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POURING SWEAT FOR THE SAKE OF CLEAN HOUSES, HAPPY BABIES, HEALTHY ELDERLY AND GREEN GARDENS: DOMESTIC WORKERS AND TRADE UNION STRUGGLE/STRATEGIES FOR THEM

Abstract:

In the process of globalization, many pre-existing problems have become more acute as well as emergence of many new problems. Domestic workers and their working standards have been one of the important issues of globalization with their growing problems. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are about 53 million domestic workers all over the world. Beside domestic workers not having a clear job definition, we could see them as charlady, baby-sitter, patient care, gardener or anything else. The problems of domestic workers like precarity, low wages, long working hours, uncertainty job definition have risen in direct proportion to their growing number. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, governments, institutes and others are seeking for solution methods and struggle strategies to solve all these problems. Trade union solidarity, trade union strategies/campaigns and domestic workers being organized are vital tools for solving domestic workers problems. Therefore domestic workers should be organized in trade union struggle and trade unions should produce effective policies on behalf of decent life and decent work for domestic workers. In this study, the importance of trade union struggle in the solution of domestic workers problems will be discussed while drawn attention to their various problems. Also different campaigns and policies will be proposed for the implementation of the trade unions related to domestic workers.

Keywords:

Domestic Workers, Trade Union Struggle, Trade Union Strategies, Decent Work for Domestic Workers

JEL Classification: J83, J51, J23

Introduction

Nowadays, domestic workers are among the most disadvantaged groups of working life. Poor working conditions, lack of legal protection about them, job insecurity, long working hours, low wages, mobbing are just some of the problems faced by domestic workers. However, domestic workers problems closely related with child labor, social gender inequality, migrant workers, forced labor. Organized struggle and trade union movement activities are so important to combat this problems. In this study, the problems of domestic workers discussed with different aspects and the impact of the trade union struggle for the solution of this problem has been evaluated by national and international aspects. In addition various examples of trade union activities for domestic workers are given in order to emphasize the importance of organized struggle.

Conceptual Framework of Domestic Work

Given the path it has followed throughout history, domestic work stands as an old job especially for women. Based on its content, domestic work can be associated with slavery, colonialism and different types of captivity (ILO, 2010a: 5). This study looks into domestic work within the scope of dependent workers. Therefore, it would be useful to mention different points regarding the conceptual framework of domestic work. The first point can be that domestic work is performed inside houses, which are personal properties. In the framework of dependent employment, the owners of houses are accepted to be employers. Thus, domestic workers render services related to household chores within a dependent employment relationship. In brief, domestic work is about housekeeping and it is carried out under the authority, management and supervision of the employer on his/her behalf. Domestic work is a broad concept including but not limited to household chores such as cleaning, washing the laundry and ironing as well as childcare and elderly care. Another point is the payment made in return for the service rendered. It should be underlined that payment can be made either in cash or in kind (food and accommodation) (Tijdens and Klaveren, 2011: 4; Karaca ve Kocabaş, 2011: 164-165).

In the most general sense, domestic work is carried out by footmen, housekeepers, servants, cooks, babysitters, drivers, wardens, pet sitters and

gardeners and the people who do household chores are called domestic workers (Karaca and Kocabaş, 2009: 162). In fact, there are certain differences among domestic workers in the way they work. Accordingly, there are daily workers who work for an individual employer. There are live-in workers working part-time or full-time for one employer or more than one employer on weekly/monthly basis. There are also daily workers who are employed through cleaning companies (Erdoğdu and Toksöz, 2013: 19). Since domestic work includes a wide range of activities, ILO offers a broad definition for domestic work: *“work performed in or for a household or households...”* Its definition of domestic worker is *“any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship...”* Yet, ILO also underlines that *“a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker”* (ILO, 2011).

