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Workers' Education And Development

M.A.S. Talukder

WORKERS' education is a part of adult education. While the objective of adult education aims at serving the adult members of the country, workers' education is designed to cover the working population only. But both have common interest and objectives.

Education and development are closely inter-related. The emphasis on education is essential because development is the need of the day. Pope Paul VI once said, "if development is the new name for peace, it is also an age-old synonym for struggle — a gigantic struggle against the tyranny of nature, the sources of disease and hunger, and the man-made evils of ignorance, inequality, discrimination and the exploitation of man by man."

While speaking of the World Employment Programme, David A. Morse, Director General of ILO, in the late sixties stated, "the people of the developing countries must be enabled to participate in development by working for it, and thereby to share in its fruits. To this end the Programme is to aim at the highest possible level of economically and socially sound employment and to increase the value and possible scope of that employment through proper training and through proper conditions. In other words, the programme would aim to put an end to the situation, now common in the developing countries, in which large and growing sections of the population are by-passed by the process of development, knowing neither the promises that it holds, nor the efforts that it demands."

The principles and policies of development are important. The rank and file workers and their leaders must know about them if social and economic development is to be made successful. This also requires that they have full information, motivation and participation in order to understand development. Education is an essential link in the process. This education goes beyond the limits of formal schooling. We may call it economic and social education. We may call it workers' education as well, because our working class people play a vital role as effective agents of change.

In developing countries, the importance of planning in social and economic development is increasing

y recognised. The role of workers' organisation in the preparation and execution of national planning is now acknowledged. This is also a basic pre-requisite for trade union participation. There are, however, other conditions for trade union participation in the development process. This involves their attitudes in terms of objectives in participation and their methods. It then presupposes educational programmes needed for preparing trade union leaders for effective participation in economic and social planning.

The basic trade union objectives are: raising living standards by rapid economic growth and maintenance of full employment. In order to achieve the objectives, they are required to participate effectively in the planning and implementation process of developmental activities. Many trade unionists consider that better working and living conditions, more equitable distribution of income may be achieved through this process.

Trade union participation includes: (a) national level planning; (b) tripartite and other bodies directly associated with planning at national, regional and other levels; (c) institutions indirectly associated with planning and/or implementation e.g., committee on employment, productivity, wages, industrial relations, vocational training etc.; and (d) outside consultation. Workers' leaders should be able to present their case and discuss their views objectively on behalf of the rank and file workers with the planning body. The question of workers' education needs arises in this context.

It is recognised that human resources constitute wealth. But this is not understood only in terms of population figures. Developing countries have already started working for human resources development (HRD). For, development schemes are now-a-days faced with failures, despite highly skilled preparations. Against this back-drop, social and economic planners are considering favourably for common endeavour in the field of training and education in various forms. These may be: teaching to read and write, development of primary and secondary education, vocational training and apprenticeship, universities,

community development programmes, basic and adult education.

Education in all its forms aims at developing knowledge, skill and attitude (KSA). This also helps broaden one's personal dignity. In training the worker with regard to his rights and responsibilities, workers' education plays a vital role. It enables the worker to understand the value and meaning of his efforts in terms of self-improvement. It also helps him evaluate his work objectively and to see how it fits into the total efforts aiming at the improved well-being of all. Labour education helps the working class people establish better human relations in work-place and outside. When a trade union undertakes the task of workers' education, it is directed not only to the strengthening of the organisation, but also promotion and development of working class community as a whole. The same is true of any endeavour undertaken by any agencies in the field of workers' education.

Dedication of mind and heart is the key to success in the field of development. This dedication helps the workers' leaders become fully responsible for ensuring positive results. In the developing countries, the greatest attention is focused in the field of economic activities with a view to improving the qualities of products and services and increasing productivity. This, of course, demands that major efforts should be deployed in vocational and apprenticeship training. But the domain of workers' training and education also needs to be explored with objectively designed programmes. For, technical education alone is not sufficient. It is essential that we understand the need to cultivate the right attitude of the worker in the right direction. If this need can be translated into action, the worker will then become aware of his own dignity and value and of his contribution to the development of the working class people as a whole. Then only a worker feels that he constitutes wealth in development.

The basic objective of workers' education is to help him face his problems with confidence. This education also enables him to realise the complexities of life in an industrial setting and his role in his social group. The primary objectives, such

as, how to write a letter, read wage-sheets, participate in union/committee meetings effectively etc. are, of course, important. But the broader aspects of workers' education centre round the subjects such as knowledge of the undertaking, workers' rights and duties, labour laws, industrial relations, collective bargaining, trade unionism and its role in development, family budget and family planning, elementary knowledge of productivity etc.

Viewed from these objectives, workers' education can influence in a variety of ways the social and economic development of the country. The development of knowledge, skill and attitude of a worker adds to the increase of his human and material resources. The aspects of a workers' family welfare can also be looked into better by well-designed labour education programmes.

Workers' education also appears to be an essential aspect of development in the context of economic programmes that are undertaken by developing countries. It is now recognised that trade unions have an important role to play, that of workers' representatives and of actors of industrial relations in search for economic and social upliftment. It is essential that workers, specially their leaders, should acquire technical knowledge and practical experience. In the absence of these, their strength and determination cannot find expression which is extremely necessary for their recognition.

It is, therefore, recommended that sound social and economic training should be imparted to all trade union levels so that the workers find themselves competent to interpret and express their desirable motives and attitudes.

Any investment in workers' education is a good investment in the context of socio-economic development. In the developing countries, trade union organisations are most often young and poor. They do not have sufficient resources to ensure adequate education to their members. Nor a country which is a victim of under-development is expected to find from among its own resources all the means for educating its citizens. In these circumstances, technical cooperation in the field of labour education is an urgent need.