



#CHOOSE TOCHALLENGE

Globally, the incidence of violence against women and girls has been on the rise with statistics suggesting that one in every three women is exposed to physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner (UN WOMEN). However, as this pandemic progresses with physical distancing and remote work guidelines being in force, victims are now closer to the perpetrators, and separated from usual support networks.

Given the increased frequency of this violence occurring locally, as well as our large female membership, BIGWU has begun taking steps towards increasing awareness among our membership, to identify, respond to, and report instances of violence at their workplace. This included training sessions with former Independent Senator and Domestic Violence consultant - Mrs. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt and HIV/AIDS Advocacy Officer - Ms Forgenie.

As per the words of Comrade Als, "there is no Nescafe solution" to these issues, however it is hoped that these interactions will usher in changes in the habits and behaviors of our members and by extension the wider community.

Above: Mrs Diana Mahabir-Wyatt at BIGWU Domestic Violence session - February 2021.
Right: 1: Cdes Johnson and Cabrera at BIGWU's candlelight vigil for domestic violence victims - March 2021. 2: BIGWU International Women's Day Activity 2021. 3: BIGWU members participating in #WALKOUT campaign against Domestic Violence in Port of Spain - March 2021



NEGOTIATIONS UPDATES

The following is a scan of some Branch Negotiations which are in progress at various branches of the Union:

PROPOSALS TO BE SUBMITTED

Cathedral Credit Union: 2021 - 2023

ECL Clerical: 1/6/2021 - 31/5/2024

Western United CU: 1/3/2021 - 29/2/2024

IN PROGRESS

Fire Services Association (2nd Div.): 2016 - 2020

Currently being finalised for a 5 year agreement with a 20% increase in salary.

SETTLED

AMGECU Credit Union: 1/1/2020 - 31/12/2022

Negotiations Settled

A.V. Knowles Limited: 20/2/2021 - 19/2/2024

Salary increase by 7% (2-2-3)

SECU Credit Union: 19/9/2017 - 18/9/2020

6% Salary increase after the consolidation of COLA of \$140.00. New COLA remains at \$140.00.

REPORTED TO MINISTRY OF LABOUR

SWWTU: 2017 - 2019

Breakdown reported to Ministry of Labour

St. Jude's: 2015 - 2018 & 2018 - 2021

Reported to Ministry for Breakdown in Negotiations

TATECO Credit Union: 1/1/2021 - 31/12/2023

Currently in Conciliation as wages and 2 other cost items are outstanding. At present the Company is offering workers a 3% increase.

REPORTED TO INDUSTRIAL COURT

ECL t/a Tru Valu (BU1): 1/3/2016 - 2018

Breakdown reported as one (1) item remains in dispute

Transcorp Credit Union: 1/1/2019 - 31/12/2021

The Court is conciliating with 1 outstanding matter to be resolved as it pertains to Hours of Work.

OSH Agency & Authority:

Referred to Court in August 2020 after employer failed to acknowledge Union's proposals. As per the Court's advice, bi-lateral discussions are still ongoing.

ECL t/a Tru Valu (BU4): 1/6/2020 - 31/5/2023

Presently 2 items are outstanding and before the Court, inclusive of wages for supervisory and managerial staff.

TEXTEL Credit Union: 1/7/2019 - 30/6/2022

Settled items include wages and COLA, however, proposed changes to workers' pension and severance packages are being disputed at present.

Final Farewell - His Honor, Mr. Kyril Jack

BIGWU pays tribute to our former **Comrade and His Honour, Mr. Kyril Jack**, who served this Union for 32 years - from 1978 to 2010.

After Bank & General Workers Union (BGWU) gained recognition for the Guardian Newspaper in 1978, KJ's leadership and labour relations interests saw him transitioning from Shop Steward and negotiating team member, to Grievance Officer and BGWU's Chief Grievance Officer subsequent to the retrenchment of Guardian workers in 1979. His aptitude for labour relations fuelled him into being an excellent Labour Relations Officer, an Executive Officer, and Second Vice President.

Kyril officially retired from the Union in 2010, but was contractually

retained up to 2011 when he was called to serve as a Member of the Industrial Court, becoming His Honor. He held this position up to December 2020.

