

Irresponsible Leadership

The storming of the Capitol building in Washington D.C on 6 January, 2021, by supporters of the Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, was indeed a sorry sight to behold. The radicalism, violence and tyranny associated with this event, ought to serve a lesson to all political and civil societies leaders across the world of what their actions, behaviour and spoken word could do incite unrest and /or insurrection by a misguided set of people.

Leaders are expected to be responsible people. This means that they are to be dependable, prepared to keep promises which are made and undertake to honour their commitments. What stands out as a major aspect of their shouldering responsibility, is the ability to accept the consequences for what we say and do. They ought not to make excuses for their actions or blame others when things go wrong.

It is said that admitting to one's mistakes is just what responsible people do. Moreover, they do so on realizing that something has gone wrong, and therefore own up to it. This is the way to gain respect and the confidence of the people whom you lead. An admission of a mistake should not be for the purpose of attracting sympathy. Added to the list of what is expected of leaders, is the ability to always remain ethical in their actions, being honest and transparent in all work, dealings and communications and to work to develop the potential of the people whom they lead.

As a leader who has set the agenda for others to execute, the best way to shoulder responsibility especially when things go wrong, is to answer for your own actions. This is not always the easiest thing in the world to do, since big egos and pride tend to get in the way. The problem can be amplified where some leaders resort to entering a state of denial. Leaders who allow their emotions to get out of hand can be a potential danger to themselves, the organization and people that they lead and to the community and society. **Those whose expectations outstrip them or are not realized, and whose anger or jealousy get out of hand can tend to become resentful, aggressive and revengeful.** Such persons are dangerous characters who cannot be taken for granted. Leaders who take on such a character have tended to lose sight of the fact that responsibility is being accountable for one's actions and to know and follow various rules, laws, and conduct codes.

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Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States of American remind us of the need to take responsibility for all of our actions. The first step towards achieving this is to let your actions match your words. If you agree to do something, do it. By keeping your word, you are demonstrating respect for the person to whom you made the promise as well as being accountable for what you said you would do. Furthermore, you must take ownership of your actions. If you make a mistake, admit it.

According to Stanley, Martin Lieber, “With great power comes great responsibility.” Using this as a guide, leaders should come to learn and appreciate that responsible leadership is values-based and founded on ethical principles. Those who lack the cognitive and reasoning skills and are prone to act irrationally, are likely to display some despotic behaviour. Society and organizations within it must guard themselves from those types of leaders, many of who may display a charismatic leadership style but are more immersed in identifying with the autocratic style of leadership.

The bottom line is that the outlook, behaviour and actions of such leaders present a definite threat to the democracy, considering that they refuse to use the democratic system to find solutions. Instead, they resort to making excuses for their irresponsible actions and behaviours. The sad tale is that people who lack the ability to think and reason and who can be easily influenced, take matters into their own hands. This is much to the detriment of themselves, the wellbeing of the society in which they live and the cause they purport to fight in the interest of an over enthusiastic, misguided and irresponsible leader.

Trade union leaders will do good to learn a lesson from the events of 6 January, 2021 which occurred in the Capitol of the USA. They should avoid being overzealous in their thinking and actions and having an obsession with the maintaining of the bastion of power. They are to be mindful that as leaders, they can easily influence the membership of their organizations and also heavily influence the thinking of the populace. Hence, they must be weary not to cross the line where they incite actions that can lead to violence in one form or another, be it unrest, riotous behaviour and/or insurrection. Labour should remain committed to following the democratic principles and process to which it subscribes, and therefore continue to promote peaceful forms of industrial and protest actions.

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