suggestions could be:

Find a better model for sharing, competing and giving way. In health and education particularly, too much time and energy is wasted on competition for the same unionised workers. Solidarity on common campaigns is undermined. This isn't the place of piety though: within reason, unions deserve to lose and gain members based on performance and politics, and choice for the worker or workplace can't be discounted.

However, a TUC-brokered agreement on spheres of influence for future organizing, completed swiftly and enforced with some degree of grace and flexibility, isn't all that much to ask. This would be best introduced with a positive counterpoint; a mandate for TUC affiliates to share resources and personnel on concerted community organizing around significant local issues.

Follow the work, or follow the worker. Public sector unions need to become public service unions. Privatization is almost always a bad thing and should be fought with intensity and vigor. This shouldn't stop the organisation of private-sector workers in public services or in workgroups where outsourcing companies dominate the market. In the same way unity should be reaching out for all transport workers, UNISON could reach out for all workers who clean, cook or care, regardless of the employer.

In response to a fractured workforce and greater self-employment, the private-sector unions should aim to become a 'union for life', offering the worker support and solidarity, wherever the work may be. Where this conflicts with TUC -brokered spheres of influence, closer harmonization of subs and ease of transfer between TUC affiliates over a working lifetime could (and I'm being really, really fanciful here) help. This model might even revive local trade councils as a real force for campaigning and organizing. Needless to say, all of this will necessitate the employment of many more paid organizers.

## II. IMPLICATIONS

The foremost implication of this trend was that when the political parties were formed as a result of reasons other than ideological (petty political interest or ego issues for instance), the labour wings of such political parties also split, increasing unnecessarily the number of already existing trade unions. It was a disservice to the working class in two ways; first, the increase in the number of existing trade unions resulted in a division among the workers; and second, the workers increasingly skippered the cause of certain politicians on whose initiative and instance the division took place. Thus the betterment and welfare of the: working class is pushed to the wall by such leadership. At times, when a certain political party and its labour wing had differences on policies concerning the working class, it was usually seen that the trade union had to concede to its parent organisation. The functioning of trade unions at the behest of leaders (mostly political), which may not be in keeping with spontaneous comrades in the working class, as in the case of many industrialized countries, betrays the lack of an industrially committed work-force.

In other words, it may be said that the monitoring of trade unions by political parties or by politically-guided persons, harmed the interest of the working class in many ways. First, the interest of such persons was guided by their moves to utilize the unions either in their own favour or in favour of their political bosses. The welfare of the working class was ignored as a rule; even when the interests of the working class were taken care of, it was prompted by their drive to improve the image of a certain leader or to win elections. The need and preferences of the working class were replaced by the election requirements of the leaders. The second implication of the trend was that the political leadership of the union, even when interested in the betterment of the working class, could hardly do much because it had little idea and experience regarding the trades/jobs in which their followers were engaged. It may be quite interesting to see that the tradeoff most of our union leaders is 'trade unionism' itself. Further, such leadership did not have a good idea of the problem of the workers pertaining to their working and living conditions, security of service and service conditions, to mention only a few. It was quite natural, then that working without a sound grasp of the difficulties, grievances and hardships of the workers in questions such leadership was hardly in a position to fight for their cause and run their functioning in correct perspective. If the foregoing observations are anything to go by, it can be easily concluded that the interest of the working class can be better protected by the leadership emerging from the rank and file of the working class itself, and not by one imposed, due to manifold considerations, from outside.

The third damage, perhaps a more alarming one, was done to the working class when the excessive politicization of trade unions adversely affected the morale of the workers. Gradually there emerged in the working class, distaste for unions and unionism, and instead of involving themselves thoroughly in union activities, the workers preferred to stay away. A large section of the workers, indifferent to union activities, holds the view that problems relating to workers pop up largely due to the presence of political leaders in the

unions themselves. As such, politicization of trade union activities brewed a bad taste among workers and they, not unpredictably, alienated themselves from such trade unions, and in many cases trade unionism itself. Perhaps that explains why a substantial proportion of the workers of these countries do not like to join trade unions, which ultimately hits the interest of the working class.

One more important development fermented by the politicization of trade unions was the unhealthy brewing of inter and intra-union rivalry. The differences arising among the unions and groups therein, mainly on grounds of linking trade unions to political parties, were ascending. It was quite natural; when the targets of many unions were different, their ways to become different. In the absence of a fixed and clearly defined target the unions hardly allowed themselves to initiate joint and consolidated moves favoring the working class; so instead of fighting their employer (s), they started fighting amongst themselves and weakened the already shaky roots of the working class.

A few other unhappy developments too were noted consequent upon the politicization of trade unions. For example, on the initiative of politically motivated trade unionists, the practice of recruiting workers without proper skill, training and competence became rampant. Such planted candidates appointed very often even if the vacancies did not exist, naturally busied themselves in creating nuisance and motivating right thinking workers the wrong way. Similarly, outsider politically motivated trade unionists were found demanding more say in matters relating to administration and management. In many cases it was also found that managers and representative trade union leaders were harassed and discouraged by the modus operandi, let alone the activities, of such planted leaders. Raising funds by all means and from all quarters, became a common practice. All this ultimately resulted in the loss of industrial development and did considerable disservice to the working class itself.

### III. SUGGESTIONS

While considering the prospects of remedial measures to the problem, it would not be out of place here to look back on the factors behind the problems themselves. When we examine the factors of politicization of the trade unions in India and U.K., we find that besides the multiparty political system of these countries, which is primarily responsible for the multiplicity and politicization of trade unions, many other factors are also responsible. For example, the increasing intervention of state and the complications involving the machinery for settlement of industrial disputes have prompted the leaders of various unions to seek help from political quarters. Again, legal, psychological and socio-economic factors have also played sufficient roles in institutionalizing trade unions activities. In these circumstances it becomes increasingly difficult for an independent trade union leader to run his union without political backing. This is, however, not to suggest that the shape of things can be improved by making the machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes simple and accessible to the common workers and their leaders.

A factor which also contributes to the politicization of trade

unions is the lack of literacy, proper education and training on the part of the union activists as well as the workers. In view of inadequate education and training many labour leaders cannot understand the technicalities and intricacies inherent in the system and it is not unnatural on their part to fall into the hands of crafty politicians. Hence providing proper education and training to the workers and their leaders in addition to teaching them the delicate basics of trade union activities shall do well to the cause of workers.

Moves to restrict and reduce the proportion of outside leadership in trade unions may be another constructive measure since the outside leadership, educated and well experienced as it is, mostly happens to be selfish and politically motivated. This done, the rank and file leadership, coming from within would naturally do well. Multiplicity of trade unions, which is also a result of politicization of trade unions, can be checked up to a certain extent by increasing the required membership for registration of a new union.

It might be pointed out, that though the politicization of trade unions cannot be stopped completely, it can be considerably checked. Such a measure would not only ensure better labour management relations, would also facilitate healthier industrial relations.

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