

Traits of Elected Officials

There are in the main a few things which trade union leaders and politicians can boast they share in common. For starters, they are both elected by their constituents. This means that they are the representatives of a body of people at the organizational or national level, who have entrusted them to represent the collective interest. Since the democratic process is followed where the choice is freely made by the exercise of the individual right to vote without prejudice or coercion, it stands that irrespective of how an individual voted; the expectation remains that the elected official will serve their interests. It would appear that this fact can sometimes be lost upon some elected officials.

Where this practice has been adopted, it calls into question the professional integrity of the elected official. It can best be described as a poor trait, as it can easily open the door for bias, segregation, discrimination, prejudice and alienation and division to set in and to take root. Where upon elected officials find themselves in such a position, there is a tendency to resort to such practices of nepotism and favouritism. This is where there is cause for concern, as this contemptuous behaviour can potentially lead to the engaging of unethical and corrupt practices.

This situation is likely to eventuate out of the fact that both politicians and trade unions can be guilty of making promises to their constituents. It cannot be dismissed that some are genuine in the promises they make. Others on the other hand find comfort in telling their constituents what they believe that they want to hear, knowing full well that the demands are unrealistic and hard to accomplish. To promise to do something that is not possible or to make a pledge with the knowledge that it cannot be accomplished in the required time frame, clearly borders on dishonesty and deceitfulness.

These are issues that members of the society tend to want to ignore and not confront. As a consequence of this, the wrong message is usually sent to those leaders, who use the opportunity to exploit the ignorance or complacency of the people. Throughout the world, there are several instances of leaders who fall short of the accepted standards, who fail to follow rules, regulations, processes and procedures, fail in meeting the expectations of the people by not honouring their word and making good on commitments and promises.

It is not unusual for some to be self serving. In public life or in the circumstances where the individual as a volunteer in an organization offers to serve the constituents, it has to be first and foremost about giving service to the people. It should never be about what rewards or inducements that an individual can amass. Too often many use the opportunity to serve as a means to promoting their individual issues and agenda, at the

centre of which is their personal aggrandizement. In an imperfect world, it is unlikely that this would ever stop, but it does not mean that persons ought not to be educated about it, made aware of its existence and influence to abhor it.

Invariably, the trade union leader is a politician in his practice of labour relations, for similar to the politician, the trade unionist has to influence policy and is involved in decision making. Moreover, the trade union leaders represent the voice of workers and working class people, and have a mandate to improve the social welfare of their constituents and society at large. Like the politician, trade union leaders are expected to be knowledgeable, skilled, experienced, intelligent and have integrity. They are expected to be faithful, honest, and trustworthy and most of all be prepared to accept responsibility for their words and actions.

Trade union leaders should be aware that like politicians, their constituents place their faith and trust in them. With this in mind, there is the need to reflect consistency in actions taken and doing what is morally and legally right.