

The Labour Movement: Prospects and Challenges. This is the theme which will inform the debate by delegates and observers at the 9th Biennial Delegates Conference of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados. The theme is an important one for the local trade union movement, and it repositions itself to face the many new emerging challenges. It stands to reason that the universality of this phenomenon makes it an important issue for both the local and regional trade union movement.

The changing global dynamics starting with globalization, privatization and trade liberalization have impacted on the traditional practice of industrial relations. Emerging from these, the trade union movement is now faced with the threat to the collective bargaining process. With the introduction of industrial courts being advanced as the alternative, trade unions are now challenged to attempt to find strategies to educate the workforce and the populace at large, to the workings and benefits of the collective bargaining system, the practice of volunteerism and social dialogue. The local trade union movement is also required to educate the public of the working of the tripartite mechanism and the social partnership.

Based on the assumption that conventional trade unionism is dying, it is expected that this conference will carefully examine the changing role and function of the labour movement, and to develop a strategic plan of action, so as to enable it to achieve its goals and objectives. This is to be seen as a required response of trade unions to the advent of globalization; which has created the need for a new kind of labour movement. It therefore challenges the labour movement to broaden its work beyond the confines of providing workplace representation, to addressing new emerging economic, social and environmental issues.

Trade unions are also challenged to give careful consideration to factors that may be impinging on their viability and effectiveness. There is also the issue of declining union membership. The need to arrest the declining number of unionised workers in both the private and public sectors, and to address the organizing of those who are unorganized, including the informal sector, becomes more apparent. This means that there is challenge of combating the obstacle of employers attempting to determine the right of employees to freely join a union of their choosing to represent them. This development imposes upon trade unions the need to move beyond traditional methodologies, and to finding new approaches to organizing workers.

In order to arresting the declining bargaining power of trade unions and protect the standard of living of workers, it warrants that unions played a greater protectionists role, so as to protect the jobs of workers as the impact of globalization and new technology steps in. The issue of contract employment over full time employment present new issues for the collective bargaining process for trade unions. This means that trade unions will be called upon to struggle with non sustainable jobs, the problem of unionization, security of tenure, and employment issues related to the application of labour legislation as these are applied in various jurisdictions.

Based on the universality of the issues effecting trade unions at the local, regional and international levels, it is for this conference to seriously consider how best to build the essential cross border solidarity, that is necessary in the era of globalization.

As it relates to the growth, development, role and function of the Congress as the local apex body, it is important that the conference devotes attention to repositioning of the organization, so that it can realized all expectations and goals. These discussions should take place against the background of the findings of the CTUSAB's survey on the 'Strategic Development of Trade Unions,' and the Strategic Development Plan (2011-2015).

Dennis de Peiza

General Secretary