

Respecting the Principles of Equality and Justice

The promotion of equality and justice has long remained part of the rallying call of trade unions. The principles of equality and justice formed part of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Countries which indentify with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, reflect this in their constitution, where by discrimination is denounced, and the freedoms of the individual are guaranteed. Since the constitution is the supreme law of the land, any departure from observing the principle of equality and justice, basically constitutes a breach of the law.

In applying the principle of equality, this can be addressed from a social and political perspective. Equality relates to what is just and equal. In comparing this to the understanding of justice, we come up with what is morally just, unjust or inappropriate. Moving beyond this, there is the understanding that the principle of equality is to be applied both at the individual and collective levels. It is the expectation that trade unions would be in the vanguard in denouncing any contrary actions that are promoted.

The right of the individual not to be discriminated against is contained in Article 1 (1) of the International Labour Convention 111. It states that, 'Any discrimination, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in the employment or occupation.' The issue of discrimination based on the employment or occupation of an individual ought to hold significance for trade unions. The trade union as voice and guardian for working class people has a responsibility to ensure that every individual is entitled to equal protection of the law.

The elimination of discrimination in the global society remains a challenge. The perpetuation of the view that the individual social status, be it class background, education, job or employment are important in giving acceptance to any citizen who offer him/herself for political office, suggests that social snobbery, elitism and the practice of exclusion continue unabated long after the dark years of slavery and the struggles of Dr. Martin Luther King, for the equality of black people in the United States of America in the 1960's.

It is inconceivable that the trade union movement would find itself engaging in such practices, where it alienates and marginalize its members. Actions which run

contrary to the engagement of the democratic principles to which the society subscribes means that there is a blatant disregard and disrespect for the human rights of equality, fairness and justice.

This brings us to examine what part if any, morality plays in the application of equality. It is considered that the best approach to this would be from the standpoint of moral equity. Using the teachings of the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle as a guide, they advanced the view that the formula of justice is premised on each and every individual being offered his or his due; with the understanding that everyone deserves the same dignity and respect.

Based on the embrace of thoughts of Plato and Aristotle and the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela for human rights and justice... Is it fair that our societies should be condemnatory and dismissive of any individual who attempts to exercise their constitutional right in a democratic society? Those who take to calling for fairness, balance, justice and the right to be heard must be complimented. However, those who in the same breath dismiss the active participation of an individual in any aspect of public life based on that person's social standing, may want to reflect on their consciousness of what is fair and just.

Those of us who read the book Animal Farm by George Orwell, would recall this famous quotation... "All animals are equal, by some animals are more equal than others". If as a learnt and progressive people in an independent and developing society this thinking yet remains, it gives serious cause for concern.