

Institutional Arrangements For Workers' Education - II

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THE training methodology in workers' education programme of the Industrial Relations Institutes (IRIs) includes all modern methods, namely lecture, panel discussion, group discussion, debate, role-playing, field visits and discussions with the aid of films and other audio-visual aids.

The Audio-Visual Unit of IRI, Tongi is well equipped with all modern equipment required in a training institute at a national level. The IRIs at Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi have also provisions for audio-visual aids in training programmes.

Evaluation: The need for evaluation of the workers' education training programme can hardly be over-emphasised. The method of training has to be adapted to the power of assimilation on the part of a given trainee. It is evaluated before and after the training in a given response which reveals pertinent information both about the trainees' execution and mastery of the response and the effectiveness of the training methods.

The training methodology, course contents and their effectiveness are, therefore, evaluated through questionnaires and individual interviews in order to assess the extent to which the main objectives of the workers' education programme have been achieved. On the result of such evaluation, the training programmes are modified in order to improve the quality of training and the output.

In order to assess industrial workers' knowledge, attitude and practice on labour laws, trade unionism, collective bargaining, etc. a study was undertaken by a team of faculty members of IRI, Tongi. This study dealt with economic and living conditions of industrial workers by analysing monthly wages, supplementary sources of income, clothing, housing, health particulars, cooperative services, recreational facilities, family planning habits and activities, general matters related to their levels of education, standard of civic sense and knowledge and education programmes.

A total of 1828 workers were interviewed, selected randomly from jute, cotton textiles including hosiery, tea, sugar, fertilizer, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, steel and engineering, paper and board, food and allied, tanneries and leather products, oil and gas and other miscellaneous industries located at the industrial regions of Bangladesh.

Some of the interesting findings of the study relating to education and civic sense are reproduced here:

★ Nearly 30 of the workers interviewed are illiterate (old workers in the age group of 50 and above, however, register a higher rate). About one-third of them state that they had primary education and another 30% claim to have undergone secondary education. Workers with Madrasha background and higher education are very negligible in number. The educational distribu-

tion of skilled workers is also more or less the same as the average.

★ More than 90% of the workers interviewed/did not have any on-the-plant training whatsoever.

★ Of the 1828 workers interviewed, only 159 (8.70%) state that they do not send their children to school mainly on account of poverty. More than 90% of the workers have not heard of the important labour laws like Industrial Relations Ordinance, Employment of Labour (Standing Orders) Act, Factories Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, Shops and Establishment Act, Tea Plantation Labour Ordinance, Maternity Benefit (Tea Estates) Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Minimum Wages Ordinance, Employment (Record of Services) Act, Payment of Wages Act, etc.

★ Nearly 72% of the workers have no idea as to the benefits at the time of dismissal/discharge. Most workers rate misconduct as the principal cause of dismissal/discharge.

★ A portion of the workers does not have any idea with regard to leave benefits: such as, return for working on Sundays/Fridays, return for working on festival holidays, annual medical leave, casual leave, basis for annual leave calculation and so on as per Factories Act and Shops and Establishments Act.

★ Only one-fourth of the workers interviewed know the dates of the Independence Day and Victory Day. A very small number of them have the habit of listening to the radio, viewing the T.V. and reading newspaper. Nearly 20% of the workers reported that they did not attend office punctually on the day the interview was taken.

More than 90% of the workers interviewed are members of trade unions. Most of the workers consider trade union to be a body to organise them to realize their demands. Very few of them view trade unions to be an agency to promote labour-management relations, to adopt useful labour welfare programmes and to train workers. Large majority of the workers do not have a correct idea as to the meaning of collective bargaining.

★ Most of the workers have identified "negotiation" as the most preferred means of realizing workers' demands.

★ Workers do not seem to have adequate training against industrial accidents, the incidence of which is quite high. For instance, in sugar, fertilizer & chemical, engineering and paper industries, more than 20% of the workers interviewed had met with occupational mishaps. Most of these are, however, mechanical accidents.

