

LABOUR

Insight



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BIGWU GIVES THE GIFT OF EDUCATION



Christmas FLASHBACK

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NEGOTIATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

Following from the negotiations report submitted at an earlier General Council meeting, the following updates identify some issues faced at some of the branches of the Union:

FIRST COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

While the Union was able to sign off on a first collective agreement for workers at **Fire Services Association**, discussions are still ongoing at **Presidential Insurance Company** and **NEDCO**. However, at NEDCO, the Union is concerned about certain activities which appear to show workers being moved around by Management in an attempt to weaken the two (2) existing bargaining units. The Branch Executive will soon incorporate members of the 2nd Bargaining Unit in an effort to ensure representation for both units.

PROPOSALS TO BE SUBMITTED

The following branches are at various stages of preparation and submission of proposals with a view to begin negotiations:

- AGRICOLA CREDIT UNION: 01/01/2020 – 31/12/2022**
- BGWU CREDIT UNION: 01/07/2020 – 30/06/2023**
- EXIMBANK: 2015-2018; 2019-2021**
- FIRE SERVICES CREDIT UNION: 2018 – 2021**
- SECU CREDIT UNION: 19/09/17 – 18/09/20**
- SMITH ROBERTSON & COMPANY: 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2020**
- TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO UNIFIED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION (TTUTA) : 2020-2022**



“Management will always try to get as much as they can from workers while giving as little as possible in return. Workers will ALWAYS have to struggle for what is fair and just and struggling together is the only way. Our Union makes us strong.”

**- CARIRI Branch President
Cde Racine Robertson**

IN PROGRESS

DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION: 2018 – 2020

The Union is seeking a 9% increase in wages for DIC workers.

REPUBLIC BANK LIMITED: 01/06/20 – 31/05/23

The Bank has not moved from its 0% offer, despite declaring \$1B in profits in 2021. Management is also pressuring staff to achieve a 100% vaccination rate among all staff members.

POLICE CREDIT UNION: 01/01/19 – 31/12/21

Workers are wearing red ribbons to protest the employer's 4% offer, despite the Company's \$30M investment in the new headquarters.

SETTLED

PROGRESSIVE CREDIT UNION: 2016 – 2019 & 2019 – 2022

Two (2) bargaining periods settled with a 13% increase in wages.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CANCER SOCIETY: 2017-2019

Due to COVID-19, negotiations settled for 3% increase (0-1-2).

NEAL & MASSY (N) CREDIT UNION: 2018-2020

Negotiations Settled

REPORTED TO INDUSTRIAL COURT

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION: 2015-2017

Still in conciliation at the Industrial Court, both parties have agreed on disputed items, however, Government's position restricts the completion and signing of the Collective Agreement.

With the CPO set to resume collective bargaining in January 2022, if parties cannot agree to a five (5) year term (2015-2019), the Union is prepared to take this to open court hearing as needed.

JUDGMENT CORNER

**Trade Dispute No. 327 of 2018
- BIGWU v KAM WAH Restaurant Limited**

In this November 2021 judgement, His Honour Mr. A. Mohammed ruled in favor of the Union/Worker as the employer's dismissal of the worker was found to be harsh, oppressive and not in keeping with the tenets of natural justice or good industrial relations practice.

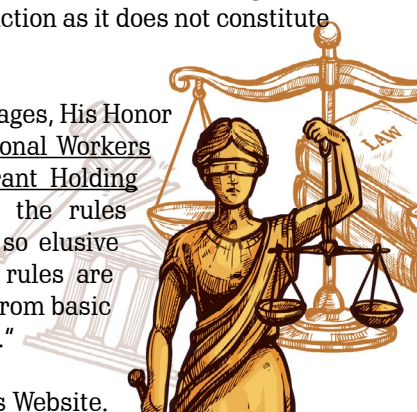
The matter giving rise to this dispute stems from the assignment of temporary work, outside of the contract of employment, becoming permanent work without commensurate compensation. When raised to the employer, the Company found the Worker "to be an obstacle to the progress of the business" and was summarily dismissed.

In his analysis, HH Mohammed clarified the point that "[a

worker] objecting to contract variation and demanding more pay cannot attract disciplinary action as it does not constitute misbehavior."

Before making the award of damages, His Honor referenced TD 472 of 2015 National Workers Union v Trader Jack's Restaurant Holding Limited, and asks "What are the rules of conduct that continue to be so elusive to so many employers? These rules are simple to follow and are drawn from basic principles of common courtesy..."

See full document on the Union's Website.



BUDGET 2021-2022: IMPACT ON WORKERS

As Trinidad and Tobago, and by extension the World, continues to deal with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more obvious that workers will continue to bear the costs of the economic adjustment.

