

## **Respect for Trade Unions and Trade Unionists**

The coming into existence of trade unions, required that there were leaders who have the fortitude to stand up to the dominant political class of the day. In representing the interest of working class people. The political class who emerged from the wealthy class were accused of their dominance, exploitation and suppression of the working class, who survived in destitution, being improvised and disenfranchised.

In this the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are good reasons to believe that people irrespective of class or race have made some progress in crossing the barriers which existed. The good news is that trade unions have fought many a successful battle in advancing the causes and protecting the rights of workers. They have lobbied to influence change at the political level, negotiated for better terms, conditions of service and wages at the workplace level, for and improved social benefits.

Whilst all of this is recognized and often much to the dismay of trade unionists, politicians tend to receive the credit for the improvements which working class people enjoy. Politicians are known to promote their social agenda and to laid claim for those things which have been achieve overtime, even when the trade unionists have had to fiercely agitate for change and improvements on the behalf of working-class people and the society at large. The history of trade unions mounting protest actions in defiance of threats by governments' is well known. The tale of governments moving to over ride the struggles of workers and the labour movement by taking to legislate rather than to negotiate, is a known historical fact.

Governments are said to embrace the slogan of 'being of the people and for the people.' The labour movement can also identified with this slogan, as in like manner of any government, the democratic process is engaged in the election of those who served to represent the interest of the people. The difference in the operations reside in the power and authority, where politicians are able to enact laws and enforced policy decisions which are support by laws, rules and regulations. It is well know that governments across the globe have been repressive to the existence of trade unions. Attempts have been made to crush trade unions and imprisoned trade union leaders. Several reports and charged have been cited of governments failing to engage with trade unions. It begs the question as to whether the trade union is seen as a true social partner or as nothing more than a threat.

In some quarters there is the perceived vulnerable of trade unions. Those in the political arena may wish to believe that some trade unions and trade union leaders will be inclined to align themselves with a political party in the hope of moving forward the trade union agenda. It is suggested that any trade unionist who think this way, should forever be conscious of the dangers in adopting such a strategy. For starters, there is always the lurking danger of having the accusation levied at them of being brought or sold. Should this eventuate, trade union leaders

**Respect for Trade Unions and Trade Unionist: 21 June 2019: Dennis de Peiza, Labour Relations Consultant: Regional Management Services Inc.**

stand to lose the respect of their members and the public at large. The damage that this could do to the image of individual trade union and the credibility of the leadership of the labour movement in general, could be long lasting.

Trade unionists have earned the envious reputation as freedom fighters and as advocates for social justice. This is legacy that cannot be erased. It is therefore hard to understand what there is to gain why trade unionists who have a pivotal role to play in the representation of working class people, shift or become engage in partisan politics. It is quite in order for persons to speculate on the reasons for their actions. It is almost certain that those who cross the **preverbal** floor are harshly judged by their members for their actions, who question the commitment, sincerity, honesty and integrity of these individuals.

The question as to why this happens is nothing more than a mystery. Can it be that those who run off in the sunset are doing so in the hope of personal gains, be it an appointment or promotion in a higher or prominent position? Is it done in the hope of earning recognition of some kind, or it is just a case of the individual losing sight of their objectivity and so exhibit what is apparently seem as divided loyalty? It can only be left to wonder if those who engage in this practice are aware of the reading of the Holy Scripture in the book of Mark 8:36-37, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Getting it right is important, and so a lack of understanding that respect is earned, means that the strong possibility exists that those who are vulnerable will always be exploited by those who have the power to entice, encourage and manipulate. The success of this happening is more than likely where there are leaders with blurred agendas. It is to be reiterated that trade union loyalty is paramount, and it is therefore ill advised that trade union leaders attempt to serve two masters at the same time. It becomes apparent that the respect for trade unions is in question, when the subject of the sincerity and credibility of trade union leaders become that of public discourse and social commentary.