

## Trade Union Reform

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been the growing obsession with transforming the way things have been done. There has been some opposition to the change out from traditional practices to what is now referred to as the new norm. Some of the intended changes may be described as radically, drastic, subtle and even unfriendly. Irrespective of the views that may be shared, it cannot be disputable that change is inevitable.

Amongst other things, a case has been made for social reform, economic reform, education reform, political reform, constitution reform and business reform. Change is often deemed to be in the interest of transforming the existing culture and practices. In putting this into perspective, a look at the definition of the word transformation, tells that the primary function of the transformation process is to bring change and to generate new outcomes.

In making a comparison of the meaning of the word transformation and reform, it can be summarized that they basically identify with bringing about change for the purpose of making improvements. In this contemporary age, a case can be made for trade union reform to take place. It makes good sense for trade unions to reposition themselves in order to become more effective and efficient in the delivery of service to their members. Additionally, the expectation is that they must be able to offer quality representation and demonstrate their ability to create a higher level of enthusiasm and involvement amongst the membership.

Trade union reform starts with a recognition of the need to address changes in the organizing of the membership, the leadership and management of trade unions, the restructuring of operations to cope with the introduction of digital technologies and the importance of responding to the needs of the membership. With respect to the needs of the people, this requires a relook at the union's role as it relates to political and social advocacy.

For starters, the reform process ought to commence with the mobilization and consolidation of the membership. There is a school of thought that in order to make trade unions effective instruments of labor welfare, it is important that all the workers should be included into the membership. For this to happen, it would mean that the concept of agency shop is embraced and adopted. An agency shop is best described as a place of employment in which full membership in a union is not required, but the union acts as an agent for the employees. In furthering the understanding of an agency shop, it also referred to as a form of union security agreement where the employer may hire union or non-union workers, and employees need not join the union in order to remain employed. However, the non-union worker must pay a fee to cover collective bargaining costs. [Wikipedia](#)

**Trade Union Reform: Dennis de Peiza, Labour & Employee Relations Consultant, Regional Management Services Inc., December 1, 2023**

The issues of leadership and management of trade unions is seemingly becoming an issue, given that the level of preparedness of individuals to function in these roles is a cause for concern. The norm is to elect persons from the membership to positions, based on the voicing of an interest to serve, because of the popularity of individuals, or simply based on one's charisma. This approach is long outdated, and it is now required that the union draws on a pool of persons who have some experience and training in the work of the movement. The introduction of some form of a prerequisite, is not meant to impede any member from serving in a leadership or management capacity, but merely is an attempt to improve on the quality of service to be provided, where upon individuals have a working experience or have been exposed to training. Notwithstanding this change, the fact remains that the door is not closed to any member of the trade union who wants to give service to it as a voluntary organization.

Seeing that the trade union is supposed to be a non-partisan organization, a stance ought to be taken when it comes to those members who want to serve in a leadership role, while simultaneously holding political office. This should not be entertained. Invariably, the individual cannot serve two masters at the same time, and can potentially compromised the trade union.

With respect to the restructuring of the operations of trade unions, attention is drawn to the benefits associated with the increasingly use of digital technologies. These include advancing and expanding membership services, and improving communication and advocacy.