

Labour Market Reforms: The Trade Union Response.
18-20, July 2007, New Delhi, India

The 14th Asian Regional Meeting of the ILO launched an “**Asian Decent Work Decade**” with objective of “realizing decent work in Asia”. The tripartite delegates of Asian Countries, after having deliberated on the Director General’s two reports describing the situation in the region with respect to “decent work” and “poverty eradication” resolved to commit to “the achievement of specific decent work outcomes in accordance with the respective national circumstances and priorities. The Meeting, which resolved to cooperate at the regional level wherein joint actions, sharing of knowledge and expertise would contribute in making decent work a reality by 2015”, called on ILO to convene regional events addressing various issues related to Labour Market Reforms, Rapid Changes in the Labour Legislation, Growing Informal Economy, Youth Employment and Decent Work for all.

To follow up on these conclusions it is proposed to hold a seminar on “Labour Market Reforms: The Trade Union Response”, to be held in New Delhi, India from 18-20 July, 2007.

Context & Rationale

The ongoing globalisation and inherent competition and informalisation are causing untold hardship, particularly to the working class. The decent work deficits have become more evident in the newly globalized economies, especially in the Asia Region. The entrepreneurs are demanding reforms in the national labour markets so as to remove rigidities. However, the workers and the unions, in the background of expanding informal sector and the jobless growth in the post reform era, argue that such flexibility is not about decent work and it only encourages insecurity of employment and the reduction in strength and influence of organised labour.

Labour Market Reforms are a significant feature of the socio-economic and political environment. The Governments, with support of business, are pushing for an increasingly flexible labour market, significantly affecting the industrial relations practises at workplace as also at national levels. Trade unions are contesting some of these changes as it adversely affects their members. For example: the **Australian** trade unions are campaigning vigorously for the revision of the labour laws to restore the protection the previous legislation provided to workers.

New Zealand faced similar crisis a few years back when an experiment was carried out which had drastic results not only on the organised workers but also on the economic development in the country. The pattern of rapid economic development in **China** is influencing the future of labour market relations in several countries in the region. A noteworthy positive development in the industrial relations has been success in organising trade unions in Wal-Mart stores in China. **India** with incredible rate of economic growth is also considering bringing about changes in its labour laws, particularly in the Trade Union Act and the Industrial Disputes Act. Similar trends are seen in other South Asian Countries as well. **Korea and Japan** has seen in recent years an increasing number of workers falling within the category of precarious employment conditions i.e. part-time, casual and irregular workers, having almost no legislative protections. In **Thailand** the unions have been facing difficulties in

organising and providing protection to contract and sub-contracted workers, casual and part time workers. In many cases these workers are beyond the purview of union coverage.

At a recent meeting of the ASEAN group of countries a need was expressed to adopt a recommendation to reform labour laws, arguing that such changes will promote business and create employment. Consideration was even being given to establishing a set of guidelines to govern labour.

Workshop Contents:

In view of these developments in the region, it is important to understand the challenges the trade unions are facing in the various countries. As such the Workshop will address following issues, critically examining how unions are dealing with various issues relating to labour market reforms, drawing lessons from good practises in the region and strengthening their knowledge base, in order to achieve our goal of Decent Work for women and men in today's global economy

Specifically, the workshop participants will: [a] Debate issues relating to labour market reforms: productivity, skills development, collective bargaining, organising amongst atypical workers and young workers, changes in labour legislation, despatch workers, growing informal economy, migration (within and outside the country) Occupational Safety and Health, Organising in Export Processing Zones, etc. [b] Exchange experiences to identify good practices in the region to stimulate regional and sub regional initiatives [c] Establish a knowledge base network by conducting studies and research to reinforce the sharing of knowledge and experiences in the region as a significant contribution in advancing the Decent Work Decade.

Discussion Papers & Documentation:

A number of case studies on the trade union responses to labour market reforms will be carried out in selected countries. This may include Australia, India, Korea, Malaysia and China. These case studies will be presented, examined and discussed during the workshop. The workshop deliberations could form follow up actions / activities at the national and lower levels.