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INTEREST GROUP POLITICS IN BANGLADESH : ROLE OF SRAMIK KARMACHARI OIKKA PARISHAD (SKOP)

INTRODUCTION

Interest groups are regarded as organised aggregates which aim at influencing the government and governmental decision in their favour without willing to promote their members to public office. It is worth mentioning that study of interest groups gains importance along with the growing emphasis placed on the informal factors of politics. In today's democratic politics interest groups have become an integral part of the political process. Interest articulation is of crucial importance among the input functions of the political system. Almond noted that four main types of structures may be involved in interest articulation, such as institutional interest groups occurring within the organised institutions of legislatures, political executives, armies and bureaucracies; Non-associational interest groups represented by kinship, ethnic, religious, regional, class and status groups; anomic interest groups such as demonstrations and riots; and associational interest groups including trade unions, business groups and the like.¹ Associational interest groups are the specialised structures of interest articulation.²

1. Almond and Coleman, *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (N. J. Princeton University Press, 1971) p. 34.

2. *Ibid.*

Among the associational interest groups in the developing societies the trade unions have been seen distinctly political. It is generally assumed that increased politicization of the trade unions of the Third World nations is mainly due to the low level of economic development and continuous political chaos, confusion and instability of these societies. In the political processes of the developing countries the trade unions come up with various demands alongwith other socio-political organisations and thus they attempt to attract public opinion in their favour.

For the purpose of this study one organised associational interest group which is involved in the political process of Bangladesh namely Sramik Karmachari Oikka Parishad (Unity Council of the Workers and Employees, or SKOP) has been taken up as a case study. Since its inception SKOP has come up with important political and economic demands. It has become a champion of the trade union movement in Bangladesh. SKOP has played a crucial role in putting forward the long cherished demands of the workers and employees and has effectively pressed the then ruling regime to come to an agreement in May 1984. While organising movements for its demands SKOP has taken part in the anti-autocracy movements in the country along with the major political parties and alliances. What were the objectives behind the formation of SKOP? What is the composition of SKOP? What methods and strategies have been employed by SKOP to achieve its goals? How far is it successful? What are its problems and prospects? These are some pertinent questions which have been investigated in this study. The nature of this research is qualitative. For the purpose of collecting information the author has depended on both primary and secondary sources. These include available literature on interest group activism, newspapers and journals, SKOP printing materials and information gathered through interview with the leaders of SKOP.

First section of this paper deals with the theoretical considerations relating to interest groups including definition, group theory, role of interest groups and its difference with political parties, and interest groups in the developed and developing world. Second section discusses the historical background and the trade union movement in Bangladesh. In section three role of SKOP in connection with the above mentioned questions has been analysed. In the final section some concluding observations have been made.

I. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

An interest group is defined as an organisation of individuals with shared attitudes and policy goals that makes claims upon others in society.³ Harmon Zeigler and Wayne Peak have defined an interest group as "an organized social aggregate which seeks political goods that is incapable of providing for itself".⁴ Thus the rise of interest groups occurs when individuals with a common concern or interest opine that by banding together and consolidating their power they can exert more influence over public policy.⁵ There has always been desire of individuals and groups to improve and protect their relative share of society's resources. As such interest groups are well known for expressing specific interests and positions by applying pressure on the political process. Interest groups are considered as the effective vehicles for the expression of the needs of many segments of the society. Shaw and Pierce noted that interest groups articulate their demands and they try to influence the outputs of the political

3. Abraham Holtzman, *American Government : Ideals and Reality*, (N. J. Englewood Cliffs : Prentice-Hall, 1980), p. 174.

4. Zeigler and Peak, *Interest Groups in American Society*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 3.

5. Dye, Greene and Parthemos, *Governing the American Democracy*, (NY : St. Martins Press, 1980), p. 211.

system in each and every possible phase of the political process.⁶ The organised interest groups always make attempts to have closer association with the concerned governmental agencies in order to influence the legislation as well as administration. Besides, these groups also try to generate necessary public opinion for advancing their cause while influencing public policies.

We may mention here that the phrases like 'interest groups', 'lobbies', 'private associations', 'interest articulators' and 'pressure groups' are often used interchangeably and in this paper all these terms have a synonymous meaning.

