Identifying and assessing alternatives: exploring possible solutions to problems and issues identified; research agenda and methodologies on representation, rights, voice, performance and power at work.

What kinds of public policy, actors, experimentation, strategies, capabilities, and research are necessary to rethink employee representation for this new world of work?

Introduction

The Caribbean is being redefined into Caribbean Community and Single Market Economic area in an era where change in the world economy is occurring at a rapid rate. The impact of such change can be a blessing and a curse, and provides the labour movement with the potential to be involved in the dynamics of the labour market and government interventions, thereby playing a pivotal role as challenges emerge into positive developments for Caribbean societies.

The underlying factors impacting on the Caribbean trade union movement (CTUM) can be identified as the Caribbean labour market becoming more flexible accompanied by variations in hours of work, growth in non-standard employment, entrepreneurship, part-time and temporary employment. These emerging occupational changes highlights the need for Caribbean trade unions to understand what are the dynamics at play in this new world of work and, of necessity, redefine the accepted meaning of trade unionism and trade union representation. This paper will therefore seek to address in the narrow sense the role of the Caribbean Labour Movement (CLM) as it relates to the defence and protection of workers’ rights within the workplace, and in the wider sense the defence and protection of workers’ rights in the society.

The Problem and its Setting

The trade union movement of the Anglophone Caribbean has passed through a number of phases in its relatively short lifetime. One of the most recent phases is that of the world recession. This has resulted in a number of Caribbean island states implementing structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) imposed by the international capital interests and put in place at the expense of labour.

SAPs have been a feature of the Anglophone Caribbean economic environment during the 1990s and into the early 21st century and it is the view of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that the performance of Caribbean labour and by extension the performance of the Caribbean trade unions during this period is a direct result of these SAPs that were implemented to cope with the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s. The Public Services International in supporting this
view added that the continued drive to privatise public services has been a major component of SAPs.

The CTUM of necessity must as a consequence redefine the accepted meaning of worker representation. Accordingly, these labour organisations will be enabled to become more relevant through the adoption of innovative approaches in their representation of the varied constituents that comprise the CLM.

**Focus and Objectives**

The new world of work is about the development of human resources together with building the resilience of the labour movement. This in itself is a challenge as the development of the CLM is based on the varied island cultures, industrial relations environments, social and economic challenges, history and traditions of dealing with conflict where fairness and equity has become a commodity that all employees seek, and workplace fairness is the key to motivating workplace productivity.

It has been opined that that the best thing to happen to was the trade union movement falling “into a coma of cooperation with its former foes” as a result of the working class inability to fight (Moody 1997, p 9). One cannot agree or disagree with this statement as it relates to the CLM; however it does lend credence to the argument that “changes in the political and economic environment have had a negative impact on the strength and influence of trade unions” (Jose 1999, p 5). Such challenges must be addressed through strategically targeted research resulting in new/redefined methods of worker representation.

The objectives of this paper is therefore to examine and identify the issues surrounding alternatives in worker representation from a Caribbean perspective, with a view to tabling recommendations that will provide for a more meaningful, influential and sustained CLM. The movement must become the master of itself to be a viable agent of change, and to ensure a decent work agenda is achieved in the world of work for future generations.

**Methodology and Sources**

An overview of the realities in worker representation will be considered followed by a more detailed assessment of the current situation in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana. A brief socio historical background will also be provided as this is considered to be germane to an understanding of the current difficulties facing the CLM.

The sources utilised for this paper are varied. Information will be obtained from the worldwide web, books, briefing papers, official and unofficial publications, and newspapers. In addition the viewpoint of labour leaders from the identified island states will be elicited through interview. Equally the views of government and private sector will also be sought.

**November 19, 2009:**