

## Trade unions come together

Akshat Kaushal / New Delhi November 08, 2011, 0:06 IST

On November 8, for the first time in the history of trade union movements in India, all central trade unions will come together to protest against rising food price and unemployment.

For the trade unions, which until recently were divided over their political affiliations, this could mean a significant change from the past. "The historic unity of the trade unions is the only silver lining in the deep darkness of despair," said a release from All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).

Trade union leaders said, the realisation of consensus over their demands and the reality of lost grounds has forced trade unions to look for common strategy. "All the central trade unions have realised that without coming together they will not be able to make any significant impact," said DL Sachdeva, general secretary of AITUC.

The understanding of working together was reflected in the recent strike at Maruti Suzuki India Limited's Manesar plant. The strike saw the coming together of two trade unions — AITUC and the Hind Mazdoor Sabha — to fight for the rights of the workers. The two came together despite their rivalry in the Gurgaon-Manesar area.

"When it comes to workers rights, the trade unions have always come together. It is now being extended to the national level," said Padmanabhan.

So, should it be seen as a sign of maturity? Political scientist Yogendra Yadav says that isn't the case. "Trade union movements in this country is on a decline. The trade unions are finding it hard to find new members from places other than their traditional strongholds. The coming together could be because of a crisis for survival," Yadav said.

According to Yadav, lack of convergence amongst political parties and their trade unions could be another reason for these unions looking to each other for support. "There is a consensus among most political parties over issues of liberalisation and globalisation. However, over these issues most of the trade unions do not have agreement with their political parties", he adds.

However, J John, editor of Labour File, a bimonthly magazine on labour issues, does not believe coming together of trade unions implies they are losing strength. According to him, this unity was a strategic move to put pressure on the government.

"The government is fighting fire on many fronts. If all the trade unions come together they will be able to exert more pressure on the government," John said.