



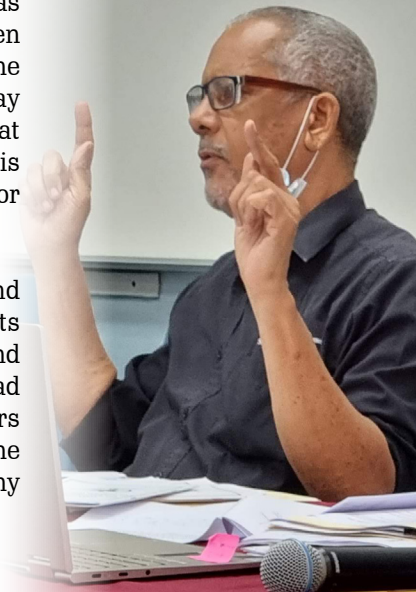
THANK YOU, COMRADE MARIO ALS

for your 47 years of Service to Trade Unionism

Retiring from BIGWU in September 2022 as President (Ag.) - 2019-2022, Comrade Als has been a part of the local Trade Union Movement for the past forty-seven years, and has come along way from his initial start as a Grievance Officer at the Bank Workers Trade Union alongside his brother and former Independent Senator Michael Als (deceased).

Over this time, Comrade Als has seen and experienced his fair share of developments within the Trade Union, political and industrial relations landscape in Trinidad and Tobago, and although just a few years shy of making the half-century milestone, he very proudly asserts that "I have done my part in holding up my piece of the sky."

Story continues on page 4)



10th BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF DELEGATES

5 & 6 NOVEMBER 2022

Empowering workers: embracing the age of digitalization while securing our prosperity



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Negotiations Updates • Judgment Corner • BIGWU Central Executive Committee 2022-2026 • Mario Als - 47 years of service • Trevor Johnson - 43 years of service • BIGWU Children's Christmas Party 2022 • JTUM Updates • International / Regional News

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CORNER

The following updates cover the period leading up to December 2022, and highlights settlements that the Union was able to complete at some of the Union's branches and with "walk-ins".

1. BIGWU and Transcorp Credit Union signed a Collective Agreement for 2022 to 2024 for an increase in 7%, as well as improvements in COLA and Subsistence. Staff was also treated to an end of year Ex-Gratia payment, along with Back-Pay.
2. BIGWU and Textel Credit Union signed off on a Collective Agreement for the Period May 01, 2022 - June 31st 2025 for an increase of 5% and improvement in COLA.
3. BIGWU signed a Collective Agreement with AMCECIT Credit Union for an increase of 12% for wages, and an increase in COLA for the period 2024-2026.



In Trade Dispute #91 of 2019 against Medflight Company Limited t/a Medical Air Services Limited, Comrade Chennel Cabrera secured a favorable settlement in the tune of \$265,000.00 for the worker.

1. In Trade Dispute #374 of 2021 against Venture Credit Union, Comrade Jason Brown was able to resolve this dispute with the worker receiving \$90,000.00 as settlement.
2. Comrade Jason Brown was able to settle the retrenchment matters for three (3) RBC workers with settlements of \$55,000.00, \$75,000.00 and \$600,000.00, respectively.
3. A contract worker in the IT Department of a large State Sector Enterprise received a settlement of \$300,000.00 after the employer failed to renew his contract and Comrade Brown took them to Court.



WE MUST NEVER FORGET THE RBL STRUGGLE!!!!

From Left - Front Row: Carolyn Jagdeo, Julian McIntyre, Wayne Corbie (deceased). Back Row: Michelle Smith, Ellis Hylegar

JUDGMENT CORNER ICA No. 2 of 2020 (A 2/2020) - BIGWU v Republic Bank Limited

"ALL Shopstewards are entitled to attend their Union Meetings"

In 2017, an issue arose between Republic Bank Limited and BIGWU regarding the interpretation of **Article 32(c) - Leave of Absence** of the registered Collective Agreement which speaks to time off for branch executives and shop stewards to attend Union meetings.