Dimensions of Domestic Work

It should be noted that it is quite hard to reach quantitative data about domestic work because of its nature. Lack of accurate and comparable data, popularity of clandestine employment, problems about defining domestic work and determining its scope are all contributing factors that make it difficult to create numerical data about the issue. However, though limited, the accessible data show that domestic work constitutes a considerable part of labor force (ILO, 2010a: 5).

Domestic workers represent an integral and important part of labor force around the world. According to the data of ILO, domestic workers represent 4 to 10% of the labor force in developing countries and 2% of the labor force in developed countries (UN-WOMEN-ITUC, 2013: 1). The research conducted by ILO has revealed that there were minimum 53 million domestic workers around the world in 2010. The word “minimum” implies that the real numbers are far more than this (about 100 million). The data also show that domestic workers constitute 1.7% of the total labor force and 3.6% of payroll employment. Besides, the data prove that 87% of domestic workers are women and women domestic workers constitute 7.5% of women’s employment. The data of ILO also revealed there are 15.5 million child laborers aged between 5 and 17 engaged in domestic work. Out of 15.5 million children, 11.3 million are girls (Tijdens and Klaveren, 2011: 7-8, 11). Although the net numbers about domestic work cannot be determined,

even the data available show that domestic workers, the majority of whom are women, have a rather significant place in employment.

Evaluation of the Problems about Domestic Work from Different Perspectives

Law makers have left domestic work out of many regulations. Domestic work has, in fact, been neglected. Thus, many domestic workers have been left unprotected against unjust and unequal treatment (Tijdens and Klaveren, 2011: 9). Since domestic workers have not been included in labor legislation, they have also been left outside most legal regulations. Therefore, they should primarily be included in legal regulations and social protection so that they can have working and living conditions compatible with human dignity. Such regulations should not be handled only at national level, but international standards should also be taken into consideration (ILO, 2010a:11).

Long working hours are among the most important problems domestic workers have. They are most of the time forced to start working very early in the morning and continue late at night. Domestic workers who are involved in child or elderly care suffer from this problem much more than others. Working hours can be extended to the entire day without any interruption especially when domestic workers are live-in workers (ILO 2010: 7).

Another problem that domestic workers have is low wages. Live-in workers in particular are usually paid in kind. In other words, in return for the services they render, their food and accommodation needs are met. Wages might vary based on different criteria such as nationality or gender. workers of certain national origins might be subject to discrimination through lower wages while workers of some other origins might be paid more (ILO, 2010a:7).

Mobbing is another important problem that domestic workers are frequently exposed to. Especially live-in and migrant domestic workers are subject to mistreatment. Domestic workers might face verbal abuse through insults at their nation, race and personality as they might be subject to physical or sexual harassment (ILO 2010: 8). In addition, they may be accused by their employers of many negative situations at home and their employers might interfere with their actions and behaviors inside the house (Evid-Sen, 2013).

Domestic workers might also encounter problems related to work health and safety. In fact, many problems about work health and safety are also linked to the problems mentioned above. Domestic workers might get chronic illnesses resulting from tiredness, which is directly linked to long working hours. Besides, they might have attention deficiency disorders as a result of tiredness, which eventually brings about job accidents. Moreover, the use of cleaning materials of poor quality leads to dermatological diseases. Furthermore, because they do a physically tiring job, they might have a backache and knee problems. In addition, they have many psychological problems because of verbal, physical and sexual abuse. They can also have job accidents like falling from heights or slipping, which might cause them to be injured and even killed (Evid-Sen, 2013).

