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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: Labour Organisations in India

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What are labour unions or trade unions?

A trade union can be defined as an organised association of workers in a trade or profession, formed to further their rights and interests. In India, Trade Unions in India are registered under the Trade Union Act (1926).

Trade unions are interested in the economic and social welfare of the workers. Labour unions may also have political interests in the larger society.

Labour Union post 1947

It was marked by the proliferation of unions. **INTUC** was formed in May **1947** under the aegis of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Since then, the AITUC has come to be dominated by the Communists. Hind Mazdoor Sabha was formed in 1948 under the banner of Praja Socialist Party. Later on, it came under the influence of Socialists. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh was founded in 1955 and is currently affiliated to the BJP.

Post-independence, trade unions became increasingly tied with party politics. Rise of regional parties has led to a proliferation in their numbers with each party opting to create its trade union. However, their influence has been somewhat reduced after the liberalisation post-1991. Issues like labour code reforms and minimum wage remains a political hot potato due to the opposition from the trade union leadership.

Post-independence, India has also witnessed different unions coming together to address a common issue. These include the crippling railway strike of 1974 and the Great Bombay textile strike, 1982. However, such strikes are seen to get less public support post-1991. There is also an increased focus on informal labour. This is due to the particularly vulnerable situation of unorganised labour. All major trade unions have registered an increase in their membership from the unorganised sector.

Problems faced by the labour movement post Independence

- **Uneven growth:** They are concentrated in the metropolises, largely catering to organised sector. Rural Agricultural labour and small scale labour are grossly underrepresented.
- **Low membership:** Trade union membership is growing, but the vast majority of India's labour is not part of any trade unions. This reduces their collective bargaining power.
- **Weak financial position:** Membership fees are set too low (25 paise) by the Trade Union Act, 1926. They are particularly disadvantaged against corporate lobbying groups that are flush with cash.
- **Political leadership:** Careerist politicians and vested political agenda mean that worker interests are sidelined. Since the leadership may not be from the labour force, they are held captive to party politics. This lead to further exploitation.
- **The multiplicity of unions:** Bargaining power is diluted and it is easy for employers to divert the attention of the labour.
- **Inter-union rivalry:** There are conflicts of interest and party politics between the unions.

- **The problem of recognition:** Employers are under no obligation to give them recognition. This means that docile unions get recognition and genuine ones may be sidelined.
- **Diverse nature of labour:** Most unions don't have properly differentiated organisational structure to cater to different classes of labour. Eg: Differences between agricultural, formal and informal labour.
- **Lack of public support:** Especially post 1991, trade unionism is looked down as an impediment to growth and development. This has led to a general ebbing of the movement across the country.

Major Labour Unions and their Political Affiliation

- All India Trade Union Congress – Communist Party of India.
- Indian National Trade Union Congress – Indian National Congress.
- Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh – Bharatiya Janata Party.
- Centre for Indian Trade Unions – CPI(M).
- Hind Mazdoor Sabha – Samajwadi Party.
- Self Employed Women's Association – Unaffiliated.

