

Trade Union Elections

It is common knowledge that organizations and institutions within the western world, inclusive of trade unions, are known to follow the democratic practices within their respective governance system. It is quite unfortunate that the integrity of the elections process is sometimes called into question by allegations made about some unacceptable practices. The evidence for the most part to support the claim(s) is not always brought to the fore, but the speculation which runs rife, does little to inspire confidence in the system.

The charge of unscrupulous behaviour in the voting process is not known to exist within trade unions elections, and hopefully will never been entertained. It is however regrettable that the nature of trade unions elections have in recent times seems to have taken on a face that is usually associated with partisan elective politics. The mudslinging, undermining and verbal abuse is slowly creeping its way into trade union politics. This is undesirable and not within the expectations of trade union fraternity which prides its self on being a family of brothers, sisters or comrades. If it is that the character of the movement is changing, it becomes apparent that there must be underlining reason(s) why this is so.

It can only be hoped that neither narrow self-interest and /or partisan political interest are elements that are emerging with the election process within the trade union movement. The movement which prides itself on unification should out rightly reject any person or persons who in offering themselves for election to office, are known to have either of these leanings as part of their agenda. It is questionable why an individual or group of individuals seeking office in a voluntary organization such a trade union, would resort to spending thousands of dollars on a campaign in an effort to win an election. This recent development in trade union elections seems to be gaining currency in some quarters. Those members of trade unions who have not been paying attention, or who ascribe nothing sinister to this new approach, ought to stop and take a moment to reflect on this new development. And what it means for the future of the labour movement.

Is this heightened election campaigning good for trade unions? On a positive note, it certainly serves the useful purpose of capturing the attention, interest and participation of the membership. For this purpose, the use of social media to campaign is to be encouraged. The down side of the elections teams and the upscale campaign spending can contribute to division and rancor within the organization. The latter is certainly something that the labour movement can do without.

How can this new trend be brought under control without trampling on the rights of members seeking election to office, so as to freely exercise their legitimate right to implement campaign strategies of their choosing? Has the point been reached where trade unions have to ask for a declaration of campaign funding and the source of that funding? It is that the time has come for trade unions to have a discussion on a protocol that applies to trade union election?

It is not the character of trade unions to identify with dirty politics. If there is a semblance that it is rearing its head within the movement, it is for the membership of trade unions to nip this in the bud, by putting appropriate standards and rules in place to govern elections. First and foremost, unethical behavior must not be denounced. Those who are found wanting or guilty, must be dealt with firmly by applying the disciplinary provisions of the constitution. The membership ought to guard against act that can potentially divide the organization.

The way to do this is for the membership to take a keen interest in their organization. It is important to attend meetings of the organization, ask questions, challenge what is reported and do not accept what is said without supporting evidence being provided, hold the officers accountable, and most of all, participate in the elections process. When it comes to the election of officers, vote for those who have a vision for the organization and a proven track record of performance. Examine carefully those smooth talkers and what they bring to the table. Let not age, beauty, handsomeness, race, creed, colour or religion be a factor. Finally, if the performance of those in office does not merit reelection, then vote for change.