

TRADE UNION HANDBOOK

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WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS

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Introduction

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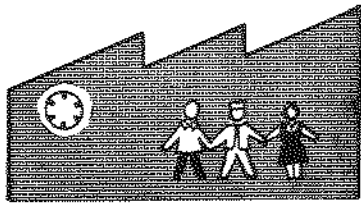
WHAT IS A TRADE UNION?

For our purpose, we may consider the trade union as a continuing, permanent and democratic organization created and run by the workers...



... to protect themselves at their work...

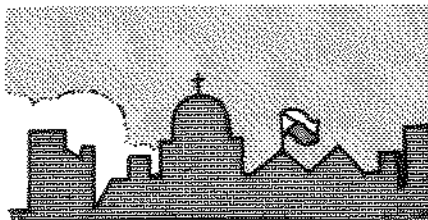
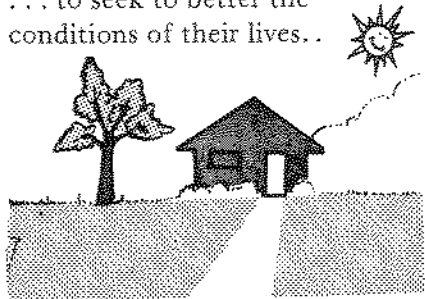
... to improve the conditions of their work...



... through collective bargaining...



... to seek to better the conditions of their lives...

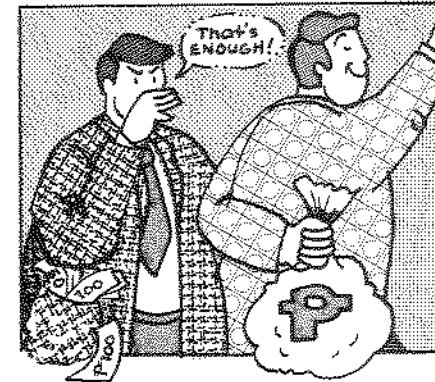


... and to provide a means of expression for the workers' views on problems of society.

In many countries a trade union has to be registered with the Ministry of Labor and Employment to be able to acquire a legal personality. Usually, it has to win an election among workers it seeks to represent in order to be recognized as a collective bargaining agent.

Do workers really need unions?

Yes, that is why workers thought of organizing their own unions. The forming of unions is inevitable wherever there are two groups of people with different interests. The employer's interest is to get the most from labor at the lowest possible cost...



... while the workers are interested in decent returns for their labor or services rendered.

Because of this basic opposition or conflict in interests, workers have realized from experience that they need to combine together to meet employers on their common demands. For this purpose, the natural instrument of the workers is the trade union.

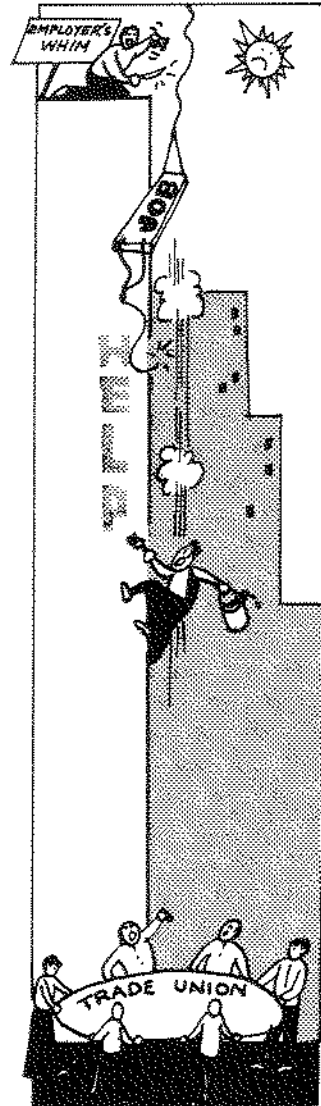




Workers have learned that if they act alone they cannot achieve anything in terms of protecting themselves from the harmful acts of employers (such as arbitrary dismissal) or in securing better working conditions or in seeking the passage of laws protecting workers.

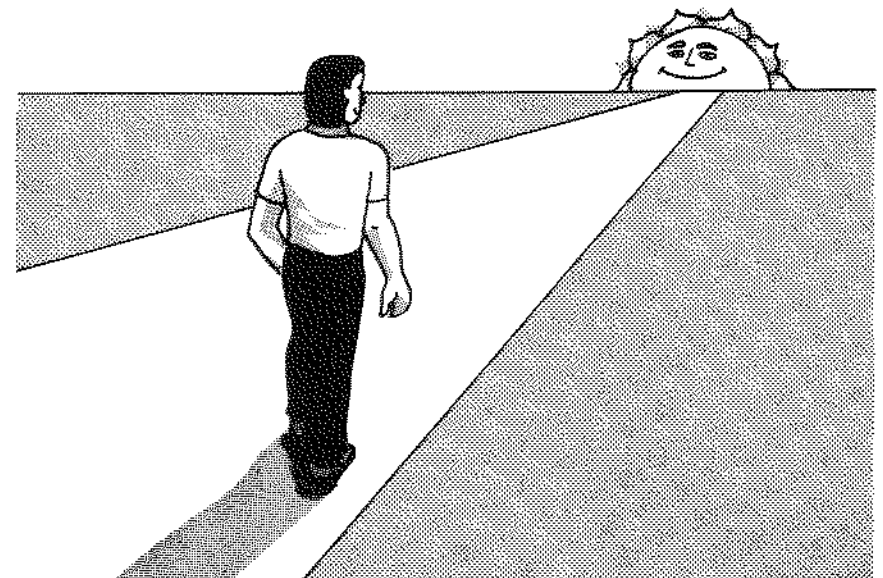
Workers as individuals soon find themselves utterly powerless and at the employer's mercy. The prospect of termination from work hangs over them perpetually.

The workers' situation is one of complete dependence on their wage or salary, which means their job. But the job can be given or taken away at the whim of the employer. The worker, therefore, becomes completely dependent on the employer's goodwill. This means the worker is not a free person. He or she has to serve the employer or starve.



But in unity, workers are no longer powerless. Through a strong union, workers can meet the employers as equals. They can recover their dignity as workers who, after all, are persons who exchange their labour for an honest living. They no longer feel very weak, utterly dependent on their employers' goodwill. Furthermore, they regain some control over their lives and their lives' conditions. No longer will they just have to accept what the employer dishes out: they can oppose management, propose ideas, demand decent terms of work, and negotiate with the employer over these.

They can now affect the lives they lead.



DISCUSS

A. Your job

- Do you find your job interesting and meaningful or is it boring and often routine?

B. Your influence on your work

- Is it possible for you to take the initiative and decide how to do things on your own?
- Can you and your fellow workers plan and control your job to any extent?
- Is it possible for your union to have any influence on how the work shall be performed?

C. Your salary

- Is your salary high enough to meet your and your family's (justified) needs?
- Is your salary fair enough in relation to your job?
- How does your salary compare with the salaries of other people?
- Is your salary fair in relation to the establishment's sales and profits?

D. Your work environment

- Are you exposed to any of the following problems:
 - poor ventilation
 - excessive heat/cold (or sudden change of temperature)
 - chemicals that are hazardous to health
 - high noise level
 - stress (that is, a feeling of working under some pressure)
 - polluted air
 - dangerous machines (such as microwave oven, chopping machine, boiler, or blanket presser)
 - unsanitary rest rooms and lockers for staff?

E. Your job security

- Do you have the opportunity to explain your side before being given disciplinary actions?
- Are you able to oppose unjust penalties effectively?
- Are you sure of not losing your job?

Which of the above matters are most urgent personally for you to improve?

Which problems do you think only concern a few?

Are there any problems that seem to be of common interest to all of you?

Do you think you can solve these problems as an individual or is there a need for joint efforts from all of you?

Are there some problems that cannot be solved without support from other workers in other workplaces?

Put your answers about the above questions on a piece of paper and save them as a source of information when you want to justify why someone should join the union.

Basis of Organization



BASIS OF ORGANIZATION

This is a question on the kind of foundation that members want the union to be built on.

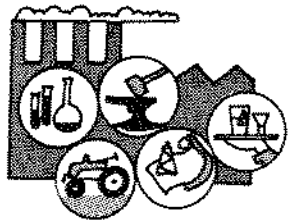
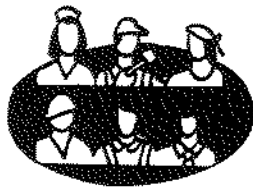
In thinking about this problem, the main consideration is: the degree of common interests among workers on which to found sufficient solidarity to meet the employers.

Basically, there are three broad options:



A union founded on craft/occupation

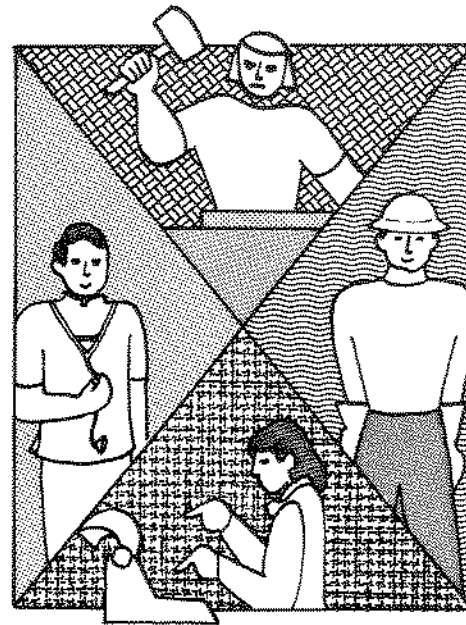
General federation



Industrial union (national union or federation)

There are also two subsidiary options:

1. one-shop or house union (local union)
2. common employer union



A . Craft Union

This was the earliest type of union. Such a union is composed of workers of a specific craft or skill. Thus, for example, all electricians and only electricians may belong to a craft union of electricians, irrespective of the place they work in or whom their employers may be. It is the craft or occupation that binds these workers together in this type of union.

The way a craft union works is two-fold:

First, it controls the supply of labor within their category of skill by the apprentice system. Second, it sets remuneration for their labor, i.e., so much per hour, below which the members are not supposed to accept. This way, they force employers to pay their rate.

This type of organization is not very popular. In fact, it is on the decline the world over because of the development of mass-scale industry.