The fact that domestic workers generally do household chores, which are attributed to women in male-dominated societies, needs particular attention. This not only gives us a clue about the employment relation but also offers important indicators as to the perception of gender. As conceptualizations like “housewives” show, domestic works have been associated with women’s “natural” tendencies and traits (Bora, 2008: 59). Even though domestic works, which are attributed to women, have been included in paid employment, they still have not drifted apart from this gender-based sphere and they are still assumed by women in general (Toksöz and Ulutaş, 2011: 166). Besides, house is mostly kept outside economic sphere and there have been efforts to separate house and workplace (Bora, 2008: 59). As a result, domestic workers do not have a classical employment relation with their employers, but they are more stuck in a job-family relation. That is the reason why it has become more difficult to define domestic work accurately and while domestic workers are trying to establish an employment relation with their employers, they are involved in the private life of their employers because of the nature of their jobs (e.g childcare and the care of elderly). Domestic workers generally assume responsibilities attributed to women in patriarchal societies such as cleaning, cooking, childcare and elderly care. Because of the nature of the job they are doing, they have had trouble establishing a formal employment relation with their employers (ILO, 2010a: 7; Bora, 2008: 73-74).

Migrant domestic workers encounter many different problems in business life. One of their most important problems is that they cannot directly converse with their employers. Language problem triggers the communication problem. Thus, they are

mostly forced to accept the working conditions without fully understanding the terms and conditions in their employment contract or without negotiating their responsibilities and rights. Apart from these, many social and cultural factors cause them to put up with poor working conditions and be subject to discrimination and mistreatment. Migrant domestic workers have also problems about social security insurance and working permits as well as problems with the agencies that help them be employed. Such agencies cut their wages giving the cost of employment and travel expenses as an excuse. As a result, they work with very low wages or no wage at all. This makes migrant domestic workers dependent on their employers and leaves them defenseless against any kind of abuse (Tijdens and Klaveren, 2011: 15-16; Erdoğan and Toksöz, 2013: 11-12). All these points and other factors as well as the feminization of domestic work and migrant work contribute to inequalities related to gender, race, ethnic origins and social status. Consequently, migrant domestic workers have become quite vulnerable to the violation of human rights. Exploitation of migrant workers might go beyond long working hours without any break, low wages, poor accommodation and working conditions, lack of social security and humiliation. In fact, such abuse might even turn into quasi-slavery and be related to human trafficking (Del Pino, 2010: 10).

Importance of Organized Struggle for Domestic Workers

As mentioned earlier, there are millions of domestic workers in the world and most of these workers work in a disorganized way. Therefore, efforts to organize domestic workers would be an important step to bring together such a big group of people. However, it should be mentioned that domestic work has distinctive features different from many occupations. Sometimes traditional organization models and support activities may not suffice, so it is of significant importance that trade unions explain the significance of organized struggle to domestic workers. Domestic work can, thus, be organized within trade union movement. Apart from this, specific problems of domestic workers should be identified and it should be ensured that domestic workers come to agree that trade unions are important tools to solve such problems. All these objectives can be reached if trade union movement is based on a multi-dimensional understanding and if trade unions carry out comprehensive activities at national and international level.

International Solidarity for Domestic Workers Rights

In 2011, ILO issued the Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers numbered 189 and Recommendation concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers numbered 201. These two regulations are very important for the protection and improvement of the rights and interests of domestic workers. In fact, not only ILO but also many NGOs and trade unions worked in solidarity to create this convention and have member states ratify it. The convention numbered 189 was accepted with 396 aye and 16 nay votes. The lobbying activities of International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) have a significant role in this result. Indeed, ITUC greatly contributed to the international labor conference in 2011 and facilitated the coordination of trade unions and adoption of the convention (Tijdens and Klaveren, 2011: 1-2). Trying to popularize the adoption of the convention numbered 189, ITUC launched a campaign called "12 by 12" and targeted to have the convention ratified in 12 countries by the end of 2012. ITUC's campaign was not unilateral but supported by many related labor organizations such as IDWN, International Union of Food (IUF), Public Services International (PSI), European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Solidarity and Solidar Migrant Forum as well as the trade unions and NGOs concerned (ILO, 2012:3). Although the targeted number was not reached by due date, the Convention has been ratified by 17 countries to date and this campaign has made great contributions to trade union movement (ILO, 2015).

