

Put an end to bullying at the workplace

July 8, 2017

Bullying at the workplace can take the form of the denial of human rights and employment rights to workers, or outright intimidation and abuse.

COMMENT

By J Solomon

A series of recent incidents in Malaysia has shown that bullying has become a serious social issue. At first glance, it appears that it is an issue afflicting the younger generation. A deeper examination, though, reveals that it is a problem that affects society at all levels.

It is a national and multi-generational issue. Bullying is also pervasive at the workplace, and it has become institutionalised – employees are bullied and forced to accept such bullying.

The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) would like to point out that bullying by corporations takes the form of the denial of human rights and employment rights to workers, and that includes the suppression and denial of trade union rights.

Politicians and government officials are also complicit in the crime of bullying at the workplace by supporting employers either expressly or implicitly.

Keeping quiet and doing nothing about bullying at the workplace is also an act of support for it. Six decades after independence, we should be embarrassed that our workers are held captive through bullying.

We need to stop this. Therefore, MTUC is strongly of the view that we need a comprehensive plan to curb this practice of bullying.

In Malaysia, we don't have empirical data on the bullying issue. However, MTUC continuously receives reports from all over Malaysia about bullying at the workplace. Even today, unions face difficulty in functioning freely and without fear in championing the cause of workers.

For example, take the bullying of Sabah Forest Industries workers whose union has been denied recognition for 25 years now; Infineon Technologies' workers union president Zulfadlee Thye, who was wrongfully dismissed and is now prevented from carrying out his trade union duties; the bullying of the Zoological Union president by forcing him to work in an environment contrary to his doctor's advice; and HSBC Bank retrenching workers through the guise of the voluntary separation scheme.

Trade unions are also denied civil engagement on mergers and acquisitions of banks such as with RHB-AMMB Holdings Berhad.

Bullying also includes intimidation and abuse, in some cases ending with the death of many migrant workers. There are many more bullying cases that can be listed here but the list would be too long.

We are not saying that all employers or organisations act in such a way. There are employers or organisations who show positive attitude towards the welfare of workers and respect the existence of unions. We must respect them, too.

But we need to take firm action to stop bullying at the workplaces as well as anywhere else in our nation.

We do not condone bullying in any form. Therefore, MTUC proposes that the government establish a National Anti-Bullying Council to study the issue in a comprehensive and holistic manner, and recommend specific ways to tackle the bullying problem in the long term. We are hopeful that this will contribute to nation-building in the long run.

MTUC would also like to work together with the government to develop a bullying-free environment. The sole intent and purpose of this exercise is to create greater awareness and provide a venue for the aggrieved to seek remedial measures to combat the bullies.

We don't want the nation to see another case like UPNM naval cadet Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain or teenager T Nhaveen. Enough is enough!

J Solomon is secretary-general of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress.

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