

Understanding Trade Union Solidarity

The term trade union solidarity is generally linked to political protest and solidarity building. This call for trade union solidarity is used as a tool to rally workers when workers in time of industrial protests, which include that of a strike. The promotion of trade union solidarity is the display of collective action. Trade unions are responsible for mobilizing and organizing working-class people for the purpose of continuing and intensifying the use of such action, in order to foster a more united front against the increasingly repressive and exploitative nature of both state and capital.

Solidarity is unity whether of a group or class, which produces or is based on unities of interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies. It refers to the ties in a society that bind people together as one. The definition suggest that the power which resides in trade unions, rest solely in the hands of the membership. It therefore requires that the leaders of trade unions provide quality leadership, and demonstrate the ability to influence the membership into collective action.

Based on the understanding of what is known as trade union solidarity, it should not be mistaken to mean that it is only demonstrated in a practical way; in the form of work stoppages or other forms of industrial protests. Trade union solidarity can also be expressed theoretical. This takes the form of statements or messages of solidarity for workers on strike against the employer, and in solidarity messages conveyed as fraternal greetings to kindred organizations.

The concept of trade union solidarity is said to be fundamental to the law of many nations. It is embodied in the fact that there is recognition of the role trade unions to represent the interest of workers. By being a signatory to the international Labour Conventions Nos. 87 & 98, countries around the world would have accepted the right of workers to be organized and to bargain collectively. Implicit in this is the fact that the collective bargaining unit within an organization has a basis for promoting workers' solidarity.

Within the context of a labour environment where the fraternal labour organizations are supposedly pursuing a common cause, there ought not to be any question raised about trade union solidarity. Any trade union organization that identifies with the slogan of

'Solidarity Forever' and does not observe what it preaches, is to all intents and purposes basically hypocritical.

It is this type of intellectual dishonesty that will serve to undermine the labour movement, and create a platform for governments and capital to exploit the weaknesses of the labour. At a time in our history where there are a myriad of challenges emerging from globalization, world trade agreements, and the impact of multinational enterprises, it is to be expected that trade union solidarity at the local, regional and international level would be widely promoted and supported.

Any actions or attempts to undermine trade union solidarity must be deplored and openly criticized. The Caribbean has had a history of struggles to achieve political solidarity. One such example is that of the failed attempts at creating a political federation. The struggles with CARICOM, the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the Caribbean Court OF Justice (CCJ) are practical glaring examples of the challenges of regional solidarity.

To the credit of the labour movement, the Caribbean Congress of Labour and the Caribbean Union of Teachers are two regional institutions that have seemingly consolidated themselves. This having been said, there is evidence of divide within individual member countries or units, whom are known to be jostling for pride of place as the national trade union centre of their country, or the voice for a particular group of workers. This apparent divide cannot be healthy as the tensions emanating from it, cannot lend to the promotion of trade union solidarity.

It is unfortunate that trade union leaders who would proudly sing the words of the Union Song of 'Solidarity forever for the union makes us strong,' would by their actions, send the wrong signals to union members and the general public.