

Workers as the Electorate

On the completion of a General Election where the result is determined on the principle of first past the post, the electorate is left to accept the declaration that one of the political parties which contested the election, has had a majority of its members elected, so as to entitle it to form the government of the day. It is to be expected that while some members of the electorate celebrate the election results, they are others who bemoan the outcome. Whatever different feelings are expressed, the important thing is that respect has been shown for the democratic process. The fact that the process was completed where eligible citizens were permitted to exercise the right to vote, and where the process was not tainted by any act of indiscretion in the polling of votes, this gives comfort to the electorate and those who contesting the elections, that the integrity of electoral process was not comprised so as to have it called into question.

On assuming office, the newly elected government is tasked with the delivering of its manifesto promises and pledges. Members of the workforce will undoubtedly have their individual expectations. Inasmuch that there would be divided loyalties when it comes to support for the individual political parties and politicians, the reality is that the workforce as a collective will have to respond to the decisions taken by the government of the day, that may impact on labour in various ways. This is where workers are expected to put aside their political loyalty and join hand in hand in an effort to protect, safeguard and promote their various interests. Workers as part of the electorate and as major contributors to the state's economic development, have a responsibility to support trade unions in undertaking to monitor the work of the government, and in demanding transparency and accountability.

Labour is pressed to unite in an effort to respond to the policies and actions that pose a direct challenge to the social and economic well being of workforce. It is at this point, that the trade union movement as the representative body of workers, is recognized for the role it is expected and required to play. For trade unions to achieve this, the ideal is that there is evidence of unification. This determination is made on the grounds that trade unions are not expected to be partisan. Conscious of this and accepting the fact that trade unions represent workers who have

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different political interests and ideologies, the threat to unification should be non-existence, always respecting the fact that each individual has the right to freedom of choice and association. Unification is a significant factor in promoting the idea of representing a common cause. A variation from this could be thwarted with problems; the magnitude of which could range from a lack of support due to political divide, and possible acts of undermining being perpetrated.

As already established, workers have their individual right to association and to vote for a political party of choice. The assumption is that workers have an understanding of the fundamental differences in the roles of a political party, an elected government and that of trade unions. Political parties are made up of persons who share a common ideology and whose sole intention is to acquire political power for the purpose of having the right to govern. The victorious party at the polls, earns the right to form the government. The government assumes the responsibility for making laws and policies that relate to the order of society, national development, the social welfare of the state, the economy, national defence and security, foreign affairs and the delivery of public services. Irrespective of where the political support of each worker lies, collectively workers stand to benefit or to be disadvantaged and impacted by whatever decisions are made by the government of the day.

Inasmuch that trade unions have a decisive role to play in the organizing of and the representation of workers, it is required that they represent the interest of membership irrespective of individual political interest or association. The possibility does exist that the some trade union leaders and groups within trade unions, might attempt to exert their influence in driving a political agenda and actions. Such behaviour can be derailed, provided always that the membership remains steadfast in the understanding that organizing and the representation of workers is the core reason for the existence of trade unions. The engaging of employers in the corporate community and government as the single largest employer in any state, should make an emphatic statement regarding the independence of trade unions.

As a unified force, labour is able to engage the process of collective bargaining and negotiations in matters of conditions of employment, wages and salaries

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agreements, grievances and labour disputes. The voice of labour in influencing changes and in the decision-making process, is solidified by the strength of organized labour. This solidity empowers trade unions to play a pivotal advocacy and lobbyist role on the behalf of workers and working class people. The power of labour movement is therefore enough to cause any government to think and rethink its intentions and actions.