

FACING THE EMERGING & EXISTING CHALLENGES

of the Trade Union Movement

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"Sometimes tortured by the words-tongues-eyes-fingers
Sometimes bucked up by the words- tongues-eyes-palms
Insulted/abused badly sometimes
And highly praised/appreciated sometimes
Sometimes with hurt sentiments
With tears flowing from the inner heart
And with gloomy smile hung on the lips
Sometimes in high temper
Challenging the entire universe in revolt
Sometimes like a rhododendron in its full form
Full of life, I come my home at haste

Retired from the work in the late evening
Tired I return to my nest."

(Portion of the poem-To my nest by Umesh Upadhyaya on state of Nepali workers)

As characterises in the poem, present state of Nepali worker demonstrates how Trade union movement itself is facing complexity of **right vs. responsibility**. Our world of work is now witnessing high expectation which has invited the labour militancy amidst slow delivery & inability to meet all of the demands made by various stakeholders.

Obviously, political transition itself is the cross-road of a possibility to transformation of society progressively and a looming danger of loosing achievement if fail to pursue proper strategy to manage delicacy of the transitional period.

The world of work in Nepal is facing multiple, both the existing and emerging challenges. We are currently facing lawlessness in the society. A competition in violence is stepping up. Some 23, known and relatively low-profiled armed groups are active in different parts of our country. We have destroyed enough existing system but a vacuum has not extinguished by much expected new system—thus every where street-crowd through militancy determining "justice". It has led much confusion **towards our future political system**. It is thus, yet difficult to forecast scenario of current fluid political situation. This has further added complexity in the world of work.

Nepali labour market has its own peculiar feature. It is based on over 90% informal economy, where agriculture is dominant. There is terrible mismatch between labour demand and its supply; which means there is a scarcity amid plenty. It has generated Unemployment/ Underemployment.

Capital mobility and change in Technology has caused change in pattern of employment. As the challenge, trade union movement is facing newer types of exploitative practice. Life long employment pattern has been replaced by flexi-time job. Categorically temporary basis, casual, piece-rate, hourly base, contract (both labour & job and directly by the principle employer & through labour suppliers), outsourced, disguised and part-time basis are the major pattern of contemporary employment. Formal employment is drastically squeezing. Workers are working in daily wages, piece-rate, weekly based and other informal contractual system. One of the main challenges of such forms of employment is rapid de-unionisation of labour market.

Interestingly, organised world of work in the global production system has invented new way for mass production with variety. Ironically, workers are losing their control at the workplace whereas producers have gained surprising way of mass production which ultimately questioned labour intensive work and introduced mechanisation for huge profit with little use of human work.

With the rippling wave of globalisation, the site of production has become scattered throughout the world. Unlike in the days of Karl Marx, today's capitalist production system has left to tend to its fixed reserve army that would "dig its own grave". It has made the world its factory. Now, an 'unseen' owner, residing in a corner of the globe, decides within a minute the fate of all workers toiling through out the world.

Whether highly skilled workers with a PhD or unskilled ones, the payment for their labour has started to be determined on the basis of a downward bidding (as less pay as possible). The workers today have been forced to stand at the crossroads, like the passers-by losing sight of their direction to follow, to auction their labour. Having no security of work, they are compelled to hunt for next piece of work once the one in hand will be finished. In the contemporary world of the work, a lot many things are decided not with the collective strength of the workers in an enterprise but with the "forces of market".

In today's labour relationship, "production processes" have become "primary" and "physical status of enterprises, secondary". In terms of the process of production, the world of work has been divided as "organised and unorganised, formal and informal, national and trans-national", and labour as 'regular' (permanent or temporary) and 'irregular' (contract-based, daily-waged, seasonal, part-time, home-based outsourcing, etc). With this division, the universal principle of workers' collectivism that "An injury to one is an injury to all" has been shattered since the workers have to fight each other for their daily survival. In such a scenario, the slogan of "those" days that 'nothing to lose but chain, a world to win', fall far short of organising the entire workforce for the grand movement necessary for social transformation.

Flexibility is the glamorous word for business community, IFIs, Government and the planners now days. One of the agenda of the flexibility is employer right to hire & fire. It demands that market should have right to determine value of our labour; whether or not to provide employment, standard wage and benefits etc. Thus the challenge of the day is **liberalisation vs. workers protection**. Capital demands laissez-faire governance of the market, whereas trade unions are struggling hard to introduce & continue labour inspection in order to maintain minimum labour standard at least.

Ecological Challenges has hit-hard to the export industry in the name of Environment friendly production such as organic product in agriculture, non-use of certain chemical during dyeing of carpet, garments and clothing products.

Globalisation has provided all round liberty to Capital and has created lots of hurdles against labour. In the name of flexibility, again market has given right to determine the wage, benefits and all fundamental rights of the workers based on demand and supply. Only those unions based upon such workers who controlled the workplaces can launch effective struggle for their betterment. Ironically now the workers are losing rapidly their control in the workplace, where as employers enjoying right to balance even accidental loss reducing cost on labour.