As a protest against the descriptive formalism in analysing politics, the Western political scientists specially the American scholars, paid their attention in interest group study in the beginning of this century. Arthur F. Bentley's pioneering work 'The Process of Government' was published in 1908 as the origin of the group theory in its present form. Systematic thinking in regard to the group theory was revived since 1950s by well known scholars like avid Truman, Earl Latham, Robert Dahl, G. A. Almond and others. These scholars have placed the understanding of government and politics into the context of clashing group interest. 'The group theory leads logically to a particular concept of the social system and of political behaviour'.⁷ Bentley considered the society as nothing but the complex of groups which compose it.⁸ Truman regarded social system as a sort of mosaic of organised groups.⁹ The group theorists are interested in the fact that society keeps going in spite of the continuous conflict among groups in which each one is furiously pursuing narrow self-

6. Shaw and Pierce, *Readings on The American Political System*, (Massachusetts: Heath and Co. Lexington, 1970), p. 271.

7. S. P. Varma, *Modern Political Theory*, (Vani Educational Books, 1986), p. 163.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

interest of its own.¹⁰ Gabriel A. Almond noted that the kinds of interest groups which are present in a society, the specificity or diffuseness of their demands, their conceptions of the political arena and of the "rule of the game", the ethos which they bring with them into the political process—these are the 'raw materials' of politics which some set of mechanisms must perform into the political personnel and public policy.¹¹ Study of politics has thus been regarded by the group theorists as the study of groups at work and as such these theorists establish the view that group politics provides an important dimension of politics.

Interest groups perform an important function of articulating interests in the political system. Like political parties these groups link individuals with government. Interest groups, as mentioned earlier, are considered important in a democratic social order. They assist the decision-makers by providing them with useful information and data for necessary policy formulation. While putting forward their causes the interest groups compete with each other and pave the way for a balance of demands in the political system. With the growth of functions of the governments there has been growth and development of various groups in society.

Interest groups while articulating the demands of their actual and potential membership serve at the same time as important outlets for the social energies of their members. Socialisation of the individuals by the interest groups often proves lasting and more effective.¹²

The organised groups employ various techniques in achieving their objectives and goals. The most commonly adopted

10. *Ibid.*

11. Almond in B. Fadia, *Pressure Groups in Indian Politics*, (New Delhi : Radiant Publishers, 1980), p. 10.

12. *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, p. 487.

techniques used by the interest groups are the following : lobbying; propagating views through press and mass media; mobilizing public opinion in their favour; staging physical demonstrations; creating violence; etc.

We may mention that power and influence of different interest groups vary considerably. Some groups are stronger and are consulted at every turn and have easy access to ministers and senior bureaucrats; others are weaker and they have to depend on petitioning, lobbying and street protests.¹³ Levels of pressure group activity and determinants of their methods depend on the following variables : the political institutional structure; the nature of the party system; the political culture; the nature of the issue; and the nature of the group.¹⁴

The involvement of the interest groups into the political process and their actions in many instances resemble political parties but there have been fundamental differences between these two types of organisations. Neumann mentioned that fundamentally pressure groups are the representation of homogeneous interests seeking influence. The interest group is strong and effective when it has a directed specific purpose. Political parties on the other hand, seeking office and directed towards policy decisions, combine heterogeneous groups. In fact it is one of their major themes to reconcile the diverse forces within political society; theirs is an integrative function which is not the domain of the interest groups.¹⁵ V. O. Key explained that pressure groups do not openly attempt either to nominate their candidates or to assume the responsibility for conducting the business of government. But such a distinction of labour may not

13. Alan Cawson, *Corporatism and Political Theory* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1986) p. 9.

14. Alan R. Ball, *Modern Politics and Government* (London : The Macmillan Press, 1981) p. 103.

15. Neumann in *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

always be clear cut as the pressure groups may be allied with different political parties and they may campaign for their respective party candidates. However, since these groups seek to influence the exercise of governmental power and public policy, they perform a distinctive function. Pressure groups by acting as spokesmen for the special organised interests within society supplement the party system and the formal functionaries or instruments of government.¹⁶

There have been differences between the interest groups of the developing countries and the developed world in regard to their position, development and role. Bernard E. Brown mentioned that generally in traditional societies interest groups are relatively unorganised and these groups develop gradually with the development of industrialisation.¹⁷ It has been observed that 'the political process in the West is generally composed of more formally and explicitly organised interests than is the case in non-Western countries'.¹⁸ In regard to the pressure groups in the Western world and the Third World countries the following differences are generally noticed : In the Western countries interest groups are regarded as the part and parcel and established feature of their political systems whereas in the developing nations the interest groups are still in the process of development. In United Kingdom and United States the organised interests are consulted in various ways in the policy formulation. These groups are in fact parts of rule-making in these societies. On the other hand in developing countries the governments have been seen reluctant to bow under any kind of pressures. In the less developed countries the economic and occupational interests are not well articulated by functionally specific associations and these groups have been unsuccessful to emerge as crucial units in the