Throughout his life, Kyril also served as President of the Bank and General Workers Credit Union Cooperative Society Limited, as Director on the International Communications Network, as a Member on the NIB Appeals Tribunal, and also Bank & General Workers Union representative to the National Trade Union Centre.

BIGWU celebrates the fond memories of His Honour Kyril Jack. We celebrate his commitment and selfless dedication to duty.

<https://www.remembr.com/kyril.jack>





Calendar of Events 2021

APRIL

15	General Council
20-21	BIGWU Education Programme
22	World Earth Day
28	World Health & Safety Day
30	BIGWU Raffle Submission (revised date)

MAY

1	MAY DAY / International Workers' Day
6	BIGWU Raffle Drawing (revised date)
19-20	BIGWU Education Programme
22	JTUM Motorcade
27	BIGWU ANNIVERSARY (47 th : 1974 - 2021)

JUNE

8-9	BIGWU Education Programme
10	General Council

19 LABOUR DAY

JULY

10	JTUM Motorcade
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Let's talk about your **PEN\$ION**



Apart from the conversation on the global reduction in economic activity (COVID-19), the buzz of "Pensions Reform" is being used by the employer class to wage a financial war in almost every country in the world. Pensions will soon be the most divisive political issue and, if nothing is done, scores of workers will be lined up to face extreme poverty later on in their lives.

While our own national community debates on whether to accept the recommendations of the 10th Actuarial Valuation on the National Insurance Scheme, anti-worker as they may be, employers have long begun winding up Occupational Pension Plans (defined benefit) in favor of lower obligation defined contribution plans.

At the time of writing this article, there are presently in excess of seventy (70) occupational pension fund plans which are listed on the Central Bank's website, as having initiated the process of being wound-up. With the local investment portfolios showing no sign of recovery in the near future, employers are grappling at the proverbial low-hanging fruit in order to resuscitate their balance sheets and satisfy shareholder interests. This however, is being done at the expense of workers futures.

In one branch of this Union, under their defined contribution plan, a worker at supervisory level with over thirty (30) years of unbroken service attained the age of retirement and was reduced to tears when she was told her monthly pension would be a paltry \$1,200.00 per month. This is taking into consideration that prior to her retirement she continually made her mandatory 5% contributions from her salary which was in excess of \$15,000.00.

Going forward, workers need to equip themselves with the information to understand the fundamental differences between the two (2) main types of pension plans (defined benefit and defined contribution), as well being vigilant on the solvency of their current plan. Knowing what benefits their current plan provides for and how to calculate this is also important.

BIGWU has begun the work to reinvigorate its Pensions General Council as this would serve to bring together representatives of all branches of the Union. TO ensure the education and sensitization of members is continually done to make proper decisions when it comes to Pension Plans and preparing for retirement. ■

COVID-19: The Global Pandemic, One Year Later

As this article is being written, the World has been collectively coping with the pandemic caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19), for the past 18 months. To date, the global records indicate we have recorded in excess of 150 Million positive cases, with a death toll of more than 3.2 Million; more than the death tolls of the World Wars 1 & 2 combined.

In Trinidad and Tobago, our first case was reported on March 12, 2020, coincidentally just one day after the World Health Organisation (WHO) upgraded the virus to pandemic level. As at May 4, 2021, our twin-island state, initially praised for its handling of the virus by Oxford University and the WHO, has recorded more than 11,500 positive cases and with cases surging upwards (Reuters). Thankfully, almost 80% of those infected have recovered, however, not as fortunate for the 174 families who mourn the loss of their loved ones, and for the more than 2,600 persons who are still afflicted by the respiratory disease, the rising death toll is assuredly of increasing concern.

The Government, as guided by the medical and scientific professionals, has taken several steps towards attempting to contain the spread of the virus throughout the country, which have posed great hardships to workers. Some of these measures include closing the country's borders to nationals and non-nationals alike, closing schools and other places of learning, along with several other businesses being restricted to specified operating hours and/or days.