ITUC's activities are not limited to this campaign. The Confederation organizes a lot of campaigns about this subject and involves domestic workers in decent work campaigns. It draws attention to the problems of domestic workers with manifestos and offers solutions to problems. It also prepares brochures to inform people about the exemplary practices in other countries. In addition to these, it prepares reports and intensively supports national and international organization movements. Besides, the meetings held in countries where domestic workers suffer from problems a lot and the reports about these countries contribute to the struggle of domestic workers. ITUC works in close cooperation with many international organizations engaged in this field and undertakes concerted action with such organizations in order to provide solutions to the problems of domestic workers (ITUC, 2015; IDWN-ITUC-HRW, 2013).

Another important organization that contributes to the struggle of domestic workers at international level is International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). An international conference held in Holland in 2006 hosted many international organizations such as IUF, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), ITUC, Global Labour Institute (GLI) and ILO and this synergy turned into a network. Having assumed an important role in the creation and popularization of ILO's convention numbered 189, IDWN organized a founding congress in 2013 and evolved into an international federation representing domestic workers. Some of the activities of IDWF can be listed as follows: getting over the problems in countries where domestic workers work in poor conditions, carrying out the required projects in countries that have not ratified the convention numbered 189, improving the working standards of domestic workers, organizing regular trainings for domestic workers and fixing solidarity days when domestic workers can express their problems (IDWF, 2014a). Besides, IDWF acts in cooperation with many international labor organizations and trade unions and contributes to the organization of conferences on domestic work. To be more specific, IDWF helps domestic workers raise their voice in international platforms, carries out lobbying activities and leads the preparation of manifestos, reports and guides to make sure that the demands of domestic workers are expressed at international level (IDWF, 2014b).

IUF is another important international trade union working in cooperation with IDWF and focusing on the struggle of domestic workers. IUF is a meta-organization of the workers employed in food sector and similar fields. IUF has a wide organization network covering domestic workers. Aware of the legal obstacles against the organization of workers employed in marginal sectors, IUF emphasizes that the organization of such workers in forms other than trade unions (like NGOs) is important, too. Leading the development of a different understanding within Global Union Federation (GUF), IUF has helped the networks created by domestic workers act in cooperation with each other as semi-autonomous structures. Thus, the representativeness and reliability of these networks have increased. IUF has also included the leaders of domestic workers in its global programs and encouraged the trade unions operating under it to follow the same principle. This not only reinforced the political prestige of these networks but also urged trade unions to support such

networks. Briefly, IUF has been one of the important actors turning IDWN into a federation (Mather, 2013: 15-16).

WIEGO is another organization that significantly supports IDWF. WIEGO works in close cooperation with IDWF when it comes to strategic and practical support. WIEGO has significant contributions to the establishment of communication with other organizations and networks, provision of financial support and compilation of statistical information about domestic workers (Mather, 2013: 17).

In short, although it seems that domestic workers struggle for their rights via certain international organizations, there is a great solidarity behind this struggle. Decent working and living conditions for domestic workers are the ultimate goal of international labor organizations. Accordingly, many more activities will be carried out so that more and more countries ratify ILO's Convention numbered 189. Some of the activities that international labor organizations concertedly undertake in order to ensure that the problems of domestic workers are increasingly discussed in international platforms are lobbying, launching campaigns, preparing manifestos that emphasize the importance of the issue and offer solutions and promoting international organization. Above all, it is very important that the situation of a domestic worker whose rights have been violated can be shared with the international community. Other domestic workers and the entire society can be informed about the situation of that worker. Thus, it becomes possible to create an international solidarity culture. This is the most important contribution that international labor movement has made to the struggle of domestic workers.

The Effect of National Trade Union Movement to Struggle of Domestic Workers

The achievements of international labor movement accelerate national practices, too. Especially, following ILO's Convention numbered 189, there has been an increase in the number of national regulations targeting domestic workers (ILO, 2013: 8-9). It is without doubt that national trade unions have contributed to the enforcement of such regulations.

