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Revitalization Strategy of Labor Movements

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1. The stagnation of trade union movement is an international phenomenon. The acceleration of globalization and technological innovation, the expanding predominance of service industries in the economies of advanced industrialised countries and the concomitant shifts in the composition of employment, and the deepening of neoliberal policy climate in the context of economic slow-down, which have prevailed since the 1980s, have all contributed to the stagnation of trade union movement in most countries across the world. This phenomenon has been captured through such indicators as the decline in union density, the weakening of political and social influence, and decentralisation of collective bargaining have been, among others.

The trade union movements in different countries have, however, since 1990s, developed and undertaken a variety of "revitalisation" strategies to wake out of the stagnation. The specific shape of the revitalisation strategy were informed by the specific nature of the challenge the unions faced, the characteristics of the industrial relations system in which the unions were constituted, and the historical identity individual trade union movement espoused. However, organising efforts, internal innovation, social partnership, strengthening of political campaign activities, and extension of solidarity with civil society and community networks have featured as common components in most of the varied strategies. The evidence of these common initiatives points to the existence of some common challenge that courses through the country-specific situations the trade union movements in different countries have found themselves in.

This study examines the strategic responses of the trade unions in the selected countries have undertaken in the face of the challenges faced by the international labour movement. It focuses on identifying lesson to be gained from the comparative survey for the trade union movement in Korea which is also found to face similar challenges.

2. The second chapter of this study categorises various revitalisation strategies of unions in different countries, and outlines the various insights and discussions on these efforts arising from industrial relations practitioners and experts. The various revitalisation strategies can be distinguished as efforts aimed at redistributing power and resources through organising, organisational restructuring, partnership, and stepped-up political activities, and efforts to forge new patterns of solidarity with diverse range of actors through initiatives to form coalitions with social movements and outreaching international solidarity. These revitalisation efforts have given rise to the prominence of two distinguishable impulses: "organising model" which aims to build a union movement of grassroots membership activism in the context of decentralisation; and "social movement unionism" which emphasises solidarity with social movements and spatial intervention in both international and local terrain.

3. The third chapter examines the revitalisation strategies in four countries –UK, U.S., Germany, and Italy – where unions are constituted in significantly different industrial relations systems. In surveying the revitalisation strategies of unions in different types of industrial relations systems, it provides insights into the specific components of the different strategies and an opportunity to explore the inter-relatedness of the common challenges, varied institutional and organisation conditions, and the diversity of strategic responses. Thus, it paves the way to deepen the understanding of the context of revitalisation strategies.

(1) The revitalisation strategy developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries revolve around organising strategy. The new trade union movement strategy in the UK emerged through the initiative of the Trade Union Congress, the trade union national centre, in 1993, calling for "Relaunch" and "New Unionism". The new initiative was composed of many dimensions, such as, internal re-organisation, modification of union strategy, organising, readjustment of unions' relations with the Labour Party, commitment to labour-management partnership, strengthening of network with civil society organisations, and consolidation of communication initiatives, including media interface. The British unions concentrated on social partnership and organising strategy, in particular, in their revitalisation efforts.

On the other hand, the revitalisation efforts in the U.S. were centred mostly on organising aimed at stepping up efforts for membership recruitment. The process gave rise to new conceptualisation, such as, "organising model" and "social movement

unionism". There have also been significant organising achievements by such unions as SEIU, HERE, CWA, and UNITE.

There were, however, significant differences between the two Anglo-Saxon countries in the way the revitalisation strategy was undertaken. In the UK, the coming into government by the Labour Party, which has been traditionally identified with the trade union movement, provided a favourable environment, enabling social partnership and organising endeavours to unfold in mutually reinforcing manner. On the other hand, the absence of labour-friendly political party and stringent anti-unionism of employers gave rise to endeavours that combine grassroots activism and other campaign activities.

(2) The revitalisation strategies in Germany and Italy, on the other hand, focused on restoring the union influence through social partnership, especially through macro-level social consultation mechanisms. Unlike in the Anglo-Saxon countries, organising – especially recruitment of new membership – was not a central priority. German unions turned their attention to social partnership endeavours on macro-economic policies, through such initiative as "Alliance for Jobs" (in full: "Alliance for Job-Creation and Qualification; *Buendnis fuer Arbeit und Ausbildung*) and "Agenda 2010" which the unions pursued with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) that came to power in 1998. The policy concertation with the ruling SPD government fizzled out, however, without significant achievements.

