

The Effects of Globalization on Trade Unions*

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ABSTRACT

Globalization is a process that leads to profound changes in the economic, social and political fields around the world. In this context, the effects on trade unions are debatable. According to some researchers, globalization has expanded the field of struggle of trade unions and increased the opportunities for international solidarity. On the other hand, increasing global competition and demands for flexibility in labor markets may cause trade unions to lose power and narrow their areas of struggle. The effects of globalization on trade unions may differ from country to country and from sector to sector. In some cases, trade unions can find common solutions by cooperating at the global level, while in other cases they may have to fight harder at the national level. Globalization has brought about a complex set of impacts on trade unions. The rise in international trade and competition has put pressure on companies to cut costs, affecting wages and working conditions. Outsourcing and offshoring have led to job losses and reduced bargaining power for unions. Work processes have become more fragmented, making it challenging for unions to organize effectively. However, globalization has also fostered cross-border solidarity among unions, enabling the sharing of information and strategies. Changes in national policies and regulations have influenced the legal framework for unions. The emergence of global unions and increased collaboration aim to address common issues faced by workers worldwide. The impact of globalization varies across industries, with sectors exposed to international competition facing more significant challenges than others. Overall, globalization presents both opportunities and obstacles for trade unions. However, the negative repercussions of globalisation on trade unions and their future have been much greater. This study has been prepared to examine the effects of globalisation on trade unions.

Keywords: Globalization, trade unions, Neoliberalism, Privatization.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the differences between countries and social classes are increasing and deepening. It is possible to see this situation in almost every country and within every class structure. While advances in science and technology, in other words, the information revolution, have on the one hand provided mankind with great convenience in its struggle with nature, on the other hand, the use of these developments by transnational corporations for profit is increasing the injustice in income distribution worldwide. On the one hand, while differentiation is observed all over the world, on the other hand, national economies are being restructured according to a single and similar production pattern. The world is being forced into uniformity; this leads to rapid impoverishment. The most important contradiction of the historical period we are living

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in is that government policies and national economies are forced to be similar to each other, despite the rapid growth of socio-economic differences between the classes that make up society. The historical -economic and social- gains of the working class are being tried to be taken back. As a result of these policies, precariousness in working conditions has become a problem that concerns the entire working class.

Traditional trade union organisations did not have the insight to defend and advance the rights of the working class in this period. For this reason, workers started to react to neo-liberal policies from wherever they were and to defend their demands. Labour movement theorists have tried to explain the general framework of the movements with the conceptualisation of social movement unionism. This discussion has been carried out in our country for the last ten years by academics, trade unionists and representatives of democratic mass organisations, which are components of the labour movement. Today, the process called globalisation has meant the unrivalled and unrestricted spread of capitalist relations of production all over the world. In such a process of expansion, while socio-economic differences are deepening, i.e. the poor are becoming poorer and the rich richer, opposing tendencies are being rapidly transformed and changed. As the phenomenon of globalisation permeates all areas of life, trade unionism has also been significantly affected. Trade union organisation has changed on the axis of democratic and independent struggle.

However, it is not possible to say that trade union organisation is at the desired level in today's process. Today, trade unions are losing strength even in countries where the working class struggle has a long history and rich experience. On the other hand, not only the trade unions but also the political organisations and the ideological-theoretical power of the working class are weakening. One of the reasons for this general decline, which applies to all areas of class struggle, is the effects of globalisation. In this study, the positive and negative effects of the phenomenon of globalisation on today's trade unionism have been examined and it has been tried to discuss what kind of changes these effects will bring to the present and future situation of trade unionism in general.

UNION AND TRADE UNIONISM CONCEPT

According to Hançerlioğlu, "A trade union is an organisation established by those who sell labour and those who buy labour to protect their interests against each other". According to him, trade unions are mainly labour unions established in different forms of the old guilds, while employers' unions have emerged to create a force against them. Labour unions usually struggle over the problems of wages and working hours. In order to achieve their aims, labour unions have the right to strike and employers' unions have the right to lock-out" (Hançerlioğlu, 1993: 233). According to Webb; "A trade union is a permanent organisation established by wage earners to protect and improve the conditions of their working life" (Mumcuoğlu, 1979: 3). According to Cahit Talas, a trade union is "an exclusive society established by workers to protect and develop common economic and social interests and to improve working conditions" (Talas, 1960: 139). F. Engels, on the other hand, argues that the trade union is a necessary weapon in the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class (Engels, 1973: 48). Koç makes a similar definition and considers trade unions as organisations formed by workers to protect their rights and interests against employers and governments (Koç, 1998: 5).

