

Role of Trade Unions in Protecting Employee Rights Based on The Collective Labor Agreement and Pancasila Values at PT Steel Center Indonesia

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Submission:

2026-04-30

Review:

2026-05-22

Accepted:

2026-05-25

Publish:

2026-05-30

ABSTRACT; *Employee rights protection constitutes a fundamental aspect of a fair industrial relations system. Labor unions play a strategic role as collective representatives in balancing the position of workers and employers. However, in practice, the effectiveness of such protection is often influenced by legal awareness and the utilization of collective mechanisms. This study aims to analyze the role of labor unions in protecting employee rights, examine the effectiveness of Collective Labor Agreements (CLA), and identify challenges and strengthening strategies at PT Steel Center Indonesia. This research applies a normative juridical method combined with an empirical approach based on organizational experience. The results indicate that labor unions function not only as advocacy institutions but also as preventive actors through education, supervision, and industrial communication. However, challenges remain, including low legal awareness and individualistic approaches to dispute resolution. Therefore, strengthening strategies through legal education, CLA optimization, and reinforcement of Pancasila-based industrial relations are necessary. This study contributes to the development of labor law by integrating legal norms, collective mechanisms, and socio-cultural values.*

Keywords: *Labor Union; Employee Rights Protection; Collective Labor Agreement (CLA); Pancasila Values;*

INTRODUCTION

Protection of workers is an integral part of the labor law system, which is based on the principle of social justice as guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This constitutional provision affirms that every citizen has the right to decent work and a decent living, as well as fair treatment in employment.

Therefore, the employment relationship is not merely understood as a contractual relationship between workers and employers, but also as a social relationship imbued with a protective dimension for those structurally in a weaker position, namely workers.¹

In industrial relations practices, the unequal bargaining power between workers and employers is an unavoidable reality. Employers, as owners of capital, have control over productive resources, while workers depend on their jobs for their livelihood. This inequality has the potential to lead to violations of workers' rights if not balanced by effective protection mechanisms, both through legal and institutional instruments. In this context, labor law functions not only as a regulatory tool but also as a protective instrument aimed at creating balance in employment relations.²

One institutional instrument that plays a strategic role in protecting workers' rights is the labor union. In Indonesia's industrial relations system, labor unions are a manifestation of the right to freedom of association guaranteed by Law Number 21 of 2000 concerning Trade Unions/Labor Unions. The existence of labor unions enables workers to collectively fight for their rights and interests, thereby balancing their bargaining position with employers. From the perspective of industrial relations theory put forward by John T. Dunlop, labor unions are one of the main actors in the industrial relations system, playing a role in creating a balance of interests through social dialogue and collective bargaining mechanisms.³

In addition to labor unions, another important instrument in industrial relations is the Collective Labor Agreement (CLA), which is the result of negotiations between the labor union and the employer and is legally binding for both parties. The CLA serves as an operational guideline for regulating workers' rights and obligations and serves as a basis for resolving industrial relations disputes. However, in practice, the effectiveness of a CLA is determined not only by its normative existence but also by the level of workers' understanding and legal awareness of its content and implementation.

The effectiveness of a legal norm is not only determined by its regulatory aspect alone, but is also greatly influenced by the level of legal awareness and the active participation of legal subjects in implementing the norm in practice.⁴ Legal awareness is a determining factor in bridging the gap between law as *das sollen* (what should be) and law as *das sein* (what happens in reality), so that without legal awareness, legal norms tend to be ineffective in providing optimal protection.⁵

Based on industrial relations at the company level, low levels of worker legal awareness are often a major obstacle to optimizing employee rights protection. Workers who do not understand their rights and obligations tend not to utilize

¹ Soepomo, *Pengantar Hukum Perburuhan* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 2009), hlm. 12.

² Asri Wijayanti, 2016, *Hukum Ketenagakerjaan Pasca Reformasi* (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika,), hlm. 45.

³ John T. Dunlop, *Industrial Relations Systems* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1993), hlm. 23.

