



Forum: Sustainable Development Goals 8

Issue: Reforming legislation to protect and promote unionisation

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Section One: Introduction Of The Issue

Introduction

Unionisation has long been, since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, a strong and powerful mechanism, representing workers in negotiations with employers regarding wages, benefits, and working conditions. Despite its great impact on empowering workers, giving them stronger voices in claiming their rights and improving their workplace environments, unionisation faces numerous challenges. Legal obstacles such as restrictive laws and regulations may make it difficult for workers to form or join a union; occasionally, workers may experience intimidation, harassment, and even termination while attempting to unionise. In fact, employers may frequently oppose unionisation due to worries about higher labour costs and less managerial control. Ultimately, some unions have internal bureaucracy issues that hinder their ability to negotiate effectively and respond to the needs of their members.

Currently, the status of unionisation varies from one region to another, and from one industry to another. In America, for example, unionisation has been facing a decline over the past years, especially in private-sector unionisation, compared to the public sectors whose rates have been stable. In Europe, countries are facing higher unionisation rates in comparison to America's rates. Finally, in Asia, the unionisation rates vary depending on the restrictiveness of labour laws; when laws are more restrictive, unionisation rates are lower, and when laws are less restrictive, unionisation rates are higher. The significance of unionisation in advancing workers' rights and the function of unions in defending those rights are being increasingly acknowledged on a global scale. In the end, it is important to comprehend this fundamental tool for workers. By removing its obstacles and difficulties, we can guarantee that workers are better protected and equipped to fight for their rights, which will actually help to create more sustainable and inclusive economic growth that benefits everyone in our societies.



Definition of Key Terms

Unionisation

The act or process of organising workers to become members of a trade union, an organisation that represents people who work in a particular industry.

Collective Bargaining

The process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine their terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more.

Legislation

A law or set of laws suggested by a government and made official by a parliament.

Labour Rights

Legal rights and human rights relating to labour relations between workers and employers. These rights are codified in national and international labour and employment law. In general, these rights influence working conditions in the relations of employment.

Employer Resistance

As a behaviour, resistance is defined as an action or inaction towards the change. In this case, employer resistance is defined by the different actions taken by an employer to oppose unionisation efforts in a company, one those actions could be anti- union campaigns and the use of legal challenges and laws.

Legal Barriers

A barrier is something such as a rule, law, or policy that makes it difficult or impossible for something to happen or be achieved.

Worker Empowerment

Employee empowerment is a management philosophy that focuses on allowing an organisation's employees to make independent decisions and to feel empowered to take action as they see fit. This is in contrast to micromanagement, which does not allow for independent decision making.

Social Justice



The view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.

Economic Growth

An increase in the production of goods and services in an economy.

International Cooperation

All professional activities aimed at supporting people in need and promoting economic, social and cultural development around the globe.

Background Information

The Industrial Revolution and the Early Labour Movement

During the industrial revolution that took place in the late 18 and the early 19th centuries, labour movement began to take place as well. As industrialisation begins progressing and development itself, more and more workers begin having and facing hard, unsafe but also harsh working conditions, for example long working hours, low salaries, no rest days, dirty working areas and more. This unacceptable situation led to a collective realisation of the issue, especially for workers, who started forming local craft unions. The first one located was in the United States of America, where some New York tailors protected a wage reduction in 1768, but we consider the establishment of the federal society of journeymen Cordwainers in 1794 the official beginning and the start of trade unions in America. As a result, several labour unions emerged in the 19th century, like the National labour union founded in 1866, as well as the knights of labour founded in the mid 1880s. These organisations emerged with certain goals which are securing better wages, having less and reasonable working hours, and having safe and acceptable working places and environments. But these organisations have faced many oppositions and legal challenges.

Labour Legislations in the 20th Century

The beginning of the 20th century, was known as a period characterised by labour rights, and the instauration of significant legislative reforms. Many pieces of legislations were set up, for example The Fair Labor Standard Act of 1938, that was a landmark law establishing a minimum wage, overtime pay and child labour standards, as well as The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 guaranteeing the rights of employees working in the private sector to organise trade unions and take collective actions. As the movement reached its rise in the 20th century, many organisations emerged as well, for example The American Federation of Labor and The Congress of Industrial Organizations. These influential organisations were established to represent skilled workers but also industrial



works, having as a goal advocating workers rights, promoting them, protecting them, and making some legislative changes to reach their goal.