As can be seen, the common point of these definitions is that a trade union is defined as an organisation formed to protect the rights of workers against the employer. As organisations that

do not leave the worker alone against the employer, trade unions struggle to increase the welfare of workers. In this framework, trade unions define the rights of workers in a broad framework. In this direction, trade unions fight for rights such as raising the wage level of workers, reducing working hours, ensuring safety in the workplace and ensuring the general social security of workers through macro-level decisions or new institutions in the social-political field. In this way, trade unions strive for more general rights for workers, such as the right to redistribution, especially in the form of a share of the national income for social equilibrium, as in the case of social insurance, as well as the right to a share of the income generated by their own workplace.

It is seen that the historical ground on which trade unionism emerged goes back quite far and developed under difficult conditions. Braudel, in his book "Material Civilisation-Economics and Capitalism", criticised the one-dimensional perception of capitalism by W. Sombart and M. Weber and said: "In my opinion, one thing is beyond doubt: Capitalism could not have originated from a single and narrow origin. The economy has also had something to say, culture and civilisation have also had something to say; it has been a history that has decided power relations". In this sense, it can be said that the trade union emerges both as a product of these spiralling transformations and as a subject that contributes to the story of these transformations (Yazıcı, 1999: 8). The economic historian Ülgener, in his studies analysing the Western Middle Ages, evaluates the period in question as an age consisting of three parts and evaluates the three periods in question as follows: Contemporary historians have analysed the traces of an individualistic worldview that distinguishes at least three stages in the Middle Ages. The first stage covers the first centuries of the Middle Ages, which partially continued the living conditions that could be considered the legacy of antiquity. Most of the bonds that record the life of the individual emerged in the centuries when the Middle Ages reached their peak. The second stage is the dark medieval period, in which the norms of morality and theology, which were becoming more and more rigid, and together with them some of the rigid social structures (primarily land ownership and the organisation of classes and strata) were imposed on individual life with their full weight. Finally, the third stage is the stage in which the age is about to reach new times, especially capitalism. What is different about the "end of the Middle Ages": It is a stage that envisages a spirit and mentality orientated towards the adoption and representation of the new, rather than adherence to tradition and custom, and an orientation towards new forms and ideas in economic and social life. All these innovations gave the end of the Middle Ages in Western Europe the character of a distinct 'economic style' (Ülgener, 1981: 27).

All over the world, the Industrial Revolution led to mass production. The changes in the production process have led to major changes in the role of labour in this process. For this reason, when dealing with trade unionism, it is first necessary to examine the Industrial Revolution and the changes it brought about. The French Revolution was mainly the result of a struggle against the aristocracy. However, after the revolution, the bourgeois class became stronger and the class structure acquired a new characteristic as bourgeois and working class. With the emergence of the industrial revolution, the fierce struggles between the bourgeoisie and the working class, which became rival parties, can be considered as the starting point of the trade union struggle in today's sense.

With the industrial revolution, cities grew and population and labour mobility increased. There was an influx of workers to the regions where factories and large enterprises were established with the industrial revolution. The competition among these workers to find a job prevented them from getting the real value of their labour and caused them to fall into greater and greater misery (Çubuk, 1979: 130). It took a long time for the demands for the correction of this

situation to move from individual to mass mobilisation. The idea that there is strength in unity among workers first began to rise in England, where factoryisation was seen intensively, and organised unions were established. As a result, the formation of labour unions became widespread and collective bargaining and contractual order began to be established in countries where industry developed, starting from England. From another point of view, this situation formed the basis of unionisation as well as the fundamental changes in production relations leading to other important social developments (Işıklı, 1995: 9).