⁴ Sari, Y. D. P., & Irawati, A. C. (2025). Business Judgement Rule dalam UU BUMN 2025: Payung Hukum atau Celah Impunitas?. *J-CEKI: Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah*, 5(1), hlm. 1947-1957.

⁵ Riyadi, S., & Irawati, A. C. (2025). Studi Yuridis tentang Perlindungan Hak Asasi Manusia (HAM) dan Kepastian Hukum dalam Penyelesaian Sengketa Ketenagakerjaan. *Iuris Studia: Jurnal Kajian Hukum*, 6(3), hlm. 927-934.

available protection mechanisms, including the role of labor unions and the existence of collective labor agreements (PKB). This situation demonstrates that legal protection depends not only on the existence of norms and institutions, but also on the quality of workers' understanding and participation as legal subjects.

Previous studies have generally focused only on the normative aspects of the role of labor unions or the effectiveness of collective labor agreements (PKB) separately, without comprehensively examining the relationship between union roles, PKB effectiveness, and legal awareness within a coherent analytical framework. Furthermore, the Pancasila-based approach to industrial relations remains relatively limited in empirical studies at the company level. Thus, a research gap exists that needs to be filled through studies that integrate normative, empirical, and social values in the analysis of labor rights protection.

In industrial relations practices at PT Steel Center Indonesia, the labor union has performed its function of protecting employee rights through various activities, such as mentoring members, communicating with management, and overseeing the implementation of collective labor agreements (PKB). However, there are still obstacles that hinder the optimization of this role, including low legal awareness among workers, a tendency to resolve problems individually, and the less than optimal use of collective mechanisms in industrial relations.⁶

PROBLEM

Based on this description, this research is crucial for a comprehensive analysis, addressing the following questions:

What is the role of labor unions in protecting employee rights?

What is the effectiveness of the Collective Labor Agreement (PKB) as a legal protection instrument at PT Steel Center Indonesia?

This study comprehensively identifies obstacles and strengthening efforts that can be implemented to create fairer, more harmonious, and sustainable industrial relations. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of normative analysis, an empirical approach, and the use of legal awareness and Pancasila values in examining the protection of employee rights in industrial relations.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a normative juridical method combined with an empirical juridical approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of employee rights protection in industrial relations. The normative juridical approach is used to examine law as a norm or rule applicable within the legal system, particularly regarding labor protection and the role of labor unions in industrial relations.⁷

⁶ Sutrisno, J. R., & Irawati, A. C. (2025). Integration of Pancasila Values in Industrial Relations: A Trade Union Perspective in Multinational Companies. *UNTAG Law Review*, 9(1), 65-73.

⁷ Peter Mahmud Marzuki, *Penelitian Hukum* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2017), hlm. 35.

The use of an empirical approach in this research is based on the author's direct experience as a labor union official at PT Steel Center Indonesia. This experience provides factual data regarding the dynamics of industrial relations, including the implementation of employee rights protection, the role of labor unions, and the effectiveness of Collective Labor Agreements (PKB). In contemporary legal research, an empirical approach is crucial because it can provide a concrete picture of the effectiveness of law in social practice.⁸

Two primary approaches, normative juridical and empirical juridical, are combined to produce an analysis that is not only theoretical but also contextual. The analysis of relevant laws and regulations includes Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and Law Number 21 of 2000 concerning Workers' Unions. This study examines the principles of labor law (e.g., protection, justice, and balance), legal systematics (the relationship between norms within one regulation and other regulations), and focuses on employee rights protection, the role of labor unions, and the effectiveness of Collective Labor Agreements (CLAs). Data is derived from the author's direct experience as a labor union administrator at PT Steel Center Indonesia.

