

The Independence of Trade Unions

It is first to be established that the purpose of an independent trade union is to ensure that there is collectively responsibility in working towards achieving solidarity, unity and autonomy. It is questionable how this can be achieved whereupon there is growing insensitivity, disrespect and often blatant disregard shown for the work of trade unions by the political directorate.

Over the years, politicians have seemingly found ways to divide the labour movement, by often appearing to pander and cater to the needs of individual trade unions. Politicians have developed the art of enticing some trade unions leaders to identify with and support the agenda of a political party or that of the government of the day. They achieve this by making promises and giving assurances. Those trade union leaders who are lured into this trap, seem to have forgotten the adage 'that a comfort is a promise to a fool.'

Those of us who are looking on and can think for ourselves, and who take the time to exercise powers of observations, would undoubtedly be disturbed that there are those trade unions leaders who exhibited a sense of divided loyalty. It is hard not to believe that those who are desirous of serving two masters, are not guilty or compromising one of the organizations which they are serving. This is rather unfortunate. The thought can be shared that the actions of those who have divided loyalties, may be fuelled by their own self-serving and self-interest.

This is enough to create a sense of apathy amongst right thinking people, and hence the lack of trust and confidence becomes an inherent problem which faces the labour movement. To all intents and purposes, workers have become concerned that their interest is not being well served. The assumption can be made that the growing decline in trade union membership is not per chance, and therefore the fact that the interest of workers has reached a low point, should not come as a surprise to the average individual.

With an educated society, it is basically folly to think that persons are not in tune with the realities which surround them. Those who are apart of the trade union movement should not be ridiculed for sharing the opinion that they are being shortchanged. They would have concluded that their interest is not being well

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served. In some quarters, it would appear that some trade union leaders have become part of the public relations arm of a government and /or political party. This is a classic example of where the exercising of one's freedom of choice and right to associate can come into conflict. They attempt to represent the interest of the trade union and political party at the same time is ethical and cannot be right.

It begs the question, whether it is the correct thing for trade unions to do, in aligning themselves to a political party. On the other hand, should trade unions move to make it mandatory that an officer in a leadership position, should be required to resign on being elected to political office? Would this be a step in the right direction towards preserving the independence and integrity of trade unions?

The independence of trade union goes beyond the realms of being comprised and marginalized. Those who speak to identifying with the practice of democracy are sometimes guilty of persecuting, manipulating, threatening and cajoling trade union leaders. It is known that in the corridors of the world, some trade union leaders have been pressured by the government to resign. Some have been thrown in jail, others have been forced into exile or worse yet, murdered. These actions speak volumes for how the independence of trade unions is perceived.