The removal of Value-added Tax (VAT) from basic food items and further incentives for first time homeowners were implemented in November 2021, however, these fiscal measures have only served to benefit a narrow bandwidth of the society and does very little to create a tangible impact for workers and the diminishing purchasing power of their wages.

Workers in public/state sector agencies are still operating on 2014 salaries as a result of this Administration's refusal to engage in negotiations and collective bargaining with representative Trade Unions over the past six (6) years. And even though expenditure amounts to \$52.4b dollars, workers in two (2) of BIGWU's bargaining units, CARDI and Cipriani College, are still working on 2004 and 2007 salaries respectively.

Negotiations with the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) are

scheduled to commence in January 2022 but, while we anticipate improvements in wages and other cost items, we are reminded that our economy is still heavily dependent on our energy sector which has its own share of local and international challenges.

Optimistically, we look forward to the new year, but with the Property Tax and increases in water and electricity on the horizon, we hope that these sentiments do not turn out to be, according to Cde Roget, "nothing but a ruse to keep the trade union movement quiet."

Trinidad & Tobago

CORONAVIRUS

Covid-2019

As at December 5, 2021
(March 2020 - Present)



75,134

Total Positive Cases

60,582

Total Recovered Cases

12,290

Total Active Positive Cases

2,262

Total Deaths

Source: Ministry of Health

BIGWU CHALLENGES EMPLOYER'S POLICY ON DOUBLE MASK & FACE SHIELD

In trying to effectively manage COVID-19 in the workplace, employers have revised existing policies and implemented new ones since the start of this pandemic and continue to do so as the situation evolves and new information becomes available.

Contrary to the advice and resources made available by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), one employer, where the Union has representation, has gone on to implement a new workplace policy effective 10th November 2021, specifically towards unvaccinated workers. This policy states that "all unvaccinated employees will be required to adhere to the additional HSE measures of double-masking and a face shield."

Not wanting to rely solely on our local and in-house experts on Occupational Safety and Health, the Union solicited the

professional opinion of Mr Victor Salazar (Director - VMARAKS Labour, Safety & Health Company Ltd) on the double-mask and face-shield mandate by this employer.

According to VMARAKS' findings, utilising information from the trusted sources of MOH and WHO, the professional opinion is that "the local legal instruments namely the MOH regulation and the OSH Act coupled with international best practice at no time supported the view of [the Company] that unvaccinated employees must 'Double-mask and wear a face shield while at work in an indoor environment.'"

In the conclusion of the report, he stated that "The science that drives the decision-making process continues to evolve as the COVID-19 virus is continually researched. This strengthens the approach of using collective preventative measures as expressed previously, where the practising of the 3W's continue to be the main pillar as it relates to working with the threat of being exposed to COVID-19 Virus (SARS CoV-2) in the workplace. The last line of defence against the same is the use of PPE in the workplace, the main role of the same is to protect the employees from the residual risk of exposure to viruses. This means the masking policy should seek to offer the best available protection to the employees by way of providing KN95 face masks to be worn by both vaccinated and unvaccinated in the workplace."

"Being retrenched is never a comforting thing. Sitting with these workers and discussing next options, in this environment, is extremely heart-wrenching. Especially as it is being done around Christmas time.

We need to pay attention to workers' mental and emotional health, not just those retrenched, but all workers."

Cde Charmaine Cedeno-Alleyne
on the ongoing retrenchment exercise at PALIG Branch



BIGWU's ADOPT-A-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

It was an early Christmas for some sixty (60) children across Trinidad and Tobago, as BIGWU worked towards finalizing the Adopt-a-School Initiative which was started in April 2021.

In the month of September and beginning of October, BIGWU General Secretary - Comrade Trevor Johnson along with Comrade Jean Edwards and other BIGWU representatives, visited multiple outlying / rural schools to effectively hand over some sixty (60) digital devices to identified deserving students/households throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

These digital devices were purchased from the proceeds of the Union's Annual Fundraising Raffle efforts earlier in the year and through contact with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) Division of Education, Innovation and Energy (DEIE), BIGWU was able to identify twelve (12) schools where there was an established need to assist students with the means to participate in their school's online learning.

The genesis of this exercise was an idea from BIGWU Acting President, Cde Mario Als who proposed that the full net proceeds of a raffle which we held earlier this year be utilised for this exercise. We also had support from several employers where we represent workers who contributed to this exercise.

As schools and education facilities were restricted from having in-person classes since early 2020, the rapid conversion of the teaching and learning environment to a virtual delivery method left several students incapable of accessing their classes. These students' inability to





log on to the virtual classes ranged from parents not having available funds to purchase a laptop / tablet for their exclusive use, to some cases where multiple school-aged children living in the same household are required to share the singular laptop / tablet / mobile phone among them.