As a result of the changes in the social structure caused by the industrial revolution, the middle classes, which constituted large masses, began to dissolve, and instead large groups of workers working for very low wages and a limited number of capitalists who began to accumulate capital began to form. Trade union movements, to which large masses of workers resorted in order to obtain their social and economic rights, started as a result of the mentioned social-structural change. In the capitalist production process, the cheaper the labourer works, the more the capitalists accumulate capital, the more capital accumulation leads to a stronger capitalist class, which in turn establishes the power of capital. As long as the capitalist mode of production remains unchanged, this vicious circle in which workers are caught will continue, each time enabling more and more exploitation. The unions and trade unions established among the workers were created to break this cycle. Workers who could not cope with the power of the employer individually united their forces in trade unions and made their struggle common.

TRADE UNIONISM IN THE GRIP OF GLOBALISATION

The concept of globalisation has been used in many disciplines in recent years. Although many people define the concept of globalisation, in general terms, it can be defined as the intensification of social relations of a global nature that connects different places affected by events occurring in distant places (Giddens, 2000: 23). According to Friedman, globalisation is "the relentless integration of markets, nation-states and technologies at an unprecedented level. That is, it is the ability of individuals, companies and states to reach the world faster, cheaper and deeper than ever before, and the ability of the world to reach individuals, companies and states faster, cheaper and deeper than ever before" (Friedman, 1999: 8). According to the World Bank, the first phase of globalisation in today's sense took place between 1870 and 1914. The main dynamics of this stage were "change" and "expansion", and the rationale was the economy. This stage enabled the West to expand politically, militarily and commercially to overseas countries that it had not been able to reach until then (Oran, 2001: 5).

After 1980, the phenomenon of globalisation, which has gradually started to concern all countries closely, has led to changes in the industrial relations system of countries to the extent of the openness of economies to the outside, with more effects in developed countries. The globalisation process has created new forms of employment by introducing new types of employment such as part-time work, on-call work, home-working in order to ensure flexibility in production, reduce labour costs and increase the chances of competition (Mahiroğulları, 2001: 2). These developments, of course, have had serious effects on the organisation of labour, wages, in short, on the labour process. Because in the past, even classical economists prioritised the contribution of labour in the value of production and even considered human labour as the source and criterion of value, whereas for the new economic order only highly skilled labour is important. The highly skilled labour referred to here is the flexible and versatile labour that emerged with the post-fordist production system. The remaining unskilled

and low-skilled labour is the labour that can be easily removed from the system, replaced and found in abundance in the process.

In order to achieve its goals in the direction of globalisation, international capital primarily aims to drag the working masses into an unprotected and defenceless position. For this purpose, its attacks are directed against two main targets: the welfare state and trade unions. The fact that the attacks of globalisation are also directed against trade unions is linked to the fact that the welfare state can only gain integrity to the extent that there is a real trade unionism. On the other hand, the economic and political models imposed by neo-liberalism on the countries of the world cannot be reconciled with the existence of a strong and real trade unionism (Işıklı, 1995: 9-11). It is not surprising that trade unions find themselves in a struggle brought about by globalisation. Trade unions have always operated across borders and their ideological roots have developed in the perspective of the European labour movement in the last century. In the new century, however, trade unions are at a crossroads in terms of industry, wages and socio-politics. In this respect, it can be said that organised labour has been slow to react against globalisation (Şenkal, 2005: 536-537). In the global economy, crises have started to occur at increasingly frequent intervals and with increasing depth. Practices such as the liquidation of the public sector, cuts in social expenditures and wars are all traditional methods used by the capitalist system to get rid of the crisis. It can be said that today, rather than any order, complete disorder prevails. While these crisis conditions impose a questioning of everything, every relationship, concept and institution, and in a sense a redefinition and re-organisation, this situation also includes the trade union movement. Therefore, the crisis that the trade union movement has been dragged into both on an international scale and in individual countries can be associated with the process of change in the capitalist system. Along with this process, a series of differences in the structure of the labour force and the labour process are also emerging. The globalisation of enterprises and their transformation into small flexible structures directly affect trade unionism.

