

2.6A: Industrial/Employee Relations: Activity



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2.6 INDUSTRIAL/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS: ACTIVITY A

Read the case study below and answer the questions that follow.

TRADE UNION? INDIA'S BPO WORKERS SAY "NO"



From Europe to North America, India's offshore workers (Business Process Outsourcing) – call-centre operators, data-entry clerks and telemarketers – may seem like the sweatshop labourers of the information age, toiling for long hours for modest pay, but an international alliance of unions that wants them to become union members is finding it very hard to recruit them. These workers think of themselves as members of a

relatively well-paid, respected professional elite in no need of union protection.

The back office outsourcing industry in India employs around 400 000 workers, yet the Union Network International (UNI) organisation has only recruited 50 of them so far. "A union would make sense if we had no job security," said Sunayna Ramen, a technical support worker for IMB, "but there are so many jobs and so few qualified staff that firms are trying all possible means to keep employees happy so that they will not leave."

A similar situation has arisen in the USA where unions have lost many members as traditional manufacturing industries decline. They find it very difficult to recruit white-collar workers and professional workers in the finance and other service industries.

An Indian who did join UNI is Sonali Singh, a call centre supervisor. She said companies give incentives to those who work beyond contracted time and young workers often ignore health

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problems, such as insomnia and bad backs, to earn extra money. “The industry’s motto is ‘shut your mouth and take your money’”, she said, “and we want to change that.”

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QUESTIONS: 15 MARKS, 25 MINUTES

1. Define the term ‘trade union’. **[2 marks]**
2. Explain why employers might not want employees to join trade unions. **[5 marks]**
3. Evaluate whether a call-centre worker in India should join the UNI. **[8 marks]**