After receiving information from MOE and DEIE of the affected schools where access to online classes were impacted by unavailability of devices, BIGWU made direct contact with the schools' Principals in Trinidad and via the DEIE in Tobago, to ensure that the students who would eventually be recipients of these digital tablet devices were in circumstances where the assistance was urgently required.

General Secretary of BIGWU, Comrade Trevor Johnson, in handing over these sixty (60) devices to the students and the principals would have identified this initiative as the Union's efforts to close the digital divide and urged the students to "treat these devices as an investment in their education and their future."





Maryam Abdool-Richards | Keream Roberts

In November, we completed the final of six (6) two-day training sessions and, as part of our annual calendar, these sessions continue to provide shop stewards and branch officers with the key competences, skills and knowledge required to strengthen and expand worker consciousness and branch organisation.

This year, approximately fifty (50) comrades attended over the course of the programme with external facilitators ranging from Dr Maryam Abdool-Richards and Dr Mark Allen (Ministry of Health) to Cde Keream Roberts (TTUTA). Presentations on various topics were also delivered by Cdes Trevor Johnson, Don Devenish, Jason Brown, Wesley Francis, Alva Allen, and Gerry Kangalee (National Workers Union).

Apart from in-house training, access to workshops facilitated by Cipriani College was made available for comrades - the introductory ten (10) Saturday course on Industrial Relations being the most popular. Also this year, eight (8) comrades were exposed to a series of Pension Sensitization workshops facilitated by the Elma Francois Institute of Research and Debate (EFIRD) covering legislation governing pensions in Trinidad and Tobago, time value of money, securities – risks and returns, understanding and interpreting financial statements and the highly debatable pensions reform.

This Pensions Plan training exposure was timely given that several workplace pensions plans have been under increased assault from business interests over the past few years. Although not subject matter experts, this cohort of comrades would be a precursor to BIGWU’s overall plan of (re)convening a Pensions General Council in 2022 to deal with these challenges to pension plans.

A Pensions General Council would firstly serve as a sensitization/education forum on current pensions issues, as well as the vehicle to galvanise a greater level of solidarity among the branches in securing and improving members’ retirement benefits.

In reporting to the Central Executive on current pension benefits at branches, the status of those funds inclusive of available documentation, will be delivered in early 2022. Subject to their review, we would then seek to put the next steps in place to re-activate the Pensions General Council.



From left: Cdes Ramkissoon, Purcell and Lewis at Pensions Sensitization Workshop at Cipriani College in November 2021.

HAPPY RETIREMENT

Cde. Marlene Sanatan



“My father told me that I have always been rebellious - probably that is why I was involved with the Trade Union?”

In August 2006, Cde Magdalene Marlene Sanatan joined BIGWU as Organising Officer, with specific focus on the RBC/RBTT organising efforts.

Cde Sanatan fondly admits that prior to her being recruited to BIGWU she always wanted to be an Organiser.

While many workers join a union to protect their job, according to Cde Sanatan, “the organiser is the person responsible for providing members with service, and building up the relationship between the Union’s members and the organisation.”

Often called the “Insurance Lady”, Cde Sanatan says her greatest accomplishment was working alongside the previous President in recruiting the 1175 RBC/RBTT workers (out of 1900) towards seeking recognition for these workers. If upheld at the Civil Appeal, this would be the second largest unit of workers recruited to join the Union. “People never thought it would have been possible,” she said, “but we did it! It took us more than twenty (20) years of effort in organising workers at this bank and we did it successfully.”

Best wishes for a very happy retirement, Cde Sanatan!

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS

25TH ANNUAL UNI WORLD EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY

The 25th meeting of the UNI Global Union World Executive Board, cognizant of the pandemic and complex travel restrictions in meeting physically, made the decision to hold this meeting virtually over November 10-11, 2021.

This was the second annual meeting of the World Executive that was held virtually to review the activities of the various units, regions and sectors of the global union over the past year. In highlighting the global issue of Occupational Safety and Health the following three points were identified as priorities:



Above: Cde Christy Hoffman, UNI General Secretary

1. Occupational Safety and Health is a fundamental right,
2. COVID-19 must be considered an occupational disease, and
3. the critical role of Health and Safety Committees.

UNI has been working towards exploring how existing rules can be relied upon in an organizing context to enable unions to make contact with workers around this important issue and find best practices and opportunities to use health and safety as a means of building worker power.