In the new production system based on "flexible specialisation" and called "post-fordism" in the literature, general-purpose machines that can produce many goods at the same time and technologies that can perform different operations simultaneously are used. On the other hand, a labour force with multiple qualifications such as design, computer programming, machine adjustment, maintenance operator, etc. replaces the low-skilled labour force that performs the same job by using single-purpose mechanical machines (Öngider, 1994:13). While on the one hand, the production system defined as flexible specialisation brings globalisation to the highest level, on the other hand, it also leads to some changes in the quality of the technology and labour force used due to its own internal structure. In the face of the diversification of demand and the instability of markets, it has become necessary to differentiate products while at the same time shifting to smaller-scale firms. This, in turn, has led to the need for machinery and technologies that can be used not for a single purpose but for multiple purposes, and for a more qualified and trained labour force. Thus, while trying to develop a production structure that can rapidly adapt to changes in demand and the market, the flexibility of the labour process comes to the fore.

Since people working in privatised public institutions or in the field of subcontracted public services are either directly fired from their jobs or new personnel are no longer recruited to these institutions, the level of unemployment increases throughout the country and people are sent to the labour markets in masses (Dikmen, 2006: 58). It would not be wrong to say that this situation prevents unionisation and leads to informalisation, especially in developing countries. One of the strategies used by companies for deunionisation is subcontracting. For example, the

Italian textile company "Benetton" is now a company made up of subcontractors. The same is true for the shoe manufacturer "Nike". Nike is no longer a direct producer, but a company that carries out research, develops models and markets them. Production is carried out on behalf of Nike by subcontractors in different parts of the world. Subcontracting prevents union organisation due to the prevalence of flexible forms of employment in subcontracting firms and low job security (Şenkal, 1999: 60-80). In developing countries, the proliferation of unskilled workers instead of skilled workers is one of the factors triggering deunionisation. New divisions of labour necessitated by increasingly competitive conditions require unskilled and very low paid working conditions for these workers. Multinational companies seeking small costs in line with world competition invest only in places where they can find low-paid workers. Since this is not possible in unionised workplaces, workers are condemned to conditions of exploitation, both by managers trying to attract foreign capitals to their own countries and by employers (Ar, 2015: 37). Today, many well-known companies carry out their production in the third world or in the poor countries of the Asian continent, where labour is sold cheaply and unionisation rates and awareness are very low.

In the age of globalisation, as in Marx's time, production is at the centre of social and economic development. Despite financial fluidity and e-commerce, in the real world people still work. The death of the working class, the end of work and the like are no more than temporary slogans. The transformations brought about by globalisation have reshaped the world of production, but have not sidelined it altogether. As a result, labour has become central to the dynamics of contemporary society and the labour movement has undergone a process of restructuring that will allow labour to influence the future trajectory of globalisation (Munck 2003: 85). Along with the impact of globalisation on trade unions, from the 1990s onwards, there have been debates that scientific and technological developments and the information age have weakened the organised power of the working class and that trade unions, the organisations of the industrial revolution, cannot survive in the information society. However, in the following years, as the negative consequences of neoliberal policies began to increase, the dominance of neoliberal ideology decreased. Thus, the views that the negativities created by the global economy have increased the need for trade unions and that trade unions can exist if they renew their policies and structures in the face of new developments have started to gain weight (Çelik, 2006: 24). Today, even if people work from home, in front of a computer, they continue to work in a certain hierarchical order, in communication with hundreds of people in an online network. In this sense, the importance of trade unions continues in the globalised labour and brain power market. However, in the face of the events that have occurred in recent years, there is a crisis of organisation and representation for trade unions. Factors such as the increase and continuity of the number of unemployed, the shrinkage in the industry, the spread of flexible working, the emergence of new production systems can create difficulties in organising and representation for trade unions. Trade unions aim to protect the living standards of their members, to prevent foreign labour from overtaking their own industrial movement and to prevent jobs from shifting to regions with the potential for low-wage labour. However, although they are conscious of developing an international trade unionism against global capitalism, their agenda consists of social problems, demands and expectations at the national level.