16. D. G. Kousoulas, *On Government and Politics*, (California : Books/Cole Publishing Co. 1982).

17. B. Fadia, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

18. *Ibid.* pp. 33-34.

political process. J. S. Coleman observes that institutional interests of army and bureaucracy are found playing dominant role in the developing societies.¹⁹ Thus compared to non-Western world the organised interests of the West are more powerful alongwith their techniques and they are in a better position in the political process. But whatever the nature, strength and role of interest groups they are very much present in the political systems of both the developed and developing countries.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH

The history of the trade unions in this part of the world dates back to the British colonial rule when in 1890 the Bombay Mills Hands Association was formed as the first labour union. In the beginning of this century gradually other bodies like Printers Union of Calcutta were established. These attempts at organisation of workers were mainly of a sporadic character. In this sub-continent trade unions began to develop towards the end of the World War-I. During the War scarcity of essential commodities and eventual miserable conditions of the workers led some prominent persons to build up labour organisations and voice the grievances of the workers. As such many Indian National Congress leaders became involved in trade union movement. In 1920 All India Trade Union Congress was established as a central association of the labour unions. In 1927 trade union Act was approved for this sub-continent for the first time which led to a gradual increase of the number of trade unions. The nationalist movement against the British rule encouraged the workers to get organised and ventilate their demands. Trade union movement gave birth to many prominent political leaders of this sub-continent. Lala Rajpat Rai, C. R. Das, Nehru were well known leaders of trade union congress. Prominent Muslim leaders like A.

19. Almond and Coleman, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

K. Fazlul Huq, H. S. Suhrawardi, Sikandar Mir were also involved in the trade union movement.

After the partition of India in 1947 East Pakistan Trade Union Federation was established in this country with Dr. A. M. Malik as president. Later in course of time the following labour organisations were formed : Trade Union Federation in 1948, All Pakistan Trade Union Federation in 1949, All Pakistan Federation of Labour in 1959, Purbo Pakistan Sramik Federation in 1969. In 1969-1970 the main trade unions which were formed include Jatiya Sramik League, Trade Union Kendra, Sangjukta Sramik Federation. By 1971 the number of registered trade unions was 1160.²⁰

During the period of united Pakistan the people of this country vigorously struggled for their democratic rights and autonomy. Every political movement of the Bengali population got momentum with the spontaneous participation of the labourers and workers. Among others this participation of the working class in the democratic struggle paved the way for radicalization of Bengali demands. The Six-point Movement of 1966 and its deep imprint in the Bengali minds led them to organise greater movement which was later culminated into mass uprising in 1969 in which the role of the workers and employees was very significant. The militant techniques used by these groups during the mass upsurge proved highly effective against the autocratic anti-Bengali regime.

After the achievement of independent Bangladesh in 1971 the high hopes and aspirations of the working class regarding their grievances were never realized. Even in sovereign Bangladesh the labour force has been brought under repression and black laws in

20. Jaglul Alam, 'Sramik Shangothaner Shankhya Barchey, Barchey Sram Ashontosh' *The Weekly Bichitra*, (in Bengali), 12th year 22 July, 1983, p. 28.

different times. In spite of that there has been a gradual increase in the number of trade unions in Bangladesh. Till February 1990 the total number of registered trade unions in this country was 4130 and the number of membership of the said trade unions was 12,79,080.²¹

Although there has been a steady growth of the trade unions in this country yet these organisations have not been able to properly ventilate their demands and failed to achieve their objectives. In many instances the trade unions are nurtured under the direct guidance of the political parties. The reason is that most of the trade unions act as the labour fronts or wings of their parent political party. The crisis and factionalism of the political parties have simultaneous effects on their respective labour fronts. Since the labour unions are greatly handled as the instruments of the political parties they in fact lose their vigour and can not stand as effective force either to pressurize the government and the owner sections or to fulfill their grievances. As such the trade unions have not been successful to represent themselves as influential organised interests in the political process and have failed to offer effective leadership for the country's labour forces.

III. SKOP : A CASE STUDY

In order to strengthen the trade union movement in Bangladesh and to add greater momentum to the struggle for the demands of the working class, a need was felt in early 1980s to establish a united forum of the workers and employees of this country. Such a strong platform was necessary for effectively pressurizing the government to accept genuine labour demands.