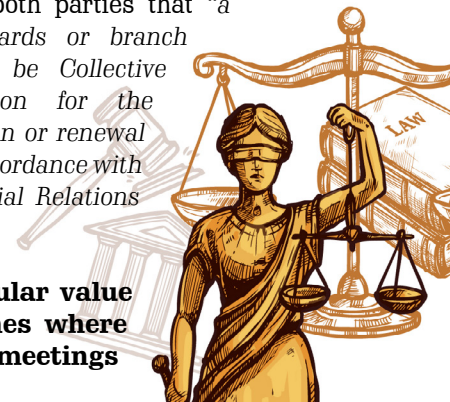
The Collective Agreement being a fundamentally important part of the workplace relationship and given that bilateral discussions yielded no change, this matter was referred to the Industrial Court in January 2020. This was led by Cde Jason Brown - BIGWU Deputy President, and defended by M.G. Daly and partners, on behalf of Republic Bank.

The Bank's application of Article 32 (c), as evidenced in their circular titled **"Industrial Relations Circular to all Board Appointed Officials"**, discriminated against shop stewards by limiting who could and could not attend Union meetings. The circular directed *"where there are more than one shop steward in a branch, the shop stewards will determine among themselves who should be attend the quarterly meetings and*

communicate that decision to the Branch/Unit Managers." In upholding the Union's position in the December 2022 ruling, the Court stated that *"Article 32 (c) does not prevent/preclude more than one shop steward from a branch from attending the monthly meetings."*

Her Honour Mrs Deborah Thomas-Felix, President of the Industrial Court, reminded both parties that *"a discussion with Shop Stewards or branch officials is not deemed to be Collective Bargaining with the Union for the amendment alteration, revision or renewal of a collective agreement in accordance with the provisions of the Industrial Relations Act, Chap 88:01."*

This should be of particular value to several of our Branches where time off to attend Union meetings continues to be an issue.



BIGWU WELCOMES THE NEW CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Banking, Insurance and General Workers Union (BIGWU) has elected a new Central Executive Committee, and at the helm is the newly elected Union President - Comrade Don Devenish.

The Union's new Central Executive Committee was formally installed on November 5, 2022 at the Union's 10th Biennial Conference of Delegates. This was the second time that these elected comrades took the Oath of Office, having initially done so at a Special General Council meeting in late September before assuming office on October 1, 2022.



ABOVE: Central Executive Officers taking the Oath of Office at the 10th Biennial Conference of Delegates - November 5, 2022.

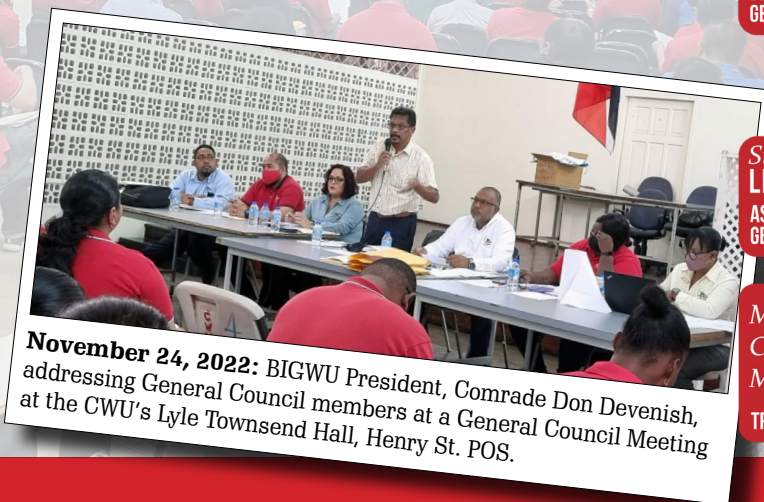
In his maiden address to the delegates and specially invited guests present at the Opening Session of the Union's 10th Biennial Conference of Delegates, Comrade Devenish outlined the focus of the newly installed Central Executive Committee as the Servant Leadership to the Union. He went on to define this style of leadership as prioritizing the growth, well-being, and empowerment of the membership, while fostering

an inclusive environment to enable everyone in the organisation to thrive as their authentic self.

As Union President, Comrade Devenish went on to identify the focus of the Central Executive over the 2022-2026 term, which he said includes:

- Empowering the membership,
- Revitalising both the Women's and Youth Committees to increase member participation,
- Placing an increased focus on the long neglected issue of succession planning, and
- Harnessing and incorporating digital technologies in all areas of the unions daily operations.

