

The Last Breath of Trade Unions: An Analysis of the Sinking Ship Without the Captain to Rescue

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ABSTRACT: The study aims to explore the significance, relevance, and sustainability of modern trade unionism in the current complex global labor market, characterized by the swift evolution of work dynamics. It delves into the historical significance, contemporary challenges, and potential future trajectories of trade unions globally. The research study traces the emergence and evolution of trade unions, highlighting their pivotal role in advocating for workers' rights amidst industrialization, colonization, and social change. While acknowledging their historical achievements, the review discusses trade unions' existential threats and declining influence in the modern economic landscape. Key findings of the study include unions swiftly approaching their demise and lacking the leadership to rescue them, difficulty adapting to changing workplace dynamics, deficiencies in social dialogue skills during negotiations and trade unions are operational and not strategic. The authors employed a secondary research approach to analyze the subject matter. The study offers recommendations emphasizing the importance of prioritizing job security, adopting a collaborative approach to negotiations, considering participation in labor laws that decrease labor expenses, and creating strategies to penetrate emerging markets in alternative forms of employment to address the challenges.

KEYWORDS: Challenges; Change; Employment; Rights; Trade Unions; Workers

I. INTRODUCTION

Trade unions serve as prominent public entities that merge the workforce from diverse occupations (Bekbutayeva, 2024). This author further describes the primary aim of unions as protecting the economic and socio-cultural rights and members' interests. Trade unions foster the growth of a constructive and benevolent economy, ultimately benefiting society by promoting social justice in the workplace (Bekbutayeva, 2024). According to Razak (2024), the rise of trade unions played an integral role in empowering workers to voice their concerns and engage in social dialogue with their employers through collective bargaining. This action led to significant working conditions improvements and created a more positive work environment for employees. Dillard et al. (2023) assert that with the support of trade unions, workers have been able to negotiate better wages, benefits, and working hours, contributing to a better quality of life for many individuals. Additionally, trade unions have helped to establish workplace safety regulations, which have reduced the risk of accidents and injuries at work (Dillard et al., 2023). In essence, the rise of trade unions has been a positive development for workers and has contributed to a more equitable and supportive work environment. In this regard, employees' labor rights were advanced and developed for the benefit of the working class.

The labor rights movement has its roots in the Industrial Revolution, marked by abysmal working conditions, insufficient remuneration, and inadequate protection for workers (Eneh et al., 2024). As a result, labor movements and collective actions were established to advocate for equitable pay, reasonable working hours, and safer work environments to combat these issues (Dillard et al., 2023). Thus, the labor rights movement played a significant role in shaping the modern workplace and contributed immensely to the advancement of society. However, Hunt and Connolly (2023) underscore that trade unions across the globe are experiencing several enduring long-term challenges that pose a threat to their pertinence, power, and legality. These issues require careful consideration and strategic planning for effective management. The ongoing evolution of the global economy, changes in work, and shifts in societal attitudes toward collective bargaining contribute to the tribulations that trade unions are currently facing. Thus, trade unions must proactively adapt to these changing circumstances and leverage new strategies and approaches to maintain relevance and influence to remain viable and effective in the contemporary business landscape.

While trade unions are essential in managing the employer-employee relationship, this study suggests that trade unions prioritize short-term operational issues over long-term strategic ones. This assertion led to a gap in modern trade unionism, which must be pinpointed and addressed to ensure the long-term success of trade unions. Based on this view, this study identified a significant gap in the current trade unions' approach to addressing workers' issues, causing a plunge in their impact. The weakness in the current system presents an

opportunity for unions to re-evaluate their strategies and develop innovative ways to support and advocate for workers in the ever-changing workplace environment. However, despite the critical role trade unions are charged and anticipated to play, this study asserts that unions fail dismally to deliver on this aspect.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Past

During the 18th century, England witnessed an unprecedented wave of industrialization that dramatically transformed the country's economic landscape. The rapid expansion of manufacturing industries led to the rise of new and diverse societal roles, including women, children, rural workers, and immigrants, who flocked to the cities searching for employment opportunities (Mitchell, 1907). However, these groups faced significant challenges and exploitation from their employers, who often paid them low wages and subjected them to harsh working conditions (Gupta, 2020). In response to these challenges, the workforce spontaneously organized into unions to protect their rights and pursue better working conditions. Despite facing opposition from employers and the government, these unions persisted and ultimately emerged as a critical trade union area for growth (Gupta, 2020). However, the journey was not smooth, as the unions faced numerous legal charges under various conspiracy decrees and corporate regulations (Gupta, 2020)

Despite these obstacles, the diverse and largely unskilled workforce continued to push forward and eventually formed the first working-class unions by the 1810s. These unions linked employees from various occupations and joined forces in solidarity to liberate workers from work-related issues. One of the earliest unions was the General Union of Trades, also known as the Philanthropic Society, founded in Manchester in 1818 (Mitchell, 1907). This action marked a significant milestone in the history of England's labor movement, as it represented the collective power of working-class people to organize, fight for their rights, and bring about social change.

In the African context, the emergence of trade unions during the decolonization era was a significant milestone in the struggle for African self-determination. Although colonial powers such as the British and French initially promoted the formation of unions to shift workers' focus from political activism to industrial relations, African trade unions rapidly grew and became crucial societal pillars. Initially, African unions cooperated with their European counterparts, but as the quest for independence intensified, they distanced themselves from their partners (Zezeza, 1986). These unions were involved in mass protests that supported the leaders' fight for liberation. As such, their contribution significantly fuelled the pace of decolonization more than any other social force (Kwasi and Kwabena, 2022).

