

University Unionism. Reflection and Commitment

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ABSTRACT

Labor relations establish links between employers and workers and are essential for the smooth running of companies, factories, and service providers. In general, they are the guiding force behind the proper functioning of the labor community and its workplace. The history of labor unions is not easy; its complexity allows us to understand the different movements throughout history in search of better working conditions and social justice. From differences in paid activities to the establishment of working hours, labor relations range from the most basic to the most elaborate activities. In the field of education, it is possible to find that the relations between the academic workforce and the employers are a good example for analyzing the importance of academic unionism, particularly at the university level. In this way, university unionism not only has the challenge of defending working conditions but also develops opportunities for these conditions to improve, not only in the workplace but also as a guarantee of maintaining the functioning of educational institutions and defending the quality of education and the training of students committed to society.

Keywords: Work, union, labor relations, university.

INTRODUCTION

Organized labor has its roots in the formation of labor, trade, and activity communities. It arose as an intrinsic need to defend the human condition through the protection of rights and equality. From the guilds of the 17th century and the trade districts of the 18th century to the great movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, history shows the struggle and organization to avoid occupational hazards, exhausting working hours, child labor, and a lack of commitment to employer obligations [3].

The truth is that deprivation, hunger, unemployment, job instability, and lack of compensation for occupational hazards drove workers, artisans, laborers, and most of all, peasants who had migrated to urban centers, to seek out mutual aid societies and production and consumer cooperatives, centers of speculation, awareness, and struggle for the defense and achievement of their subsistence. In this way, the groups became societies of resistance against employers and the state, representing a possible serious precursor to trade unionism in Mexico [8].

It is worth mentioning that the origin lies in the labor movements that later defined the category of class. The communist economic model promoted the participation of commissions in corporate decision-making and public policy derived from the state toward labor legislation.

In the second half of the 20th century, neoliberalism generated new forms of labor relations with short-term contracts, layoffs, and mass rehiring in order to eliminate employer commitments, avoid continuity, and renounce seniority. Most unions resisted, while others lost the battle under pressure from employers by demanding too much and lacking a vision of the market and production.

As Blanke [1] points out, trade unions in Mexico originated during the development of the welfare state, which benefited the establishment of highly bureaucratized and large-scale organizations and institutions. In some cases, unions became part of the state, and class struggle was replaced by negotiation within the state; union

representation was limited to the union's ability to achieve good economic and material exchanges with the state and employers through large agreements; The representation of workers' interests was indirect, although it did negotiate real wage increases, benefits, job guarantees, and the extension of social security. The democracy formally established in the union statutes had nothing to do with the decisions made by the rank and file, which was controlled but not necessarily illegitimate. Although decisions were difficult, the grassroots struggle for real improvements did not end. In this sense, it is possible to affirm that The transformation of the economy has been profound and encompasses all sectors; macroeconomic and financial stabilization has been underpinned by significant structural changes; the adjustment of public finances, trade liberalization, economic deregulation, financial liberalization, and the process of divestiture of public enterprises. Above all, however, the most serious issue is that this modernization has been achieved by disregarding social interests, even consciously sacrificing them and betting that this neglect will have no repercussions. However, the internationalization of economies has had serious consequences, transforming labor relations and changing workers' perspectives, with significant differences depending, of course, on the role that each country plays in globalization [1].

University unions

In this area and with very similar purposes, educational unionism emerged, within which university unionism, whose characteristics are specific to the activities of higher and upper secondary education taught at universities, is generated through the principle of freedom, whether in teaching or research, the two fields where autonomy bears enormous fruit for society by training professionals and generating knowledge, thus fulfilling the social character of the university [2]. The word “university” comes from the concept of universality, which is the basis of the saying, “Nothing human is alien to me.” The autonomy of public universities is the conscience of the nation. Therefore, the state has an obligation to protect their integrity and encourage their full development. Despite countless limitations, problems, and even attacks on autonomy, university unionism is an example of the labor resistance of academic staff [4].

One of the problems faced by the various university unions lies in budgetary criteria, since the economic sustenance of public universities comes mainly from resources provided by the State. The annual negotiations over budget allocations take on special significance in light of the chain of federal budget cuts that occur year after year. Many voices are raised in defense of their resources, arguing that these are fundamental areas for development; however, these requests from public higher education institutions have not been properly heard, valued, or addressed [5]. Public universities are particularly affected by the substantial reductions in their financial resources; the subsidy that the federal government provides to these institutions is becoming increasingly insufficient, to the detriment of teaching, research, and cultural outreach programs. These economic phenomena, which are completely beyond the control of public universities, are causing a gradual and serious deterioration in higher education in our country. The money currently allocated to public universities is only enough for their subsistence; it does not encourage them to achieve academic excellence [6].

In this sense, we are seeking a way for unions and employers to join forces for the benefit of the university community. For example, through the Federal Labor Law, which establishes that in public and autonomous institutions that provide higher education, labor relations are directed toward seeking social justice among workers and leave aside the perspective of balance between the factors of production, labor, and capital. In universities, there are academic and administrative workers whose labor rights must be respected. However, in the university environment, there are values that must be taken into account for the proper exercise of these rights. In public universities, there is no private capital seeking profit. They are at the service of the nation, serving society without discrimination or prejudice. That is why, in universities, labor relations between workers and institutions seek balance and social justice [9].

Unions of academic and administrative workers at the university, as the case may be, and the leadership of those unions, can only be made up of workers who provide their services at each university. Workers from different universities cannot join together in a university union. This provision helps to preserve university autonomy [7].

In contrast, general legislation provides for industrial unions, made up of workers who provide their services in two or more companies in the same industrial branch, and national industry unions, made up of workers who provide their services in one or more companies in the same industrial branch, located in two or more federal entities.

Unions at each university may be for academic staff, administrative staff, etc. In collective agreements, labor provisions relating to academic workers do not extend to administrative workers, nor do labor provisions for administrative workers cover academic workers, except where expressly agreed in collective agreements [3].

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to consider that the struggle to improve working conditions is a long road. The beginning of the labor relationship was formed through dissatisfaction with the deplorable conditions in which the work was carried out. The participation of labor organizations through unions has narrowed the gap between inadequate and fair conditions [5].

In this sense, societies require decent unions because they visualize and materialize short-, medium-, and long-term benefits. Social justice is manifested through collective bargaining agreements.

In the case of academic unions, mainly university unions, they not only fight for better economic and working conditions, but also face the challenges of raising the level of society through decent higher education, committed to society from a universal vision of culture, science, and comprehensive knowledge.

University unionism cannot and must not be silenced; it must fight and focus its energies on improving the working conditions of its members; that is its natural and legitimate function. Universities are the mind of the country, they are the temple of knowledge from which the voice and reason that guide society emerge.

That is why we must learn from the past, reflect on the present, and visualize the future through university union work in order to achieve labor and institutional stability and consolidate the university project with firmness and conviction.

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