

# Taking Responsibility

(Dennis de Peiza)

The deafening silence of trade unions across the Caribbean to the ongoing impasse involving the players on the West Indies Cricket Team who were on tour of India, their representative body WIPA and the West Indies Cricket Board, must be puzzling and disconcerting to most.

If the reports which were carried in various selections of the local and international media that the members of the West Indies team on tour of India, threatened to take a form of protest action against their representative body WIPA are accurate, then this can only be described as nothing short of a preverbal industrial relations nightmare. As it stands now, it would seem that Caribbean sporting history would have been spared the indignation of having to record the first known case in the international sports world, of players taking strike action against their own representative body.

Whereas this may be unheard of, it is not unprecedented that members of a trade union or representative body would have tabled a vote of no confidence in the elected or appointed leadership. This development in West Indies Cricket is unique, in that it involves a group of players who have a dispute with their representative body, and who at the same time are seeking to engage their employer as third party, in seeking a resolution of the matter.

In the circumstances where the facts are totally unclear, the silence of trade union leaders should be quite understandable. It would be irresponsible and a fundamental breach of the cardinal rule of the grievance procedure, for any trade unionist to make a definitive statement on this matter, without doing the necessary investigation. It would appear that every day the plot in this fairytale story changes, and so it leaves one to ponder over what really are the facts of the case.

There are so many unanswered questions that need to be answered. Who called off the tour? Was it the players or the West Indies Cricket Board? Do the players have the authority to call off a tour? If it is that they do and in fact did, would this be sufficient grounds for the WICB to prefer charges against the players for breach of contract or to bring them before its Disciplinary Committee on a charge of bringing the game into disrepute?

The key point which needs to be established is the root cause of the problem. The available information suggests that it relates to the pay of the players. The question which remains is... Was there a concluded negotiation between WIPA and the WICB? Did the players give their assent to any agreement that was reached? May be the problem lies with the understanding by WIPA and the WICB of what constitutes a

negotiated settlement under a collective bargaining agreement, and what is meant by a Memorandum of Understanding.

It is noteworthy that in an industrial relations matter of this magnitude, there is no known public record that the WICB has turned to the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) for advice on how to resolve this embarrassing episode in Caribbean Cricket. With the headquarters of both the CCL and WICB located in Antigua, one is left to wonder what could be the possible excuse for not making an approach to that body for assistance. It is quite interesting that politicians would jump at the opportunity to play an interventionist role. The engagement by Attorneys-at-Law also adds to the intrigue.

Coming out of this saga, the people of the region must seek answers to two burning questions. Who will take responsibility for this fiasco? Will this be another case of a reprimand extended and thereafter will the matter be swept under the carpet? In a culture where it seems that no one is held accountable when things go, it shouldn't come as a surprise if business continues as usual. However, it is reasonable to expect that the governments of the region acting under the guise of saving face, should resort to bailing out the WICB in the payment of the millions of dollars due to the Indian Cricket Board, as compensation for losses on the aborted tour? Moreover, would it be fair for the taxes of the people of Caribbean to be used to bail out West Indies Cricket, while citizens continue to face massive unemployment and underemployment, and the economies of the region continue to struggle under the weight of a global recession?

While this is something to ponder about, the indications are that the industrial relations nightmare becomes creepier by the minute. If the recent publicized position of the International Cricket Council which suggests that the West Indies players should not be repeat the act of withdrawing from a tour, then it begs the question.....Have the players been convicted and condemned without due process being followed?

Should the issue of due process be called into question in this episode, then those who cry victimization and recriminations, may be well be thinking that they have good grounds for their call.