During the 1870s and 1880s, South Africa underwent a period of colonization, which displaced African tribes from their ancestral lands. This displacement led to the forced relocation of indigenous people, who had no choice but to abandon their homes and lands. As a result, African workers were pushed into hard manual labor while white workers secured skilled and managerial positions, creating a clear divide in the workforce (McGowan and Kordan, 1981). The mining industry in South Africa gained immense power during this period, shaping the country's economic landscape with a system characterized by white monopoly capital and the exploitation of cheap African labor (Labour Research Services, 2021). This exploitation resulted in the hiring of African migrant male workers from designated areas, forcing them to work under intense conditions for meagre wages. The system was based on racial capitalism and fuelled the conflict between labor and capital, leading to the emergence of trade unions. These unions played a critical role in challenging the oppressive system, comprising a diverse workforce that included white and African workers, men and women, and urban industrial workers alongside commuter and migrant laborers (Labour Research Services, 2021). Despite these challenges, these trade unions worked relentlessly to fight for workers' rights to improve their working conditions. They succeeded in creating a more equitable system, and their efforts continue to inspire workers globally to fight for their rights and to stand up against exploitation and oppression.

2.2 The Present

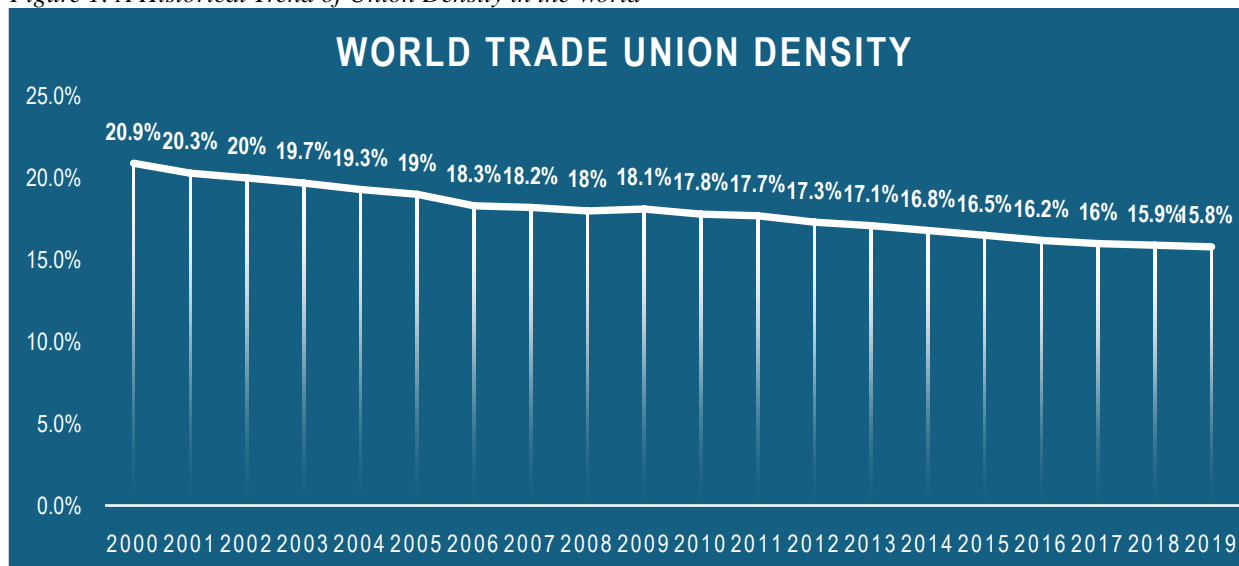
Throughout modern history, organized trade unions have played an essential role in safeguarding workers' rights. They have been the collective voice of workers, resonating against the chaotic backdrop of industrialization and economic evolution. According to Kwasi and Kwabena (2022), in the African continent, trade unionism emerged during the struggle for decolonization, highlighting the critical role played by trade unions in advocating for workers' rights. Since the establishment of the General Union of Trades (Gupta, 2020), trade unions have tirelessly championed fair wages, safe and favorable working conditions, and equitable treatment for workers worldwide.

Despite their significant contribution, trade unions appear confronted with existential threats that are a menace to their existence in today's world of work. Supporting this claim, Mbandlwa and Dorasamy (2021) suggest that trade unions, once formidable defenders of workers' rights, are grappling with these threats. Therefore, they must address these challenges to guarantee a perpetuation of their critical role in protecting employees' rights, particularly in an ever-changing economic landscape. The authors further opine that, as we

progress into the 21st century, the economy is becoming increasingly complex and dynamic. As a result, it is becoming more evident that the traditional pillars of union strength are crumbling, with unfavorable labor markets and economic circumstances creating immense obstacles for the trade union movement (Mbandlwa and Dorasamy, 2021). This challenge has led to a decline in the political appeal, prestige, and power of unions over time. In other words, despite their long-standing history of advocating for worker rights and protections, unions are battling to maintain their relevance in the changing economic conditions, making it laborious to represent worker interests and secure better working conditions effectively.

