

A part of the work of the Union has been to protect the workers from unjust treatment by the employers. This has been made possible by the establishment of Grievance Committees. They provide an outlet for the worker to channel and give constructive and emotional expression to his "gripes" and problems without fear of retaliation.

Recognising the importance and value of clearing up misunderstandings and preserving harmonious relations, both the Company and the Union have agreed to make every reasonable effort to dispose effectively any suggestions or complaints. An employee with a complaint may approach the Grievance Committee of his branch of the Union, who will then approach the officer designated by the Company to deal with such matters. But unlike other organisations, which have to work through the line authority, the Union by working through the grievance procedure, can bring its complaints to bear directly on top management.

AS this is a relationship between decision-makers and responders, there is bound to be conflict. The Union has tried, as far as possible, to limit the unilateral decision-making authority where Management placed its own needs above those of its employees. While the Union has not been successful in establishing joint determination in a great variety of subjects, it has attempted to restrict Management's arbitrary decision-making powers by getting the Management to consult and, in certain cases, inform the Union before taking any action. The stage is not yet set when bilateral decision-making becomes a rule rather than an exception.

Besides having access to top management in the case of grievances, the union has also been able to get some Companies to agree that the procedure for retrenchment will be discussed in consultation with the Union. Further, in the event that a Company intends to engage new employees, the retrenched employees are given the first preference for re-employment indicating that the Union is trying to create a property right to the jobs for its members. The principle of "last in, first out" is now becoming an accepted one. Even though Lindeteves-Jacoberg (Far East) Ltd., maintain the right to use discretion in exceptional circumstances when an employee is indispensable to the Company, it has to first consult the Union about the matter.

Mansfield & Co. Ltd., has also agreed that in the event of promoting any member, who was covered by the Agreement, to the non-bargainable categories, the Union will be informed before any such promotion is effected<sup>22</sup>. Further, in the case of vacancies, the Union's comments or representations will be given due consideration by Management before a selection is made. The Union has succeeded in getting Harper Gilfillan & Co. Ltd., to agree to provide any benefits granted as a result of the collective Agreement, which are in addition to those already granted, to Union Members only. This is indeed a great restriction on Management's unilateral decision-making powers. In a similar way, Mansfield & Co. Ltd., has agreed that the salary scales mentioned in the schedule are payable to members of the staff only as long as they are members of the Union. The position of those members of the staff who are removed from the membership register of the Union is to be clarified by an exchange of letters between the Union and the Company,

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22. Clause 12(c) of Part 1 of Government Gazette Supplement No.245, State of Singapore dated 9th November, 1962.

Finally, in two of the Agreements the Union has been successful in getting the Companies to acknowledge the right of the employees to participate in trade union activities and that no employees will suffer discrimination on these grounds. The Companies have also consented not to discourage employees from joining the Union. The Union has also been most successful in getting the Companies concerned to recognise that employees who are members of the Union may engage in domestic grievance procedure during office hours and <sup>on</sup> the office premises. This is another great concession which the Union has been able to wrest from some of the Companies. As a result of this concession, the employees may start a work-to-rule campaign or go on strike if they feel dissatisfied with any action of Management. The Company is not in a position to retaliate except by opening negotiations with the Union, if it desires to find a solution to the complaint or grievance.

Thus we see that the Union has been able to slowly restrict Management's decision-making powers. Undoubtedly some of the concessions agreed to by Management are not really significant, but at least it is a start. With passing time, as the Union organization becomes more solidified and "aggressive", the stage will be set for the introduction of bilateral decision-making as a general rule.