

Responding to Labour Challenges

Throughout the world, there are a number of shared concerns as they relate to globalization, privatization, governance issues, migration, human trafficking, adapting to digitalization, flexibilization, the diversification of the workplace, promoting of the social protection floor, the issues of precarious work, promotion of the decent work agenda, addressing occupational safety and health issues in the workplace and the rising incidence of non- communicable diseases. The larger concern relates to how these are impacting on the labour market and the work experience.

The conclusion may be drawn that with the introduction of globalization, the character of the labour market, labour environment and work experience has undergone a transformation. It is known that Globalization is about cross border transactions in the production of goods and services, which in turn facilitates the movement of labour to low cost countries. This has implication for the protection of labour rights, employment rights, the safeguarding the social security safety nets and maintaining the force of labour unions. As a consequence, trade unions are confronted in addressing the global employment challenge. They are challenged in their efforts of organizing the third sector, entrepreneurs and self-employed persons, and employees of global and offshore companies. Consequently, trade unions are faced with threat of being dismantle.

There are good reasons to believe that power which employers tend to wield, particularly those at the helm of large companies and corporations, poses a challenge to the work of trade unions. This is brought about by an abiding sense of unitarism, which ultimately is a force that enables employers to predominate. The primary objective of the trade union movement has always been that of establishing solidarity as a means of combating and eliminating competition and divide between workers. This is for the purpose of building and consolidating a common bond when dealing with the employer.

In this transformative age, trade unions are now experiencing some difficulties with the emergence of generational issues, the promotion of the LGBTQ +1 agenda, the interests of ethnic and sectorial groupings. The promotion of and the representation of the varying interests, has given rise to some internal divide and intra union conflict. These developments are of grave concern, as they threaten the retention of trade union solidarity.

In response to these developments, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), suggests that the best way for trade unions to address the challenges confronting labour in this transformation age, would be to for trade unions to first address any fragmentation within labour, wherever it exists. ACTRAV also recommended better cooperation between trade unions, so that they can be able to speak with a single voice, improve their representativeness and make a greater input into the decision making process. ACTRAV underscored the point that solid governance structures are also essential for trade unions. Such is not only for the purpose of ensuring their effective operation, but also to maintain their integrity and credibility with workers and the public at large.

Responding to Labour Challenges: Dennis de Peiza: Labour & Employee Relations Consultant, Regional Management Services Inc. 22 September, 2023

The advice if heeded, will certainly make a difference in diverting attention from the growing practice of individualism, as is apparent when it comes to managing labour relations in some labour unions. Where wisdom prevails in this matter, this would sure to send a strong message to those who want to divide the labour movement or who are desirous to prey on its perceived weakness, that it would not be tolerated.

It is strongly recommended that labour resets its agenda, if it is to cope and meet the new dynamics of the transformation age. There is little that labour can do to retard the processes of globalization, the technological revolution, new types of employment, business transfers and information technologies, amongst other things. If labour is to contribute and to influence the change process, it requires that collectivism defines the identity of the labour.

As has taken place in some jurisdictions, there has been the establishment of joint trade union councils. These have drawn up joint declarations, charters and protocols on the modalities of working together in national social dialogue fora. In the Caribbean island of Barbados, a national trade centre known as the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados, was established in 1995. Since 1991, Barbados established a Social Partnership mechanism, a model that embraced the participation of government, the private sector and labour. It must be understood that for such a mechanism to work, there must be a commitment on the part of government to consult and dialogue, and not to adopt an attitude that the government governs.

Trade unions leader are urged to avoid any pitfalls that will retard the effectiveness of the trade union operations. They are advised to place a premium on the promoting integrity, transparency, and accountability.