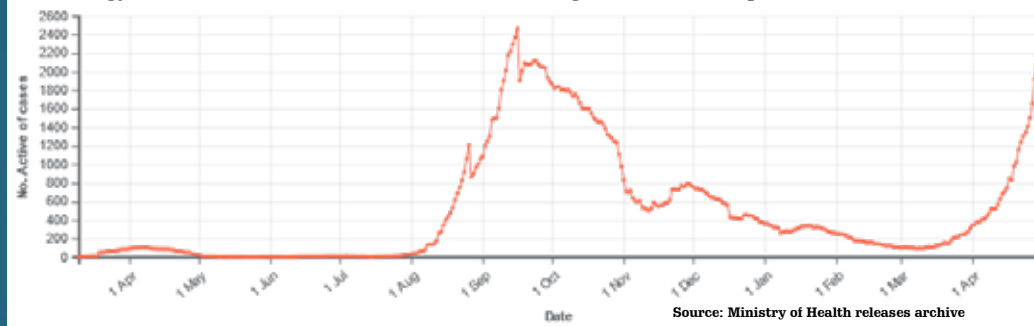
To date, the nation's borders are still closed causing disruptions in travel and commerce for several sectors

who rely on the inflow of persons and/or goods, however, recent reports have suggested that this closure was applicable primarily to air travel and not to the boat loads of migrants fleeing the poor economic and humanitarian conditions in neighboring Venezuela (Global Americans).

those in the middle and lower rungs of the economic ladder have been the hardest hit, as government's suggestion of implementing a paid 'Pandemic Leave' was not accepted into their 'for-profit' models.

In several workplaces, they have sought to reduce the size of their workforce as a way of reducing

Chronology of active COVID-19 cases in Trinidad and Tobago - March 2020 to present



Source: Ministry of Health releases archive

With the high levels of uncertainty among the population of the effects of the virus, the first wave of cases was met with an appropriate level of caution, although now as we crest into our third wave, the focus has been blurred. The Prime Minister, in attempting to control the movement of persons by restricting economic activity, schools, gyms, bars, restaurants, shopping malls, clothing stores and others were made to shut their doors to business in fear of being fined or considered a part of the "recalcitrant minority", more fondly referred to as the "zessers and wessers" by Her Excellency the Commander-in-Chief.

This idea may have been well conceived, but it is proving to not be a viable long-term solution. With the restaurants and scores of other businesses not deemed as "essential services", workers have been again sent home with no word as to how lives and livelihoods can go on. Private sector workers, especially

expenditure and overheads, much to the despair of workers. Some businesses have also tried using the more palatable furlough to disguise the temporary lay-offs, and in one such case, engaged workers in successive rounds to maximise profits.

In her recent publication – Labour Law in the Commonwealth Caribbean – Her Honor Deborah Thomas-Felix cites that the Trinidad and Tobago legislation does not make any provisions for layoffs. In the book, she references her deliberations in GSD-IRO 031 OF 2015 Steel Workers Union v Arcelor Mittal, and others before that, reinforcing the "need for much needed dialogue between parties as we make adjustments in the workplace to treat with the new paradigm which has been created for the most part by the global economic recession and the COVID-19 pandemic." She also went on to reiterate how important cooperation, consultation and collaboration of the social partners

is in maintaining order and stability in the labour market.

While our health care professionals have been working continuously for the past 13 months at the numerous hospitals, health centres and parallel health care system, or on the daily television briefings, the protective services have been similarly occupied. Almost on a weekly basis they have had to keep abreast of the numerous revisions to the Public Health Ordinance legislation which restricts and/or permits activity (now at revision 131), as opposed to the which is definitely a daunting task to say the least. This is extremely taxing, for most, as the hope of the arrival of vaccines would have brought relaxing of the restrictions, however, quite the opposite. Now facing a third wave of infections, along with variants that are said to be more contagious rather than deadly, according to the latest Ministry of Health estimates, we are fast approaching system capacity.

For workers whose workplaces have allowed for working from home, or alternatively referred to as remote working arrangements, have sought

to engage their workers in longer days and hours than their counterparts who have been regularly going to the normal office place. Some workers have stated being engaged in online work for 10 hours per day, and for some even longer than that to complete the increased demands during the pandemic. Workers have to be vigilant as it pertains to ensuring that the remote-work not only takes care of the needs of the business, but also takes into account the circumstances of the workers (UNISON). This is especially important when schools have been out since the start of the pandemic and many workers have children who require at home supervision or parental support in ensuring that work is completed.