Building a Shield against COVID-19

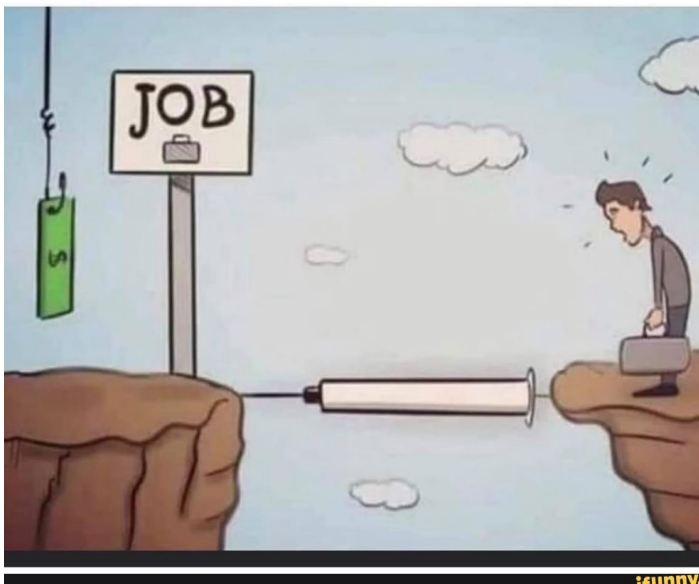
GUIDELINES FOR UNIONS TO RESPOND



UNICARE RELEASES NEW GUIDELINES TO 'BUILD A SHIELD' AGAINST COVID-19

In March 2021, marking one year since the start of the global pandemic, UNICARE released new guidelines outlining key changes in the industry that will help keep nursing home workers and residents safer during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Full document available on www.uniglobalunion.org.

No one should have to cross this bridge. NO ONE.



U.S. BANK WORKERS WIN HISTORIC UNION CONTRACT



Members of UNI Global Union affiliate, the Communication Workers of America (CWA), are celebrating the first union contract in the banking sector for 40 years.

Workers at Beneficial State Bank across Washington, Oregon and California ratified a three-year deal that secures a fair minimum wage and increased benefits, expanded training opportunities, a joint labour-management committee, and a US\$1,000 bonus.

JTUM FREEDOM DAY MARCH

Despite the extended State of Emergency (SOE) to November 2021, Trade Union leaders still came out and joined forces to stage a march from the Aranguez Savannah to the Red House, Port of Spain.

The SOE and COVID-19 protocols placed restrictions on members' participation, however, the leadership endured the weather as they marched into the city, to highlight "matters of crisis" facing citizens. These issues include job losses; increasing food prices, rent, and household items; planned rate hikes in electricity, water and fuel; and concerns on privatisation and vaccination.

Photos: At right: 1&2: Leaders braving sun and rain as they walk to Port of Spain. 3: Cde Roget addressing those gathered.



The longest ever organising campaign in the history of this Union was waged over RBC/RBTT workers. From since before the merger of the two (2) heritage Unions, the Bank and General Workers' Union (BGWU) and continuing into the current BIGWU would have dedicated almost twenty (20) years in organising efforts towards gaining Recognised Majority Union (RMU) status for workers at this Bank.

The claim, supported by 1175 workers out of a total complement of 1900 (>51%), was submitted in February 2011 and took the Union and the RRCB a grueling six (6) years to complete the process. It was only in January 2017 when the Board granted the recognition certificate (#1/2017) and identified one (1) bargaining unit for RBC/RBTT workers.

Dissatisfied with the outcome, the Bank, with its deep pockets, sought redress by referring the matter for Judicial Review and before Her Honor Supreme Court Justice M. Mohammed, deficiencies were identified in the RRCB's certification procedure/process in accordance with Section 34 of the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01.

BIGWU is enjoined in this RRCB's appeal of this judgement despite being ordered to quash the Report of the Certification Application and the Certificate of Recognition issued.

Further updates on this matter will follow as it comes up for hearing in the new year, 2022. BIGWU, represented by Attorneys Mr. Michael Quamina, Mr. Anthony Bullock and Ms. Gitanjali Gopeesingh, will be paying keen attention in the interest of the RBC/RBTT workers, as well as the possible far reaching implications to the entire Trade Union Movement.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

8 GOOD JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

The United Nations (UN) hosted a series of virtual workshops for Trade Unions in Trinidad and Tobago on the topic of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation and the Decent Work Agenda. These workshops were held in October and were facilitated by the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies (CCLCS).

The workshops held are as shown below:

Activity	Date	Resp.	Status
Awareness raising on 2030 Agenda and National Action Plan.	6/Oct	CCLCS/ ILO	Complete
Document current 2030 Agenda and TU Engagement in UN Reform Process. Identify avenues for increased participation and contribution.	22/Oct	Drafting Ctte - CCLCS, TUM Reps	Complete
Virtual Workshop / meeting to present TU position to the UNRC.	27/Oct	CCLCS	Complete

The full report of the workshops will be available at a later date.