This research is descriptive and analytical in nature. The data used in this study consist of secondary and empirical data. A qualitative approach is used not only to describe the phenomenon but also to provide a critical assessment of the effectiveness of employee rights protection in industrial relations. The use of normative juridical methods combined with an empirical approach in this research is expected to produce a comprehensive analysis, not only from the legal aspect as a norm, but also from its implementation in industrial relations practice, thereby contributing to the development of more responsive and applicable labor law.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Trade Unions in Protecting Employee Rights in Industrial Relations

PT Steel Center Indonesia's protection of employee rights encompasses three primary roles: advocacy, representation, and oversight. The advocacy function is realized through assistance to members in addressing employment relations issues, both related to violations of normative rights such as wages and working hours, as well as other administrative issues. The protection of employee rights is quite optimal through these three primary roles: advocacy, representation, and oversight. These three functions reflect the strategic role of labor unions as instruments of legal protection for workers in industrial relations. Furthermore, the representation function is evident in the union's role as an intermediary in conveying workers' aspirations to company management. In practice, not all workers have the courage or ability to express their concerns directly, so the union serves as an effective communication channel to bridge the interests of both parties.

Furthermore, the oversight function is carried out through monitoring the

⁸ Creswell, J. W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed., 2021), hlm. 170.

implementation of labor norms in the company, such as compliance with wage regulations, occupational safety and health, and social security. This demonstrates that the protection provided by labor unions is not merely repressive but also preventive.

Furthermore, the advocacy function is realized through assistance to union members in addressing various employment relations issues. This assistance is not only limited to formal disputes, but also includes bipartite problem resolution between workers and employers.⁹ In practice, advocacy is carried out regarding violations of normative rights, such as late payment of wages, non-compliance of working hours with statutory provisions, and violations of workers' leave and social security rights. Normatively, this advocacy function is in line with provisions in the Law that legitimizes labor unions to fight for, defend, and protect the rights and interests of their members. In other words, the existence of labor unions functions not only as social organizations, but also as legal entities that play a vital role in enforcing labor law.¹⁰

Furthermore, the representation function is reflected in the role of labor unions as intermediaries in conveying workers' aspirations and interests to company management. In the reality of industrial relations, there is an imbalance in bargaining power between workers and employers, with workers often in a weaker position.¹¹ Therefore, labor unions exist as collective representatives capable of strengthening workers' bargaining power in the negotiation process, both in the drafting of collective labor agreements (CLAs) and in the resolution of industrial relations disputes.

Furthermore, this representation function also plays a role in creating constructive communication between workers and employers. Not all workers have the courage, ability, or access to convey their aspirations directly to management. In this context, labor unions serve as an effective and legitimate communication channel, minimizing the potential for conflict arising from miscommunication or misunderstandings.¹²

The supervisory function is carried out through monitoring the implementation of labor norms within the company environment. Labor unions actively oversee company compliance with legal provisions, such as wage standards, the implementation of occupational safety and health (K3), and participation in social security programs. This function shows that the role of trade unions is not only reactive to violations, but also preventive in preventing violations of workers' rights.¹³

From the perspective of legal effectiveness theory, the supervisory role of labor unions is part of the societal and legal cultural factors that contribute to the success of law enforcement.¹⁴ The existence of an active and responsive labor union can increase legal awareness among both workers and employers, thus creating harmonious, dynamic, and equitable industrial relations. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that the labor union at PT Steel Center Indonesia has fulfilled its multidimensional role in providing legal protection for employees. However, the effectiveness of this role is still influenced by various factors, such as regulatory support, company management commitment, and the level of participation of union members themselves. Therefore,

⁹ Lalu Husni, *Pengantar Hukum Ketenagakerjaan Indonesia*, (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2016), hlm. 102

¹⁰ Undang-Undang Nomor 21 Tahun 2000 tentang Serikat Pekerja/Serikat Buruh, Pasal 4

¹¹ Adrian Sutedi, *Hukum Perburuhan*, (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2011), hlm. 75

¹² Zainal Asikin, *Dasar-Dasar Hukum Perburuhan*, (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2012), hlm. 56

¹³ Hardijan Rusli, *Hukum Ketenagakerjaan*, (Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia, 2011), hlm. 88.