Labour Insight extends a warm welcome to the new Central Executive, led by Comrade Devenish, and wish them all the best and support needed as they chart the way forward for BIGWU in facing the challenges ahead and adapting the industrial relations principles and practices to the changing norms. ■



November 24, 2022: BIGWU President, Comrade Don Devenish, addressing General Council members at a General Council Meeting at the CWU's Lyle Townsend Hall, Henry St. POS.



Don DEVENISH
BIGWU PRESIDENT



Jason BROWN
DEPUTY PRESIDENT



Janelle JOHN
FIRST (1ST) VICE-PRESIDENT



John Mark LEE WAH
SECOND (2ND) VICE-PRESIDENT



Nadine BAKSH
GENERAL SECRETARY



Naresh RAMPERSAD
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY



Stacy-Ann LEWIS
ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

Melissa Aguilera-Greig
Catherine Robinson
Mandy Clarke-Whitley
TRUSTEES

COMRADE MARIO ALS

1975 to 2022: 47 years in Trade Union Service

cont'd from
Cover Page

In speaking with Labour Insight, Comrade Als reminisced on his formative years, including being a graduate of Presentation College (San Fernando), and the major influences which shaped his consciousness and life-long passion for social justice.

He credits his elder brother's activism, as well as his extensive involvement in a number of left-wing political and nationalist movements which advocated for meaningful change post-Independence as helping to mold/shape his thinking at that time. "In our household and yard, Michael always had all sorts of persons - even some now prominent national and caribbean personalities - all hours of the day, night and even on weekends, having all sorts of discussions and debates about literature and ideologies," recalled Comrade Mario Als.

"But it was not just Michael," Comrade Als continued, "it was also largely as a result of my mother's doing. You see, I came from a large family of which I am the second to last of nine (9) children, and my mother was always a fierce advocate of equity and justice. She was always making

acomodation for other less fortunate children. The only thing that she disliked more, was injustices towards women." Laughing, Comrade Als added "... in my mother's eyes, it did not matter na (sic), the man was always wrong."

Comrade Als reaffirmed the Trade Union Movement as being a great teacher over his years. As he recalled the Bank & General Workers Union's (BGWU) strike at the Trinidad Express (1981), he stated that "you have to be able to learn from both your successes and your failures in this business, especially how to read and measure the balance of forces, mood and strength."

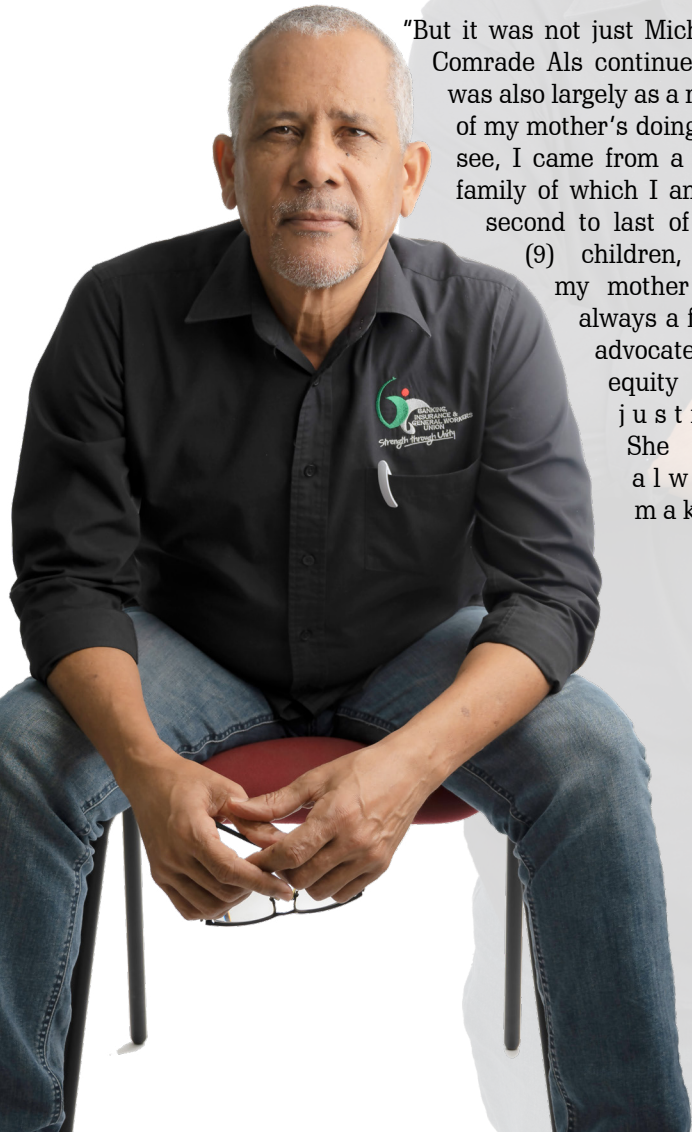
In identifying another important point, Comrade Als continued, "Solidarity is also extremely important, and must be fiercely protected at all costs." He pointed out that "at the employer's workplace workers don't allow personal differences to prevent product or service delivery, and we have to adopt this at the Union level to ensure the advancement in workers' terms and conditions." He ended off that point in reminding Labour Insight that we (workers) must fight to protect the wins that we have, as our foreparents struggled and fought for them to be able to be where we are at present.