B . General Federation

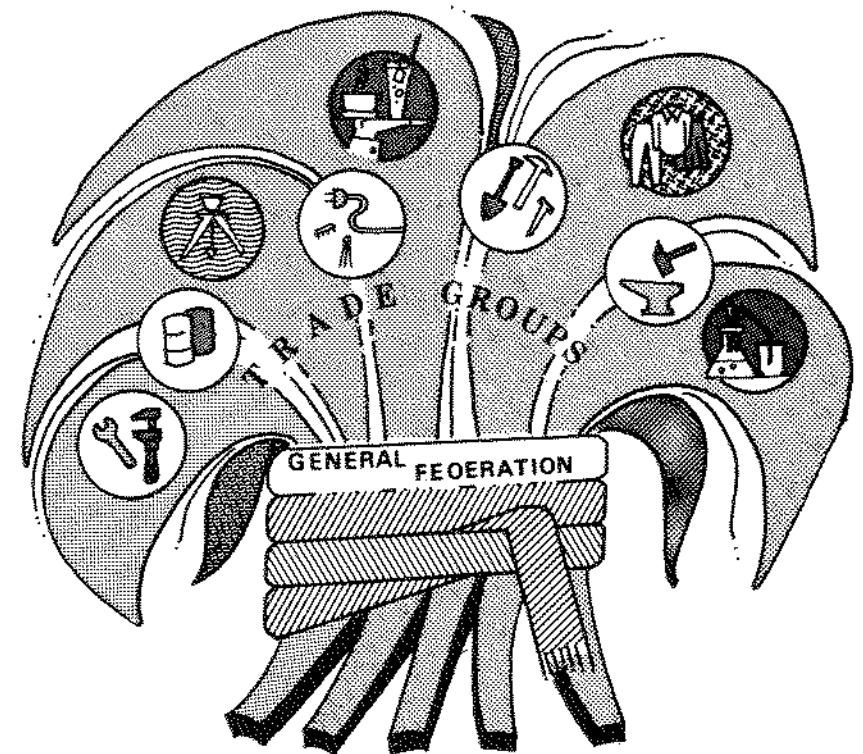


This type of union is composed of all workers irrespective of employers, industries, or skills. Historically, however, it tends to organize unskilled laborers who have been left out by skilled workers organizations, e.g., craft unions. It is also the preferred form of union organization in small countries where no single group of workers is strong enough to form an effective union by itself.

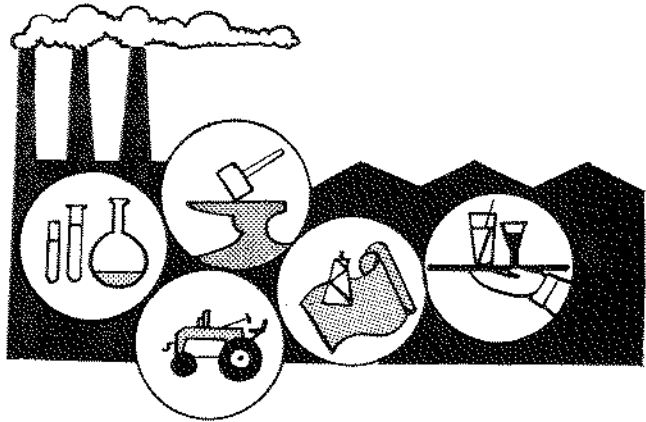
Such a union is usually large and powerful because it groups all working people together under one company to meet employers who quite often act in concert, be it in a special locality, region or country. By being able to mobilize workers in several companies or industries, it can better meet a joint employer front and also organize solidarity actions or financial support for workers across company or industrial divisions. Certain services, such as research, can be pooled which makes them cheaper.

General unions have also several disadvantages. First, if there is more than one then there will be rivalries and raiding of members which weaken the labor movement. Also, by representing all groups of workers, they may find it difficult to work out policies that serve them all.

However, this can be remedied by setting up a balanced regional and trade structure for the unions. For example, general unions in Britain have "trade groups" that look after the interests of workers in individual industries.



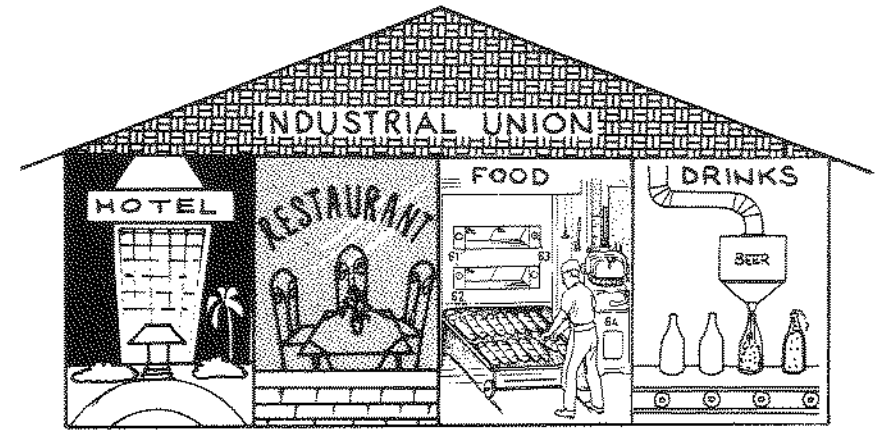
C. Industrial Union (National Union or Federation)



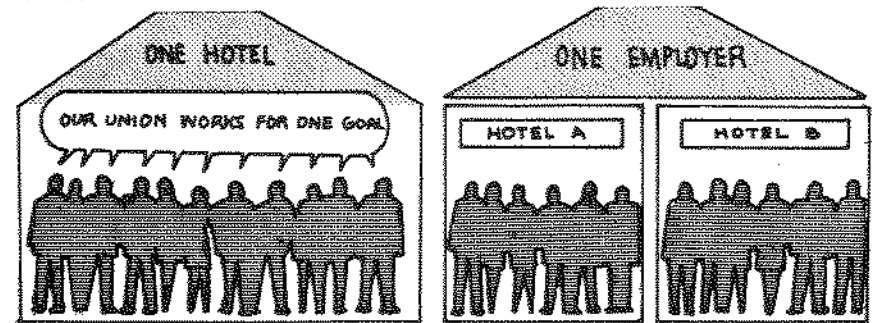
This type of union organizes all workers within a specific industry, e.g., the food and allied industry, or metal or chemical industry. Thus, skilled and unskilled workers, white or blue collar, all belong to one union as long as they work for that particular industry.

Workers in one industry face many common problems. For example, all are affected if general business goes up or down. Sectional interests are much easier to overcome than if there are rival general and craft unions. Employers cannot play out one union against the other.

On the other hand, industrial unions should always try to combine in a general confederation or national center to cope with general problems such as legislation and also to pool services that each of them may find too costly to provide.



Two small variations or subsidiary options to the above three broad categories are: the one-shop union and the common-employer union.



Alternatively known as a house union, the one-shop union organizes all workers in the same establishment or factory. It has the advantage of being relatively easy to organize because all workers share a common goal in securing a good collective agreement for their particular establishment or factory. However, it is usually small and weak, having little bargaining power. Moreover, it suffers from the serious disadvantage of being easily dominated by management as the same officers of the union are employees and are working in the establishment.

The common-employer union is basically the same except that it organizes across establishments owned by the same employer. It suffers from basically the same disadvantages as a one-shop union.

Three Important Principles for Trade Unionism

DISCUSS

1. Which type of union is most common in your country?
2. What type of union is your union?
3. What is your opinion of the advantages and disadvantages of your type of union in comparison with the other types of union?



THREE IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES FOR TRADE UNIONISM: UNITY, INDEPENDENCE AND DEMOCRATIC METHODS

A. Unity

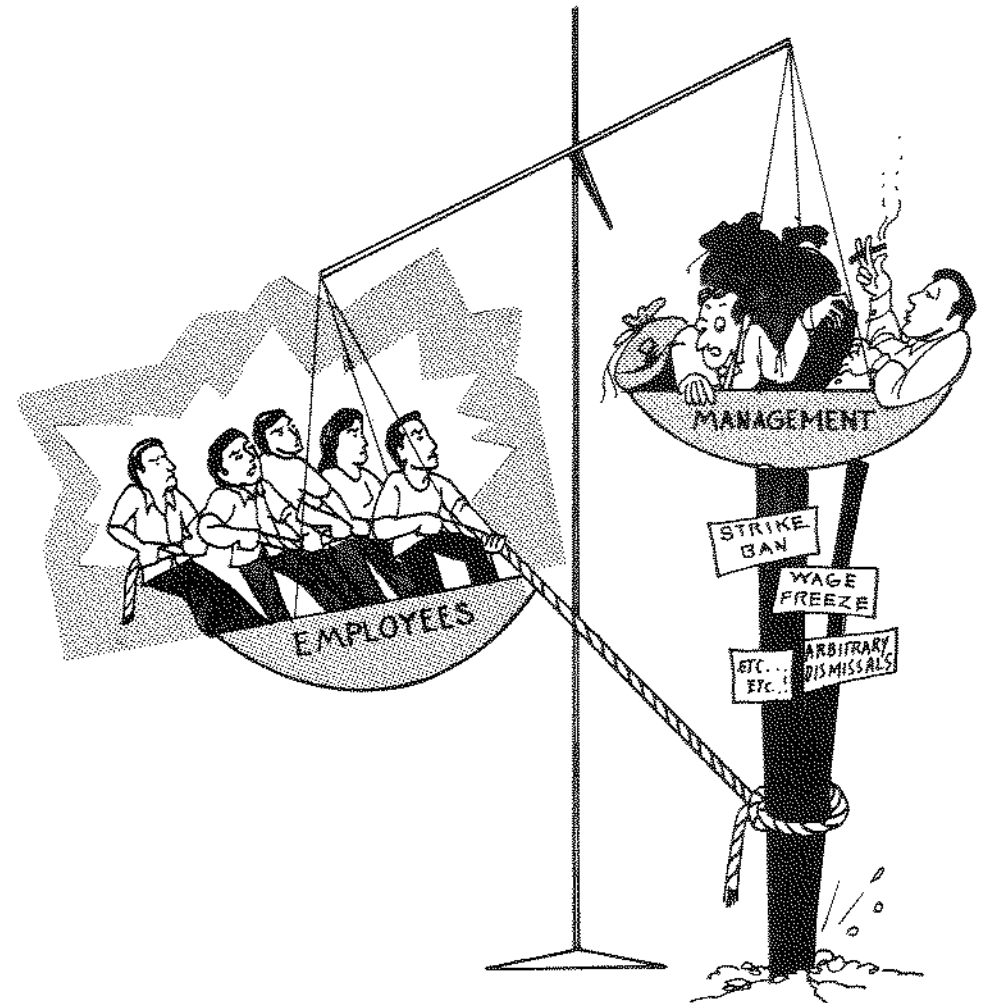
The first principle of trade unionism is unity: the unity of workers, or put another way, solidarity, "one for all, all for one."

