

Restoration of Confidence in the Labour Movement

The labour movement has traditionally occupied a respected place in the national space. Based on its strength the movement it has been a powerful voice in lobbying for change and influencing the decision making process. The movement is not one to be taken for granted, and has over the years demonstrated that its contributions should not be trivialized and its impact underestimated. Trade unions have been able to mobilize workers to pressure employers including governments to stop, think, listen and even change the course of an intended action.

The ability of the labour movement to make such a decisive impact, has been aided by astute leadership, which has demonstrated a high sense of loyalty and commitment to the cause of labour. Though not tended to aligned themselves to political parties, some trade union leaders in attempting to advance labour's agenda and for the primary purpose of influencing changes from the inside of the partisan political decision making process, have established some links with political organizations. Those who undertake to identify with a political party's agenda, seemingly have all good intentions in doing so. However it can be said that signs of change are noticeable when these leaders become immersed in the political intrigue. In so doing, trade union leaders run the risk of having their intentions and actions being placed squarely under the microscope.

There is the standing practice in the United States of America for trade unions to align themselves to political parties. While this is not a common feature in the culture of the English speaking Caribbean, there is evidence of this existing in the territories of Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana. However, it would appear for the most part that trade unions have maintained their independence from political parties. The question of confidence in trade union leaders and by extension the labour movement, can be called into question, where and when there is a departure from the norm.

The signals sent by any leader (s) whom by their actions and utterances tend to side with the agenda of a political party, and/or openly flaunt their personal preference for one party over another, will more than likely contribute to fractures within individual trade unions. In fairness to individual leaders, they like all other citizens, have the right of choice and freedom to associate, and therefore it would ill-advised to trample on their constitutional and fundamental rights.

It should be left to those individual to behave responsibly, and be careful not to have their ethics, integrity and credibility called into question. Where there is the presence of any reprehensible behaviour on the part a leader, this is sure to have an impact on how the membership feel about and treat to their organization. Some may to tend to lose interest in the activities and life of the organization, while others may resort to the withdrawal of membership. It gets even worse when

the members don't respond to rallying calls made by the union. At the back end of it, the recruitment of new members becomes a headache for the organization.

It does little to the image of the trade union when any of its leaders are publicly called to account by the membership for inept and questionable behaviour. It is more damaging where the internal organizational issues of whatever making, be it policy making issues, personal or organizational issues of divide between the elected officers, or issues of divide between the elected leadership and staff members, are played out in the glare of the public. This begs the question of the maturity of the leadership of the organization. More upsetting to members, potential members and the public, is the public ridicule which any leader of a trade union undertakes to inflict on another trade union organization. These are facts that some would want to dismiss and sweep under the carpet, but though it hurts, the truth must be told.

The issue of being self-serving is one that leaders should avoid, as this can potentially give rise to concerns over the perceptions others hold of trade union leaders. It cannot be taken away from them that they have a right to serve at the national level like anyone else. It cannot appear that this is all important to the individual, who is willing to accept any offer, without taking into consideration the wider implications it has for how the organization is perceived and possibly where its interest and loyalties lie. It cannot always be about the acquisition of titles and the receiving of accolades.

Trade union leaders who take the liberty of speaking for the membership on substantial matters without dialogue and consultation, run the risk of creating tensions within the walls of their organizations. Where this occurs, it challenges the application of the democratic making process. The perception that the leadership is acting contrary to the wishes of the members, or is giving the appearance of aligning itself with a political organization or its agenda, is a negative that stands to bring no measure of comfort to the level of confidence which the members, potential members and the public repose in the leadership or the organization.