

Restoring the Pride of Trade Unions

Trade unions have been known to be powerful forces in countries across the globe that promote equality and justice. Worldwide their work incorporates representation, activism and education. Over the years trade unions have become well respected. The history of the labour movement would reflect that trade unions have been progressive in their achievements. These include the successful lobby for new and revised labour legislation, the championing of fair labour standards and practices, securing high wages and salaries for workers, securing higher minimum wages, health and pension benefits, other social benefits, and safety and health laws.

In the past, trade unions engaged employers including government as an employer, in both unprecedented and emphatic battles. There is an emerging view that trade unions are not as aggressive as they were, and as such are now poised to be steamrolled by employers. The view emerges from a perceived weakness of the labour movement. This is attributed to the lack of militancy in the leadership, and the declining solidarity that was once a hallmark of the movement.

As it stands, it seems that trade unions are under pressure and are caught in the midst of a survival struggle. This must not be allowed to be perpetuated. It therefore requires that the movement seriously undertakes to review what is happening within its own back yard. Trade union leaders should accept that there is a need to revive the 'race to the top for workers, rather than a race to the bottom'.

The solution to the restoration of the pride of the labour movement lies within its ability to successfully champion the causes of labour. It is all about restoring the confidence of the union membership, stimulating and capturing the interest of the unionize workers. Moreover it is about providing the type of challenge to the employers and the legislature, which forces them to take trade unions far more seriously. These should be made

aware that trade unions are not dormant or dead, neither are they to be taken for granted.

Gerard J. Meara the Executive Director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 73 in Hamilton, offers some appropriate advice which ought to be heeded. With reference to what existed in his jurisdiction, he commented that, "In the face of powerful enemies, union members continue to fight back to maintain the quality of life that American workers so richly deserve. Whether it is at the bargaining table, in legislative halls or at the ballot box, workers and their unions must continue to press their demands in a unified and forceful way."