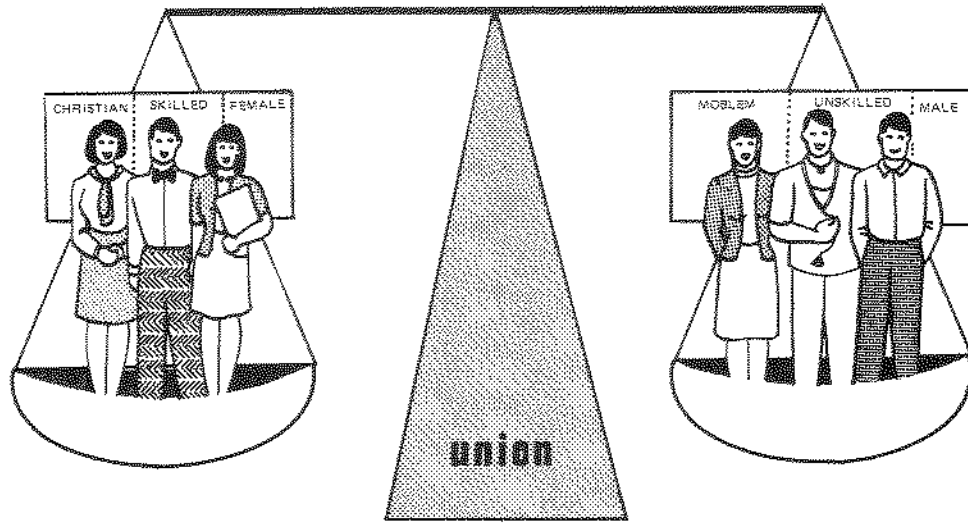
With solid unity, many things can be achieved by the workers. Without unity, nothing of significance can be achieved by an individual worker.

What this means in practice is: the organizational objective of a union is 100 percent membership.



The strength and influence of a trade union in its relationship to employers depend on the extent the employees of the company concerned are unionized. The higher the proportion of unionized workers to non-unionized workers, the greater the strength. Apart from numbers, strength also comes from organizing the key, skilled workers in the enterprise.





Depending on what the basis of organization of the union is—whether it be craft occupation, a specific industry, an undertaking, a common employer or general labor—all workers should be united into one union, irrespective of race, religion, creed, sex, skill, etc. All are equal in the eyes of the organization.

Trade unions should also operate **nationally** because local or regional unions cannot develop sufficient bargaining power or competence over a whole range of issues to adequately safeguard the interest of workers.

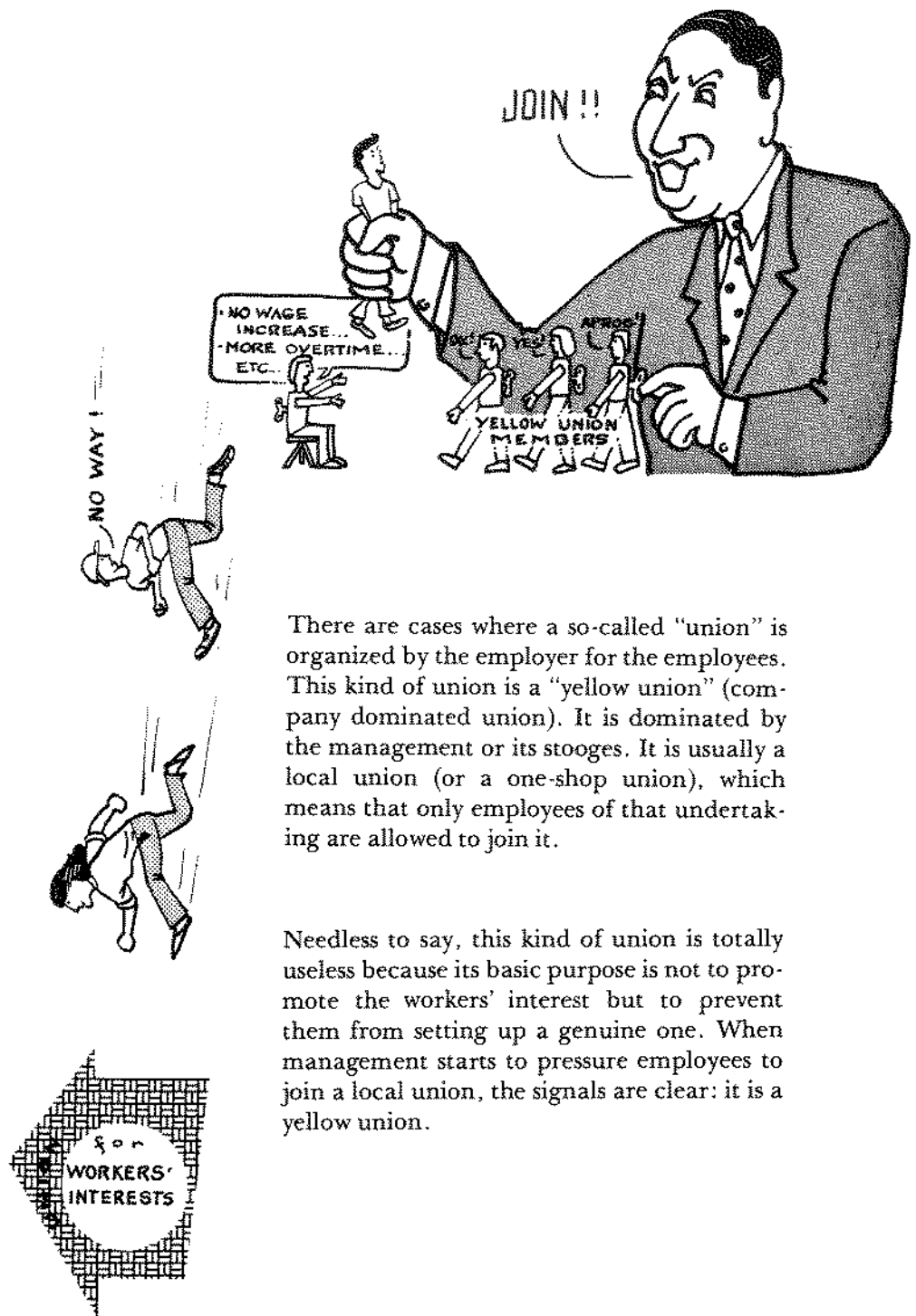
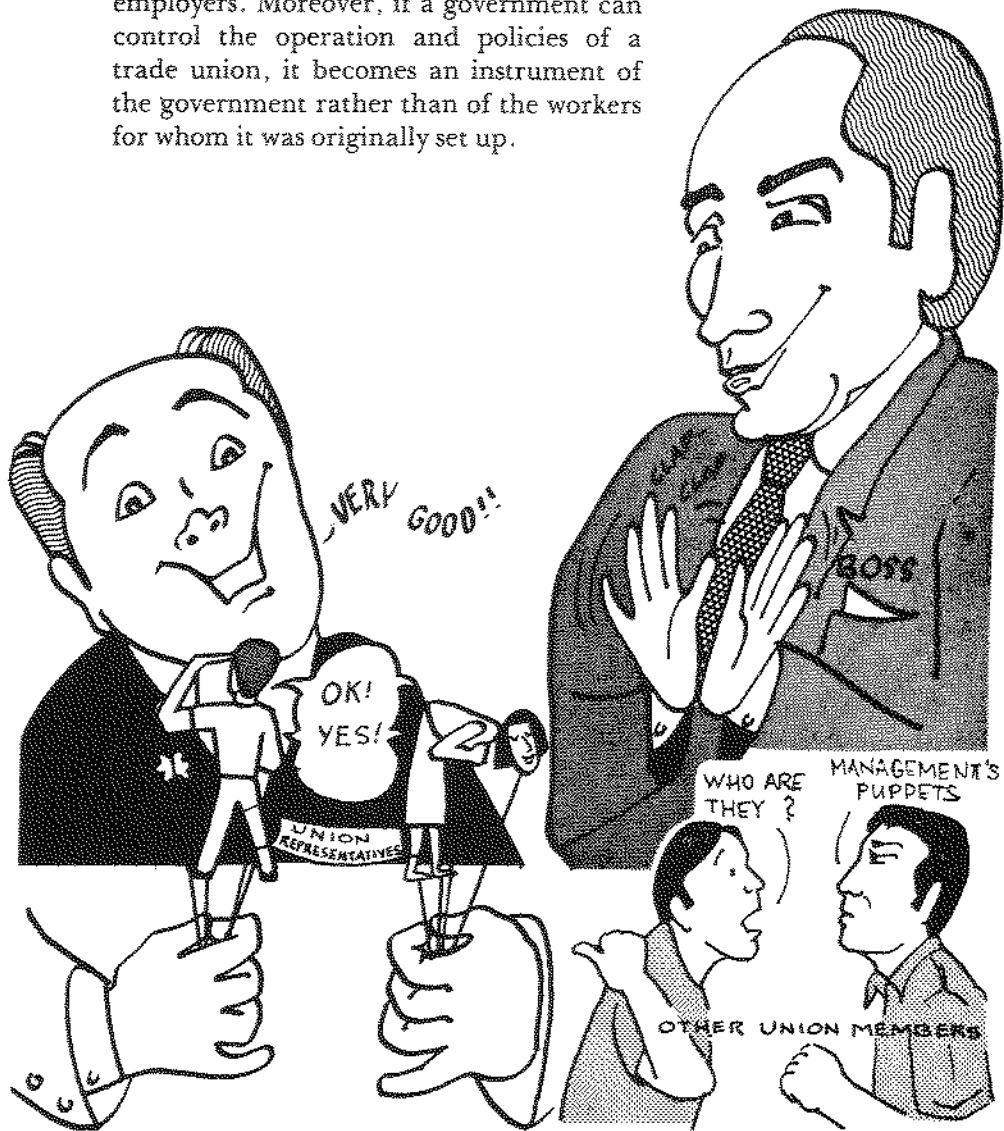
Trade unions should not be considered as closed societies. They should not be an instrument of privileged or elite workers, jealously guarding member's privileges against non-member workers who receive lower wages and are unorganized. They should be open to all workers, otherwise, these same underprivileged workers could be used as scabs against organized workers in the event of a serious conflict.