The data utilized in the graph below was sourced from OECD 2022. However, it's important to note that the graphical representation(s) within this material were produced solely by the author.

Figure 1: A Historical Trend of Union Density in the World



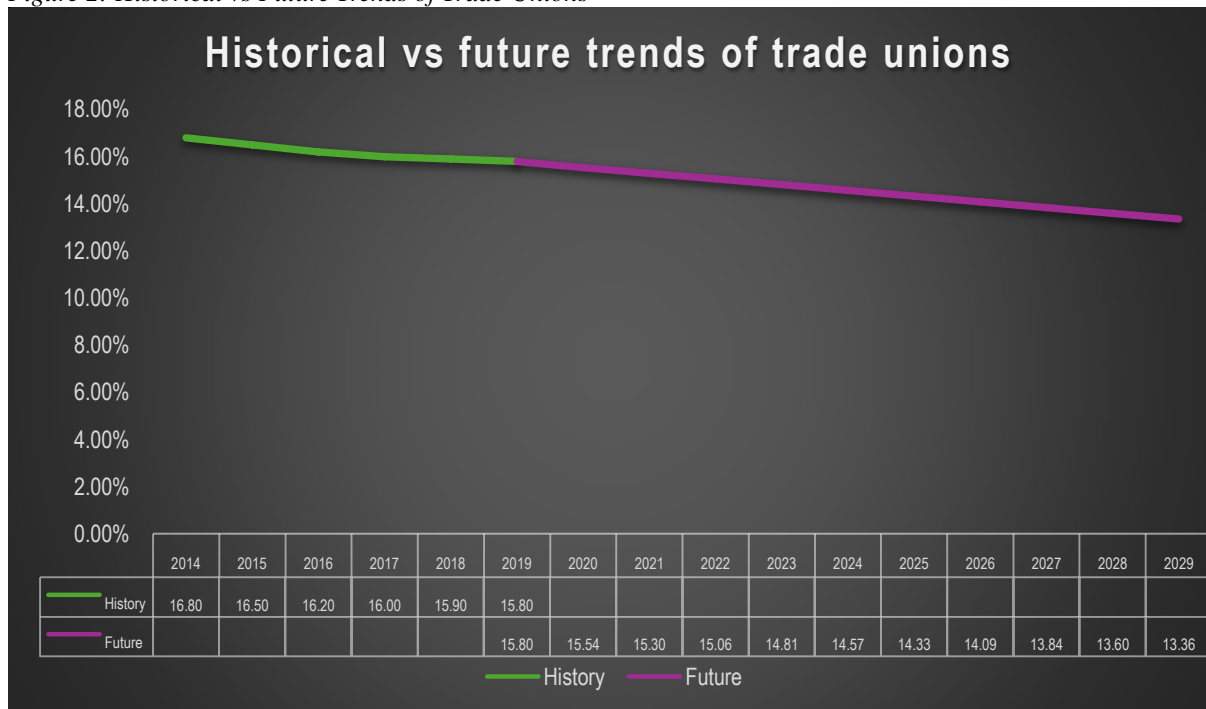
Source: Author

The graph presented above provides a visual representation of the changing trend of trade union density worldwide from 2000 to 2019, revealing a gradual decline in workers' participation in organized labor movements over this period. At the beginning of the 21st century, trade union density was at a robust level of 20.9%, indicating a significant proportion of the global workforce's involvement in collective bargaining and labor rights advocacy. However, the collective bargaining power and membership of trade unions have been gradually eroding on a global scale, leading to a decrease in trade union density. The decline in trade union density has been more apparent in the latter half of the period, raising concerns about the future of organized labor movements. Nonetheless, this presents a new opportunity for trade unions to revitalize themselves and explore inventive and practical approaches to engage with the workforce, rebuilding their collective bargaining power and membership. With this approach, they can better champion workers' rights and improve labor conditions across various industries and regions.

According to the data presented, there has been a consistent decrease in trade union density since 2010. This decline indicates widespread changes occurring in labor markets and socioeconomic structures across the globe. These changes have significantly impacted the labor market dynamics, posing new challenges for traditional trade unions. The rise of non-traditional employment arrangements, such as freelance and gig work, has also contributed to this trend. Moreover, the global COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the labor market, with many industries experiencing significant disruptions and job losses. In another sense, the shift towards remote work, accelerated by COVID-19, negatively impacted trade union density. For instance, with more workers telecommuting, there are fewer opportunities for traditional union organizing in the workplace. Moreover, the development of automation and digitalization has led to the displacement of workers in some industries, further eroding traditional trade union membership. Finally, the globalization of production and services has created new challenges for unions, as corporations can now relocate to countries with lower labor costs. Given these challenges, trade unions must find creative ways to adapt to these evolving paradigms to remain relevant and influential. This action may require new approaches to organizing and collective bargaining and a willingness to embrace their challenges and forms of representation.

The historical data presented in the graph below was sourced from OECD (2022). Forecasted information and graphical representations included were developed solely by the author.

