Union Revitalisation and the Role of International Solidarity: The Case of 'All Transport Workers Union' in Turkey

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For around three decades, trade unions have continuously been losing their power in many countries. This process manifests itself not only with declining union density, but also with concession in collective bargaining, eroding social as well as political influence in society, weakening representation of and legitimacy among working class. Besides, already disadvantaged state of the labour at the age of neo-liberalism requires existence of strong trade unionism for balancing power against influence of capital. Union revitalization is an urgent need for the power of labour throughout the world because unions still represent -or at least seek to represent- vast numbers of the earth's 'have-nots' as well as to the almost same extent 'have-somes', and because progressive coalitions and initiatives are very much strengthened with the inclusion of labour (Turner, 2004:2). In addition to that, it might not be possible to transform social disparity in global, national or local scales towards equality without existence of strong trade unions.

The importance of trade unions has proliferated discussions about 'union revitalization' or in other words union renewal. Even it is an ambiguous concept it may be defined as a process of "re-gaining power along the various dimensions that capture the main orientations or spheres of union activity" (Behrens et. al. 2004:20). Debates about revitalisation have been mainly based on adoption and implementation of different strategies and innovative tactics to regain power.

Besides that, the capital has extensively mobilized and globalized especially through growing multinational companies all over the world. This situation required trade unions rethinking of 'international solidarity' through collaboration and cooperation with each other and social movements. As a part of this development, Turkish trade unions also have put an effort to strengthen their linkage with international trade unionist movement for convergence at the basis of 'international solidarity'. All Transport Workers Union (TUMTIS) represents an important and unique experience of it at global logistic companies operating in Turkey. The union has started a strategic organising campaign at United Parcel Service (UPS) and succeeded the struggle with signing of collective bargaining. The union has also succeeded to organise at Deutsche Post DHL as well. International solidarity has carried a crucial role during these campaigns.

In this study, the role of international solidarity in the context of union revitalization is discussed. The main research question is raised as what is the role of international solidarity in the process

of union revitalisation? This question is answered by a case study on organising campaigns of TUMTIS at two global logistics companies.

Selected Bibliography

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Biography

Baris Erdem Gurkan holds B.A. and M.A. degree in labour economics and industrial relations. He also graduated from Labour Policies and Globalisation master programme of Global Labour University. He has worked at various trade unions. Currently, he works as an organiser at Revolutionary Bank and Insurance Employees Union, affiliated to the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DISK).