21. *Bangladesh Economic Survey* 1989-90, Ministry of Finance, Finance Division, (June 1990), p. 203.

Initially in 1983 some national trade union federations came forward for the purpose and later at the beginning of 1984 thirteen such federations formed the alliance of the national trade union federations called Sramik Karmachari Oikka Parishad or SKOP. Subsequently the number of the national trade union federations joining the SKOP rose to fifteen which were as follows: Bangladesh Trade union Kendra; Jatiya Sramik League; Bangladesh Workers Federation; Bangladesh Trade Union Shangha; Bangladesh Federation of Labour; Jatiya Sramik Federation; Bangladesh Shanjukta Sramik Federation; Bangladesh Gonotantik Sramik Andolon; Samajtantrik Sramik Federation; Jatiya Sramik Jote; Jatayabadi Sramik Dal; Jatiya Sramik League Bangladesh; Samajtantrik Sramik Front; Bangla Sramik Federation; and Bangladesh Sramik Federation. At present nineteen national trade union federations are affiliated to SKOP as its component parts.

SKOP which has been an alliance of the national trade union federations represents itself as a unique platform of the workers and employees of this country. Since SKOP has not been a registered body, it does not have any written constitution of its own and as such no organisational set up of SKOP can be traced. The leadership of SKOP is collective as represented by the leaders of the national federations which are affiliated to it. This collective leadership is responsible for the affairs and doings of SKOP.

While establishing SKOP the founding leaders came to an agreement regarding the code of conduct in running this united forum. The code of conduct was not written down in any document rather such conduct was to be followed as an agreed principle like convention. The main points of the code of conduct have been the following :

- a) Equal status and equal rights of all the national trade union federations which comprise SKOP.

- b) Decisions of SKOP are to be made on the basis of consensus.
- c) The meetings of SKOP are to be presided over in turn by the leaders of its component federations. Thus the principle of rotation in regard to presiding meetings is to be followed.
- d) The national trade union federations affiliating to SKOP will select their respective representatives to participate in the meetings and other programmes of SKOP.
- e) All concerned would do their best to make SKOP a unique body to put forward the demands of the workers and employees of Bangladesh.
- f) All other national federations, excepting anti-liberation forces willing to join SKOP for strengthening its movement would be included in this alliance.

The national trade union federations which are the component parts of SKOP represent three broad categories of membership. These are as follows :

- a) Socialist;
- b) Nationalist; and
- c) Independent.

The national federations belonging to the first type have a socialist and revolutionary outlook and they are more concerned about strengthening the movement of the politically conscious labour forces against the existing capitalist system. The federations of the second category consider themselves as the nationalist forces and thus they are interested to struggle mostly

for the economic rights of the working people and gain benefits within the existing state structure. The third category represents those federations having nationalist outlook but non-aligned to political parties. It can however be mentioned here that most of the SKOP leaders have political affiliation and as such their federations work as the labour wings of different political parties.

After the formation of SKOP its leaders moved forward and launched a Five-point demand programme. The five-point demand included : to achieve the rights of free trade union activities; to stop further denationalisation of industries; to grant thirty per cent dearness allowance to all workers and employees in both the public and private sectors; to publish immediately the report of the Industrial Workers Wage Commission; and to set up factories and mills at the shortest possible time by reducing unproductive expenditure on non-essential heads.

In advancing its demands SKOP has employed the commonly adopted methods of placing effective pressure on government, staging demonstrations, approaching to public opinion through meetings, leaflets, magazines etc; holding strikes and adopting other types of action programmes from time to time.

Initially the ruling regime was found reluctant either to negotiate or to accept the demands made by SKOP. But in spite of such government attitudes SKOP went on with its programme and organised effective movement. Gradually the five-point demand of the workers and employees gained enough strength alongwith the total support given by the country's major opposition political parties. The 24-hour hartal of 28th April 1984 called by SKOP was fully observed which expressed the solidarity and forcefulness fo the united labour movement. SKOP leaders later threatened the government that they would call 48-hour countrywide strike on 22nd and 23rd May 1984 if the regime failed to accept their demands. Facing such tremendous pressure the government had

to sit with the SKOP leaders and after marathon meetings, prolonged discussions and debate an agreement was signed by the two parties on 21st May 1984. From the government side Labour Minister and Labour Secretary signed the document in the presence of the then Prime Minister Mr. Ataur Rahman. On behalf of SKOP the following leaders signed the agreement : Kazi Jafar Ahmed, Mukhlesur Rahman, Abdullah Sarkar, Protapuddin Ahmed, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Mustafa Jamal Haider and others. Such an agreement between the government and an alliance of the national trade union federations was first of its kind in the history of Bangladesh. This agreement included 29 demands of the workers and employees. Important among these were : cancellation of Industrial Law Ordinance 1982 and MLO 19; facilities for the terminated labourers in the transferred and other industrial complexes; fixation of minimum wage at Taka 460; increase of dearness allowance; etc.