Figure 2: Historical vs Future Trends of Trade Unions



Source: Author

2.3 The Future

The graph above further shows a projected decline in the percentage of workers represented by trade unions from 2020 to 2029. This trend reflects the changing nature of the labor market, with remote work and other non-traditional arrangements becoming more common. For trade unions to remain effective, they must adapt to these changes and find new modes to represent the interests of workers. However, this requires leadership capable of navigating the complex challenges of the modern labor market. While the decline in union representation may be concerning, it also presents an opportunity for trade unions to modernize and evolve. However, this will require a willingness to embrace new challenges and a commitment to quality leadership. If trade unions can rise to these challenges, they will continue to play a vital role in shaping the future of organized labor. If they fail to do so, they may fade away in the coming years. However, this study argues that the survival of trade unions in the labor market is under threat, and there is a high probability that they might become obsolete. Despite their historical significance, trade unions are experiencing a downward trend, and there is a lack of active intervention to address this issue. The study suggests that trade unions have no choice but to adopt new approaches and tactics to remain viable in the labor market because failure to act on this challenge could lead to their extinction.

The data shows a consistent decline in trade union membership rates. In 2024, the projected density is 14.57% and is anticipated to decrease further to 14.33% in 2025 and 14.09% in 2026. This trend is attributed to several factors, including shifts in the labor market towards more precarious work arrangements and technological advancements that require new skills. The forecasted membership rates continue to plummet, reaching 13.6% in 2028 and 13.36% in 2029. These figures indicate a troubling downward spiral for trade unions, confirming the study’s assertion that trade unions are sinking amidst a sea of challenges and obstacles. Overall, this study views the future of trade unions as being bleak if something is not done and their strategies are not improved based on some of the factors that contribute to their predicament in the current study.

2.4 Trade Unions Positive Impact in the Workplace

The concept of collective bargaining power is a crucial aspect of labor relations. Workers join and form trade unions to gain a stronger voice in negotiations with their employers. This increased leverage can lead to better wages, benefits, and working conditions. Moreover, unions provide a sense of solidarity and support among workers, which can be particularly valuable during times of conflict or crisis. Overall, the success of a trade union is a testament to the power of organized labor and the role it plays in ensuring the interests of workers.

The labor laws and labor relations in Ireland, Italy, and Sweden are a testament to the significance of voluntarism, collective liberation, and contractual statutes and employment working conditions (Paolucci et al., 2022; Armaroli & Tomassetti, 2022; Rönmar & Iossa, 2022). This assertion implies that these countries adopted a unique and efficient approach toward employment contracts and collective agreements. Resultantly, they were

successful in ensuring fair and equitable treatment of employees. Notably, it is a remarkable achievement that other countries can learn from and adopt in their labor laws and labor relations by emphasizing collective bargaining and contractual obligations.

The legalistic tradition of labor law and industrial relations in France and Spain has resulted in a robust system of statutory regulation governing trade unions, collective bargaining, and employee influence (Muñoz Ruiz et al., 2023). These authors further indicated that this system extends to state intervention in industrial relations, ensuring that the rights and interests of workers are well-protected. According to Muñoz Ruiz et al. (2023), this regulatory framework has proven effective in maintaining a fair and productive workplace environment.

Opote and Mahmoud (2022) shed light on the evolving role of trade unions in developing nations. They argue that plant-level agreements are gaining popularity, as they serve as an effective tool to improve employment conditions. This trend challenges the conventional notion of collective bargaining, widely acknowledged by various governments. Therefore, it is imperative to concede and appreciate this novel approach towards collective bargaining as it promotes fair and equitable working conditions for all.

Recently, Pulignano, Thompson, and Dorflinger (2020) investigated the impact of trade unions on preventing capital from exploiting existing institutions in logistics multinationals in Germany and Belgium. The researchers discovered that trade unions were prosperous in thwarting capital's endeavors to evade and manipulate existing establishments, albeit to varying degrees and in different forms, depending on the industrial relations settings of each country. The authors' previous research on third-party logistics in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany similarly concluded that differences in institutional regulatory frameworks among the countries studied resulted in a relative lack of worker mobilization in the organizations researched. These findings underscore the importance of vigorous institutional laws and the trade unions' crucial role in ensuring compliance.

Furthermore, Bekbutayeva(2024) uncovered that the trade union movement in Kazakhstan has been facing significant challenges in recent years. This scholar further revealed that in 2014, a regressive law on trade unions was adopted, making it difficult for unions to operate freely. Furthermore, in 2017, independent unions faced direct attacks, further exacerbating the situation. Despite these obstacles, trade unions in Kazakhstan have been actively advocating for workers' rights and interests. They have been collaborating closely with regional and sectoral trade union groups to ensure that workers' voices are heard, and their rights are protected (Bekbutayeva, 2024).

The Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) is the most significant trade union organization in the country (Bekbutayeva, 2024). According to this academic, it plays a crucial role in shaping socio-economic protection, labor law, and labor protection policies. The FTURK represents workers in various sectors aiming to improve workers' living standards in Kazakhstan. Therefore, it is essential to support the trade unions in their efforts to ensure that the voices of workers are heard, and their rights are protected. Strengthening workers' rights in Kazakhstan will benefit the working class and the country's economy and society.

2.5 Organized Labor Deficiencies

Maccarrone et al. (2019) discovered a trend of decreasing union density in Ireland over the years, from 55% in 1988 to 24% in 2016/2017. This reduction highlights the need for unions to take this issue seriously and work towards creating a conducive environment that encourages unionization and safeguards workers' rights. It is imperative to prioritize the workers' interests and protection, necessitating proactive measures towards promoting union membership. However, this will not be a comfortable task to execute in these tough economic times if unions do not thoroughly deal with their challenges effectively to handle this dilemma.

