

Problems of Trade Unions

Some of the major problems faced by trade unions in India are as follows:

1. Small Size
2. Poor Finance
3. Politicization
4. Multiplicity of Unions
5. Inter-Union Rivalry
6. Lack of Enlightened Labour Force
7. Lack of able Leaders
8. Lack of Recognition
9. Lack of Interest
10. Opposition from Employers
11. Indifferent Attitude of the Members
12. Lack of Balanced Growth

1. Small Size

To quote there were 9,023 trade unions submitting returns during the year 1992. The total membership of these unions was 57.4 lakhs, with an average membership of 632 per union. Nearly three-fourths of the unions have a membership of less than 500. Because of their small size, unions suffer from lack of adequate funds and find it difficult to engage the services of experts to aid and advice members in times of need. They cannot bargain with the employer effectively on their own

2. Poor Finance

Sound financial position is an essential ingredient for the effective functioning of trade unions, because in the process of rendering services or fulfilling their goals, trade unions have to perform a variety of functions and organize programmes which require huge financial commitments. Hence, it is imperative on the part of a trade union to strengthen its financial position.

Small in size is one of the reasons for the poor financial position of the unions. Moreover, the subscription payable by every member is kept low. Some members may not even make a prompt payment of the small amount of subscription. These are also not very many sources from which unions can get funds. They may probably depend on contributions from philanthropists. The poor financial position can only weaken the trade union movement.

3. Politicization

A serious defect of the trade union movement in India is that the leadership has been provided by outsiders' especially professional politicians. Most popular trade unions in India are affiliated to certain political parties. These political parties are only keen on making every grievance of the working class a political issue to attain political gains.

Ironically, in many cases, the political leaders possess little knowledge of the background of labour problems, fundamentals of trade unionism, the techniques of industry, and even little general education. Naturally, unions cannot be expected to function efficiently and on a sound basis under the guidance of such leaders. As a result the problem only gets wide publicity and remains unsolved.

4. Multiplicity of Unions

Often there exists more than one union within the same industry each backed by a political party. These various unions have conflicting ideology. If one union comes out with a strike proposal another union may work against it. As a result, none of the unions is actually able to solve the problems of the workers.

5. Inter-Union Rivalry

The existence of many unions within a particular industry paves way for what is called inter-union rivalry. These unions do not work together for the cause of the workers. Each union may adopt a different approach to the problem. The inter-union rivalry may become a more serious problem of the workers. As a result, the employees are unable to derive the benefits of collective bargaining.

6. Lack of Enlightened Labour Force

The lack of an enlightened labour force capable of manning and conducting the movement efficiently, purposefully and effectively has been a major problem in the development of trade unions in the country. Lack of education, division by race religion, language and caste, migratory nature, lack of self consciousness, and non-permanent class of workers have been attributed as the causes for the lack of enlightened labour force in India.

7. Lack of able Leaders

Another barrier to the growth of trade unions is the lack of able leaders. Some union leaders give a strike call even for petty problems that can easily be resolved through talks. On the other hand, there are leaders who have secret contract with the management. They get bribes from the government and work against the interests of the employees. Some leaders don't convene a meeting of the general body at all even when a crisis develops. They take unilateral decisions that are force on the employees.

8. Lack of Recognition

Most management is not prepared to recognize trade unions. This happens because of any of the following reasons:

- The existence of low membership that reduces the bargaining power of the union.
- The existence of more unions within the same industry.
- Inter-union rivalry.
- The indifferent attitude of the employees themselves towards trade unions.

9. Lack of Interest

For a large majority of workers, unionism even today remains a distant issue. In fact, workers avoid union activities out of sheer disinterestedness. Those who become part of the union do not also participate in the union work enthusiastically. In such a scenario, it is not surprising to find outside political leaders exploiting the situation serve their own personal agenda.

10. Opposition from Employers

Apart from the fact that most employers are not prepared to recognize trade unions, they also do not let their employees from a union. The employers are able to achieve this, by adopting certain punitive measures like threatening employees victimizing union leaders, initiating disciplinary action against employees indulging in union activities and so on. Some employers also start rival unions with the support of certain employees. Sometimes, they may go to the extent of bribing union leaders to avert a strike or such similar show of protest by employees. The employers fail to understand that the union enables the employees to express their grievances in a democratic manner and can also be used as a means of promoting better labor management relationships.

11. Indifferent Attitude of the Members

Union leaders alone cannot be blamed for the weakness of the trade union movement. The indifferent attitude of the members of certain unions is also a barrier. Some members do not even make a prompt payment of the subscription amount. The treasurer of the union has to go behind

them, remind and persuade them to pay the subscription that is often a very small amount. On the other hand, there are not members who neither attend the general body meetings nor do they bother to know what is discussed in such meetings. There are still others who do not take part at all in any of the programmes of the union organized to press the demands of the employees like slogan shouting procession, demonstration, hunger strike etc. Members generally expect the office-bearers to do all that is necessary to achieve the demands.

12. Lack of Balanced Growth

Trade unions are often associated with big industrial houses. A vast majority of the working population is without any union backing. The entire agricultural sector is highly unorganized in India. The agricultural workers are subject to all kinds of exploitation. The same is true with respect to those working in small scale and cottage industries. Lack of balanced growth of trade unions in all sectors is one of the major problems of the trade union in India.