

## Changing of the Guard

With the emergence of trade unions in Barbados in 1945 when the Barbados Workers' Union was founded, the process of democratization was institutionalized. This is to say observance and practices of the principles of democracy have since that time, characterized the behaviour of trade unions and staff associations. Barbados has had a proud record of democratic institutions that pride themselves on following the tenets of the island's constitution, where freedom of choice and association are clearly expressed.

With this being the case, the promotion of free and fair elections and the exercise of the right to vote have been embedded within our instructions. The trade union has and continues to advocate for the right of the individual to participate in the decision making process at all level. This is a matter on which there can be no compromise. The practice of the participation of the people starts at the level of national elections and is expected to filter down to all levels within organizations and enterprises.

Since this is not to be taken lightly, the trade union movement subscribes to engaging in a process to elect leaders in the movement in a fair and democratic manner, where prejudice and discrimination in any form are scoffed upon. Our leaders are elected in a transparent process. The process is tended to be guided by procedures that are set and approved by the individual organizations. By following this practice, it can be concluded beyond a shadow of a doubt that the system works.

In the history of Barbados, union leaders have come and moved on. It is a credit to the nation that the democratic system which has featured prominently in the electoral process, has remained unchallenged. Though this may be the case, it cannot be ruled out that the approaches and strategies adopted by individuals to promote a candidate over another in some instances may have left a lot to be desired.

In the labour movement it is customary to refer to each other as brother and sister or comrade. These are words that should not be taken and used lightly if the good will that is to characterize the relationship is to be disregarded at any time, to satisfy an intention. This is not the ideal to be promoted, as such runs contrary to the labour movement's philosophy of working to create harmonious working relationships.

Those who assume leadership roles, have a responsibility to themselves and others to be guarded that their actions, whether by word or deed, are not used as weapons against them. It is therefore important not to appear to subscribe and articulate principles, so as to influence the members of an organization or enterprise, without first

assessing the pros and cons of our actions. The downside of this is that what is said or done could result in a short term benefit, but could prove to have a deleterious effect on the organization or enterprise in the short, medium or long term.

Politics has its place in any institution where persons will vie for elected office. In the trade union movement is not expected that political division should be an emerging feature. The movement prides itself on promoting collectivism, and with this being the case, it raises a fundamental question of the seriousness and the commitment to the promotion of this ideal.