

## **Responsible Trade Union Behaviour and Actions**

As the trade union movement undertakes its own introspection, a discussion on responsible trade union behaviour and action, can only be considered as one that is merited. The merits of such a discussion are well grounded in universal ethics, guiding principles, the constitution requirements of individual trade organizations, rules, regulations and the dictates of the law. Responsible actions and behaviours whether attributed to the collective will of an organization or to that of an individual, should be guided by the application of a sense of maturity, professionalism and decency.

Starting at the individual level, each member has a right to retain membership of a trade union, provided always that the required subscriptions are paid and that the rules of the organization aren't breached. Failure to follow the rules and expectations, that member becomes subject to be expulsion, if found to be in breach of conduct that is unacceptable or inimical to the interest of the organization.

While the trade union retains the right to discipline, it certainly cannot expel a member for the reason of being a member of a political party, or for holding or having held membership in another existing or former registered trade union, civic or religious organization. Whereas, trade union have vested powers which are derived from the Trade Union Act and by their individual, the exercise of these must not infringe on the constitutional rights of the individual. For example, a trade union cannot discipline a member for failing to take place in a strike or any other form of industrial action.

Workers should be aware that having proceeded on strike action, they have effectively withdrawn their labour and therefore not entitled to be pay for each day that they did not work. It is therefore important that workers prior to proceeding on a strike, ensure that the trade union has a strike fund to pay those striking members who stand not to be paid by the employer. If the trade union fails to inform or educate its members on this standing policy and practice, or to make provision through the setting up of a strike fund, such would constitute what can be claimed as both irresponsible behaviour and action.

The showing of opposition or lack of support for any proposed form of industrial action by a member, should not be offered as a reason by a trade union for the imposition of any form of disciplinary action or sanctions. This also extends to the instance where a member does not support proposed industrial action and decides not to participate in the strike fund.

This bring us to the notion that trade unions are organizations have an overarching responsibility to represent the interest of the membership and therefore their actions and behaviours cannot

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be deemed as irresponsible. This is an assertion that tends to suggest that trade unions are not to be held to standards of conduct. In the absence of trade unions following the guiding principles on which they are expected to observe, it raises the fundamental question as to the moral authority they have to condemn others whose behaviour and actions are of a similar nature.

It is to be respected that trade unions are independent in their activities from political parties, non-governmental organizations, employers and employers' associations. They therefore do not fall under their control, neither are they subordinate to them. It is established that any interference, could be seen as an infringement of trade union rights and an attempt to prevent their legitimate function. With this in mind, those with a contrary view, may wish to appreciate that there must be a balance. Moreover, it is to be expected that equity and fairness would be reflected in the application of practice, as this denotes an understanding of what is acceptable.

The principles of good leadership and exemplary practices should always be in the forefront of the minds of trade union leaders. Trade union leaders should never subscribe or be party to behaviours or actions which call into question their integrity, professionalism and motives.