B. Independence

If an organization is to serve the needs of its members, it must be controlled by the members themselves, for who but they themselves can best define and guard their own interests?

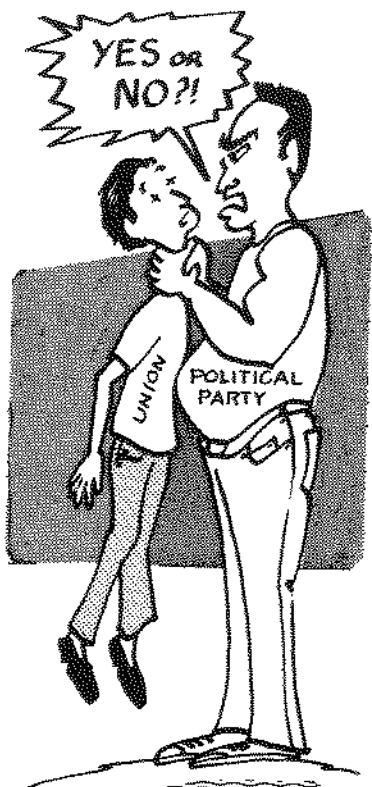
If a union intends to truly achieve the principles and objectives upon which it was founded, it should not allow itself to be dominated or controlled by external interests, be it government, employers, political parties, religious, communal or fraternal organizations, or individual persons.

A government may or may not be well disposed to trade unions, but in general, it is very responsive to the interests of the powerful groups in society, usually the employers. Moreover, if a government can control the operation and policies of a trade union, it becomes an instrument of the government rather than of the workers for whom it was originally set up.



There are cases where a so-called "union" is organized by the employer for the employees. This kind of union is a "yellow union" (company dominated union). It is dominated by the management or its stooges. It is usually a local union (or a one-shop union), which means that only employees of that undertaking are allowed to join it.

Needless to say, this kind of union is totally useless because its basic purpose is not to promote the workers' interest but to prevent them from setting up a genuine one. When management starts to pressure employees to join a local union, the signals are clear: it is a yellow union.



Equally, the union should resist any attempt by any political party to control and dominate it. The interests of the political party are not necessarily the same as those of the union. Even if there are some areas of shared interests, the ultimate aim of a trade union is to serve its members. This aim may be distorted under the domination of a political party whose basic aim is to obtain support from all sectors to secure power.

In many countries unions have created their own political parties, which have gained the support of others that share workers' political goals (small farmers, lower middle class). Provided unions retain the control of such parties, and do not allow them to be destroyed by sectarian splits, they are the best way to defend the workers' interests in the representative bodies where legislative decisions are made and enforced.



Occasionally, a union may face attempts by religious or communal groups to subject it to their control in order to serve the latter's religious or sectional interests.



If this happens, the union will be weakened as it will inevitably be divided by the attempt of one group to seek hegemony (controlling influence) over all the others. Such hegemonic operations are anti-union as they encourage one worker to fight another rather than concentrate their energies on the employers.

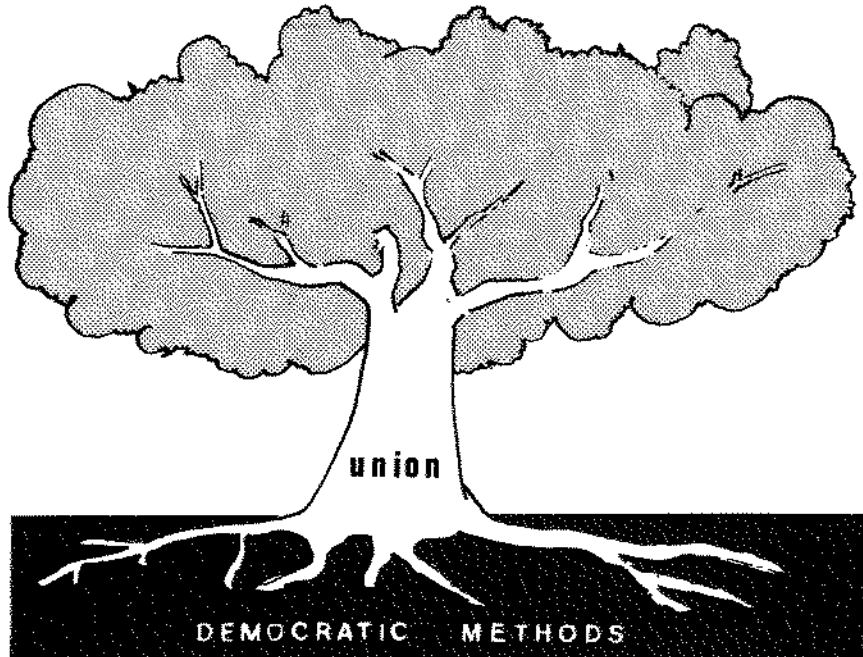
Individual members of unions are, of course, completely free to practice whatever religion or to accept whatever political creeds they wish, but they should not seek to impose their personal beliefs on the organization nor cause the organization to be subject to such non-trade union principles.

Let us discuss the problems at the union meeting today!

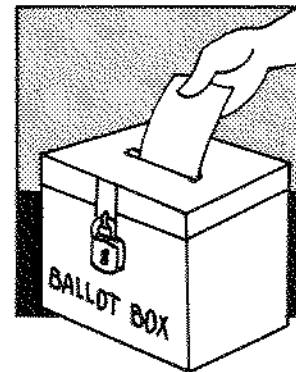
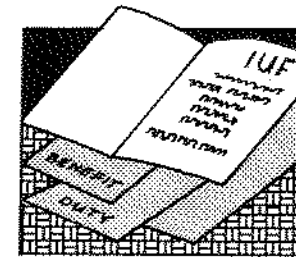
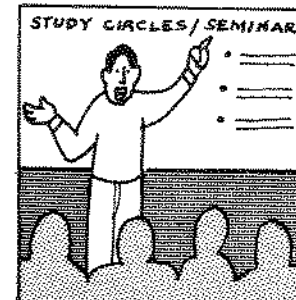
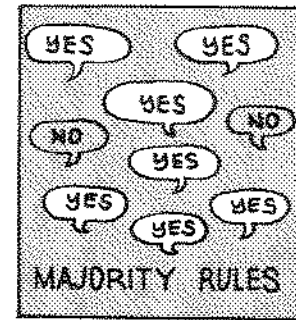
C. Democratic Methods

A trade union cannot be effective in fulfilling the wishes of the members unless it is a voluntary association of workers with common interests, i.e., to secure higher pay and better working conditions. Voluntary organizations cannot be strong and effective unless there is wide and deep participation of members in its activities and struggles.

Participation can only come about if the organization is a democratic one. Hence, democracy is an essential pillar of unionism.



In practice, democratic methods mean, broadly, the following:



1. All sections of the membership should be fully and fairly represented in the decision-making process. The aimed-for result should be to express the genuine will of the majority of members on any issue.
2. Members shall have the priority right to be educated about the union's rules and constitution to enable them to participate fully in the union's decision-making process.
3. All members shall have the same rights and privileges as well as duties and obligations.
4. Representatives, executive officers and others should be elected by secret ballot periodically by and from among the members and be answerable to them. They should be subject to recall if the majority of the membership is not satisfied by their actions. Never should they be appointed by one person only.



5. Activities should be communicated to all members and be subject to periodic review by the members.

Traditionally, trade unions have always been a very democratic institution. This is so because there is no other effective long-term way of functioning. Thus, it has been said that trade unions are a modernizing force because, as a democratic institution, they are in reality a popular school of democracy (particularly in underdeveloped societies seeking modernization).

DISCUSS

1. The five points mentioned above.
2. Do you have other opinions regarding democracy in a trade union.?

UNION STRUCTURE

How a union is structured determines the following:

- How decisions of the organization are made;
- How members are represented in the decision-making bodies;
- How the membership is mobilized to confront problems.

In general, there are five levels:

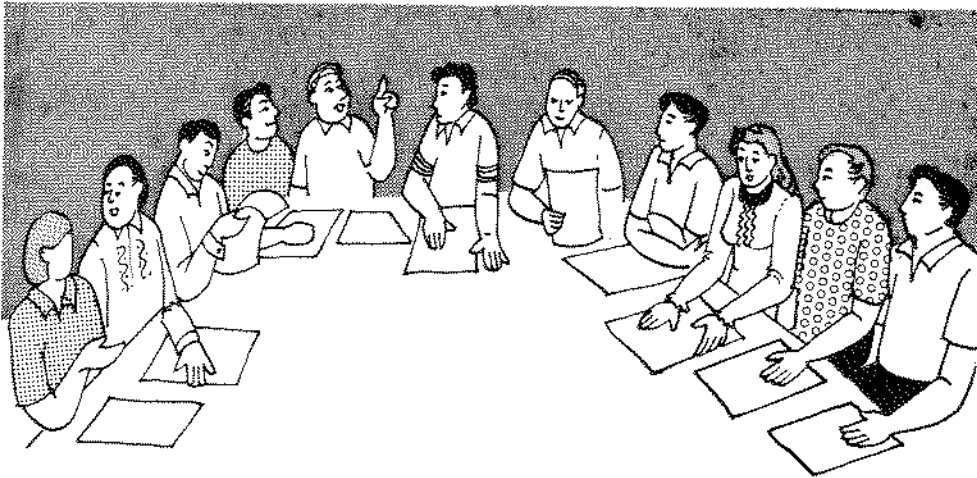
1. The Delegates' Conference or Congress

This is the supreme decision-making body. Here, all the members are represented by their elected representatives. Its functions are to make the broad policy decisions, elect officers and members of an executive council, review past activities and lay down guidelines for future activities.

A delegates' conference may be held once in every two, three, four or five years.

2. Executive Council or Executive Committee

This body is usually elected at the delegates' conference. It represents the whole membership and meets to take important decisions and to supervise the work of the executive officers.



3. Administrative Committee

Instead of vesting all powers of decision on a single person as the president or general secretary in between meetings of the executive council, a small mobile group of principal officers of the union is vested with the power of collective decision and responsibility. It is usually a small group of people who are in close contact with each other.

4. The Executive Officers

The Executive Officers are the President, the General Secretary, the Treasurer, etc.

