

The Power of Workers

As the world faces one crisis after crisis, workers as a group become impacted in some way. In most cases, third world governments and employers in that part of the hemisphere, tend to be reactionary to global developments. It is understandable that the industrial and first world countries are at the forefront of the decisions making process. It is generally felt that third world and so called developing countries, are usually not in a position to wield any significant political influence. In the scheme of things, the power of workers is not to be estimated. As an organized group in any geographical region and or country, workers are able through collective action, to pressure the political directorate to retract on intended policy decisions and actions.

Very often when reference is made to workers' power, there is the tendency to associate this with employees' ability to demand better wages and working conditions. This perception clearly doesn't do justice to the real meaning of workers' power. This narrow perception may have for a long time, accounted for the reason why workers tend to concentrate or limit the extent of the power and influence that they can bring to bear, to happenings within the workplace.

The basis for this assumption on the narrows confines of workers' power, is borne out in the definition given to unions by the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). The body in identifying how it sees the organization functioning of a union, made the observation that it is about workers coming together as a team to make improvements at the workplace. The point is advanced that union members work together to negotiate and enforce a contract with management, that guarantees the things workers care about, like decent raises, affordable health care, safer workplaces, job security and a stable schedule.

Trade unions from the time of their establishment have been advocates for change. In earlier times, many would have referred to them as lobbyist groups. It is accurate to say that trade unions have graduated to become very active in influencing political decisions in the western world, where the democracy system of governance is practiced. The practice where governments continue to marginalize the inclusion of trade unions in the governance and decision making process, and moreover, to engage in the ridiculous practice of imprisoning trade union leaders or even executing them, is to be decried.

In the progressive age in which we live, the International Labour Organization is to be respected as the world body that guides the process of inclusion and promotes the concept of tripartism. In the case of the latter, it is the expectation that the government, the national trade union centre and the private sector/ employers' organization, would work together for the purpose of ensuring that there is participation in the national governance and decision making process. It stands to reason that any member government of the ILO which commits to observing the ILO principles of good governance, should be held accountable for its actions of not practicing what it preaches.

It is to be expected that International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) as the global voice of the world's working people, would like the ILO, want to distance itself from such atrocious behaviour.

It is to be noted that the primary mission of the ITUC is that of the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions. Its areas of activity include those of trade union and human rights; economy, society and the workplace; equality and non-discrimination; and international solidarity. Based on its mission and major areas of focus, it would be difficult to conceive of that body denying any national trade union centre the opportunity from entering into its membership.