

It is very difficult to call Malayan trade unionism as matured. It is relatively young and has yet to acquire maturity. The Union Movement in Singapore has been tossed and torn by political vicissitudes and very often Unions are undoubtedly being misled by political arrivists. Partisan rivalry has been extended from the political field to the industrial scene. This has indeed been damaging to the Union Movement in Singapore. Both the People's Action Party (PAP) and the Barisan Sosialis are trying to acquire control of the Unions. This has resulted in^a split among the Unions. Union solidarity has given way to inter-Union rivalry.

The Singapore Business Houses Employees' Union (SBHEU) which has represented most of the employees in the Agency Houses in Singapore, is influenced by Barisan Sosialis leaders, many of whom act as advisers to the Unions. It always rivals the Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union (SMMWU), which^{is} supposed to be PAP-controlled. A good example of this inter-Union rivalry can be noticed in the case involving the workers of C.K. Tang Limited, Singapore. SBHEU claims that the SMMWU is no longer representative of the employees of the above Company. In a statement the former Union said that a majority of the workers of the Company had left the SMMWU to join the SBHEU and challenged the SMMWU to a secret ballot to settle the dispute of the Union representation²⁴

24. A report on this issue was published in the daily newspaper Malayan Times dated 6th March, 1963.

Surely such inter-Union rivalry does not benefit the worker.

The unions and the Union leaders should be more interested in the welfare of the members and should not mix their political sentiments with their union activities. Politics and industrial well-being are two quite separate and distinct compartments and there should be no necessary connection between industrial and political militancy.

To maintain industrial peace and harmonious employer-employee relations, it is necessary to have a healthy Trade Union Movement. It means separate workers must unionise and separate unions in the same industry must amalgamate. Secondly they must elect efficient leaders commanding personal respect. The leaders must be as good in their knowledge of Economics and the principles of Labour Management as the Manager he is facing. It is the general ignorance of many trade union leaders that has made their Unions and themselves pawns in the hands of so-called organisers and advisers - persons often with interests very remote from those of the rank and file.

Good industrial relations also requires the genuine co-operation of the employers. Of course the kind of motivations that lead individuals to join trade unions are essentially opposed to the goals of the organisations in which the Union Members serve. But we ought to recognise that it is this fundamentally different orientation from that of the Management group that has resulted in inevitable conflict. To contain this conflict within manageable limits and maintain the industrial status quo, greater co-operation is required between the employers and the Unions. The effectiveness of this co-operation and consultation depends on the feelings of both the parties concerned. The pace of such co-operation relies not only on the will of Management, but also on the chance that Union representatives are given to participate in the decisions effecting

the workers.

Internal administration may be the employer's own precinct, but the employer must have every consideration for his employees. He ought to run his business according to a consistent enlightened labour policy and not in terms of likes and dislikes, eventually leading to the victimization of the individual workers. On their part the Unions must encourage workers to serve efficiently and to the best of their ability.