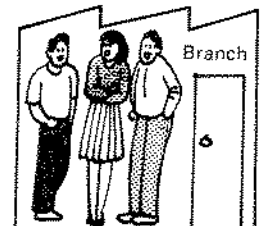
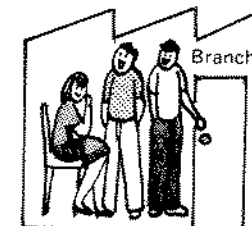
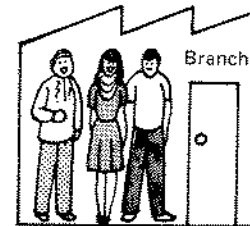
The Executive Officers are in some unions elected by the Delegates' Conference, in other unions elected by the Executive Council.

5. The Branch or Local

The Branch is the basic unit of the trade union organization, and it maintains the closest contact with rank-and-file-members.

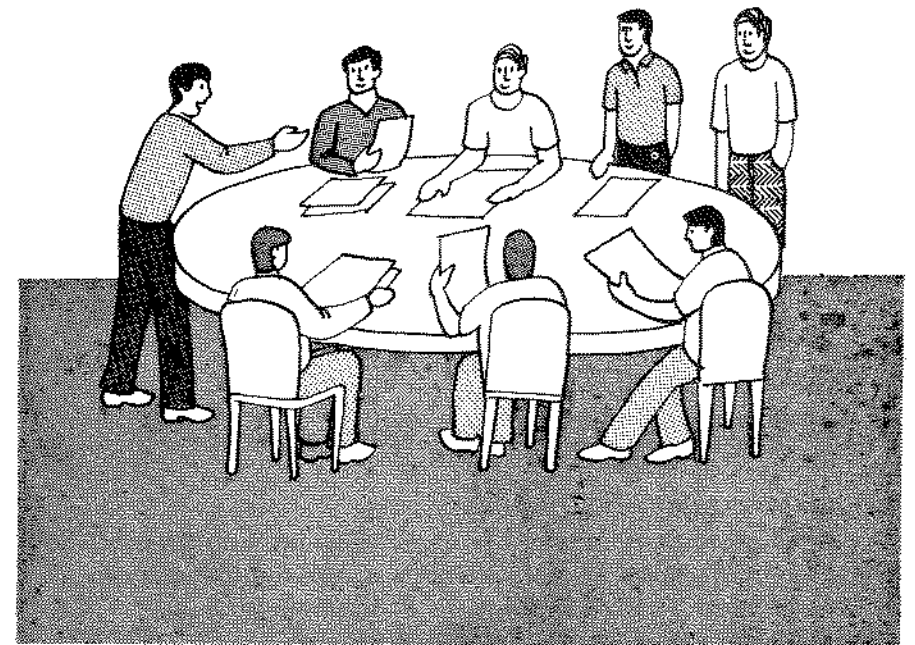
Organized either on the basis of where members live (e.g. a regional branch, an area branch or a district branch) or where they work (e.g. X, Y, or Z factory branch), the branch is the source of trade union activities and vitality. A strong union organization at the workplace is essential as a base for a strong union structure. It is usually administered by an elected branch or worksite committee and its usual activities are: Grievance handling, Education, Organizing new members, Enforcing collective agreements, etc.

Collective Bargaining with employers is usually the function of the headquarters and not the branch.



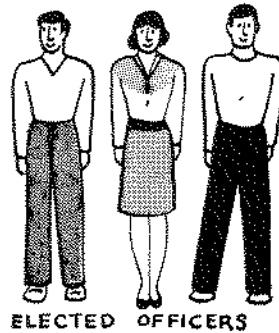
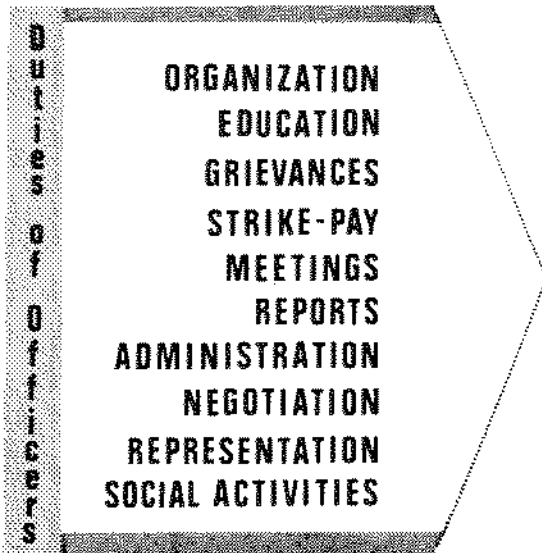
DISCUSS

1. What are the objectives of your union?
2. Who has the right to join the union?
3. Do you as an individual member have any influence over decisions taken by the union?
4. Compare the described organizational structure with the one actually being implemented in your own union.



ADMINISTRATION

Having set up a union to protect and promote their interests, it is now up to the members to see to it that their union can work continuously and effectively.



The members must elect responsible and capable people to serve as officers. They must continue to keep a watchful eye over the elected officers to check against negligence and to ensure that policies which have been democratically laid down are seriously pursued.

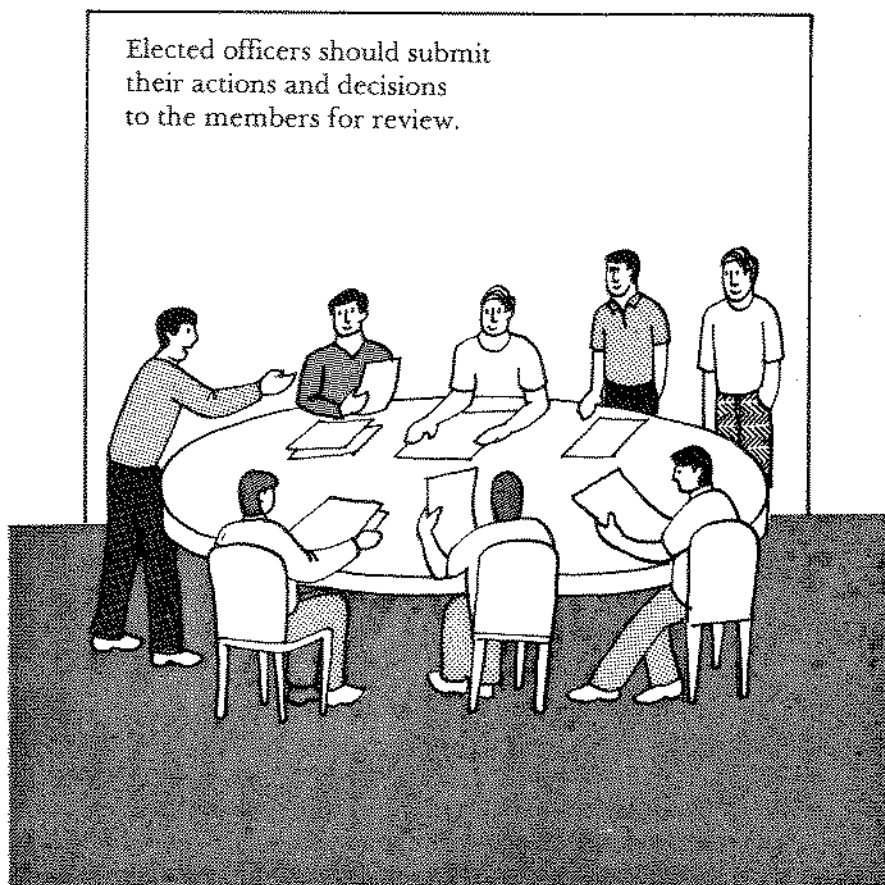
The administration of a union depends not only on the executive officers, but also, and more importantly, on the members themselves. Members need to keep the executive officers informed of their problems. They should be conscious of what the union and the officers are doing or not doing.

The members will ultimately get the union they deserve

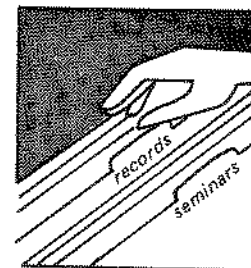


WRONG CONCEPTS ABOUT UNION LEADERS

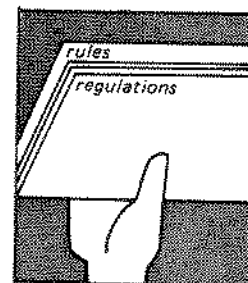
The administration of a union is carried out by the elected officers responsible for the various tasks that have to be performed. They should not avoid the responsibility of submitting all their actions and decisions to the members for review. In fact, they should encourage all the members to do this, as participation of the members in all aspects of the union's activities, including its administration, is important for the strength of the organization.



Basically, administration of a union consists of the following functions:



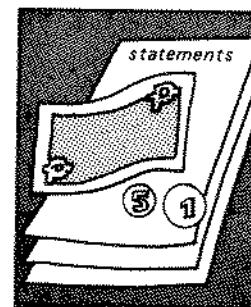
1. Keeping records of meetings and decisions of the union's governing bodies;



2. Adherence to the rules of the organization as regards meetings, obligations to report to the appropriate responsible bodies within the organization, and general union accountability;

