

Planning for the Future

It is traditional that at the start of a new year, persons who are so minded, engaged in the practice of making resolutions. The intention is noble, but the real test rests in the ability of the individual to make good on the promises made. It is true that the realization of the wishes, hopes and aspirations are often dependent on external forces. Generally, the individual may have no control over these forces. Moving from the individual to the organization or enterprise, it would be expected that the leadership and management would have undertaken a review of the performance and achievements of the past year, and would have made some definite plans for the coming year. These would include goals to be attained and targets to be reached.

Considering the role, functions and expectations, workers and members of civil society have of trade unions, it would be taken that the leadership of these organizations would be responsible enough to start the New Year, by conducting an objective assessment of the progress made in the past year. In this process, concentration ought to be placed on the achievements recorded, identifying failings and shortcomings in meeting the needs of the respective membership. This is an imperative for any organization which is serious about satisfying the aims, goals and objectives it set for itself. It has repeatedly been said, that to fail to plan, is to plan to fail. This should be a lesson to those leaders of organizations who take things for granted, and who live in the realm of hope, without any clear vision and strategies to guide their actions.

In an environment where trade unions are facing mounting pressures from employers and governments, coupled with the drastic reduction in unionized membership, there are clear signals that trade unions have to revisit the way how they do business. They ought to recognize that it cannot be business as usual. Any perceived weakness of the labour movement can render it to being vulnerable to the pressures imposed upon it. This can lead to the labour movement being undermined.

In looking ahead, labour unions have to do some serious introspection of themselves. First and foremost, the movement has to review the quality of persons

Planning for the Future: Dennis de Peiza: Labour & Employee Relations Consultant: Regional Management Services Inc., December 29, 2023

that are elected to serve in leadership roles. It is unproductive and not in the best interest of any trade union that attracts persons who lack knowledge of the industrial relations practice and are incapable of executing assigned roles. There is a need to guard against attracting those persons who offer themselves for what personally benefit they stand to gain.

Trade unions are in a dire need of attracting persons who are committed to serve. This business of electing individuals on a popularity ticket, and further, the trend of forming internal political groups within trade unions, is definitely not a step in the right direction. It is plain to see that many trade unions are wielding under the pressure of a declining membership. Moreover, trade union appear not to be appealing to young workers, whilst older workers are withdrawing their membership; citing dissatisfaction with the quality of representation given. It is evident that many have lost confidence in and respect for the trade union leadership.

If a change is to come about sooner rather than later, it is advisable that as a priority, trade unions concentrate on paying attention to the education of workers, undertake to more vigorously champion the causes of workers without reflecting a partisan political interest, building a better image themselves, addressing the issues of succession planning and attracting quality persons into their leadership ranks.