Another key point in looking at the effects of COVID-19 is the effect it has on person's mental health. With all of those issues mentioned beforehand, the impact on the worker, whether they have been made to work from home for longer hours, furloughed, or outright retrenched. These concerns, added with the fear of contracting the virus form the new realities for workers who now commonly report feelings



ABOVE: Cdes Naresh, Patricia and Lystra helping with BIGWU's Hamper Drive, 2020

of anxiety, depressions, loneliness, self-criticism, stress and lower self-esteem. We need to ensure that workers have access to the mental health services as needed, as well as do what we can to reduce the stigma associated with its use.

EMPLOYEE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Courtesy First Citizens Branch



Now that we've understood the responsibilities of the employer, let's discuss **the responsibilities of the employees.**
RULE #1 - IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS, STAY HOME and GET TESTED FOR COVID-19



To reduce the spread of COVID-19 and uphold occupational health and safety, ensure that masks are always worn, hands are always sanitized, and temperatures are taken by temperature sensors.



Avoid "liming" in close proximity. Remember to stay 6 feet apart at all times. Utilise screens provided by the employer to ensure social distancing.

The responsibility is on the employer to provide the protective measures and utensils, but it's up to the employee to use them, and to use them responsibly.

In ending off, the words of Her Honor can be seen as a beacon for workers, trade unionists, and employers alike, "Although the world is currently experiencing what has been described, in some quarters, as one of the worst global health and economic crisis, we should think ahead and prepare for life after this crisis. In my view, policy makers should embrace the ideals and the guiding principles of the ILO (for the past 101 years) which promote decent work for all, in conditions of 'freedom, security and dignity' particularly in this crisis." ■

BIGWU COSSABO



Delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the BIGWU COSSABO was held in March 2021 under the theme of Building Capacity /Strengthening Institutions.

This event, initially carded for March 14, 2020, was a key part of the Union’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan as there was the need to solicit input from Branch Officers and Activists in shaping ideas around the ways in which the Union can improve its delivery of defending and servicing the rights and interest of the six thousand (6,000) plus membership.

Albeit virtually, the event allowed representatives from almost twenty-five (25) branches to engage each other in debate and discussion on building capacity and strengthening the institutions of the Union.

Starting with presentations on the Role and Function of BIGWU Branch Officers and Structure of the Union from the General Secretary - Cde. Trevor Johnson, and the 2nd Vice-President - Cde. Jason Brown, participants were later assigned into eight (8) groups to begin their deliberations.

Working within their allocated time, each group focused on an assigned question, reporting the outcome of the discussion and their recommendations to the plenary and the Central Executive.

Questions

1. Impediments to the efficient Branch structure
2. Impediments/Weaknesses to effective communication -
 - between Branch Executives and Members,
 - between Branch Executives and Union Office, and
 - between the Union Office and Members.
3. Weaknesses of Branch Executive knowledge as it pertains to the Branch functions and functioning,
4. Weaknesses of Well-defined Branch Executive objectives

The recommendations included suggestions such as,

- resuming regular branch meetings with increased visibility of the assigned Labour Relations Officers, and
- increased use of social media platforms for communicating, educating and encouraging increased member participation.

Before presenting to the General Council, a working group of the Central Executive has been assembled to distill the COSSABO feedback and recommendations, and to develop a comprehensive action plan to encompass the situations and recommendations tabled.

Future initiatives would be convened to solicit and engage the consciousness of the membership in charting the future of the Organisation. ■

Above: BIGWU Central Executive at BIGWU COSSABO - March 2021



cossabo

kós · sa · bó

acronym

Conference Of Shop Stewards And Branch Officers

A meeting of the second-rank leadership (shop stewards, branch officers, and activists) where discussions and debates on fundamental issues facing the Union and/or Movement are conducted.

This Conference aims to derive responses from a wider participation of shop-floor representatives and democratically adopt measures that promote workers’ interests while strengthening the movement of working class democracy.

Accepted suggestions received in this forum cannot be actioned as this is not a constitutional decision-making body within the Union.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ACT CHAPTER 88:08 *Quick Read*

What you should know

- Your safety, health and welfare at work are protected by law.
- Your employer has a duty to keep you informed about safety and health.
- Your employer has a legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, your safety, health and welfare at work.
- You have a responsibility to look after yourself and others.
- If there is a problem, discuss it with your employer, safety and health committee or safety representative.