In Italy, the "leftist" trade unions found in the upheaval brought about by the fall of the socialist states in East Europe, the reconfiguration of the political parties, and economic crisis, an opportunity to redefine their ideological orientation and strategy. In seizing the political opportunity the unions were able to enhance their social influence. The union revitalisation endeavours emerged out of the abandonment of class struggle orientation by the CGIL – regarded as the "leftist" trade union centre – to adopt a strategy of co-determination. The union movement navigated through the re-organisation of the welfare state and the labour market that had reigned through 1990s by pursuing social pacts and new industrial relations framework based on social concertation strategy.

(3) A comparative survey of the union revitalisation strategies in the four countries brings forth the following conclusions. First, the differences in the political and institutional environment greatly influence the differences in the substance and effectiveness of strategies adopted by the unions in their revitalisation endeavours.

Second, the effectiveness of an organising strategy is greatly enhanced when it is combined with efforts aimed at institutional, organisational, and orientational innovation, over and above campaigns directed at grassroots-level organising.

The fourth chapter undertakes a critical overview of the strategies –their formulation in terms of process and substance – for trade union movement development adopted by the two trade union national centres in Korea. It found that the development strategy of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which pursued twin goals of industrial unionism and political empowerment, was more successful in terms of its implementation. The interaction between the three factors – namely, widely shared commitment to the strategic goals throughout the organisation, consistency and persistence in the endeavour, and institutional factors –contributed to the success. However, these same factors were found to be, in reflection, the very causes for the general shortcomings in the implementation of the development strategies set out by the two national centres. It can be concluded that the effective implementation of the development strategies of the trade union movement in Korea could be enhanced when unions move away from the rigidity of insisting on "one best way" but become fully committed to giving life to (and managing/facilitating) the "process" of participation and consensus building in strategy formulation and implementation.

The fifth chapter can be regarded as the conclusion of the overall study, where a comparative review of the revitalisation strategies of unions in other countries and Korea is undertaken with a view to highlighting lessons for the Korean unions.

The development strategy of the Korean unions centres on industrial unionism and political empowerment. These are seen as the vehicles for enhancing the unions' representative capacity with regards to the workers in irregular employment and small, medium, and micro enterprises; consolidating their bargaining power in the labour market (through industry-level collective bargaining); and increasing their political and social influence. Social partnership strategy, which feature prominently in most of the union revitalisation strategies in the advanced industrialised countries, on the other hand, has failed to find stable currency midst on-again, off-again attempts and sustained controversy since its initial emergence in 1998. While solidarity with other social classes and groups which has long historical precedence remains relatively strong, unions have not been able to build stable alliances and solidarity with so-called new social movements. International solidarity, similarly, has not gained greater currency in qualitative terms despite its relative growth compared to the past.

A key pre-requisite for the successful implementation of the strategic initiatives is the establishment of corresponding trade union movement identity. The desirable orientation for the Korean trade union movement appears to be clear to all concerned: overcome the entrenched economism associated with enterprise unionism and the damaging impact of divisive politicism; secure appropriate balance for unions located in the triangular framework of institution, organisation, and movement; and enhance representativeness, bargaining power, and influence with an aim to actively pursue progressive social reform. This calls for a greater and secure supply of resources from class solidarity and socio-political solidarity which can be utilised for more forceful role vis-a-vis the market, society, and the state. This may be encapsulated as "social unionism" or "social solidarity unionism".

Pursuing the development strategy may constitute an unprecedented challenge for the trade union movement in Korea. While the strategies espoused – nominally or in effect –by the trade union movement in Korea can be said to call for a comprehensive and radical shift in view of its current state, the internal and external environments within which the strategy is being contemplated are extremely unfavourable and inhospitable. This has meant that unions have met with severe difficulties in rational and efficient allocation of human and material resources appropriate for the strategic objectives. Furthermore, unions have encountered conflicts and tensions at each stage of the course of strategic endeavours. An effective management of the strategic transition process would not be complete without conscious efforts to design specific and well-defined implementation strategy, strategic coordination, clear understanding of the order of priorities, clear delineation of roles for the various different levels of organisation, and deliberate commitment to active process of deliberation and communication, and democratic concentration.