

THE SEARCH FOR NEW UNION STRATEGIES: TURKISH CYPRIOT TRADE UNIONS

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ABSTRACT

Trade unions can be defined as institutions who act to protect the rights of their members at work through collective understanding of organization and action. Unions are known to fight for justice to workers, justice in the organization and empowerment of their members. Unions have to develop strategies like any other organization. These strategies can be grouped according to the parties which they are in a relation with. Most common classifications of these strategies are Classic (Traditional) Strategy and Partnership Strategy (Boxall and Haynes, 1997; Haynes and Allen, 2001). Partnership strategy is important for the contemporary unionist approach. In this strategy the aim is to prioritize the individual while producing strategies unlike the collectivist approach. Additionally, it is important for unions to generate strategies that can offer solutions to problems of the society and cooperate with NGOs. The study has been carried out in 2008 within a project aimed to find out the policies used by the Turkish trade unions in Cyprus. The data was collected by questionnaire method from a sample of 123 people including the union managers, members of board, union representatives and union members. Research findings showed that Turkish unions in Cyprus are inadequate about adopting new strategies other than industrial strategies.

Keywords: Trade unions, strategies, industrial strategies, partnership

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Introduction

Trade Unions have to develop strategies like any other organization. These strategies can be grouped according to the parties which they are in a relation with. The strategies regarding the relationships with employees and employers are called industrial strategies. According to Neo-liberal Approach, trade unions adopt the industrial strategies as their main strategies and value them more. Strategies adopted by the trade unions have to protect their members' economic and social rights as well as increase the labor efficiency and decrease the turnover rate. Besides their industrial strategies, trade unions have to make a strategic choice regarding their relations with government, political parties and national or international organizations. So, these strategies can be grouped as the other strategies. The aim of this study is to find out the policies of Turkish trade unions of Cyprus in the means for developing their strategies. The expected contribution of the study is, after revealing the inadequate sides of Turkish trade unions in Cyprus, to guide them for developing new strategies by taking into account the strategies used in the countries where unionism developed.

The Need for Change in Union Strategies

Trade unions can be defined as institutions who act to protect the rights of their members at work through collective understanding of organization and action. Unions are known to fight for justice to workers, justice in the organization and empowerment of their members. During 20th century, trade unions have been an important aspect of the working life for employees, according to research results, during this period "at least two in five workers were members of a union" (Leigh, 2005). However, when we look at the last two decades it is possible to see the weakened state of trade unions due to the decrease in overall memberships (Williams, 1997). Since 1980, trade unions density has declined across the developed world. Statistical data suggest that trade unions density fell from 32.6 % in 1995 to 26.4 % in 2001 within the European Union countries (Waddington 2005). When we look at the situation of countries in EU the decrease is significantly spotted in new member states where the percentage fell from 42.7 % to 20.4 % between 1995 and 2001, whereas in the EU15 percentage fell from 31.0 % to 27.3 % in the same period (EC 2004). According to these indicators, it is possible to comment that trade unions now represent a smaller division of the workers all over the world than at any other time since 1950. There are various forces and dynamics currently affecting the state of the trade unions including

the globalization (Serrano, 2005). Furthermore these dynamics can be identified as the reasons of workers to move away from the trade unions causing a change of economic and industrial structure within the countries. Undeniable increase in global competition, increase of multinational production networks, outsourcing, contemporary economic policies, rapid change in technological innovation, privatization, decline in the manufacturing sector and growth of the services sector, variations in production processes, and increasing number of employers who are not favoring unionization have decreased the number of “organizable” workers, damaged the membership commitment to unions (Serrano, 2005; Waddington, 2005). As Waddington (2005) states; due to these factors in almost all the countries there was a high unemployment and the trade unions offered relatively few services to this phenomena, consequently most trade unionist that became unemployed abandon their union membership. Currently, employment is shifting from industrial sector, where unionization rates tend to be relatively high, to private sector services, where unionization rates are relatively lower causing organizations to face a change in composition of the labor force (Matsaganis, 2007; Waddington, 2005). Therefore, all these changes on the labor and employment characteristics had weakened the trade unions, taking away their organizing and bargaining opportunities and in order to adjust to these newness trade unions shall reinvent or reengineer themselves to new strategies if they want to keep up with an increase in membership. Trade unions should concern some changes about their image and attract potential members by convincing them that unions are still applicable and beneficial in the modern world (Williams, 1997). Therefore trade unions shall apply new strategies for both recruiting new members as well as for remaining the existing ones.