In general, your employer's duties include:

- Making your workplace safe and without risks to health.
- Providing adequate welfare facilities.
- Giving you the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary for your safety and health.

In general, your employer must:

- Assess safety and health risks, and make arrangements for implementing the safety and health measures identified by the annual risk assessment.
- Consult with you in preparing a safety and health policy, that shows the organisation and arrangements for your safety and health, including the appointment of the safety committee.
- Appoint competent personnel to assist with safety and health responsibilities.
- Set up and provide emergency response procedures and adequate first-aid facilities.
- Ensure that the workplace satisfies safety, health and welfare requirements, for example, ventilation,

temperature, lighting, sanitary conveniences, washing and rest facilities.

Risk Assessment

The Act provides for annual risk assessments to methodically identify and evaluate all the safety and health risks associated with the workplace as per the Safety and Health Policy.

In general, employees' legal duties include:

- Taking reasonable care for your own safety and health and that of others who may be affected by what you do or do not do.
- Co-operating with your employer on safety and health issues.
- Refraining from misusing work items, including PPE, meant for your safety, health or welfare.
- Ensuring that you are not under the influence of any intoxicant that may endanger the safety, health, or welfare of yourself or any other worker.

As an employee, you have the right to refuse unsafe work

- if you are exposed to imminent danger.
- If you think there is a risk of imminent danger in your workplace, you should first discuss it with your employer, supervisor or manager. You may also wish to discuss it with your safety and health representative, if there is one.
- If you are concerned that your employer is exposing you to imminent danger and you have pointed this out without getting a satisfactory resolution, you should contact the Occupational Safety and Health Agency.

Telephone Contact:
623-OSHA(6742)



Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken more lives than World Wars 1 & 2, forcing us to change the way in which we work, communicate and travel; changes that may endure for generations to come.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act 2004 (as Amended), has defined the provision of a hazard-free, safe and healthy place of work as the employers' responsibility, to which they have to keep up-to-date with the changing measures and protocols being implemented by the Government.

In echoing the Prime Minister's sentiments, we all must take personal responsibility for our own well-being, as well as those we love and associate with. This includes our leaders, who must lead by example with DSM... "Distancing, Sanitization and Mask wearing".

To withstand this crisis, we must all be co-operative, making the changes required to avoid personal exposure and beat the virus into submission. As the old saying goes, "prevention is always better than a cure".

By: Cde. Wesley Francis – Labour Relations/Health and Safety Officer (BIGWU)



REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS

VOLCANIC ASH BLANKETS EASTERN CARIBBEAN ISLANDS

- April 12, 2021 by Sandra Massiah, PSI

As if COVID-19 and dengue fever aren't enough, Caribbean economies now have one more hazard to deal with. La Soufrière volcano in St Vincent rumbles and threatens lives and livelihoods. Health systems are again under strain and long-term exposure to ash will worsen people's health and wellness.



UNI AT 20: TWO DECADES OF BUILDING WORKER POWER GLOBALLY

UNI celebrated 20 years of building workers' power by reflecting on the 20-million-member global union's history and looking forward to the organization's future.

The anniversary, moderated and organized by UNI Deputy General Secretary Alke Boessiger, brought together union leaders, activists, and scholars from Argentina to England; Johannesburg to Japan. Because of the pandemic, the anniversary was held online, but the spirit of solidarity was palpable.



"Today's UNI was built on the shoulders of visionaries, and we've made their vision, a reality," said UNI's General Secretary Christy Hoffman. ■

TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS



UNITE TO FIGHT MAY DAY 2021

SATURDAY 1ST MAY

@

10:00AM

VIRTUAL RALLY



BIGWU Comrades, unable to be on the streets given the pandemic, participated in the united Trade Union Federations Virtual Rally, held on May 1. The event was streamed live via Facebook, and if you were unable to log on, it can be viewed on BIGWU's Facebook page, or by clicking the image (at left) or following link.

[MAY Day 2021 Rally](#)

Comrades now more than ever we must unite to defend the interest of our members, the working class and Trinidad and Tobago