Since the conditions of the agreement were in favour of the working class people, the leaders of SKOP termed it as great victory. An autocratic military regime was thus forced to concede in the face of a united labour movement for trade union freedom and their economic demands.

Although the government accepted some important demands of the labourers, it was found unwilling to implement in full the agreement signed in May 1984. There were however pressures from the leaders of SKOP for total fulfilment of the said settlement.

During this time a major set back occurred as some influential and powerful leaders of SKOP like Kazi Jafar Ahmed left this alliance and joined the government. Such a betrayal from the prominent leaders came as a serious blow to the growing strength of SKOP. As a result of which SKOP efforts proved comparatively less effective than the past in regard to successfully pressurize

the ruling regime for its cause. However, there had been initiative from SKOP to regain its strength and organise afresh its united movement.

On March 1, 1985 strict regulations were imposed under martial law which prohibited political meetings, demonstrations and hartals in the country. The trade union activities were also banned. In subsequent months some leading members of SKOP were arrested. They were later released in the wake of violent movement of the labourers.

One unfortunate event which greatly affected the power and solidarity of the united labour movement had been the break up of the unity of SKOP. Factionalism developed within SKOP on the question of the election of Jatiya Sangsad (national parliament) held in May 1986. Some national trade union federations were in favour of the election. Some federations were against it and some federations maintained neutral position in this regard. Factionalism and the resultant division of SKOP made it a moribund forum. But later on there was a realisation on the part of the labour leaders that the hopeless fragmentation of the labour forces were against their common interest and eventually such observations paved the way for the reunification of the component parts of SKOP. As such necessary initiatives through mutual discussions were taken to close down the gap of differences of opinions. It was thus evaluated that break up of the alliance on the question of election of Jatiya Sangsad proved wrong, that factional feelings within SKOP was unacceptable irrespective of opinions, that reunification of the alliance could be possible only through a process of united movement. Thus reunification of SKOP was finally effected within one year on the occasion of the celebration of May Day in 1987.

After its reunification SKOP once again moved forward and organised fresh movement along with the demands of implemen-

ting the earlier agreement including increasing dearness allowance to 60% ; paying eleven months arrear ; stopping the creation of holding companies and denationalisation; cancelling lock-out and layoff; opening closed mills; etc. The strike of 12th July 1987 called by SKOP was totally observed. Thus SKOP reappeared as a strong platform of the country's working force.

It is important to note that SKOP played a very significant role in the anti-autocracy movement during 1987 alongwith the major opposition political parties and alliances of the country led by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. During this movement for restoring democracy the labourers and workers came forward at the call of SKOP and strengthened the hands of the political forces with their militant techniques which were effectively employed during hartals and processions.

From November 1987 the political movement of the opposition was turned into a one-point movement against the autocratic Ershad regime. Participation of SKOP in this movement was very crucial. SKOP offered its total support to the one-point demand at the cost of its Five-Point demand programme. It was therefore a great contribution as well as sacrifice on the part of the workers and employees for the cause of establishing democracy in Bangladesh.

The one-point political movement continued for nearly three months but could not be successful. Since SKOP identified itself with the one-point demand of the political alliances, it lost its separate identity and as such the labour movement lost its vigour at the national level. The failure of the political movement left a deep shock all over the country. There was also a simultaneous effect of frustration on the whole trade union movement of the workers and labourers.

After the floods of 1988 SKOP once again raised its demands and called for a united movement. On 14th July 1988 SKOP placed its amended five-point demands which included : implementation of the agreement of 1984; fixation of minimum wages at Taka 1400 along with other allowances; formulation of favourable labour policy and industrial law as per ILO Charter and their proper application; stoppage of indiscriminate disinvestment and retrenchment of workers; reopening of laid off mills and establishment of trade union freedom and democracy at all levels in the country.²² The movement of amended demands of SKOP continued along with its programmes of rallies, demonstrations and calling strikes from time to time. SKOP also urged the eight-party, seven-party and five-party political alliances for extending their full support to its demand programme.