¹⁴ Soerjono Soekanto, *Faktor-Faktor yang Mempengaruhi Penegakan Hukum*, (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2014), hlm. 8

strengthening labor union institutions and increasing legal awareness among all parties is necessary to achieve optimal labor protection.

However, the research findings indicate that this role is still not fully optimal. This is evident in the continued failure of workers to utilize labor unions to resolve employment relations issues. Some workers tend to resolve issues individually without involving collective mechanisms. This situation indicates a weakness in the internalization of the function of labor unions as collective representation. This situation indicates a weakness in the internalization of the function of labor unions as collective representation in industrial relations.¹⁵

This phenomenon demonstrates that sociologically, labor unions have not been fully integrated into workers' legal culture. This can be understood as a gap between legal structure and legal culture, where legal norms are available but not fully internalized by legal subjects.¹⁶ In this context, the effectiveness of labor unions is determined not only by normative legitimacy but also by the level of trust and participation of their members.

Theoretically, this situation contradicts the concept of industrial relations proposed by John T. Dunlop, which emphasizes the importance of collective interaction between workers, employers, and the government in a balanced industrial relations system.¹⁷ In this context, weak collective participation can reduce the effectiveness of workers' rights protection. Within this framework, labor unions serve as the primary actors representing workers' collective interests. Therefore, low worker participation in labor unions can disrupt the balance of industrial relations and reduce the effectiveness of legal protection for workers. Furthermore, weak collective participation also impacts workers' diminished bargaining power in negotiations with employers. In modern industrial relations practices, workers' bargaining power is highly dependent on collective solidarity and the organizational strength of labor unions.¹⁸

Furthermore, low worker legal awareness is also a key finding in this study. Many workers lack a comprehensive understanding of their rights and obligations in employment relations, thus preventing them from utilizing available legal protection instruments. This demonstrates that the issue of legal protection is not only related to normative and institutional aspects, but also closely related to education and public legal awareness.¹⁹ Legal awareness is a determining factor in legal effectiveness, as law depends not only on written norms but also on the behavior and compliance of legal subjects in implementing them.²⁰ This aligns with developments in contemporary legal studies that position society as a key element in the success of law enforcement.

From the perspective of contemporary legal effectiveness theory, societal factors and legal culture are crucial variables in determining the successful implementation of

¹⁵ Lalu Husni, *Hukum Ketenagakerjaan Indonesia (Edisi Revisi)*, (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2021), hlm. 145

¹⁶ Achmad Ali, *Menguak Teori Hukum dan Teori Peradilan (Edisi Terbaru)*, (Jakarta: Kencana, 2022), hlm. 78

¹⁷ John T. Dunlop, *Industrial Relations Systems* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1993), hlm. 45.

¹⁸ Adrian Sutedi, *Hukum Perburuhan (Edisi Pembaruan)*, (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2021), hlm. 102

¹⁹ Hardijan Rusli, *Hukum Ketenagakerjaan (Edisi Terbaru)*, (Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia, 2022), hlm. 120.

²⁰ Arista Candra Irawati, "Kesadaran Hukum dalam Perspektif Kontemporer," *Jurnal Hukum dan Pembangunan*, Vol. 52 No. 1, 2022, hlm. 210.

labor law, particularly following regulatory reforms through the Job Creation Law. Even adaptive and modern regulations will be ineffective without increased legal awareness and active worker participation.

From the perspective of contemporary legal effectiveness theory, societal factors and legal culture are crucial variables in determining the successful implementation of labor law, particularly following regulatory reforms through the Job Creation Law. Even adaptive and modern regulations will be ineffective without increased legal awareness and active worker participation.²¹

Therefore, it can be seen that the role of the labor union at PT Steel Center Indonesia has been functioning functionally in carrying out its advocacy, representation, and oversight functions. However, the effectiveness of this role still faces obstacles in terms of collective participation and worker legal awareness. This demonstrates that the protection of employee rights depends not only on the existence of labor union institutions as formal structures but is also significantly influenced by the quality of social interactions, the level of trust, and the legal awareness of workers as the primary subjects in industrial relations. Empirical facts require strategic efforts in the form of increasing employment law literacy, strengthening the institutional capacity of labor unions, and fostering participatory and dialogical industrial relations in order to realize effective and equitable legal protection.

