

A Rethink of Labour's Role

In a world characterized by high unemployment, ongoing struggles for an increase in the minimum wage, the exploitation of workers by employers in various forms, a growing decline in trade union members, apparent disrespect and disregard for trade unions by governments and capital in failing to engage in the process of consultation and dialogue, the signs of close collaboration between governments and outcomes that sometimes appear to run contrary to the causes of labour and the threat of destabilization to the labour movement through the practice of inclusion by governments, are all contributing to a perilous industrial relations climate.

In the midst of the darkness of the times, it is for the actors within the labour movement to begin to think about its relevance and existence in a climate where the actions of governments and capital are seemingly directed at testing the fortitude of labour to withstand the pressures of the new labour relations dynamics. In a world that has taken on a face of a new form of capitalization, it would appear that the intentions are to reduce the gains made by labour and to reduce the strength of the working class. The labour movement has a renewed challenge to ensure the values of solidarity, equality, freedom, peace and sustainability are not undermined and destroyed. Trade unions have to resign themselves to staying the course in living up to the expectation that they will remain as democratic organizations within which the members decide on the key political and strategic issues. Within our global societies, there are political institutions and conglomerates who wield immense power and influence, and are therefore able to dictate the agenda.

It is for the labour movement to demonstrate its tenaciousness and to stand up under the slogan of no retreat and no surrender. The importance of this position is captured in an article captioned, 'Why trade unions are even more relevant today' (Terry Belle, 20 June, 2015). He wrote, "The labour movement is in principle the only secular, non-partisan and democratic that could play such a role." The point is to be reinforced that trade unions as democratic organizations are more relevant than they have ever been. Therefore, it must be stressed that they must not refrain or back away from fighting the workers' battles. They must recommit their resolve

A Rethink of Labour's Role: Dennis de Peiza: Labour & Employee Relations Consultant: Regional Management Services Inc., 15 January, 2021

to continue to organize workers, promote workers' solidarity, fight the rising tide of unemployment, fight against social injustices, social deprivation and press for social safety nets to be established. In this new environment, the fight against capitalism must be directed at reducing the impact of the technological revolution that threatens to remove workers from the workforce and to increase the profits of the capitalist.

The nature of the technological revelation makes it obvious that the struggles ahead for the labour movement are arduous. Mechanization in various forms including robotics and the move to digitalization will see the removal of highly skilled jobs. It is critical that trade unions pay attention to and outreach to unemployment. Researchers at the Britain Oxford University estimate that 47% of jobs in the United States of America could be automated in twenty years' time. This revelation allows for the reasonable assumption to be that small open economies stand to be decimated if the workforce is to give way to new technologies.

Based on what is expected to be forth coming in the immediate future, trade unions cannot shy away from taking the fight to employers including government as the largest employer. The fundamental aim should always be that of the creation and sustaining of employment, and negotiation for improve working conditions for workers. It is at this crucial time that trade unions should be paying attention to and being vocal about the issues of low pay to workers, the varying of the contract of employment to provide for reduce hours of work, the introduction of zero hours contract, the removal of overtime pay among a host of other things.

As an independent and nonpartisan voice of labour, the labour movement now has plenty work to do. There is no need for protection under the political banner but to stand up on its own two feet and to address without fear or favour, the causes of working-class people. The labour movement has to speak out against the exploitation of the most vulnerable and the middle class, who are being made through the new technological revolution to pay higher cost for services. This is felt through the imposition of fees and taxes imposed by governments, and high charges, user and transaction fees that are applied directly or indirectly by the corporate sector.

With each passing year, irrespective of it being a time of crisis, it is for the labour movement to consolidate, unite and fight a common cause. There is no big or small fish in the pond that the giant shark cannot and will not eat if it so chooses to do. Labour has to refocus and see that it has an important role to play in motivating new members to join, providing assistance and advice to members, encouraging member commitment and member participation, providing trade union education and training, exerting influence on relevant legislation, taking the lead in driving campaigns for action and change, promoting social justice, negotiating collective agreements and ultimately, pressing demands for better living and working conditions.