Strategies

In the literature the union strategies have been classified in several ways. Most common classifications are Classical (Traditional) Strategy and Partnership Strategy (Boxall and Haynes, 1997; Haynes and Allen, 2001). According to Boxall and Haynes, 1997, classical approach is only about recruiting new members to the unions and there is not any cooperation with the employer of the workers. Adversely, partnership strategy depends on the cooperation with the employer and the trade union. Today, Partnership strategy is currently popular and attracting a great deal of employment practice in which growing number of unions and employers enter into formal agreements to build long-term relationships based on cooperation (Haynes and Allen,

2001). The main distinction between classic and partnership unionism strategy is that the partnership strategy has included the opinion that the role of unions cannot be expanded simply around conflict resolution and settlement rather partnership strategy seek a more constructive approach in the strategic management of firms and industries continuously unions are on more secure ground when this strategic intent is combined with more effective forms of organizing (Boxall and Haynes 1997, 1997). According to previous studies, unions decline will continue if they don't embrace partnership, if unions fail to attract workers in the more various areas of the economy and if they fail to adapt to the changing labor market conditions (McCracken and Sanderon, 2004). On the other hand some previous studies support the importance of the partnership approach but adding that if partnership important for renewal and survival of unions, they need to expand agreements in the service sector as well, which is the key growth area in the economy (Oxenbridge and Brown, 2002).

Individualism versus Collectivism

The mentality of the unions has been changed as the employees are getting differentiated economically and culturally. According to these developments, the union structures have to be changed as well. Increasing interest in the individualism has led to a change of the approached adopted by labor unions. Employees are not only working towards making money to live but they are more interested about the issues such as benefits, living patterns or gender equality. Also the increase in diversity of populations led to a change in terms of social groups. This meant that the understanding of solidarity before, is no longer easily applied by the unionists (Mückenberger et al, 1995). "Organizing the Unorganized" is a unionizing strategy supported by Bill Fletcher, where the employee skills and energy have to be utilized whereas their hopes and ambitions have to be united (Fletcher, 2000). It is important to consider that the current members are the key for convincing the unorganized workforce and also they can play a role in rebuilding a labor movement. Differences between blue-collared and white-collared employees and also men and women employees have to be taken into consideration. In general, unions were accepted as the unions of blue-collared employees, however because of this reason unions could not reach the white collars and women employees (Mückenberger et al, 1995). When we look at the last three decades it is possible to see the growing number of women participating in the workforce and, in many countries, they constitute the fastest growing group of potential

unionized workers. (Yates, 2006). Furthermore unions should be ready to offer help for retirement plans of potential elderly employees as well as personal development plans for younger employees and adopt this mentality as a part of their strategy. On the other hand, collectivist approach does not differentiate the workers according to either their personal characteristics and skills or their economic and cultural differences.

Social Movement Unionism and NGO's

Social movement unionism is increasingly being seen as the strategy that has to be adopted by the unions. However, what is often forgotten is that social movement unionism originated in the Third World. Trade unionism can be accepted as a form of social movement. Social movement unionism is more class-based, focused and collectivist type of unionism. However, trade unionism can still be accepted as a feature of trade unions acting like social movements (Fairbrother, 2008). All theories of social movement unionism argue that unions should form alliances with like-minded political parties. This is not only to revitalize unions, but also to challenge the neo-liberal economic order both within a country and worldwide (Schiavone, 2007). Some kinds of this unionism can be characterized as economic, with which are narrowly focused and with limited views of freedom. Such unions tend to be organized in top down ways and they usually have low membership participation rates (Fairbrother, 2008).