Effectiveness of the Collective Labor Agreement (PKB) as a Legal Protection Instrument at PT Steel Center Indonesia

The Collective Labor Agreement (CLA) serves as the primary legal instrument governing employment relations at the company level. The CLA is the result of negotiations between the labor union and the employer, setting out the terms of employment, rights, and obligations of the parties, making it legally binding for the parties involved.²²

The Collective Labor Agreement (CLA) at PT Steel Center Indonesia serves as the primary legal instrument governing employment relations at the company level. The CLA serves as a reference for various aspects of the employment relationship, such as regulating wages, working hours, leave, and dispute resolution mechanisms. In practice, the CLA has been used as the basis for resolving several industrial relations issues, particularly those related to workers' normative rights. This demonstrates that the CLA has a repressive function as a basis for conflict resolution.

However, the effectiveness of the CLA still faces challenges in implementation. One key finding is the low level of worker understanding of the CLA's contents. Many workers lack detailed knowledge of the rights and obligations stipulated in the CLA, thus preventing them from using it as a basis for asserting their rights. The CLA serves as the primary normative reference for various aspects of the employment relationship, such as regulating wages, working hours, leave, and industrial relations dispute resolution mechanisms.²³

Collective Labor Agreements (CLAs) are used as the basis for resolving various

²¹ Khairani, "Dinamika Perlindungan Tenaga Kerja Pasca Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja," *Jurnal Legislasi Indonesia*, Vol. 18 No. 3, 2021, hlm. 345

²² Lalu Husni, *Hukum Ketenagakerjaan Indonesia (Edisi Revisi Terbaru)*, (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2022), hlm. 162

²³ Adrian Sutedi, *Hukum Perburuahan (Edisi Pembaruan)*, (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2022), hlm. 134

industrial relations issues, particularly those related to workers' normative rights.²⁴ This demonstrates that CLAs have a repressive function, serving as an instrument for resolving conflicts when agreed-upon provisions are violated. However, research also indicates that the effectiveness of CLAs still faces various obstacles, particularly in implementation.

One key finding is the low level of worker understanding of the substance of CLAs. Many workers lack detailed knowledge of the rights and obligations stipulated in CLAs, thus preventing them from using them as a basis for asserting their rights when violations occur. This situation indicates a gap between the existence of legal norms and the level of understanding of those norms by legal subjects. From a contemporary labor law perspective, the effectiveness of CLAs is determined not only by the quality of the agreement's substance but also by the level of socialization and internalization of its contents among workers.

This low level of worker understanding of CLAs is also closely related to limited legal awareness. This aligns with the view that law will be effective if there is a congruence between legal norms and the behavior of society as legal subjects. If workers do not understand the contents of the Collective Labor Agreement (PKB), they tend to be passive and unable to take legal action when their rights are violated. The lack of educational programs related to the PKB and the lack of active involvement of labor unions in disseminating the contents of the PKB are contributing factors to this low level of worker understanding.

The Collective Labor Agreement (PKB) essentially serves not only a repressive function but also a preventive one, serving as a guideline for preventing industrial relations conflicts.²⁵ However, this preventive function will not function optimally if workers do not understand the contents of the PKB as a guideline for their daily work relationships. The legal status of the PKB at PT Steel Center Indonesia has functioned normatively as a legal instrument for regulating employment relations and resolving conflicts.

However, its effectiveness remains suboptimal due to implementation challenges, particularly related to workers' low understanding and legal awareness of the PKB's contents. This demonstrates that the success of the PKB depends not only on its existence as a legal document, but also on the process of internalization, socialization, and active participation of all parties in its implementation. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed to increase the dissemination of collective labor agreements (PKB), provide workers with labor law training, and strengthen the role of labor unions in providing legal education to their members. These steps are crucial to ensuring that collective labor agreements (PKBs) serve not only as formal documents but also as effective and equitable legal protection instruments in industrial relations practices.

