

The Trade Union Objective

Global developments as it pertains to the changing economic and social landscape political have seemingly impacted on the way trade unions do business. These are also coupled with the political decisions that have seen the development as a new form of capitalism that has emerged with under the phenomenon of globalization and neocolonialism. Globalization and neocolonialism have directly and indirectly, sought to change the character and functioning of trade unions.

Trade unions have been defined as an organization “whose purpose is to improve the material welfare of members, principally by raising wages above the competitive level. (Booth 1995, p.51). In the context of the changing new environment, the purpose of trade unions is best captured in the view that in raising wages above the competitive level, this may foster economic growth if it succeeds in shifting income away from the owners of capital to the workers, and if the workers' marginal propensity to save exceeds the one of capitalists. (Andreas Irmen & Berthold U. Wigger, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2002/2003), pp. 49-67)

The burning question which comes to the fore, relates to what does this means for the development and growth of workers. If a response is to be forthcoming from trade unions it is most likely that they would communicate that the creation of quality paying jobs, the retention of jobs and the provision of decent work are critical to labour. The clear intention would be that of reducing the incidence of unemployment and poverty levels. Including in this, would be the protection and upliftment of the most vulnerable members of the workforce.

While workers upliftment and the safeguarding of the interest of workers remain a priority for trade unions, the wider concern of trade unions becomes that of the political engineered policies, which are directed at foreign borrowing from international financing lending agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). While it is that these funds are earmarked as development funding, the concern of trade unions is deepened by the structural adjustment and austerity policies as conditions that are attached to the granting of these loans. It is also a matter of interest to trade unions that governments enter into long term borrowing agreement. This means that the long term repayment commitment requires that governments identify ways of generating revenues in order to meet the repayment obligation.

Mindful of the impact that the actions of government can tend to undermine the progress of working class people, it is understandable why trade unions are weary of the excessive foreign borrowing from the multilateral lending agencies. Trade unions are not oblivious to the fact that these conditions have often had a major impact on levels of employment, real wages and social programmes. Those who condemn trade unions for pressing their demands for appropriate wages and salaries increases, may wish to consider that trade unions fully understand that the raising of wages, salaries and reducing income inequality, is important to the spurring of the nation's economic growth and development.

If sustainable development is to be achieved, trade unions understand that the raising of wages, salaries, reducing income inequality, providing better jobs, reducing wage gaps, reducing the cost of living, and stimulating growth towards significantly reducing poverty. In working to make this happen, trade unions must be in the forefront of influencing the course of employment creation and the development of social and economic policies. Trade unions must not lose sight of the fact that they must hold politicians accountable, and the best way of achieving this, is to ensure that workers are organized.

This brings to the fore all the reasons why the protection of workers becomes extremely important to trade unions. It is no secret that workers are called upon through the imposition of new or increased taxes and levies, to provide funds for government to meet the repayment of foreign loans. Trade unions are forced not to sit on their laurels, but to aggressively pressure government to act in ways which are prudent and do not serve to downgrade the social and economic standard of living of working class people. It cannot be fair that government should tax the life out of working class people, while in contrast, it is known that big businesses benefit from tax relief, tax concessions, waivers and the writing off of taxes payable to government. This type of exploitation of the masses as opposed to safeguarding the interest of the capitalist class, has been one of the principal factors behind the emergence and the continued work of trade unions.

In this era where the concept of tripartism has been established, trade unions would want to use this mechanism as a vehicle for strengthening collaboration between workers and their representatives, Governments and employers in the implementation of sustainable development.