Following the rise of NGOs and new social movements an increasing number of people argue that these groups located within "civil society" rather than the labor movement can "rise-up" and challenge neo-liberalism (Schiavone 2007). For a very long period of time unions and NGOs have relationships which tend to be complex, starting from close co-operation and even up to problematic relationships. However if unions and NGOs can work in co-operation, their aggregate influence on social and political environment can be remarkable. NGOs and trade unions are important actors for the global civil society. NGOs can be defined as institutions which are voluntary, not-for-profit and independent. Nevertheless although unions are concerned especially with conditions in employment and the workplace, they tend to have broader social and political concerns over a wide range of both national and international issues (Spooner, 2004). However trade unions had lost much of their capacity to advocate the employees in the period of postwar. On the other hand, due to the rapid globalization a significant change had happened in the societies and this led to a tremendous growth in the NGO sector and also pushed

NGOs into the arena of societal governance and advancement. NGOs are now concerned about the issues which are also a concern for the unions apart from their core issues such as employment, working conditions and wage levels (Gallin, 2000). The expected cooperation of unions and NGOs are very important and if this cooperation fails it can negatively affect the both sides. Also, a success or failure in union/NGO cooperation have to the potential to influence the direction and the pace of social development which can restructure what the world society will look like in the future (Gallin, 2000).

Method of the Research

The sample of the study is 123 people including the union managers, members of board and union members; whose 53 % has unionism background for more than 11 years. Out of 44 unions currently present in North Cyprus, 24 of the respondents are the managers, 51 are member of the board, and 41 are union members and remaining 7 stands for the other classification.

There are 4 research questions regarding the results of the study.

Q1: What kind of strategies North Cyprus Trade unions have adopted and how they are deciding on new strategies?

Q2: What is the level of relations with politics?

Q3: How are their relations with NGOs and Civil society organizations as well as national and international unions and other organizations?

Q4: What are the opinions of trade unions about partnership?

The questionnaire was made up of 49 questions and responses were collected from 123 people. The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS program.

Findings

The sample's 83 % is found to be male and 43 % is between 36-45 ages. The majority of the sample, 53 %, is Turkish Cypriot and 73 % have been living in North Cyprus for more than 35 years. 47 % of the sample is university graduates.

According to findings, 52 % of the respondents in Turkish unions of Cyprus are deciding on their union strategies by debating with the members and representatives of the unions and 61 % has

answered that their main aim is to defend and ensure their member's economic and social rights as stated in Table 1.

Table 1: The main aim of the unions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Increasing member count	5	4.1	4.1	4.1
To protect and improve its members' economic, social rights and benefits.	75	61.0	61.0	65.0
Acting together with other organizations for solving the economic, social and political problems of the country	15	12.2	12.2	77.2
No special targets, only according to current situation.	2	1.6	1.6	78.9
Other	9	7.3	7.3	86.2
Missing Data	17	13.8	13.8	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Related to this, 51 % of the sample stated that they are checking the rate of success in reaching their aim on a once in three month's basis which can be seen on Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of checking the strategies' success

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Once in three months	63	51.2	51.2	51.2
Between four months-	20	16.3	16.3	67.5

one year time				
More than one year	11	8.9	8.9	76.4
None	5	4.1	4.1	80.5
Missing Data	24	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

On the other hand only 4 % of the participants have stated that their unions adopted recruiting new members as their main aim. As stated in Table 3, while majority of the respondents stated that union’s main aim is to defend and ensure their member’s economic and social rights, also majority found the cooperation between unions on normal basis.

Table 3: Cross-relationship of main target of the union and the degree of cooperation between unions

The degree of cooperation between unions	Main target of the union							Total
	Increasing member count	To protect and improve its members’ economic, social rights and benefits.	Acting together with other organization s for solving the problems of the country	No special targets, only according to current situation.	Other	Missing Data		
Too much	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	
Much	0	5	1	0	0	2	8	
Normal	3	52	11	1	5	13	85	
Very few	1	14	3	0	4	2	24	
None	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	

	Missing data	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total		5	75	15	2	9	17	123

Continuously, as can be seen on Table 4, respondents who found organizing level of the Turkish trade unions adequate in public sector and poor in private sector, stated that the organizing level of unions is good or very good (52 %). This statement shows that unions are leaving the private sector aside while considering only public sector as their main potential organizing group. However 38 % of the respondents who found unions adequate in public sector and poor in private sector stated that organizing level is poor.