Programme Of Other Bodies : In Bangladesh there were 1160 registered trade unions with a membership of 4,50,606 in 1971; while at present 3945 registered trade unions with total membership of 16,48,783 upto December 1992 are actively

engaged in trade union functions. Besides, 23 registered National Federations of Trade Unions and 97 registered Industrial Federations of Trade Unions as on 31st December, 1992, are also playing dynamic roles in trade union activities of Bangladesh.

The trade unions should feed and develop their own workers' education programme in order to impart adequate knowledge to the rank and file workers about their rights and obligations and on the labour laws of the country to understand their problems and find out solutions to ameliorate their working and service conditions. Accordingly, in Bangladesh some efforts as to workers' education and training are being made by some trade unions with the assistance of some International Agencies like ILO, AAFI, ICFTU, WCL, WFTU, etc. But their efforts are yet to make a remarkable impact in the field with systematic and integrated programme. Recently some national Federations of Trade Unions have formed a platform under the name and style "National Co-ordination Centre for Workers' Education (NCCWE)" from where they have been trying to impart workers' education. This is a very positive step in as much as some federations of trade unions having different ideologies have at least agreed on one aspect and that is the importance of workers' education.

Problems : Indifferent attitudes of both management and workers' organisations in a labour surplus economy like Bangladesh, coupled with a large-scale ignorance about the need for any training and educational programme for workers pose a positive hindrance to successful implementation of workers' education programme of the government. It is often found that managements, of some private enterprises are reluctant to allow their workers time-off for reasons of loss of production. To this adds the high level of illiteracy among the rank and file workers and their general apathy towards improving their standards of living. Lastly, most of the trade unions are busy in bargaining and settlement of industrial disputes, thus leaving practically little or no time and energy for organising workers' education programmes by themselves.

Suggestions

In order to improve the situation, it is suggested that:

i) Both management and workers' unions are required to be motivated towards the need of workers' training programme. This may be done by organizing seminars, workshop, etc. by the government in collaboration with ILO. The employers' association and workers' organisations may also play an important role in achieving this goal.

ii) The management may also give some incentive by way of granting leave with fully pay, sanctioning tea allowance, providing transport and

other physical facilities to trade union officials and workers willing to participate in such training programmes.

iii) Some of the subjects of workers' education training courses may be incorporated in the syllabus of our work-related training centres; namely Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation Training Centres, Technical Training Centres, Tele-Communication Training Centres, Bangladesh-German Technical Training Centre and Bangladesh Institute of Marine Technology. A total period of 4 hours may be allotted for workers' education in the weekly working hours of these institutions during the last four months of the institutional courses.

iv) The establishment of a full-fledged Workers' Education Training Institute may be an important step in the field. A development project designed to raise the status of the Industrial Relations Institute (IRI), Tongi, to the level of a National Institute of Labour Administration (NILA) having, among others, a full-fledged division for workers' education fully equipped with sufficient a number of trained faculty members, research facilities and other equipment in order to organise more vigorously and efficiently workers' education training programmes was approved in the early 80s. But it was shelved on pruning later. It is now time for us all to think if we should undertake a similar project in the field of workers' education and labour administration.

v) Lastly, a semi-autonomous board for Workers' Education consisting of representatives of government, employers' association, trade unions and educationists may be set up with the task of formulating national policies on workers' education and training, executing them in collaboration with the proposed NILA through regional Industrial Relations Institute (IRIs) and evaluating the results.

The need for adequate workers' education should be fully realised by the government, employers and trade unions. The responsibility of the government is to provide compulsory primary education and develop technical training institutes and programmes. The employers should arrange technical and vocational training to the employees. Trade unions should come forward to provide training in trade union principles and practices. Thus it is a matter of joint responsibility.

In Bangladesh, however, the government has undertaken the major portion of this joint responsibility alone. But we are eagerly looking forward to a future when both the employers and trade unions of Bangladesh would equally share the burden of their respective responsibility and obligation in the field of workers' education and training.

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