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When Solidarity Needs a Different Home

One industry. Shared interests. Different convictions.

One union can give workers a powerful collective voice. But unity becomes fragile when members no longer agree on how that voice should be governed.

The deepest divide is about power. Do members choose their leaders, or merely endorse choices made for them? Can they question decisions without fear? Must leaders account for every deduction? Does the constitution bind everyone, including those at the top?

These are differences over democracy, accountability and dignity. Left unresolved, they weaken the trust that holds an organisation together.

Still, another union is no automatic cure. Multiple unions can divide bargaining strength, duplicate costs and turn colleagues into rivals. Employers may exploit the gaps. Members can end up with two secretariats, two slogans and the same old problems.

A new logo, unfortunately, does not come with a factory installed conscience.

The first task is reform. The next question is whether reform has a fair chance. Where credible channels remain, members should use them. Where those channels repeatedly fail and incompatible principles make separation unavoidable, a different union can provide a legitimate alternative, subject to applicable legal requirements.

The transition needs clear membership choices, transparent dues arrangements and cooperation on shared workplace concerns. Separate organisations can still stand together on pay, safety and dignity.

For members, the potential gains are practical: meaningful choice, leadership that must earn support, greater accountability and an organisation whose rules reflect their convictions.

But those benefits must be built through direct elections, transparent finances, fixed terms, due process and protection for dissent. Otherwise, separation simply changes the address of the problem.

An African proverb says one finger cannot lift a stone. Collective strength also needs agreement on where that stone is going.

A different union matters when it gives members a credible home for values they can no longer advance within the existing structure.

The test is simple: will members have more power over the people who speak in their name?