Devereux (2020) highlights that South Africa has made significant progress in labor laws following the end of apartheid in the late 1990s. However, despite the implementation of pro-poor labor legislation, non-compliance by farm owners remains a persistent subject. This author also underscores that in the Western and Northern Cape, some farm workers' labor rights were violated through abuse and exploitation, highlighting the need for a continued effort to create a safe and equitable work environment for all workers in South Africa (Devereux, 2020).

In 2015, Germany implemented a law that mandated a minimum wage for all workers (Haipeter & Rosenbohm, 2022). This finding is twofold. On the one hand, it suggests that this legislation was introduced as a response to the decline of collective bargaining, resulting in many workers receiving wages below a fair and reasonable level. The goal of the minimum wage law was to ensure that all workers, regardless of their occupation or industry, would receive a minimum compensation for their labor. This measure was designed and implemented to prevent the exploitation of workers and to promote social justice by reducing income inequality. The introduction of the minimum wage law was a significant step forward for Germany, as it helped to establish a baseline for fair compensation that all employers must meet (Haipeter & Rosenbohm, 2022).

However, on the other hand, it signals that the introduction of the minimum wage law also highlighted the erosion of collective bargaining in Germany. Collective bargaining traditionally played a crucial role in setting wages and working conditions for many workers in the country. The decline of this practice has made it more difficult for workers to negotiate fair wages and benefits and has contributed to the rise of income inequality in Germany. While the minimum wage law was a critical step toward promoting social justice and reducing income inequality, there is still much work to be done to address the root causes of these issues, including the erosion of collective bargaining (Haipeter& Rosenbohm, 2022).

2.6 Bureaucracy Surrounding Organized Labour

The bureaucracy involved in dealing with trade unions can be detrimental to the well-being of workers and the overall economy. In the context of ensuring better working conditions, institutional perspectives (Dörflinger, Pulignano&Vallas, 2021) suggest that having a highly regulated industrial relations system and a workers' representation setup, as exhibited in Argentina's formal labor market where Mercado Libre operates, can be effective. However, such systems can also hinder collective participation, depriving workers of having their voices heard through trade unions. Therefore, labour relations stakeholders, particularly the state, employers, and employees should foster a culture of open communication and collaboration between employers and employees. This approach will empower workers to voice their concerns and have them promptly and efficiently addressed, which will ultimately lead to a more positive and productive working environment, contributing to the economy and creating jobs.

Similarly, Lukyanchuk (2020) argues that the absence of legal measures in Ukraine that recognize social partnership and its replacement with social dialogue has led to a decline in the influence of trade unions on social security policies. The shift from social coalition to social dialogue has resulted in an inadequacy of trade union governance and a lack of adequate representation for the interests of workers in social protection policies. Therefore, it is essential to develop effective legislative mechanisms that recognize social partnerships and provide a platform for trade unions to have a more significant impact on social protection policies to address this issue. Such mechanisms must ensure fair representation of trade unions and their members while safeguarding the interests of other stakeholders in the social security system. The development of such measures is critical for promoting social protection and ensuring that workers' rights are adequately represented and protected in the decision-making processes related to social policies. Essentially, creating a better work environment for all requires collaboration, particularly in labour relations, where unions advocate for workers' rights. However, unions are incapacitated to solve the challenges they face in isolation. Issues such as unfair wages, inadequate job security, and unsafe working conditions, among others, require all stakeholders, including employers and the state, to work together.

All parties involved in labour relations can prioritize the well-being of citizens over their interests by working collaboratively. This endeavor will potentially build a society that values everyone's existence and sustains the economy. Employers can provide safe and conducive work environments where employees' rights are respected. Unions can constructively fight for workers' rights and ensure employers comply with necessary regulations and policies. The state can provide sound labor legislation to ensure fair wages, job security, and safe working conditions, inter alia. Collaboration between the state, employers, and unions has a ripple effect that benefits all. It leads to a more harmonious workplace, translating to increased productivity and economic growth. These parties can achieve a more equitable distribution of resources, promote social justice, and ultimately build a better future for all by working together. It is vital to note that job losses impact not only unions but also the state. Therefore, all parties need to embrace collaboration as a means of achieving common goals in the ER domain.

Czazasty (2022) claim that Poland has undergone significant changes in labor law and industrial relations, mainly as a result of democratic transformation, enlargement, and marketization processes. These changes have given rise to a fragmented collective bargaining landscape (Czazasty, 2022) that warrants close attention, given its potential impact on the country's labor market.

The abovementioned issues shed light on the limitations of unions in various countries, implying a need for unions to consider them seriously. In summary, these crises offer valuable insights into some areas where unions must focus their attention and improve their functioning.

2.7 Trade Union Lack of Innovation

The body of legal principles and regulations governing the relationship between employers and employees, commonly known as labor law, has undergone significant transformations to meet the exigencies of contemporary work environments (Liukkunen, 2021). This assertion created the imperative for unions to adapt their structures, practices, and policies to align with these contemporary complexities. However, this study suggests that unions struggle intensely to keep pace with these changes, failing to adapt effectively. The evolving nature of work brought about a range of challenges, including the emergence of the gig economy, remote working arrangements, and non-traditional work arrangements, as previously mentioned, among others.