In 1996, domestic workers created National Federation of Domestic workers in Bolivia (FENATRAHOB) and in 2003 their struggle ended to their benefits. This movement

played a significant role in the issuance of the law on domestic workers in Bolivia. This law granted many rights to domestic workers including minimum wage, regular office hours, paid leave and health insurance (Solidar, 2011: 10; UN-WOMEN ve ITUC, 2013: 4). Another positive example is the legal struggle of Domestic Workers United (DWU) in New York. DWU managed to persuade authorities to pay an amount of nearly 500.000 USD to the domestic workers, who had not been paid for a long time (ILO, 2012: 8). In the USA, a regulation passed in September 2013 introduced certain rights to domestic workers such as minimum wage, overtime payment and the same law expanded the scope of existing rights. Nearly 2 million domestic workers have been positively affected by this law, in the making of which DWU had important contributions (IDWN-HRW-ITUC, 2013: 8-9). On January 18, 2013, Batas Kasambahey, which is considered to be the Magna Carta of domestic workers, was accepted in the Philippines. This act introduced important regulations in working life and social insurance rights of domestic workers. Technical Working Group (TWG), a triple advisory group, had an active role in the preparation of the act. Some leading labor organizations such as Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, the Federation of Free Workers, the Alliance of Progressive Labor, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) and the Informal Sector Coalition of the Philippines (ISP) also contributed to the process (ITUC, 2013: 25; ILO, 2009).

Trade unions, with their strategies and activities, have undoubtedly made great contributions to the practice of the above-mentioned regulations and similar legislations. Therefore, possible ways of solving the problems of domestic workers should be discussed, priorities should be identified and strategies should be determined within trade union movement. Similarly, previous experiences should be taken into account and best practices should set an example.

Activities concertedly carried out by trade unions and public institutions are extremely important for the definition and recognition of domestic work and domestic workers within legal legislation. The awareness of public institutions should be raised through such activities. For instance, in New York, DWU cooperated with the Ministry of Labor and conducted trainings aimed at specialists and inspector based on their needs. The trainings covered topics such as the features of the domestic work sector, the problems faced by workers throughout their employment and the strategies applied by employers to turn the tables on themselves (ILO, 2012: 6). The purpose of the trainings was to

help inspectors who are to audit domestic work fulfill their mission more actively. The activities led by trade unions are not limited to this. They have conducted many more activities.

In many countries, a special national day has been determined for domestic workers. This is one of the most significant outcomes of the trade union movement. On these special days, the public is informed in detail about the rights, interests and problems of domestic workers through press or in other ways. Also, various activities are performed so that domestic workers can have decent working and living standards. Such activities are common in Latin America and March 30 is celebrated as the day of domestic workers. Apart from this, October 7 is celebrated as *World Decent Work Day* when trade unions mention the problems of domestic workers. Such national or international days make the problems of domestic workers known and their struggle gains a much more important dimension. There is no doubt that activities like this do not suffice to reflect the importance of the issue. It is essential that domestic workers get together to be able to regard themselves as individuals of labor force and learn about the problems of one another. Their ability to act together within an organized movement is very important. Therefore, inviting domestic workers to big meetings and discussing their problems in such platforms will significantly contribute to the problems of domestic workers. For example, National Confederation of Trade Unions of Senegal (CNTS) organized the march on October 7, World Decent Work Day with the participation of domestic workers. This not only raised awareness about the problems of domestic workers but also reinforced the class consciousness of working class (Solidar, 2011: 10; ILO, 2012: 8). It should be noted that celebrating May 1, International Workers' Day and March 8, International Women's Day in this direction will contribute to the struggle of domestic workers.

