

## Threats to Trade Unions

For some considerable time now there has been a sustained debate about the relevance and existence of trade unions. Those who have an interest in seeing the demise or marginalization of the trade union movement must be catapulted at the fact that their agenda has not gained the currency as expected.

Within the Commonwealth, it is a norm that the national governance structure makes provision for the participation of government, capital and labour in the decision making process. It is a given that no society and economy can exist and grow without workers, as labour is a key element to productivity. Capital by itself cannot drive the growth and development of a society and economy. It therefore seems that the threats to trade unions are more intended to control them than to bring about their demise. The idea of marginalizing trade unions might be a path that both government and capital may attempt to pursue for their own individual reasons. It would be wishful thinking that the hands of the clock can be turned back to what existed in colonial times.

If the intention of government or capital is to steam-roller and crush organized labour, it pays to recognize that workers are conscious of the benefits to be had from the collectivism approach. It shouldn't be taken for granted that workers are ignorant that at the core of this is representation they enjoy, which is best reflected through the process of collective bargaining and negotiations. Unless it is outlawed, governments and capital can rest assured that wherever there are workers, they will more than likely seek to be organized.

This notion that the demise of the trade union movement is imminent might be based on the current trend where employers are moving to offering individual contracts for service. This will of course work in some instances, but it would be folly to think that this would be the norm. The system of contract employment is unlikely to be sustainable in large organizations, if they are to maintain sustainable and viable operations. Employers will have to come to grips with the fact that they can create in-house competition over wages and conditions, which have the potential of driving them out of business. The fierce competition which that approach can initiate in the marketplace, can hardly be good for capital, as this in itself can be self-defeating.

Dating back to the early 1900's at the time of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, labour has been made aware of the power of unionization. Back then and more so now, workers are aware of the role of the trade union in negotiating wages and salaries, conditions of services and addressing other issues. It would be interesting if workers were to turn their backs on a system that offers them representation and support, and resort to leaving themselves open to the whims and fancies of government as an employer, and those employers within the private sector.

It is important that workers never lose sight of the power and influence that they bring to bear as organize labour. It is from this stand point that they may be perceived as a threat to governments and capital/employers. Governments will and can be intimidating to labour unions by way of the legislative reforms and policies initiatives they introduce or contemplate so to do. However, how far they go, may be determined by the fact that labour unions have political clout. As we all know, politicians are mindful that it is from working class people that they have to seek votes.

The threat to trade unions cannot be dismissed or taken lightly, as there are several examples of actual attempts. The latest treat to date is that issued by Theresa May, the new British Prime Minister, who came to office at the resignation of David Cameron following the Brexit Vote, 24 June, 2016. The parliamentary opposition has warned that May's "reactionary" new Cabinet could undermine workers' rights yet further. The opposition's fear is that Prime Minister May is bent on establishing a right wing reactionary cabinet which will drive through right-wing neoliberal policies, and so undermine the very existence of those organizations which stand up for working people.

History will recall that when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, British trade unions were quite powerful. However by the time she left office in 1990, the labor union movement had been substantially weakened. In the United States of America, it is said that Republican presidents never had much regard for trade unions. The actions of President Ronald Regan in the summer of 1981 to fire 13,000 striking air traffic controllers and destroyed their union, confirmed this.

It is well known across the world that extreme actions are taken against trade union leaders. Some are subjected to dismissal from work, imprisonment, and to having acts of violence perpetrated against them; resulting in their death. This is unlikely to change, but the answer to whatever threats which may come from time to time, is for working class people to remain steadfast and in solidarity; not being intimidated or having their resolve shaken.