



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO TRADE UNIONISM IN MALAYSIA

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**PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO TRADE UNIONISM IN
MALAYSIA**

By

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Faculty: Graduate School of Management

Although trade unions in Malaysia generally play an important role in protecting the rights of workers, the movement is facing a declining trend. This study has examined the perceptions of workers, employers and trade union leaders on factors contributing to the decline of trade unionism in Malaysia. The central theme of the study was to identify the perceived barriers to trade unionism. Data was obtained through a structured questionnaire survey involving 859 employees, 429 employers and 182 trade union leaders. Further, in-depth interviews were conducted with union leaders, employers and the state to triangulate the results. The findings suggest that trade union decline is inevitable and trade unions do not seem to appeal to a large segment of the workforce. They not only perceive that unions have a negative image, but also that union membership may damage their career prospects. Unions appear to have limited power to maintain strong bargaining relationships with management, to organise new workplaces and to influence the need for union membership among new workers in existing workplaces. The current economic and political climate is further challenging the relevancy of trade unions. This study further suggests that the

employer is a key determinant for trade union decline. Employers perceive trade unions as reducing their competitiveness. They also view trade union leaders and members unfavourably. While some employers appear to engage in union busting activities, a majority of employers attempt to influence workers' values and perceptions by shifting towards HRM-type practices. This study concludes that employer opposition to unionisation as well as internal weaknesses within the trade union movement will mean that trade unions will struggle to collectivise in Malaysia. Leaders in companies, trade unions and the government need to discuss issues related to formation of trade unions, competitiveness of industry and legislation. Accessibility and availability of certain data from trade unions and employers are the main limitations. Based on the research findings, the theoretical and practical implications have been discussed. Suggestions for further research are also presented.

Key Words: Trade unions, Employers, Employees, Barriers, Malaysia

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERSEPSI HALANGAN-HALANGAN TERHADAP KESATUAN SEKERJA
DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Walaupun kesatuan pekerja di Malaysia umumnya memainkan peranan penting dalam melindungi hak-hak pekerja, gerakan ini menghadapi trend menurun. Kajian ini meneliti persepsi pekerja, majikan dan pemimpin kesatuan sekerja ke atas factor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kemerosotan kesatuan sekerja di Malaysia. Tema utama kajian ini adalah mengenalpasti halangan-halangan ke atas kegiatan kesatuan sekerja. Data diperolehi melalui kajian soalselidik berstruktur yang melibatkan 859 pekerja, 429 majikan dan 182 pemimpin kesatuan sekerja. Selanjutnya, temuduga mendalam dilakukan dengan pemimpin kesatuan sekerja, majikan dan pihak kerajaan untuk pengesahan hasil kajian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kemerosotan kesatuan sekerja tidak boleh dielakkan dan kesatuan sekerja nampaknya tidak lagi menarik bagi sebahagian besar pekerja. Mereka bukan sahaja melihat bahawa kesatuan sekerja memberi imej yang negatif, tetapi juga mendapati keahlian mungkin memberi kesan buruk kepada kerjaya mereka. Kesatuan sekerja kelihatan mempunyai kuasa terhad untuk mempertahankan kuasa tawar-menawar

dengan majikan, untuk mengelola di tempat kerja yang baru serta mempengaruhi keperluan untuk keahlian kesatuan sekerja antara para pekerja baru di tempat kerja sedia ada. Keadaan iklim ekonomi dan politik semasa menjadikan kesesuaian kesatuan sekerja lebih mencabar. Kajian ini, selanjutnya, menyarankan bahawa majikan merupakan faktor penentu kepada kemerosotan kesatuan sekerja. Kesatuan sekerja menganggap kesatuan sekerja sebagai mengurangkan daya saing mereka. Mereka juga melihat pemimpin kesatuan sekerja dan ahli-ahlinya sebagai sesuatu yang tidak menyokong. Sementara beberapa majikan menjalankan aktiviti-aktiviti pemusnahan kesatuan sekerja, majoriti daripada mereka cuba mempengaruhi nilai-nilai dan persepsi pekerja dengan mengalih kepada pendekatan dan amalan-amalan pengurusan sumber manusia. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa halangan pihak majikan serta kelemahan dalaman di dalam pergerakan kesatuan sekerja itu sendiri bermakna kesatuan sekerja akan menghadapi rintangan besar untuk mengkolektifkan di Malaysia. Pemimpin-pemimpin di syarikat-syarikat, kesatuan-kesatuan sekerja dan kerajaan perlu membincangkan isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan penubuhan kesatuan sekerja, daya saing industri dan undang-undang berkaitan. Kebolehcapaian dan ketersediaan data tertentu dari kesatuan-kesatuan sekerja dan majikan-majikan ialah pembatasan utama. Berdasarkan hasil kajian yang diperolehi, implikasi teori dan praktikal telah dibincangkan. Cadangan untuk penyelidikan lebih lanjut juga dikemukakan.

Perkataan Utama: Kesatuan sekerja, Majikan, Pekerja, Rintangan, Malaysia

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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 25 January 2010 to conduct the final examination of Nagiah Ramasamy on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Perceived Barriers To Trade Unionism in Malaysia” in accordance with Universities and Universiti Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A)] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Thesis Examination Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or any other institutions.

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