

The Trade Union as an autonomous Body

The public questioning of the independence of trade unions, suggests that there is some concern about their functioning, as it relates to how they conduct their business. It is left to conclude that questions are being raised about the actions and decision making of the leadership, and the possibility that these are influenced by external sources.

Trade unions are registered under the national law. In the case of Barbados, trade unions are registered under the Trade Union Act. According to the definition of a trade union, it is an independent organization which represents the interest of its members at the workplace. Trade unions interface directly with the employer, but are not under the domination or control of the employer, group of employers or the employers' association. Moreover, it is not liable to be interfere with by an employer or association.

Those who raise red flags about the independence of trade unions, may wish to rethink their varying positions, should they accept that trade unions are not dictated to by the employer or the association of employers. Trade unions are autonomous bodies. This means that they are self-governing, and thus have the freedom and power to make their own decisions. Those who share and promulgate the misguided view that the independence of trade unions is in question, may wish to explain the grounds for their claim and expression.

Trade unions in engaging with the employer in the process of negotiation and collective bargaining, have a responsibility to their members to work towards achieving better working conditions, wages, salaries, fair and equal treatment for their members. With the understanding that trade unions are also expected to give advice to their members who experience problems at work, and to represent their interest in discussions, dialogue and consultation with employer, it would be certainly be counterproductive to their independence if they were to act differently.

Trade unions are known to negotiate agreements with employers on pay and conditions of work, discuss members' concerns with employers, accompany members and represent them at disciplinary and grievance hearings and provide members with legal and financial advice. It would be matter of share folly, if trade unions were to behave irresponsibility and perpetrate actions that are contrary to the interest and welfare of their membership.

It is to be understood that there are those within our communities who for reasons best known to themselves, such as having a partisan political interest, would attempt to sully the name of an individual trade union organization, by embarking on smear campaigns. It unfortunate that some trade unions leaders who by their actions and mouthings, would give credence to the promulgated view that trade unions are being political partisan and influenced by external political forces. Where there is evidence of this, it is for the trade union membership to act and direct the leadership to halt, change its behaviour, or suffer the fate of removal from office.

The membership of trade unions must hold the feet of the leadership to maintaining the independence of the organization, and a commitment to executing the five principal functions of providing service, representation, discharging a regulatory, governance and administrative function.