Table 4: Cross-relationship of organizing level and success of organizing strategies

		Success of unions' organizing strategies					
		Generally Successful	Successful in public sector but not successful in private sector	Traditional union base (male, full-time, etc.) adequate in organizing, female, part-time worker,	Traditional union base and inadequate in organizing	Missing data	Total
Organizing level of unions	Excellent	2	6	0	0	0	8
	Very Good	3	16	0	0	4	23
	Good	3	36	0	2	2	43
	Poor	2	38	1	5	0	46

Nearly Absent	0	2	0	0	0	2
Missing Data	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	10	99	1	7	6	123

Continuously, the majority of the sample has indicated that partnership strategy is a very important issue in having better workplace conditions and relationships with a percentage of 81 as can be seen in Table 5. Table 6 indicates that this is the common opinion of all respondents (union presidents, members of the management board and union members).

The results showed that opinions of unions about partnership are generally positive where only 4 % has stated that partnership may weaken the bargaining power of their union. Additionally, only 10 % commented that employers do not prefer partnership strategy.

Table 5: Opinions about partnership strategy

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Helps to improve working conditions and ensure workplace peace.	100	81.3	81.3	81.3
Employers don't prefer this kind of collaboration	13	10.6	10.6	91.9
This kind of collaboration weakens the bargaining power of the union	5	4.1	4.1	95.9
Missing Data	5	4.1	4.1	100.0

Total	123	100.0	100.0	
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Table 6: Cross-relationship of main opinion about partnership strategy and position of the respondents in the union

	Main opinion about partnership strategy				Missing Data	Total
	Helps to improve working conditions and ensure workplace peace.	Employers don't prefer this kind of collaboration	This kind of collaboration weakens the bargaining power of the union			
Position in Union President	18	4	1	1		24
Union Member of Union Management Board	43	6	1	1		51
Union Member	33	2	3	3		41
Other	6	1	0	0		7
Total	100	13	5	5		123

According to question regarding the relations with politics in Table 7, 70 % answered that the Turkish unions in general are too involved in political issues. However when sample was asked whether their union is supporting any political party, 88.6 % has answered “no”, causing a conflict with their previous answer (Table 8).

Table 7: Unions' level of being politicized

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Too Much	51	41.5	41.5	41.5
Much	35	28.5	28.5	69.9

Few	30	24.4	24.4	94.3
Very Few	4	3.3	3.3	97.6
None	2	1.6	1.6	99.2
Missing Data	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Whether the union supports any political party

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No	109	88.6	88.6	88.6
Yes	12	9.8	9.8	98.4
Missing Data	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen in Table 9, 22 of respondents answered the question about the level of being politicized of their own union as “none” whereas the same respondents answered the question about Turkish trade unions’ level of being politicized as “too much” which causes a conflict.

Table 9: Cross-relationship of level of being politicized (both respondents’ union and all trade unions)

	The level of being politicized (respondents’ union)						Total	
	Too much	Much	Few	Very few	None	Missing data		
The level of being politicized (all trade unions)	Too much	6	4	9	10	22	0	51
	Much	2	8	8	10	7	0	35
	Few	0	2	17	4	6	1	30
	Very	0	0	0	2	2	0	4

few								
none	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	
Missing								
Data	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	
Total	8	14	34	26	39	2	123	

Another question was about trade unions usage of information technologies where 53 % of the sample answered as on the normal basis and also another question showed that 51 % of the Turkish trade unions in Cyprus have their own web sites. Furthermore, when the sample was asked about which period unions were serving the best for their members, 41 % answered between 1984 and 2004, 24 % answered after 2005 and remaining 24 answered as between 1975-1983. About the relations between the unions, the 69.1 % of the sample answered as they are finding it on normal basis and also 54.5 % has answered that unions, NGO's and other society organizations are not cooperative enough (Table 10 and 11).