These developments require unions to restructure their operations and strategies to cater to the needs of a more diverse and fluid workforce. Despite this, unions have been slow to adapt and continue to rely on traditional models that are no longer adequate. Regardless, this study contends that contemporary trade unionism has shifted its focus towards operational aspects rather than strategic ones. This approach has led them to face multiple issues, as they have failed to understand that the techniques that worked in the past are no longer effective in the current scenario. Therefore, trade unions must adopt a more strategic approach to overcome the challenges of the modern-day labor market.

Correspondingly, Van der Walt (2019) opines that in Africa, the current socio-economic climate has shifted significantly from the post-war era, during which substantial economic and social reforms were adapted and successfully implemented. As such, the conditions that enabled these reforms, the 'golden age' of post-war capitalism, no longer exist (Van der Walt, 2019). This assertion highlights the stark differences between the contemporary economic landscape and that of the past. The implications of this shift are significant and warrant further analysis to comprehend the current situation and identify potential strategies for future reforms.

In Germany, membership in trade unions continues to hold the essence in the privatized postal, telecommunication, and transport sectors; however, unions faced challenges in imitating this trend among new market prospects (Dribbusch & Birke, 2019). This shortcoming highlights the need for innovative approaches to unionization that can adapt to the changing nature of work and employment relationships in today's economy.

In summary, trade unions must embrace change and innovate their approaches to better align with the realities of contemporary workplaces to overcome this challenge. This shifting could involve adopting new technologies, developing more flexible contract arrangements, and forging partnerships with other stakeholders to create more effective and inclusive work environments. With this angle, unions can remain relevant and empower employees to navigate the complexities of modern work arrangements.

2.8 Trade Unions Contemporary Adversaries

The subsequent segment of this study examines the contemporary antagonists faced by trade unions and is outlined as follows: Altering Characteristics of Employment Agreements, the Influence of COVID-19, and the Emergence of Work from Home.

2.8.1 Altering Characteristics of Employment Agreements

The categorization of gig workers as either employees or independent contractors has become a significant challenge for the legal system, as it has far-reaching implications for businesses and workers in the gig economy (Daskalova, McCrystal & Wakui, 2021). The main point of contention is the nature of gig work, characterized by short-term, project-based engagements and high flexibility. While some argue that it should be typical employment, others contend it falls under the purview of independent contracting arrangements. This debate has attracted the attention of policymakers and scholars, and the resolution of this issue will significantly impact the future of the gig economy and the legal frameworks governing it. Additionally, there is a growing interest in the role of trade unions in representing and addressing the concerns that gig workers are often self-employed, lack the bargaining power of traditional employees, and may be vulnerable to exploitation and underpayment.

Gusto, an integrated payroll and Human Resources (HR) platform catering to small and medium-sized businesses in the United States (US) reported a 23% surge in the payments made to contractors over the past two years (Wilke & Bowen, 2022). These researchers further highlighted that this growth indicates the rising trend of companies opting for contractual employment, with one in every five employees now classified as contractors. The findings provide valuable insights into the current state of the job market in the US and underscore the need for companies to devise effective employment policies to address the increasing prevalence of contractual employment.

According to Englert and Runciman (2019), reintegrating South Africa into the global market economy increased the utilization of casual and externalized labor. According to estimates, approximately 40% of the formal labor market workers were in precarious work (Englert & Runciman, 2019). This trend has contributed to a situation where a significant proportion of the workforce operates under unstable and uncertain employment arrangements. The implications of this development are manifold and require careful consideration by policymakers and stakeholders in the labor market.

According to Ma and Haugen (2022), managers in China are exploring alternative sources of labor, such as labor broking, to find a workforce that is affordable, adaptable, and willing to endure harsh conditions. These managers are exploiting workers' differences to justify unequal employment terms and compensation. In a similar vein, many companies prefer to utilize labor brokers instead of hiring workers directly, as they provide a source of affordable labor (Pakkies, 2021). This action allows companies to maintain greater control over labor costs, which can be a significant expense in many industries. However, this practice has been criticized by some as exploitative, as labor brokers often provide lower wages and fewer benefits to workers. This course can result in a situation where workers are paid less than a living wage, despite working full-time. Despite these concerns,

using labor brokers remains a common practice in many industries, particularly those that rely on low-skilled or temporary workers.

Finally, the dismissal of workers by a client company through a labor broker presents a significant predicament for the affected employees (Englert & Runciman, 2019). This predicament is because it is challenging to contest such dismissals since the client company is not recognized and considered as their employer (Englert & Runciman, 2019). These scholars further highlight that these employees lack effective recourse against wrongful dismissal. Thus, the legal framework governing the employment relationship between the employees of a labor broker and the client company needs to be re-evaluated to ensure the protection of employees' rights.

2.8.2 The Influence of COVID-19

Dupuy and Jules (2021) found that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on industrial relations revealed that the pandemic negatively affected company-level collective bargaining, which has, in turn, impacted trade unions. This outcome is detrimental for workers, as collective bargaining is a crucial tool that enables them to negotiate for better working conditions, wages, and benefits through trade unions. Despite this, this study suggests that trade unions are not utilizing collective bargaining effectively due to their lack of negotiation skills.

During the pandemic, the labor market has been negatively affected in various ways, including a reduction in work hours, lowered salaries, layoffs, suspension of contracts, limited access to compensation and job opportunities, closure measures, confinement and distancing requirements, increased informality, and the extension of working hours (Herrera, Torres-Lista & Montenegro, 2021). These issues are a pain to trade unions, particularly the loss of jobs, as it affects their membership and threatens their existence.