The prominence of information and service jobs with the globalisation process, flexible working models, the policies of employers towards deunionisation, the reduction in the size of many enterprises, subcontracting practices and the predominance of individual contracts have also played an important role in the loss of power of unions (Zencirkıran, 2012: 490). Today, when people see voting as a waste of time even in elections that will determine their own future,

when people legitimise making money in a short way, eating rights, and the system in which the strong oppress the weak, it does not seem possible for trade unions to develop in this environment.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the 16th century capitalist primitive accumulation followed by the Industrial and French Revolutions, radical social upheavals - centred in Western Europe - took place. As the means of production developed and centralised, the bourgeoisie seized political power by taking the workers and peasants behind its back. However, the bourgeoisie created the working class as a necessary consequence of the dispossession steps it took while organising a new society. The history of the working class is also the history of struggles. Knowing and properly analysing this history will enable us to understand and overcome many of the problems we face today; understanding the past will, in a way, contribute to understanding and interpreting the present. The innovations of the 17th and 18th centuries offered people a whole new world. Especially the changes in labour life inevitably played an important role in the emergence of trade unions. In addition, with the inventions and mechanisation in the second half of the 18th century, workers started to work together and new production techniques emerged. In the face of this situation, which turned into a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class, trade unions began to be given great importance. The introduction of trade unionism into legal systems was not easy in many countries, and this could only be realised in the last century. This slowed down the progress of trade unionism considerably.

Especially in the last fifty years, very serious transformations have taken place in the world. While capitalism was trying to overcome the crisis it was experiencing through various methods, the world rapidly came under the influence of neo-liberal policies with the effect of globalisation. In the new world order, neo-liberal policies have been the means of restructuring the process. While developed countries have been the main actors in the restructuring of the process, many third world countries have been forced to adapt to this change. Undoubtedly, the rapid colonisation of the world has also played a major role in these developments. Over the years, capitalism has become the dominant economic system of the whole world. The capitalistisation process started in the Eastern Bloc countries and structural adjustment policies in developing countries facilitated the implementation of neo-liberalism.

While the number of workers is increasing all over the world with globalisation, the biggest reason for the visible decline in the number of unionised workers is thought to be the fear of unemployment. It is a known fact that workers who do not like their jobs, wages or working conditions cannot unionise for fear of unemployment or express their reaction to the harsh and unfair conditions in which they work. In addition, the failures of collective agreements and strikes, the crisis of confidence among workers, the inability of the working class to carry their demands to the political arena and the increasing tendency towards individualisation have led to a decline in the number of unionised workers. Trade union statutes remained only on paper and were not put into practice.

If we weigh the positive and negative effects of globalisation on trade unionism, we can say that the negative effects are greater, as we observe the decline in the rate of unionisation worldwide and the decline in people's interest in trade unions. If we talk about the positive effects of globalisation on trade unions, first of all, it has led to the growth of multinational companies and created more employment opportunities for workers. Unions can also benefit

from the increased membership and collective bargaining power that comes with a larger workforce. Globalisation has increased awareness of the importance of fair labour practices and human rights. Unions can take advantage of global pressure to advocate for better working conditions. The negative effects of globalisation on trade unions are primarily increased outsourcing and wages that are not remunerative for labour. This has facilitated the relocation of jobs to countries with lower labour costs and has led to job losses in some countries. In addition, when jobs move to countries with weaker labour regulations, trade unions will find it very difficult to protect workers' rights and interests vis-à-vis transnational corporations, and will lose their importance in the eyes of workers. In addition, globalisation has created a more competitive global market and given employers more power to negotiate with unions.

Unions can build alliances with international labour organisations to combat these negative effects of globalisation, increase their bargaining power and defend workers' rights at the global level. Unions can equip their employees with skills development and research and development programmes to equip them with the necessary skills to compete in a globalised economy. By adapting to changing work and working conditions, they will also increase the loyalty of their employees to the union. In this sense, there is no escape from the grip of globalisation in today's capitalist world and trade unions should change their regulations and practices in this direction and act as a union that can adapt to changing conditions, not as a union of an ideology, an idea, an economic model.

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