Table 10: Level of cooperation between unions

	Frequenc y	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Too much	3	2.4	2.4	2.4
Much	8	6.5	6.5	8.9
Normal	85	69.1	69.1	78.0
Very few	24	19.5	19.5	97.6
None	1	.8	.8	98.4
Missing				
Data	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Table 11: Opinions about cooperation of unions with NGO’s and other society organizations

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid They cooperate	48	39.0	39.0	39.0
They don't cooperate	67	54.5	54.5	93.5
Missing Data	8	6.5	6.5	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Relatively, respondents were asked about whether their unions are members of confederations and federations or not, eventually it is found that they have adequate memberships. Also, unions have membership in some national and international organizations like; Türk İş, Türksen, PSI, EPSU, ETUCE, IE, WFTU, Avrasya Metal-İş and cooperation with NGOs like; Bu Memleket Bizim Platformu (This is Our Homeland Platform), Kıbrıs Barış Platformu (Cyprus Peace Platform), Hak İş, Hür iş, Avrasya Metal-İş Unions and PEO in Southern Cyprus.

Next, the sample has answered the question about the main limitations for union organizing in Cyprus as; 30.1 % stated that the negative attitudes of employers, 29.3 % stated that the importance of unions hasn't been understood enough and 18.7 % stated the limitations as legal regulations as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: The main limitation for union organizing

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Legal regulations	23	18.7	18.7	18.7
The importance of unions hasn't been understood well	36	29.3	29.3	48.0
The benefits provided by government are enough (e.g. minimum wage)	1	.8	.8	48.8

Negative attitudes of employers towards unions	37	30.1	30.1	78.9
Inadequacy of benefits provided by unions to their members	2	1.6	1.6	80.5
Missing Data	24	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Lastly, the sample was asked about the image of Turkish unions among the Cyprus society, 42.3 % answered that people are seeing them as organizations which are always remembered with their strikes as can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13: Opinions about the image of trade unions among society

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Always remembered with strikes	52	42.3	42.3	42.3
Organizations providing good benefits to their members	33	26.8	26.8	69.1
Organizations which has a say in country's destiny	15	12.2	12.2	81.3
Other	10	8.1	8.1	89.4
Missing Data	13	10.6	10.6	100.0
Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Results

Turkish unions have adopted a neo-liberal approach and they are using industrial strategies. Their main aim is defending their members' rights and benefits which is an indicator for their strategies. While determining the union strategies, debating with members and union representatives is a desirable situation for democracy. Unions are willing to develop good relationships with employers (partnership strategy) in order to ensure peace in workplace and to provide better working conditions. On the other hand, the relations between the unions are on normal basis, however it should be improved. The usage of information technology is considerably low, where only half of the unions have their own websites. The usage of technology can increase for the means of recruiting new employees.

Turkish unions are inadequate about adopting new strategies other than industrial strategies. Also unions are not showing the adequate importance to the relationships between NGOs and other society organizations, so it is possible to state that Turkish unions haven't adopted the social movement unionism strategy yet, however, political parties, unions and NGOs are working towards peace in Cyprus within "Bu Memleket Bizim Platformu" ("This is Our Homeland Platform") because of Cyprus problem going on. On the other hand, unions are seen as organizations always coming up with their strikes and this result as a disadvantage in acceptance to the society. In the private sector, the inadequate unionism depends on the negative attitudes of the employers and lack of mentality about unionism. In this manner, Turkish unions have to improve their image among the society. Besides their negative image about strikes, being too politicized is another disadvantage for Turkish unions. Additional suggestions of respondents for development of Turkish unions can be as follows: Union membership should be made compulsory with legal regulations (although this approach is accepted as unlawful in many countries), more professional and wider-visional union managers are needed, unregistered workforce should be registered, all of the union heads should come together to create a committee where the problems are going to be discussed and most importantly as first, the country's political problems should be solved, then the rest will come.

Limitations and Future Research

Present study had only involved the ideas from members and administrators of the trade unions in Northern Cyprus. Other studies, concerning impressions and suggestions about union strategies in Northern Cyprus from the other stakeholders in the country (NGOs, Society, Media, Government etc.), can be conducted by using different methods of research like individual interviews. Further studies can be conducted to find out the consequences of adopting new union strategies, regarding opinions of society about union strategies and about increasing the number of members in unions.

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