3. Adherence to and execution of policies and decisions made by the various decision-making bodies of the union;

4. Collecting dues, keeping financial records, and managing the funds of the union;

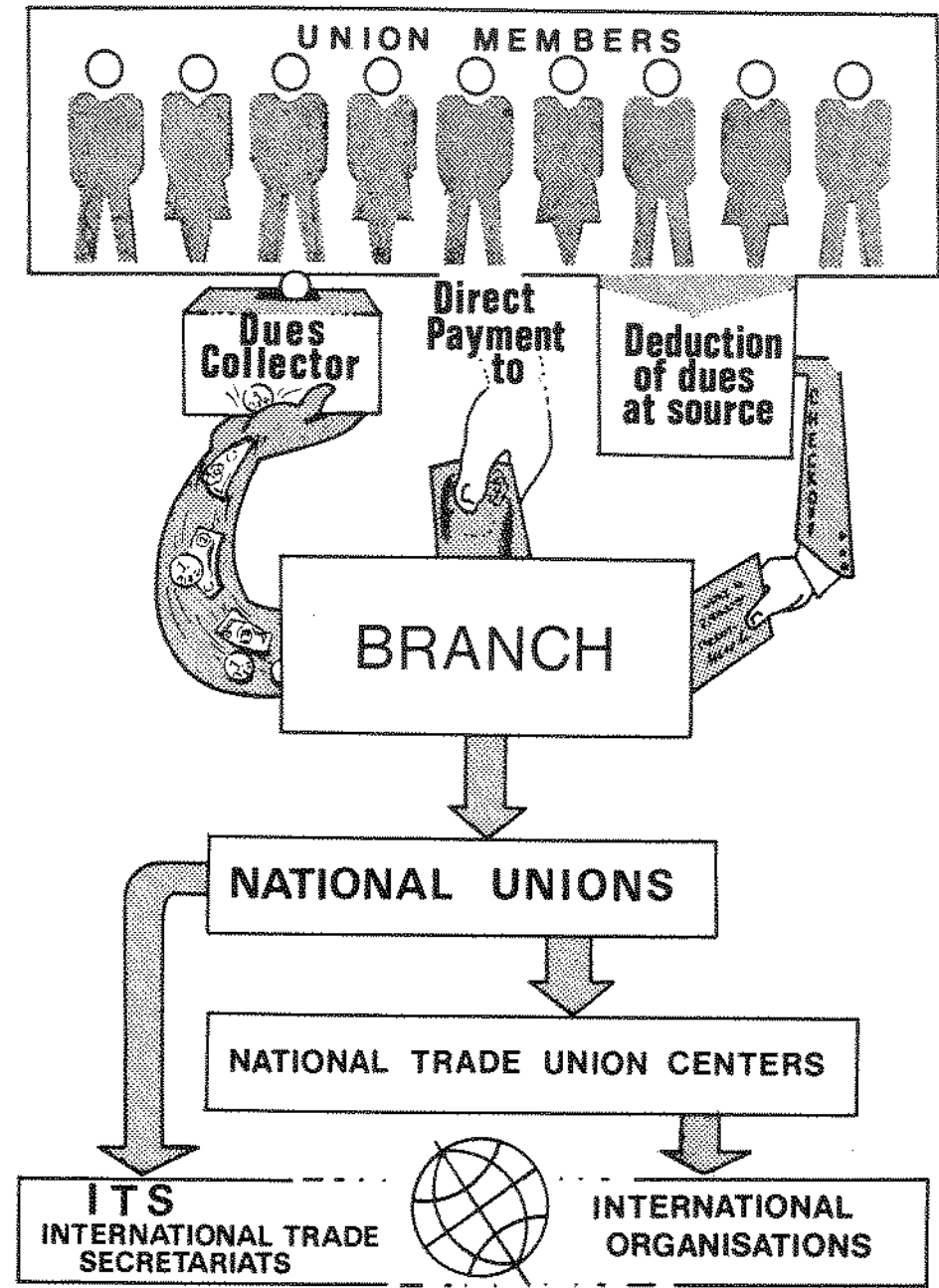


5. Following of government regulations on the operation of trade unions, e.g., filing annual financial reports and membership figures, keeping minutes of elections and strike votes, etc.

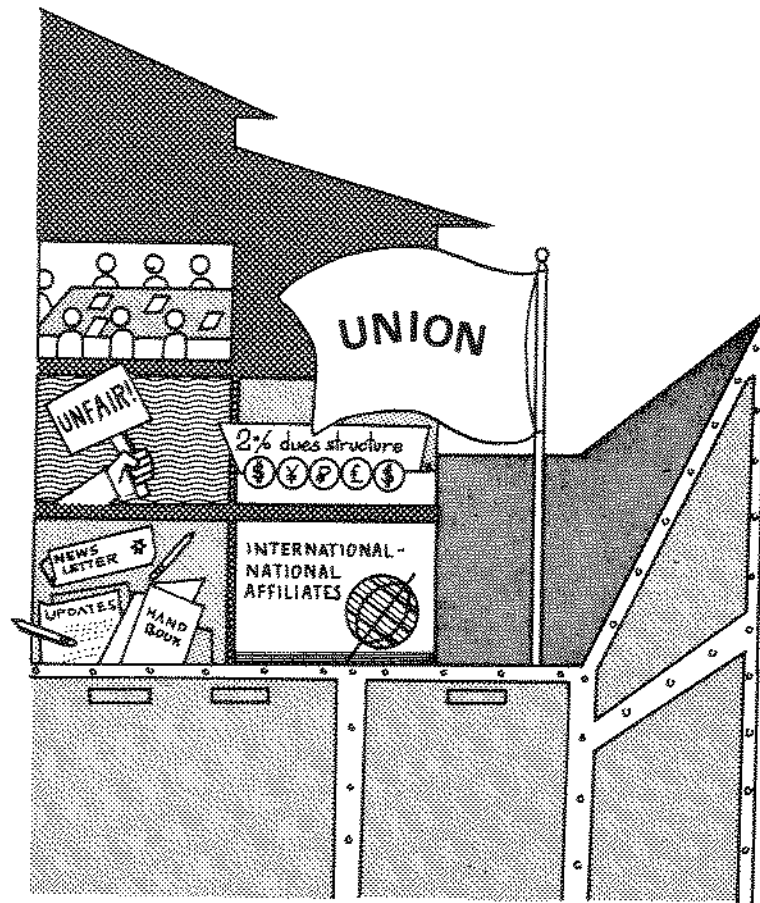
DISCUSS

In your opinion, who is responsible for each point (1-5) mentioned above?

Finance

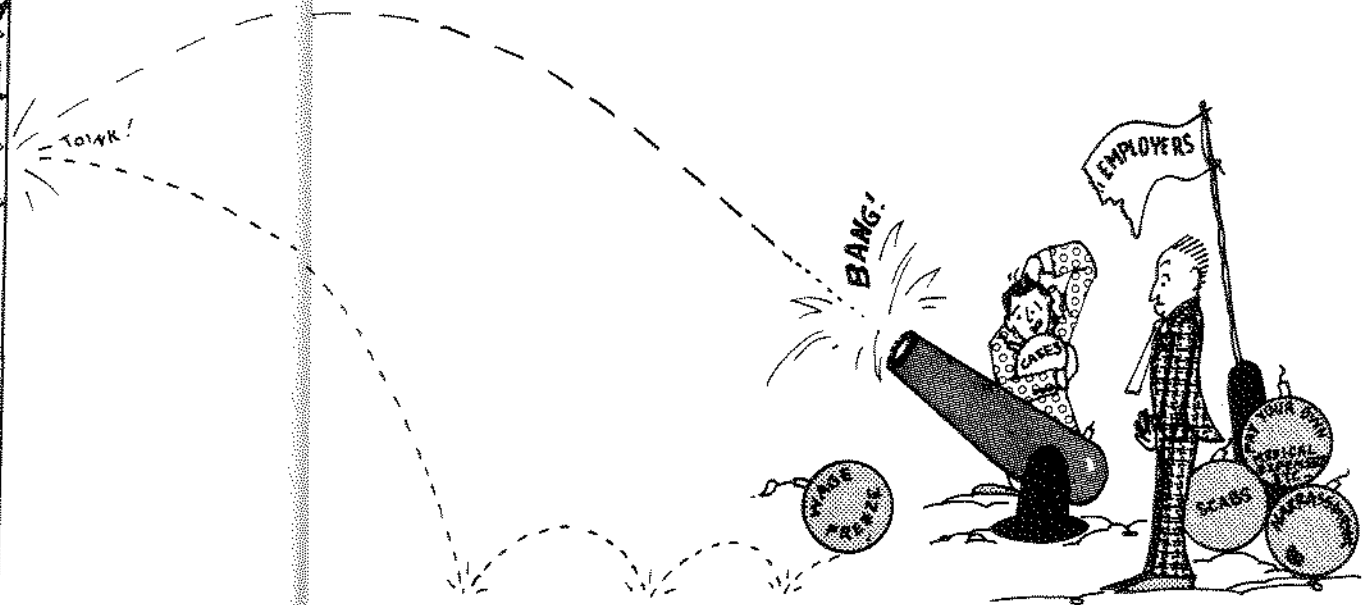


There are some workers who think that it is enough to come together to wage a struggle only when there is a major problem, such as securing better wages. They see permanent organization in a negative way and therefore refuse to support the building up of a permanent organization. However, they will contribute generously when a struggle is on.



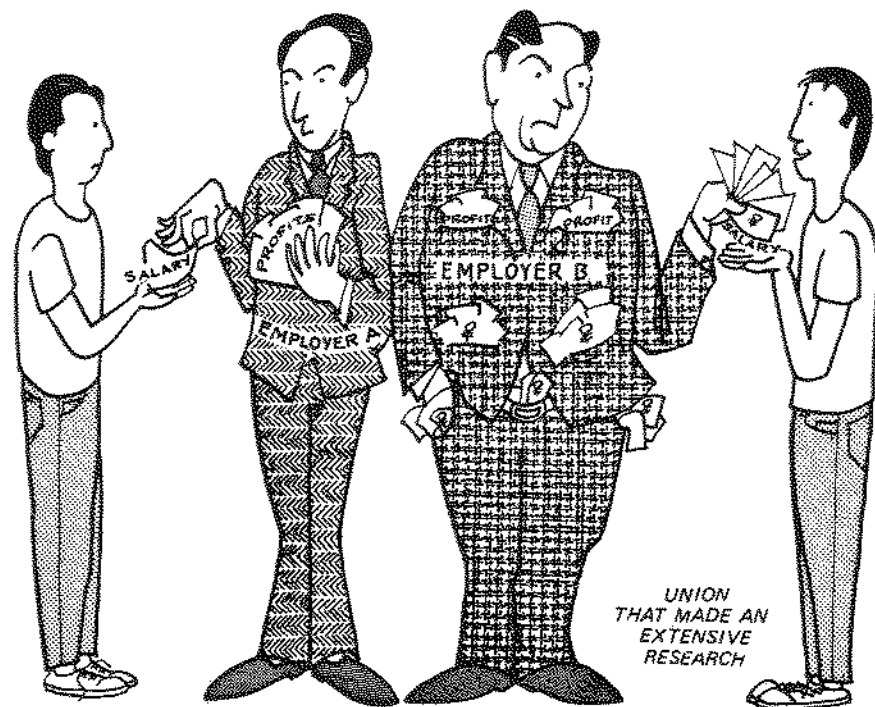
Experience has shown that this is wrong and that the lack of a permanent organization tends to breed problems, whereas the existence of a powerful, permanent organization tends to discourage employers from creating problems. Moreover, it is usually too late to think of organizing a union when the big problem has arrived on the doorstep. This is like looking for the insurance agent when a fire has started in the house.

There are other workers who do not see the union as having any work to do except to periodically negotiate agreements (which they think can be done by voluntary workers); to handle a members grievance (which they also think can be done by voluntary unit councilors or officers); to maintain some administration work, the bulk of which, it is sometimes felt, could again be done by volunteers. Hence, they conclude that the union should not collect anything but token dues and other assessments from members.