Obstacles and Strategies for Strengthening the Protection of Employee Rights

Based on the research findings, several major obstacles to protecting employee rights at PT Steel Center Indonesia exist. First, low worker legal awareness. This is evident in workers' lack of understanding of their rights and obligations and minimal utilization

²⁴ R. Subekti & Tjitrosudibio (edisi pembaruan), *Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Perdata*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2022), hlm. 338

²⁵ Abdul Khakim, *Aspek Hukum Perjanjian Kerja Bersama*, (Bandung: Citra Aditya Bakti, 2023), hlm. 77

of available protection mechanisms. Second, a tendency to resolve problems individually. The research findings indicate that some workers prefer to resolve problems privately without involving the union. This situation has the potential to weaken workers' bargaining power in industrial relations. Third, the limited capacity of trade union organizations, particularly in terms of human resources and organizational systems. This impacts the effectiveness of their advocacy and protection functions for members.

The strategies implemented in this research include: first, increasing legal education for workers through outreach and training programs. Second, strengthening the capacity of trade union organizations by improving the competence of their administrators. Third, increasing communication between the trade union and management through bipartite forums. These strategies align with the concept of Pancasila-based industrial relations, which emphasizes deliberation, justice, and a balance of interests in employment relations. Therefore, employee rights protection is achieved not only through formal legal approaches but also through cultural and social values.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that the role of labor unions in protecting employee rights in industrial relations at PT Steel Center Indonesia is crucial. The labor union at PT Steel Center Indonesia has played a key role in protecting employee rights through advocacy, representation, and oversight. These three functions demonstrate that labor unions play a crucial role as legal protection instruments, both in assisting with problem resolution, conveying workers' aspirations, and overseeing the implementation of labor norms. However, the effectiveness of this role is not optimal. This is due to the low level of worker participation in utilizing labor unions and the low level of legal awareness among workers. This weakens the collective function of labor unions and their bargaining power in industrial relations. The protection of employee rights depends not only on the existence of labor unions but also on the level of worker participation and legal awareness. Improved legal education and a strengthened role of labor unions are needed to achieve more effective and equitable industrial relations.

The Collective Labor Agreement (CLA) at PT Steel Center Indonesia has traditionally served as the primary legal instrument for regulating employment relations and resolving disputes, particularly regarding workers' normative rights. Thus, it plays both a repressive and preventive role in industrial relations. However, the CLA's effectiveness is not optimal due to workers' low understanding and legal awareness of its contents. This situation indicates a gap between legal norms and their implementation, resulting in the suboptimal use of collective labor agreements (PKB) as a basis for protecting workers' rights. The effectiveness of collective labor agreements (PKB) is largely determined by the level of internalization, socialization, and participation of workers, as well as the active role of labor unions in providing legal education. PKBs will function optimally as a legal protection instrument if they are not only understood as formal documents but also implemented effectively in the practice of employment relations.

This study provides several recommendations, as follows: First, strengthen ongoing legal education for workers through structured socialization and training programs. Increase workers' understanding and legal awareness so they can optimally utilize their rights in employment relations. Furthermore, labor unions need to strengthen

their participatory approach to increase member involvement in organizational activities. Second, increase transparency in the implementation of Collective Labor Agreements (PKB) to encourage the creation of dialogical and open industrial relations. Companies also need to ensure that every policy adopted aligns with the provisions of the PKB and applicable laws and regulations. PKBs should not only be formal documents but also be consistently implemented in the practice of employment relations.

3) Government

The government, particularly agencies responsible for labor affairs, can increase oversight of the implementation of collective labor agreements (PKB) in companies, strengthen labor law education and development programs, and encourage the strengthening of labor union institutions through regulation and facilitation. The government's role is crucial in ensuring that industrial relations operate in accordance with the principles of justice, legal certainty, and a balance of interests between the parties.

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