

A United Sense of Purpose

When one thinks about the unification of the labour movement, it jumps out at you that the purpose for doing so is to establish and share a common bond. To have a united sense of purpose is envisaged as a significant element in defining the relationship of a workers' grouping. This starts at the level of the membership of a trade union or staff association. The next step is that of individual organizations being united under the umbrella of a national trade union centre. Thereafter the national trade union centre undertakes to be a member of a regional or an international workers' organization. At the ground level being that at the workplace, the unity of purpose is encouraged and promoted. It is here that collective bargaining units are established.

It is expected that trade unionists understand what is truly meant by a sense of purpose. It matters most that there is a commitment to such. This takes us back to the first principles of trade unionism, which starts with the unity of workers as promoted under the slogan of 'One for all, all for one.'

There ought to be an awareness by workers and trade unionists that the interest of the collective is paramount. This is based on the contention that much can be achieved where there is the solidarity of workers or within a workers' grouping. This underscores the importance of collective bargaining and gives real meaning to the right to associate. In consolidating their base, trade unions should understand the importance of their attachment to national, regional and international workers' organizations, given that it is the platform for developing and consolidating their bargaining power base. The purpose of this is to ensure that labour organizations adequately protect and safeguard the interest of their members. It is very important to understand that through the consolidation of trade unions, this offer a layer of protection from the manipulation, domination and control by external powers such as governments and political parties.

Having taken a position of comfort under an established workers' body, individual member organizations should not seek to impose their will, simply for the purpose of promoting and safeguarding narrow self-interest. Where such behaviour is known to exist and where an accusation is made that any workers' grouping has lost its way, is

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requires that the accusing body takes a careful look at itself in the mirror, for the purpose of identifying its own weaknesses and shortcomings.

Trade Unions organizations are known to be governed based on a constitution. It is accepted that this is a guiding document that forms the basis for the rules, regulations, standing orders and procedures which the organization adopts. Every member organization is required to respect and observe the constitution and the management practices which guide the operations of the body. Any blatant disregard shown for the provisions of the constitution and the management procedures, is more than likely to give rise to disruptive and inept behaviour. Such can cause the organization to encounter difficulties in the management of its affairs. This can lead to frustrations, disenchantment, discord, loss of interest, enthusiasm and even disunity. None of this is healthy for the wellbeing, image and management of an organization, which is forced to expend time and energy coping with negativity and calculated disruptions.

In any organization, the mounting of challenges and the expression of varied or differences of opinion are to be expected, welcomed and desired; provided always that these are done in a decent manner and in keeping with the established guidelines and procedures. Within our democratic institutions, it is accepted that decisions are made based on a majority vote. The unwillingness to accept decisions made and to follow rules and procedures are sure to undermine the unity of purpose which organizations hope to achieve and maintain.

In order to maintain a unity sense of purpose, organizations would want to discourage the engaging of any form of bullying and intimidatory tactics. There should always be zero tolerance to the flouting of the constitution, standing orders, rules and established procedures of the organization.

Trade unions are voluntary organizations of workers and /or employers which have been formed to protect their interest through collective action. Based on the principle of the pursuit of collective action, it is highly undesirable that individual interest should be allowed to supersede that of the collective. Actions which suggest that this is the preferred choice, raises serious questions of the commitment to the shared principles and values on which trade unionism is founded.

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The unity of purpose is best expressed by the International Labour Organization Committee on the Freedom of Association, which viewed that:

'The principle of trade union pluralism is grounded in the right of workers to come together and form organizations of their own choosing, independently and with structures which permit their members to elect their own officers, draw up and adopt their by-laws, organize their administration and activities and formulate their programmes without interference from the public authorities and in the defence of workers interest.'