

Exercising Responsible Leadership

It is well known that politics transcends all aspects of life. Elected politicians like trade union leaders carry an awesome leadership responsibility. These persons are expected to make decisions on the behalf of their constituents. There is some fundamental difference in the nature of the roles played and the level of responsibilities assumed. It is a fact that government maintains a national responsibility. Though trade union leaders may shoulder responsibility that is pitched at a parochial level, it cannot be discarded that the decisions made and actions taken do have an impact at the national level.

What emerges from this is the need to develop and maintain working relations between government and trade unions, as they both undertake a role of representing the interest of the people. Politicians may choose for whatever reasons, to ignore trade unions and their demands, however, wise counsel would suggest that it is not the most prudent thing to do. Across the industrialized countries of the world such as France, Germany and Spain work stoppages are often associated with the people's response to government's policies that are based on broad social and economic issues. The working class under the umbrella of the trade union become a strong voice against measures which are either being contemplated or unilaterally implemented. It may be that in many an instance, the workers response is not necessarily related to work.

The voice and force of the people are not to be ignored. When a group of workers protest against an action or intended action of government, it is important that government listen. The promotion of social dialogue was meant to allow for meaningful communication to take place so that informed decisions could be made. It is for this reason that trade unions take a lead in the calling of general meetings to discuss matters of prime importance to its members. It would be folly for a trade union leader to take a major decision, appropriate as it may appear, and masquerade saying that it has been done in the name of the membership. Unilateral decisions at the level of the trade union may be gloried if they achieve their intention. This certainly will never be the case when it all goes wrong. This too holds true for governments.

The problem for both governments and trade union leaders is that sometimes they take their followers for granted. This may result where complacency and even overconfidence has set in. The force of governance may dictate the making of

some hard decisions. These decisions should however be predicated on sound reasoning. If a decision which is taken becomes unpopular to the point that it is enough to create large scale resentment, then it suggests that there is a need to revisit the decision. If the decision taken is the cause of pain, suffering, hardship and distress to the populace, then good judgement should prevail. Arrogance will never achieve anything else but to create resentment and build pressure. Good leadership will always have the will to rescind an unpopular decision and go back to the drawing board.

Trade unions have always been accused of being militant. In the past this was the method used to pressure governments to listen. This would remain with us. Modern day trade union leaders are receptive to dialogue, and where governments and managers of organs of governments are of the same mind, then the headaches and agonies of the past could be significantly reduced.