Fine et al. (2021) accentuate the growing vulnerability of low-paid workers to exploitation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby presenting a significant challenge to trade unions. However, addressing this issue is no mean feat, given that many employers faced financial constraints during the pandemic. Consequently, policymakers, employers, and unions must collaborate and find innovative solutions to ensure worker protection and welfare in these challenging times. Correspondingly, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, South Asian laborers encountered significant challenges concerning the timely payment of wages and outstanding dues owing to business shutdowns (Sahu, 2021). This dilemma led to unfavourable labor issues, including violations of labor rights, unhealthy working conditions, and unsafe living conditions (Sahu, 2021). As such, the pandemic has been a critical source of concern for workers in the region, who have had to navigate obstacles to ensure their safety and well-being.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic posed numerous challenges for trade unions across various dimensions. Notably, it has accelerated and influenced the trend of working from home, which has become another significant concern for trade unions.

2.8.3 The Emergence of Work from Home

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring business continuity has been a fundamental challenge for organizations worldwide. As a result, working from home emerged as the primary strategy to keep businesses running smoothly (Aguilar et al., 2020). According to scholars, this shift to working from home also posed significant challenges for workers, including increased work pressure and uncertainty in the labor market. These challenges created unique circumstances in which workers have had to adapt rapidly to new work environments and technologies, often without adequate support or training. Supporting this view, Kooli (2023) asserts that working from home presents a viable strategy to mitigate the impact of confinement measures, thereby enabling businesses and institutions to sustain their economic activities. In light of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work provides a flexible and adaptive approach to meet the challenges of the current situation. This approach ensures business continuity and promotes employee safety and well-being while facilitating organizational agility and resilience.

This assertion is corroborated by Knardahl and Christensen (2022), who claim that organizations that offer Work from Home (WFH) options to their employees experience a lower turnover rate versus those that do not offer such flexibility. The study highlights the importance of providing employees with the ability to work remotely, which has become increasingly popular in recent years. Organizations that allow WFH options are more likely to retain employees, as they can balance work and life responsibilities. This system can lead to increased productivity and ultimately contribute to the overall organizational success. These findings underscore the need for organizations to consider offering WFH as an option to their employees to improve retention rates and maintain a competitive edge in the job market.

For this reason, Bloom, Han, and Liang (2022) provided empirical evidence suggesting that allowing employees to adopt the WFH arrangement can positively impact turnover rates and costs. They also opine that firms providing this option to their employees experience a decrease in rates under discussion. This phenomenon may be attributed to several factors, including increased job satisfaction and flexibility, reduced commuting times and costs, and a better work-life balance. Therefore, WFH arrangements have the potential to

be a valuable tool for employers looking to improve employee retention and reduce costs associated with high turnover rates.

In summary and light of the findings, it appears WFH is becoming a permanent fixture in the modern workforce. As such, it is imperative that trade unions not only accept this reality but also develop strategies for dealing with it. One area of concern is the potential impact on collective bargaining efforts. For example, if workers are dispersed and working from home, how can trade unions effectively mobilize them to participate in a strike? This measure is just one of many complex questions that must be addressed as WFH becomes increasingly prevalent. Therefore, trade unions must take a proactive approach to adapting to the changing nature of work.

III. MATERIALS AND CONTEXT

3.1 Data Sources

The study selected and utilized a comprehensive research methodology by collecting quantitative and qualitative secondary data. On the one hand, the qualitative approach was predominantly employed. On the other hand, quantitative data from the OECD union density was gathered to generate graphs that complemented the data collection.

The qualitative data was obtained from credible peer-reviewed journals and books and involved an extensive literature review that explored trade unions and their relevance. This approach was critical in enabling the researchers to gain a comprehensive subject matter that emerged from the literature. On a positive note, this approach helped provide a more nuanced and exhaustive perspective. This method was selected and suitable because it was cost-effective for the researchers since the data was readily available.

Specifically, the qualitative component of secondary research entails thorough content analysis, incorporating materials such as books, document reviews, and accredited journals (Taherdoost, 2021). Following data collection, the researchers meticulously reviewed the sources, extracting pertinent information aligned with the study's objectives. Content analysis served as a systematic means of extracting valuable insights, themes, and patterns from the available sources, enabling researchers to explore complex phenomena and discern underlying trends. The deliberate reliance on secondary data underscored the team's strategic choice to leverage pre-existing information and scholarly discourse effectively. With this approach and systematically examining already published works and relevant materials, researchers were able to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, offering new perspectives and new insights. Overall, through the meticulous application of secondary research methods, the study achieved its objectives by contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

IV. FINDINGS

- Unions are Swiftly Approaching their Demise and Lack the Leadership to Rescue them.

Recently, organized labor has faced numerous challenges, contributing to its degeneration. The strategies that were practical decades ago are no longer sufficient and relevant in today's globalized markets. One of the key factors contributing to this dilemma is a lack of leadership within labor unions. Without effective leadership, unions fail to adapt to the changing landscape of the global economy. As a result, they are rapidly losing relevance and influence, emerging as a threat to workers' well-being and overall economic health. Addressing this leadership deficit is critical to the long-term viability of organized labor and requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders involved in the labor movement.

