

Agitate but don't Violate

When the Capitol of the United States of America was stormed by rioters on Monday, 6 January, 2021, the allegation was made that the violent attempted insurrection was incited by President Donald Trump. Aron Blake a senior political reporter writing in the Washington Post, 11 January, 2021 commented that, "Trump's speech included no overt calls for his supporters to actually enter the Capitol or resort to violent means. But it included plenty of allusions to the idea that Congress accepting Joe Biden's victory — an all-but-assured outcome at the time — was a result that simply couldn't be countenanced and must be stopped. He urged his supporters to "fight" and "fight like hell" and lamented that they didn't do so as hard as Democrats."

Based on the words which President Trump uttered, the conclusion could have been drawn that the language used was enough to bring the office of President into disrepute. It can be reasonably argued that this conclusion was supported by the actions of the Democrats to introduce a single article of impeachment alleging that President Trump incited the violent attempted insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Where an utterance like this or of a similar nature that are made by a leader and supported by allies or colleagues, is enough to raise concern that there is a breach of ethics and the tenants of good governance. In the general scheme of things, the organizational culture would tend to suggest that any such action or behaviour, represents a fundamental breach which serves to bring the office into disrepute.

In most established civil society organizations including political organizations, trade unions, and national sporting bodies, there are codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures and penalties. These are in place in order to ensure compliance with the rules and standards of the organization, to eliminate breaches of behaviour or actions on the part of an individual that are inimical to the interest of the organization. The term disrepute addresses

actions or behaviour that can potentially damage the reputation of the organization. Such action or behaviour is deemed to be offensive. Those at the helm of an organization are expected to be the standard bearers, who would lead by example and not deviate from following the constitution, rules, procedures, guidelines and/or standing orders. Where a leader deviates from these and acts in a contrary manner, this amounts to a form of behaviour which compromises decency and good order, ignores and tramples on the said rules that they are expected to observe and enforce, or supports the inept behaviour of a member of the organization in committing a violation, then that leader needs to be held accountable for their action.

The storming of a meeting or the perpetrating of an act that may be intended to break up a meeting that is in progress by any member of an organization who has no legitimate right to be there, is reprehensible behaviour. Support for such an action by a leader, makes it difficult to understand how such behaviour differs substantially from the using of words which would have the net effect of inciting supporters to act in an irresponsible or violent manner.

It is generally accepted that in any organization there will be disputes, disagreement and differences of opinion. Holding fast to the democratic principles, it follows that the appropriate channels and procedures should be used to address all matters of concerns. Where acts occur that appear to be directed towards circumventing the rules, establish procedures and guidelines, and which are seemingly encouraged, this unfortunately signals that anarchy is more likely to prevail over the rule of law and order. This basically means that the constitution of the organization and/or its governance arrangements have been ignored and are rendered useless.

Most would come to expect that such outrageous behaviour is not to be associated with trade unions. Trade unions are known to preach, promote and practice unity, solidarity and the brotherhood of man. Hopefully, the commitment to these ideals will not be threatened by narrow-mindedness,

shortsightedness and selfishness of individuals, for what reasons that may be propelling them.

Trade unions are well known for engaging in the process of negotiations, consultation, dispute and conflict resolution. The importance of communication is always stressed. Bearing this in mind, there is every conceivable reason to expect that in dealing with any internal matters, actions taken would be guided by following the very principles and strategies used in the daily industrial relations practice. It is rather unfortunate that those who are expected to do the right thing would opt to do the wrong thing. When this occurs, the integrity of those who are active participants is likely to be called into question. The organization's ability to properly represent the interest of its members is placed under the microscope.

It is best that trade unions refrain from engaging in patterns of behaviour which are played out on political platforms. That is to say that no effort should be spared in staying clear of engaging in cut throat behaviour, character assignations and the maligning of opponents and others. The members of organizations should be extremely cautious and sensitive of acts that are prone to bring the integrity and image of the organization into question. As a safeguard, a no tolerance approach should be adopted, and in so doing, the invoking of the disciplinary provisions of the constitution should be considered, if and when it becomes necessary. It is important to remember that the act of due process is to be followed, in ensuring that the issue of fairness is not in doubt.

It has often been said that actions speak louder than words. It is therefore advisable to think before you act.