There have been several obstacles faced by SKOP while pursuing its demands. These include legal, political, economic as well as attitudinal hindrances. Some demands of SKOP contradicted with the country's prevailing laws and were against the regulations of the government. As such this legal bar acted as great obstacle to meet the SKOP demands by the ruling regime. SKOP has always been against any policy of denationalisation of industries but the government was seen strongly in favour of the policies of privatisation and denationalisation and accordingly it made political decisions to put those decisions into action. In order to meet SKOP's economic demands the various economic questions of government's ability to pay, productivity and production came as crucial hindrances. Moreover, the attitudes of the government as the biggest employer and other employers always remained hostile towards the interests of the workers and employees. Such

22. SKOP Leaflet.

attitudes were manifested by the application of their dragging on policy, piecemeal solution of labour problems and dividing the unity of SKOP by bribing some of its influential leaders to join and work in favour of the interests of the government and owner sections.

As mentioned earlier, while putting forward its own demands SKOP has also played a significant part in the political movements of this country. It is thus important to discuss the role of SKOP in the mass upsurge of 1990.

SKOP extended its full support to the anti-autocracy movement organised in November-December 1990. This movement later culminated into mass upsurge which toppled the autocratic Ershad regime from power. From the middle of October SKOP chalked out its agitation programme as per mandate given by its national convention held in September at Dhaka.²³ SKOP's action programme coincided with the opposition political alliances' anti-autocracy movement. Ershad regime's response towards this movement was one of total repression. SKOP leaders expressed their deep concern and condemnation over the killing, arrest and repression. They observed that the Ershad regime had no right to remain in power as the country was in total anarchy and they called upon all to forge greater unity with a view to unseat the autocratic regime. SKOP announced its action programme on 11th November in pursuance of its five-point demand.²⁴ The action programme included the techniques of rally, sit-in-demonstration, torch procession, general strike and blockade. Such announcement also inspired the political agitation in the country and went in favour of the political movement.

Despite its total support towards 1990's anti-autocracy movement SKOP did not involve itself fully in this upsurge as it

23. *Bangladesh Observer*, October 17, 1990.

24. *Bangladesh Observer*, November 12, 1990.

did in 1987 remaining in the forefront. When asked on this particular point SKOP leaders in general replied that while taking part in a political movement trade unions can not maintain their separate existence with the advancement of the movement. Referring to 1987 movement the leaders said that their total involvement in this upsurge would have meant participation at the cost of their five-point demand. Some other SKOP leaders told that it was the major opposition political parties which wanted SKOP to play a less important role in the political movement of 1990.

After the fall of Ershad regime and the formation of caretaker government a delegation of SKOP met the acting President and apprised him of the situation prevailing in the industrial sector and submitted to him a ten-point charter of demands. Recently the SKOP leaders also met the Prime Minister of the BNP government and reiterated their demands. There is an apprehension on the part of SKOP leaders that the present government would not be much willing to meet SKOP demands. If this happens SKOP will have no option but to go for greater movement for its cause.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although SKOP has been regarded as the champion of the working class interests yet it has got some inherent limitations and problems. It has always been difficult on the part of SKOP to remain as a cohesive force with the multiplicity of its leadership, difference in orientation and outlook of its leadership and organisational differences of its component parts. The factors of regionalism, reformism and opportunism which in fact were inspired by the owner sections also have adverse effects on SKOP's strength. Another weakness of SKOP has been the influence of political parties. Since the leaders of the national trade union federation belong to different political parties they can not escape the influence of their respective political organisations while

taking decisions for SKOP. Sometimes SKOP has been caught in a dilemma in matters of its role of struggling for the demands of the workers and employees and at the same time playing political role at the national level. It has thus been difficult for SKOP either to define the relations of economic demands with political movement of the labourers or to integrate the two within the existing state structure. Since its inception SKOP has remained confined to urban centres, any call for observance of SKOP programmes has not evoked much response or participation in the rural places.

In spite of the limitations and weaknesses it can not be denied that SKOP has contributed greatly to strengthening trade union movement in this country. It has proved that a strong united trade union movement can even force an autocratic regime to concede to labour demands by signing an agreement favouring labour interests. It has of course been a great achievement that the component parts of SKOP with varying political orientations and multiplicity have remained united for more than eight years in a single platform for upholding the cause of the labourers. In fact the very formation of SKOP has been a great victory of the working class people. This platform of the workers and employees has established a unique example in the history of the trade union movement of Bangladesh.