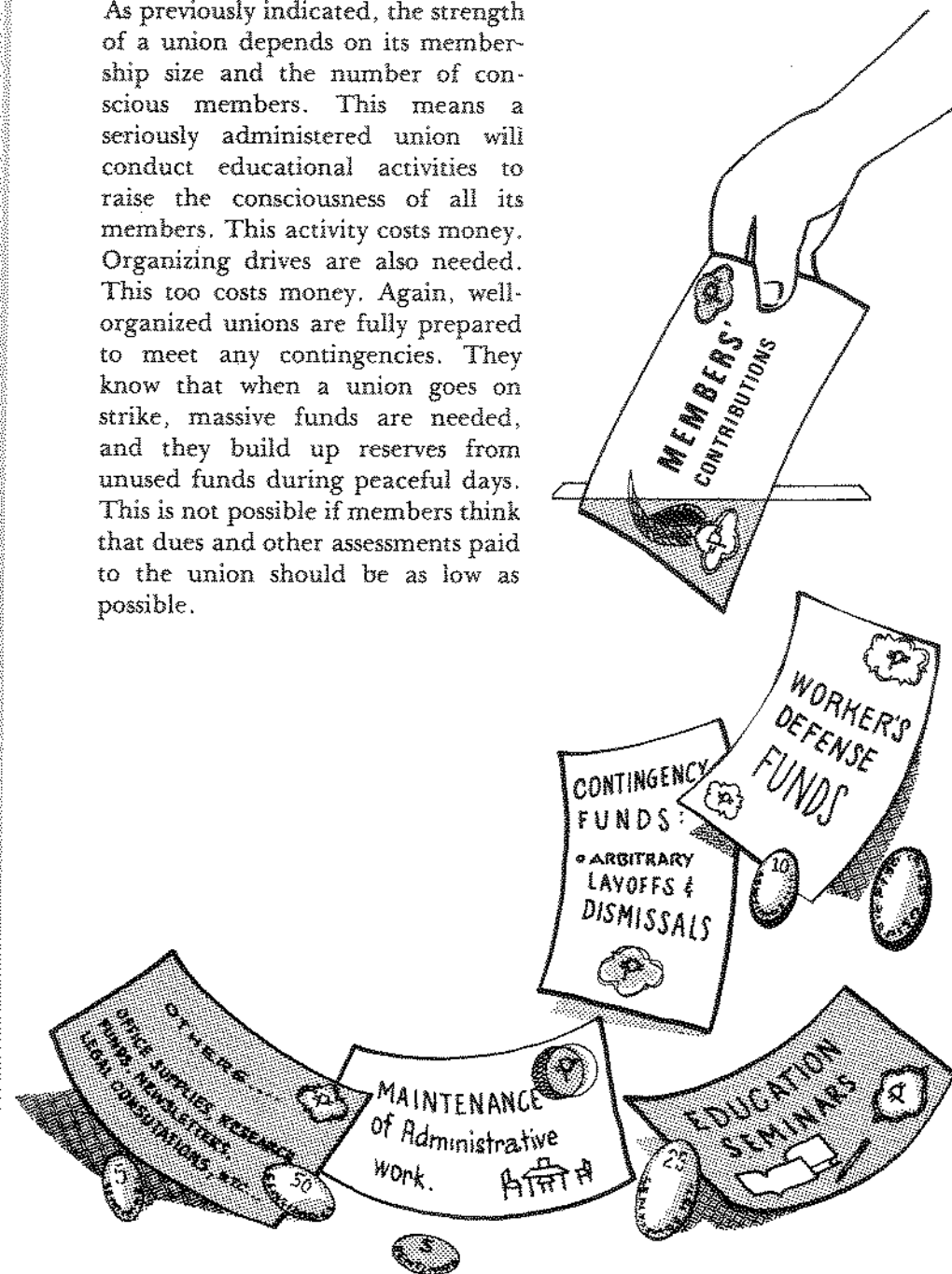


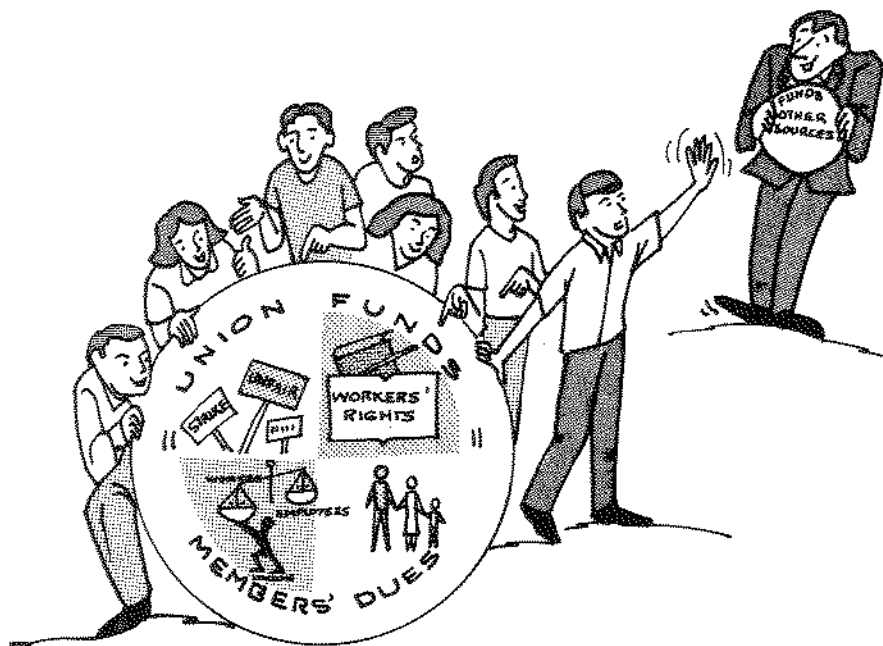
There are two broad questions to be considered here. First, the range of a union's activities. Second, the use of a volunteer versus a professional (or employed person).

Depending on how a union looks at the objective (purpose), the amount of effort it puts into this activity varies. For example, some union officials make little or no preparation for negotiation and aim merely at going for a 5 or 10 percent wage increase over the previous agreement. On the other hand, some make extensive research into ascertaining the maximum the union can get from an employer; they find out thoroughly the employer's ability to pay.



As previously indicated, the strength of a union depends on its membership size and the number of conscious members. This means a seriously administered union will conduct educational activities to raise the consciousness of all its members. This activity costs money. Organizing drives are also needed. This too costs money. Again, well-organized unions are fully prepared to meet any contingencies. They know that when a union goes on strike, massive funds are needed, and they build up reserves from unused funds during peaceful days. This is not possible if members think that dues and other assessments paid to the union should be as low as possible.



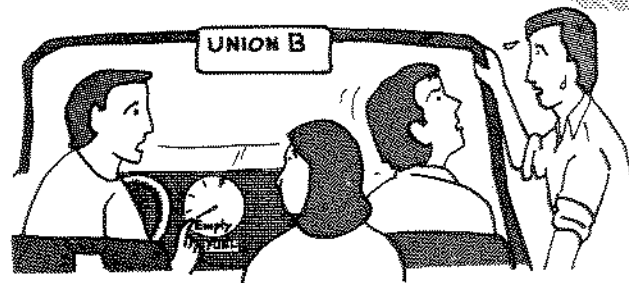
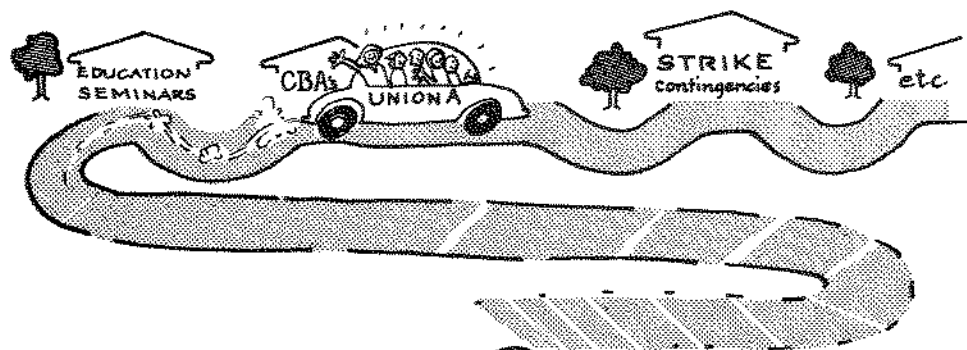


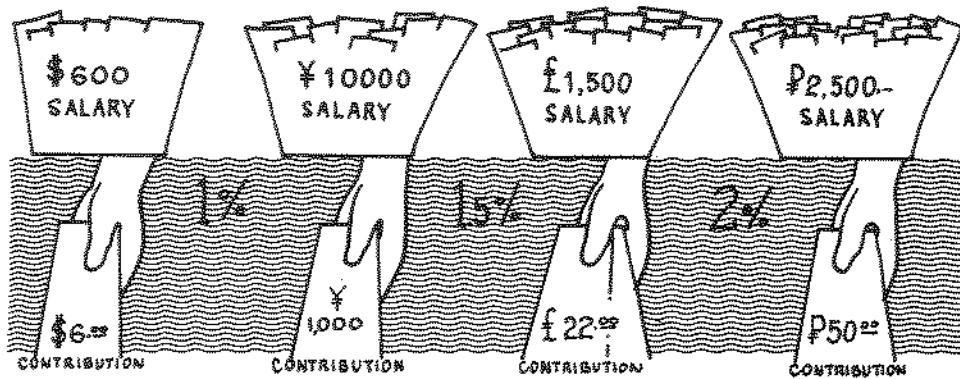
Finally, to be independent from employers, government and political parties, other groups and individuals, the union's finances should be derived solely from the members and not from any outside sources. The saying: "Who pays the piper, plays the tune" is true. A union that accepts money from sources other than its membership for its operation must necessarily, sooner or later, play according to the command of the paymaster.

Therefore, it is important for all rank-and-file members to understand why they have to pay dues and other assessments in order to make them understand that they should constantly be informed of the way in which the funds are utilized. It's one of the members' rights in a democratic organization.

If solidarity is the muscle of the organization, money is the lifeblood. The question may be asked: how much money does a union really need? Such a question is inadequate. What should perhaps be asked is: how much money does a union really need to do such as such a project and have so much strength?

Well, there is no limit to what a union needs. The more it has, the stronger it is financially, and the more it can do for its members. The question is: what kind of union do the members want? Will they be satisfied with a feeble organization or do they want the most effective instrument possible?