Trade unions frequently use communication channels such as the media, Internet and radio to raise awareness about domestic work. One of the best examples in this field is the short film made by the confederation of workers' trade unions in Paraguay United Workers Trade Union Federation (CUT) (ILO, 2012: 8). Similar activities can be seen in other countries, too. In some countries, specific television channels have been established to increase awareness and television programs have been prepared to train child domestic workers. Some radio stations have been created to raise awareness about human trafficking (ILO, 2010a: 88). Raising awareness and creating

perception are without doubt not enough to solve the problem. In addition to this, there should be a clear transformation and the state should also be involved in the process. For example, Malaysia Trade Union Council (MTUC) prepared post cards on which some demands such as weekly leave, decent work and living conditions were written to be sent to the representatives of the government. MTUC also publicized the violations that domestic workers have been subject to through media (ITUC, 2012; ILO, 2012: 9). Another example about how to protect the rights of domestic workers can be seen in Sri Lanka. A trade union operating in Sri Lanka created a telephone line and set up a complaint mechanism through which domestic workers can communicate the abuses they have been exposed to. In a similar way, Jamaica and the Philippines have also applied such methods. Yet, it should be remembered that although such methods have contributed to the solution of the problem to a great extent, they have failed to be sustainable for some reasons (Kabeer et al., 2013: 255; ILO, 2012: 8-9).

Domestic workers may be deprived of sufficient legal protection, but they get a lot of support. In many countries, there are different struggles, which are still ongoing or which have been concluded. In Trinidad and Tobago, there has been a struggle for domestic workers so that they can have minimum wage. The National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) has persuaded the government to provide minimum wage to domestic workers. Following this successful step, domestic workers have gained more rights, too. Among them are paid leave on national official holidays, sickness leave and maternity leave (ILO, 2012: 46). Struggle for the rights of migrant workers, who constitute an important part of domestic workers, have also an important place in this field. In many countries, people struggle for the rights of migrant works and have obtained important gains. There are also significant struggles to prevent child labor in domestic work. In Tanzania, Conservation, Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers' Union (CHODAWU) has prevented the exploitation of 6000 children in domestic work and reached an important accomplishment (ILO, 2010b: 16; ILO, 2012: 47).

Conclusion

First of all, It should be noted that the solution of the problems of domestic workers shouldn't be evaluated from a single aspect. Certainly many different strategies and process are effective in solving these problems. In some respects trade unions have important roles in solving domestic workers problems such as creation of social perception about the problem of domestic workers, created pressure on the governments to make legal regulations for domestic workers, organizing campaigns for domestic workers for recognizing their rights etc.

Decent work and decent life for domestic workers, improvement of labor standards across the world are the main issues that need to give importance by international trade union movement. In this respect international trade unions and other labor organizations should organize solidarity activities and prepare publications and reports containing information related to domestic workers problems. Domestic workers should be invited to congresses, submits, meetings and workshops coordinated by international trade unions and other labor organizations. Thus domestic workers will have chance to express their problems in an international platform. Thereby awareness of the domestic workers problem will be increased at the international level. Problems experienced all over the world by domestic workers should unfolds such above methods. International trade unions and other labor organizations should organize campaigns to get more ratifications of ILO Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention numbered 189 and strengthen domestic workers' unions. In addition, technology and social media should be used to strengthen international solidarity. Above all, all international labor organizations should act in co-operation.

At the national level, the problem of domestic workers should be expressed more intensely by national domestic workers trade unions. All parties related to issue should be brought together and national minimum labor standards should be determined. Various workshops and meetings should be coordinated to achieve this goal. Trade unions should inform employer as well as workers about domestic workers rights. National labor movements should struggle for the provision of legal guarantees for domestic workers by creating pressure on governments. Domestic workers trade unions should collaborate with trade unions organized in other sectors to strengthen their right struggle. Above all the importance of organized struggle should be adopted

to domestic workers. In brief, domestic workers should discover their power from collective solidarity and collective struggle.

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