As a reminder, Comrade Als suggested that workers need to stand firm and never compromise on their integrity. This would involve knowing how to measure our approach, which can only be done by arming ourselves with the facts (research), keeping our integrity intact, and by commanding respect from everyone.

"BIGWU has always been able to command respect and hope that the Union's new leadership builds upon this, and continues to strengthen the pillars of the Union."

While he is still very impassioned with trade unionism, Comrade Als identified his immediate next steps to include focusing on his two (2) grandsons, and devoting some time to engaging in more activity within civil society and other differently abled communities.

As he said in ending the interview, "we will see how it goes from here." ■



COMRADE TREVOR JOHNSON

*Former BEU President ('98-'02) &
BIGWU General Secretary ('02-'22)*

"I have always had a passion and interest in representing people," recalls Comrade Johnson, "thus it was natural for me to join the Union when I joined the Bank in 1979, a mere three weeks after graduating from Queen's Royal College."

Comrade Johnson has been a member of the Union for 43 years and over this time has served in the full gamut of positions, initially starting as a shop steward at the Republic Bank, Frederick Street Branch, before being elected to serve on the Union Executive in 1987. On the Executive of the Bank Employees Union (BEU), he has held positions of Assistant Secretary/Treasurer, Deputy General Secretary, Vice President, and President from 1987 to 2002, all this before the merger with Bank and General Workers Union (BGWU) in 2002, where he has served as BIGWU's General Secretary from 2002 to 2022.

Apart from being a dedicated husband and father of three, Comrade Johnson's working life has been dedicated to the development of Trade Unionism, and in this stead he has served on numerous committees and boards both locally and internationally over the years.

Since attending his first international conference in Singapore in 1990, he has successfully represented the Caribbean and Americas region at the global level of our international affiliate, Union Network International (UNI) Global Union - the World's largest global Union, with over 15 million members in 1000 Unions in 130 countries. Comrade Johnson is currently a sitting member of the UNI World Executive Board, and is probably the longest serving member after initially being elected as an alternate in 2004, and being later upgraded to a full member in 2005.

Locally, he has also served on a number of Boards and Committees representing worker and trade union interests which includes the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies (CCLCS) Board of Governors, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) 144 Tripartite Consultative Committee, as well as currently being the Assistant General Secretary of the Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM).

Labour Insight, on behalf of the Central Executive and Membership of BIGWU, wishes to thank Comrade Johnson for his years of service to the membership and the Union, and wish him all the best in this new chapter of his life. ■



CHILDREN'S *Christmas* PARTY

NOV. 27
2022

At this year's Children's Christmas Party, despite the rains and reports of flooding in several areas, the Union was able to spread Christmas Cheer to over 500 children and 300 adults. Last held in 2018, this event would not have been possible if not for the support from the various Branches, Volunteers, and members who braved the weather to attend. Special thanks to Mr and Mrs Claus, and their elves, who took time off from their North Pole operations to make a guest appearance on such short notice.



Special thanks to the following sponsors:



JTUM DEMANDS BETTER CRIME RESPONSE

On 8th November 2022, the Joint Trade Union Movement hosted a press conference to highlight the impact of violent crime on the working class. This press conference was led by the President of JTUM and President General of OWTU, Comrade Ancel Roget.