The Ongoing Efforts and the Contemporary Developments

Workers rights and the formation of labour unions have evolved in the 21st century building upon progress made in the part of the century through key milestones such, as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibited discrimination, at work based on race, colour or religion and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) established in 1970 to ensure safe and healthy workplaces.

In recent times, there has been an increased focus on safeguarding and advancing unionisation, especially in light of economic difficulties and evolving labour markets. Indeed, the protection and advancement of workers' unions have received a lot of attention lately. Efforts to change labour laws are being considered to better protect workers and hear their voices, with a focus on enhancing legal safeguards for workers, streamlining union formation procedures, and advancing collective bargaining rights. Collaboration on a global scale, like teaming up and working with the International Labour Organization (ILO), is essential and crucial for aligning and supporting global unionisation efforts and backing worldwide unionisation initiatives to bring labour standards into line.

Section Two: United Nations and International Involvement

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

The United States of America

The rights and obligations of employers, labour unions, and employees are established by the US labour law. Resolving the "inequality of bargaining power" between employers and employees. The Fair Labor regulations Act (FLSA) of 1938, which establishes minimum wage, overtime compensation, and child labour regulations, and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, which ensures the right to organise and bargain collectively, are important pieces of law.



Canada

In Canada, both federal and provincial laws govern unions. Transparency and accountability are ensured by the requirement that all union constitutions be recorded with government labour boards. The Canada Labour Code guarantees fair labour standards and workplace safety by outlining the rights and obligations of workers, employers, and unions in federally regulated businesses.

European Union

EU policies in recent decades have sought to achieve high employment & strong social protection, improve living & working conditions, and protect social cohesion. The EU aims to promote social progress and improve the living and working conditions of the peoples of Europe.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

It brings together governments, employers' and workers' organisations from its 187 Member States to address world of work challenges, set and monitor international labour standards, and works with development cooperation partners on projects and programmes to help realise the Decent Work Agenda.

National Labour Relations Board (NLRB)

The NLRA protects workplace democracy by providing employees at private-sector workplaces the fundamental right to seek better working conditions and designation of representation without fear of retaliation.

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

The Canadian Labour Congress is the largest labour organisation in Canada, bringing together dozens of national and international unions, provincial and territorial federations of labour and community-based labour councils to represent more than 3 million workers across the country.



Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- **International Covenant on Economic, Social and cultural Rights (1966)**

The article 7 of this treaty specifically addresses this issue. Indeed, the States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work.

- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)**

Article 22, specifically addresses the right to freedom of association, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of one's interests. Indeed, Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

- **United Nations Human Rights Council Sessions (3 times a year)**

The relevant session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) for labour rights is the 56th session, which took place from June 18 to July 12, 2024. This session included discussions on labour rights and protections, among other human rights topics.

- **International Labor Organization Conferences (annual conference)**

The relevant session of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for labour rights is the 112th Session of the International Labour Conference, which took place from June 3 to June 14, 2024, in Geneva. This session focused on setting international labour standards and discussing key social and labour questions.

Section Three: Solving The Issue

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The Civil Rights Movements

The mid-20th century marked a pivotal moment in American history when the echoes of justice reverberated through the nation. The civil rights movement, led by courageous individuals, sought to dismantle the oppressive shackles of racial segregation and discrimination in the country. Simultaneously the labour movement championed the rights of



workers, demanding fair wages, reasonable working hours, and an end to exploitative labour practices.

Possible Solutions

Support ILO Initiatives

By supporting ILO initiatives and integrating them to some of the sustainable development goals (SDG) programs, this could lead to a collaborative approach to labour standards and sustainability .

Involve Trade Union Representatives in the Making of Decisions

Encouraging trade union representatives to participate in sustainable development decision-making processes guarantee that workers' opinions are heard and taken into account when developing sustainable policies.

Encourage the Teaching of Environmental Issues

A foundation of environmental awareness and responsibility is established early on by promoting environmental education at all levels of the educational system.

Required Audit and Eco-Management Procedures

Encouraging the mandatory adoption of audit and eco-management procedures, making sure they are publicly accessible and independently verified, encourages openness and conformity to environmental regulations.

Section Four: Resources

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