- Unions Lack Adaptation to Change.

The changing dynamics of contemporary workplaces have presented challenges for trade unions in adapting to maintain their significance. Trade unions must be willing to embrace change and explore innovative strategies that align with the evolving nature of work to support and represent their members better. In the current world of work, trade unions must stay vigilant to adapt to the shifting landscape to remain relevant and effective in their roles as advocates for workers.

- Trade Unions are Operational and not Strategic.

The operational and strategic functions of unions are distinct. While operational tasks are typically related to the day-to-day activities of the organization, strategic tasks involve long-term planning and decision-making. Based on this distinction, unions are primarily operational rather than strategic entities. In this sense, unions tend to focus on the immediate concerns of their members, such as working conditions, wages, and benefits, rather than broader issues of social and economic justice. The efficacy of unions depends on their ability to balance operational and strategic priorities in a way that advances the interests of their members and promotes social justice.

- Unions Lack Social Dialogue Skills

During negotiations, labor unions typically present their demands to employers through an ultimatum. Rather than engaging in a negotiation process, unions often use strikes to threaten employers as leverage to push

them to comply with their demands. This approach is advanced regardless of multiple factors that can prevent employers from meeting the unions' demands, such as financial constraints or legal limitations. When faced with these challenges, employers must carefully weigh their options and determine the best course of action to ensure a fair and amicable resolution to the negotiation process.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Unions should focus on preserving jobs rather than prioritizing salary increases at the cost of job losses. One way to ensure a win-win situation in labor relations is for unions to prioritize job security over high salaries for some employees at the expense of job loss for others. This approach benefits all parties involved since employers may agree to the union's demands after prolonged negotiations but may be unable to afford the salary increases. As a result, the employer may resort to laying off part of the workforce as an alternative to cut costs. Unions can help create a more stable and sustainable work environment for all employees by prioritizing job security.

- Unions may consider adopting a more flexible and collaborative approach focusing on mutual understanding and problem-solving.

Unions should adopt a solution-driven approach and offer constructive solutions to disputes during negotiations, particularly in times of crisis. Rather than adopting an adversarial approach towards employers, unions should approach negotiation to contribute to the economy and safeguard employees' jobs. Following this approach, unions can play a pivotal role in resolving disputes and fostering cooperation between employers and employees. This action will promote harmonious industrial relations and support economic growth and stability.

- Organized labor contemplates the possibility of participating in and accepting labor laws that decrease labor expenses as a means of alluring investments in their respective nations.

Implementing this measure has the potential to create jobs and save existing ones, which could ultimately bolster the strength of trade unions. Nevertheless, it is crucial to exercise caution and attentiveness during its execution to avoid any disservice to the working class. Instead, it should be viewed and approached as a mutually beneficial endeavor that benefits all parties involved in the employment relationship, leading to an overall enhancement of the economy. Considering the challenges posed by the changing nature of work, trade unions should adopt a flexible approach that allows them to acclimatize and remain relevant. This recommendation emphasizes the need for unions to be adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of the modern workforce.

- Trade unions should devise strategies for penetrating the market of new forms of work.

Trade unions must develop strategies to establish a presence in the emerging market of unconventional forms of employment. As the work landscape evolves, trade unions must adapt to the changing times and find modes to reach out to those employed in non-traditional work settings. This strategy necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the gig economy and other emerging forms of work, as well as a proactive approach to engaging with workers in these sectors. Therefore, it is incumbent upon trade unions to devise innovative strategies that enable them to connect with workers in unconventional forms of employment and advocate for their rights and interests. Failure to do so could result in a significant loss of relevance and influence for trade unions in the long run.

VI. CONCLUSION:

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of trade unions, examining their historical background, present situation, and future prospects. The research explored the strengths and weaknesses of trade unions and the challenges they face from their adversaries. The findings indicated that trade unions need to develop better strategies to address the factors contributing to their current situation. It identified critical challenges trade unions face and proposed solutions to overcome them. Although the study recognized the complexity of the situation, it also highlighted the possibility for trade unions to revive themselves. The study recommended that trade unions review their strategies and make the necessary changes to ensure their survival. In conclusion, the study emphasized the urgency for trade unions to take decisive action and work together towards a brighter future. The rationale is that trade unions are in a precarious state and face the risk of collapse without prompt intervention.

6.1 Advantages:

Despite limitations, the paper presents key findings regarding the existential threats and declining influence of trade unions in the modern economic landscape. These findings shed light on important issues facing trade unions globally, contributing to scholarly discourse and informing policymakers, practitioners and trade unionists. Additionally, this paper offers practical recommendations for addressing the challenges faced by trade unions, such as prioritizing job security, adopting collaborative negotiation approaches, and exploring alternative forms of employment. These recommendations provide actionable insights for trade union leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to support workers' rights and labor market stability.

6.2 Limitations:

The study's reliance on secondary research and potentially biased sources may limit the generalizability of its findings to diverse contexts and regions.

6.3 Delimitation addressing the limitation:

To address the limitation of limited generalizability resulting from reliance on secondary research, the study focuses on a broad temporal scope, encompassing multiple historical periods and phases of trade union development. By examining trends and patterns over time, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of trade unionism's evolution, which can help mitigate the potential bias of individual sources and enhance the applicability of findings across diverse contexts and regions.

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