At the time of the conference, the murder rate had crossed 520 and it was believed that the crisis was being heightened

by government's incompetence or unwillingness to address the situation. Comrade Roget maintained that, "The responsibility to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago rests with the government of Trinidad and Tobago."

While the fight for more than 4% increase in wages and salaries for public sector workers continues, JTUM wanted to raise awareness of the crime crisis. JTUM also wanted to show that the working class has been abandoned by the State that is responsible for their safety.



- Settling wages and salary negotiations will mean nothing if recipients or workers are made victims of the runaway crime situation.
- The government seems unwilling or incompetent in dealing with the crime situation, and if they were in Opposition would be protesting crime.
- We keep seeing new lows: Pennywise shooting - La Romain; Rose Hill - Laventille.
- Guns are not manufactured in Trinidad & Tobago, so where are they coming from? And why no national discussion about where the guns and unlimited ammunition are coming from. Who are the importers or funding the imports?
- What would those in power do if it had been their child hiding from gunfire and crawling under a desk?
- The decreasing public confidence in the Police Service resulting in lesser reporting of crimes.
- Bandits do not care about party cards. The rise in gun violence is not happening to the 1% so the government does not care.
- Locking down the borders is as important now as ever.

View Press Conference on Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/170445603002784/677093730468437>



REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS



FOOTBALL WORLD CUP & WORKER'S RIGHTS

DOHA, QATAR - Like it or not, Argentina has won the first ever FIFA 'winter' world cup as hosted by an Arabic nation, Qatar, but FIFA's 'Best World Cup Ever' came at the expense of several thousand migrant workers.

Despite FIFA's estimated US\$7.5 billion in revenue, FIFA President - Gianni Infantino - and the world governing body has not commented on "sharing the wealth" with the migrant workers who built \$220 billion in stadiums and tournament infrastructure in harsh and at times deadly conditions.

Apart from the highlights of Lionel Messi's last performance on the International football stage, this World Cup in Qatar will indeed be remembered, but for all the wrong reasons: as the most expensive sporting event ever – and the most deadly.

International media and human rights bodies bore down heavily on the oil and gas rich emirate, claiming that Qatari authorities failed to investigate thousands of south-asian and east-african migrant workers' deaths, and recently instituted labor reforms were late, narrow in scope, and too weak.

Watch this Johnny Harris documentary on "What Qatar is hiding" for more details.



WATCH ON YOUTUBE



NEW YORK, USA - More than 1,400 New York Times employees staged a walk

out in one of the most dramatic labor disputes in decades. This action was the culmination of months of frustration over ongoing contract negotiations since expiring in March 2021.

Projected operating profits amount to approx. \$320 million by year-end, with staffers negotiating to share more of the fruits of the recent successes after enduring stagnant wages and belt-tightening during leaner times.

Despite the last major strike at the Times in 1981, which lasted a mere 6½ hours, the morning daily newspaper has failed to "bargain in good faith", according to Union officials.

Read More:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2022/12/08/new-york-times-walkout-strike/>

PREPARE FOR HIGHER FOOD, FUEL PRICES IN 2023 - IDB

Caribbean countries are being urged to prepare for the prolonged effects of external economic shocks in 2023 which include high food and fuel prices and rising international interest rates. The warning follows the data released in a new report from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

financing requirements of each country, according to the report, **'Headwinds Facing the Post-Pandemic Recovery'**.

has been coping with high inflation since the fall of 2020.

The IDB warned that higher interest rates could lead to economic slowdowns, or even recessions, in important source markets for exported services and goods from the Caribbean.

Among the report's key findings are that households and businesses are feeling the impact of price increases.

David Rosenblatt, IDB Caribbean Regional economic advisor, expressed hope that the **"unfortunate external conditions will improve during 2023"**.

"Although domestic inflation has been somewhat less severe in Caribbean countries, rising prices diminish real incomes for households and increase business costs for firms," it said, noting that online surveys from the World Food Programme also suggest a sharp rise in food insecurity across the Caribbean.

"As with natural disasters, however, it is always prudent to prepare for the worst, even as we hope for the best," he said.

The impact of these shocks depends on the trade structure of individual countries, as well as the external

The annual inflation rate climbed to an average of eight per cent by mid-summer in the Caribbean countries covered in the report, excluding Suriname, which



[Available for download on the IADB Website: www.iadb.org](http://www.iadb.org)