

## **Trade unions and the Media**

The media has long been known to play an important role in all aspects of the life of a nation. It serves the useful purpose of disseminating information. Trade unions as part of the community use the media as a means of transmitting their message to the members and the general public. The use of the media can be employed as part of the strategy to lobby support and to put the trade union's case when and if it becomes necessary. Trade unions leaders understand that the media can be used extensively to educate, create awareness, promote and market the work and activities of the trade union.

Based on what has been presented, such engagement would tantamount to a positive use of the media. Trade union leadership should not be blinded to the fact that there is a negative side to the media. Evidently, the way information is interpreted and presented can cause trade unions and the labour movement some night mares. It is often said that the media seeks to provide a balance view, but it cannot be categorically stated that this is the norm.

Journalists and reporters are expected to perform their tasks without any reflection of bias. Like any other workers, there are expected to follow the standards of their practice. It is however to be respected that journalists, reporters and announcers are also human beings, and are entitled to have an opinion. Based on the fact that journalists and reporters should have good analytical and reasoning skills, trade union leaders should exercise great caution and care in what they communicate to the media. They should be weary of the fact that they do not have control over the engaging of the editing tool, or have any say in what headline is given to a story.

They should also be guarded on use of the media when it comes to the matter of sensationalization of information. Information provided to the media should be factual and specific. There is no room for dramatization and or entertainment. There are some leaders whose interest is that of capturing media attention. These will always be an attraction to the media. Unfortunately, such persons usually find out that the media can make you or break you.

Where these individuals go wrong, is that they believe in and count on the loyalty of the media. Following that none of this holds true, it seems as a nonsense if trade unions are less than honest and candid with the media. Every trade

unionists should be aware that whatever statements they make publicly are recorded in some form or fashion. When research is undertaken, information which is recorded can be used by the same media practitioners as they see it. For those who don't think before they speak or act, or who allow emotionalism and other interests to influence public statements and comments they make, are likely to find that the same media by reporting the facts, can stand accused by them and their followers of performing an act of injustice.

As media professionals it would be wrong to chastise journalists, reporters and announcers for doing their jobs. However, there is nothing wrong in holding them accountable for irresponsible acts in their writing and reporting. This includes as misrepresentation and/or incorrect interpretation of information provided, any act which is seemingly less than objective, apparently bias, or is are intended to create division.

It may be often hard to prove, but there is always the possibility that the media can be misguided and misinformed. Where and when this occurs, such will more than likely lead to the misrepresentation of information. Added to this, it may also appear that the media supports some hidden agendas, and hence can result in some fallouts and pressures being brought to bear on individual trade union bodies.

Knowing the possibilities which exists, it is for labour leaders to manage their communications with the media, so as to protect themselves, the image and integrity of their individual organization and its membership. It therefore would be inappropriate to entertain the presence of the media in a closed meeting of the membership, or into any fora where sensitive internal discussions are taking place; ranging from matters related to policy, grievance handling, a disciplinary hearing and collective bargaining issues. Least of all, it would be a highly senseless act for any trade union leadership to invite the media into a meeting of its Executive Board or Executive Council.

As professionals, the training of the media practitioners would lead them to possess good listening and writing the skills. Like the trade unionist, they develop the skills that lead to perfecting the art of influence and persuasion. It is through the use of the print and electronic media that media practitioners wield the power which their hold in their hands. Trade unionists should therefore be

conscious of the fact that the media can be a friend, but ought not to lose sight of the fact that the media is 'a friend of all but a satellite of none.'