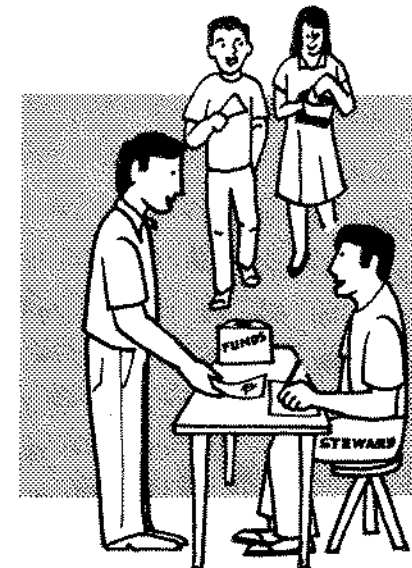
Workers in many countries find that they can have a reasonably strong union if they contribute at least one percent (1%) of their gross monthly income to the union, provided that membership of the union is not too small. Organizing to increase the membership is important and will increase the union's income, but it should not be a substitute for the percentage dues structure.

A percentage system has the merit of fairness as the burden of contribution to the union falls equally on all members. Those with high income and who can afford to contribute more ought to do so. Those on the lower income bracket pay a proportionally equal amount relative to their income, and so they pay less.

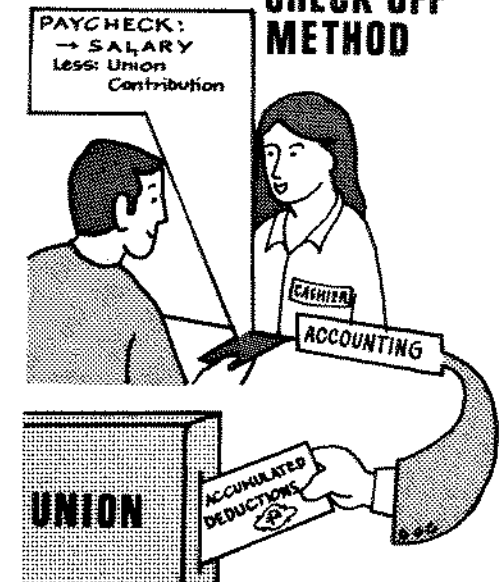
Another policy question is the method of collection of dues. The normal method in the past is for local officers or unit councilors (shop stewards) to go to all members in the workplace directly each month and collect the dues. Direct collection of dues requires direct contact with the members and does not depend on the cooperation of the employer. Increasingly, however, unions have resorted to making a contract with the employer for dues to be deducted regularly from members' salaries. The sum collected is then sent to the union by check.

This system, known as the "check-off," has disadvantages, such as the possible withholding of remittance to the union in case of a serious struggle. Also, it requires the union officials to find other ways of maintaining direct contact with the members. Nevertheless, the check-off system has the advantage of saving tremendous time and energy of union officers, as well as enhancing the financial stability of the union. It is used more and more today.

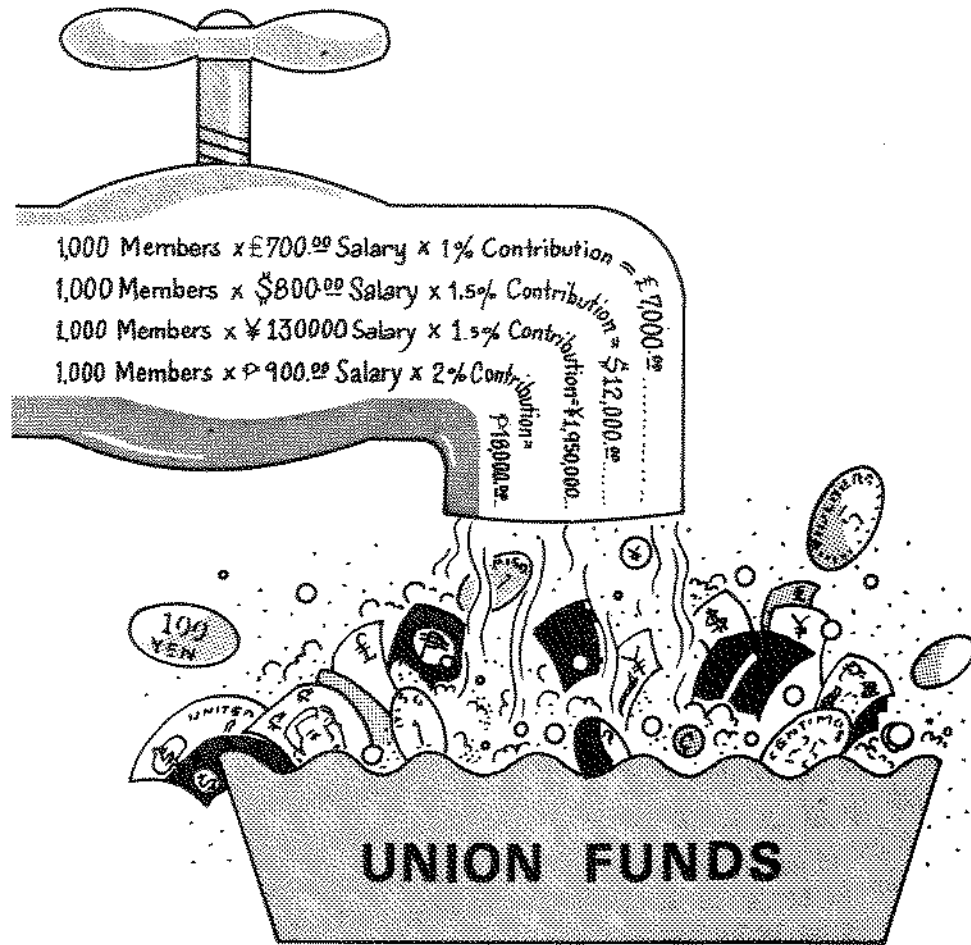
DIRECT METHOD



CHECK-OFF METHOD

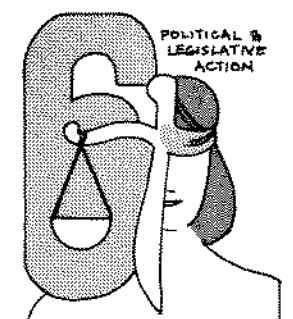


It has commonly been said, quite erroneously, that because workers in developing countries are poorly paid they therefore cannot afford to pay big subscription to unions. This is not the correct way to view the problem. No matter how low the wages are in a country, if the principle of percentage dues structure is applied and if the union has been organized on a base of an adequate membership, it will not be weak, but will have the potential to develop into a really powerful union, with sound financial resources to do the jobs that have to be done.



DISCUSS

1. a) What is the main source of income of your local union at present?
 b) Discuss the advantages and risks of receiving grants from external sources, i.e., from governments, political parties, foreign non-union organizations, international trade secretariats, etc.
2. Are your monthly dues deducted by the employer from your salary? Why/why not?
3. Discuss the disadvantages and advantages of the "check-off" system.
4. Is the current amount of dues enough for your union to carry out the proposed activities? (at the local as well as at the national level)? If not, how can the union solve its financial problems?





The union's main activities are as follows:

1. **Organizing new members** is essential because the collective bargaining strength of a union depends on the size of its membership. The bigger the union, the stronger and more powerful it will be.

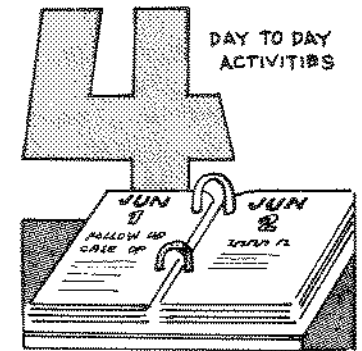


2. **Collective bargaining** is essentially what workers join the union for, i.e., to be part of the united forces to secure better pay and working conditions from employers. The first task of the union is to secure recognition from the employer and establish the collective bargaining relationship with him.



3. **Education of all members** to enable them to take an active interest in trade union work and activities now constitutes an important item of trade union activities. The strength of a union depends not merely on the overall size, but also on the size of its conscious and active members.

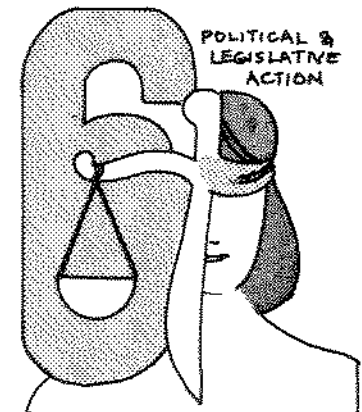
4. The day-to-day activities of a union consist of acting on the members' problems, for example, grievance at work, dismissal, making sure that the collective agreement signed by the employer is adhered to, etc. Such activities are usually carried out by what is known as a unit councilor or a grievance committee.



5. **Social welfare** of members may be undertaken by the union as part of the benefits it gives to members. Thus, should a member face family problems, such as death of a family member, the union may provide some monetary relief to the member to help him over the difficulties. The existence and activities of trade unions are, to a certain extent, circumscribed by the laws of the country. Different laws in different countries restrict trade union activities in different ways.



6. **Political and legislative action.** Since workers and trade unions need freedom in order to be able to work properly, it is natural that all unions in the world are



The Union and Society

perpetually engaged in seeking more and more freedom of activities from the government. Freedom is to union organizations what air is to all of us. Hence, the struggle for more trade union rights and democratic rights in general also constitutes a typical trade union activity. This, however, requires unions to pool their strength and influence in national centers, and to establish labour parties under their control.

It is important for all unions to be united in an industry union and/or national center whose responsibilities include such national problems as legal rights and freedoms. Trade unions, therefore, have to invest time, energy and resources to participate in the work of the national center and of the labour party where they exist.

THE UNION AND THE SOCIETY

The workplace, the company, and the people who are working there are part of the society. It is impossible to separate the company and the place of work from the society as a whole.

The conditions under which we work will be determined not only by the company or place of work. Our situation at work is influenced by many other things as well.

The opportunity to receive education and to have good communication are factors which influence our working situation.

The union cannot limit its tasks to the place of work. If the union wants to work in the interest of its members, it must try to influence the society as a whole. This can be done, for example, through:



- full employment policies
- price policy
- cost-of-living policy
- industrial relations policy

This is the reason why all local unions should establish nationwide industrial unions which then come together in one national center.

This is also the reason why unions need to create a political arm, to represent their interests, and the interests of the people as a whole, in the political institutions: a labour party.

To be able to influence the policy of the society, we need big and strong organizations at the industrial and political levels.

DISCUSS

What is your opinion about trade union involvement in the society?

