

Celebrating 65 years Educating, Empowering and Building Capacity among workers

Sisters and Brothers,

Once again, the workers of the world have risen to a global challenge.

In the face of this devastating pandemic, COVID-19 – you are the true heroes.

Here in Grenada doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals, police officers, public servants, media workers, farmers and fishermen, cleaners, sanitation workers, utility workers, dockers and countless others, have held this nation together amidst its biggest threat.

The working class has once again proven itself indispensable, both in the development and defense of our nation.

And this current challenge compels all of us to look with different eyes on the value of work and on the value of each worker – the skilled and the so-called unskilled. It forces us to advocate for a world economic system, where ALL workers are better appreciated and remunerated.

On this Labour Day, this Government stands in awe of our workers' commitment and sacrifice. Indeed, the whole of Grenada does.

The little that we do in our part of the vineyard, indeed pales in comparison to your collective commitment and patriotism.

Within the Ministry of Labour, and during the last year, we have settled scores of contentious labour issues, almost every one of them putting workers individually and collectively in better positions.

While we have not done so with trumpets blasting, there have been many instances, which your union leadership will know very well, where we have stood steadfast in guarding the rights of the workers.

We have to continue to be careful that none of your hard-fought gains over generations of struggles are eroded.

It is contentious work that deserves collective vigilance, but it is a work that we are committed to doing and that we shall all do, together.

Working together, brothers and sisters, means, reasoning together.

The most important thing that we can ever do is keep all the avenues of dialogue opened; to understand the greater cause of the workers, especially the least among us; and to never see any contention or dispute as a zero sum game.

We can disagree without being disagreeable. And we must never let genuine struggle put one set of working class people against another.

World history has shown that most progress is incremental. In our dream to get a full loaf, sometimes we start by accepting half a loaf, because if we do not, the alternative might be no bread at all.

The dogmatic will call this a contradiction; the realists will call it pragmatism.

Compromise is not sell out, but can be a strategic pause to a greater good. We must fret on injustice; but a different perspective to a singular challenge must not always be regarded as disrespect.

And, that is as much a message for us in government as it is a message for comrades in union leadership.

I believe in the workers of this country; always have. And I believe in your cause. This Government is an ally of the worker.

The good thing about this country is that the fabric of the society has changed in the last generation. Working class children have more positions of power and influence than at any time in our history.

Let us make good use of that opportunity to build something really better for the great, great grand children of a once impoverished people, who have thrown off the yoke of slavery, and of colonialism.

In regards to the current pandemic crisis posed by COVID 19, the Government has announced a stimulus package, the core of which is to help protect people's jobs, and to give many sectors of this society a hand-up.

This Government is committed to spending millions to make sure that our people are not set back too far; and that we can hold our community together – determined to rise from this as a more united and stronger people.

This government is committed to ensuring no job is lost in the public sector, and that every payment is met. Some recalibration may be required to ensure we protect each and every job; and, we are certain that with the cooperation and understanding of all parties we shall overcome and triumph.

I call on leaders in our private sector – and I am confident that we have a core of very progressive leaders now in that sector – to seek to safeguard your workers as well.

All sides will have to make sacrifices – but we must not leave anyone behind.

While we are cognizant that this is as much an economic crisis as it is a health one, we also know that our first priority must be to save lives.

This is why, we have already engaged different sectors – including private sector organizations and trade unions – informing them that, going forward, there are certain conditions that must be in place to protect the health and safety of the worker, and to ultimately, safeguard this nation.

We are working with them, seeking their input and feedback, on a draft document that outlines reasonable guidelines, expectations and timelines to protect workers' safety. Finalised manuals will be circulated to each sector, with the specific health protocols that must be present in the workplace.

As a responsible and reasonable Government, we assure that we will do our part to actively enforce those protocols, as far as is legally and practically, possible.

On a day like this, we should also remember the working class people all over the world – and particularly for us – workers in Cuba and Venezuela, who have had to suffer more than they should because of brutal and illegal economic sanctions imposed by world powers.

But, it is those same workers of Cuba who are all over the world in the frontline against this global pandemic.

Those are the same countries, on the backs of their workers, that continue to come to the aid of the region when we need it most—as they have already demonstrated through this pandemic.

Their struggles must be seen as our struggle – and we must offer solidarity – forever!

Before I end, I must take this opportunity to again thank all workers for their understanding and solidarity during this period. But I must, especially, thank the frontline and essential workers who have kept the engine of this country going, against some deadly odds.

Your Government is ever mindful of those on the frontline taking care of the sick, with great risks to their own personal safety, amidst the challenging scarcity of resources worldwide. Government is considering some ways and means of providing you with some tangible token of appreciation.

In this regard, discussions have begun with the Public Workers' Union to ensure that some special compensatory allowances are made to the stalwarts in the struggle against the Novel Coronavirus pandemic.

As well, I believe it is incumbent on me – on behalf of the Government and all the Grenadian people – to pay tribute to the contingent of Cuban health combatants, who have left their families at home to be here with us in Grenada. Cuba has a rich tradition of internationalism, of helping mankind – whether on the battlefield of Angola to put an end to the wretched system of Apartheid; or on the battlefield against Ebola in Africa; or assisting after earthquake ravages in Haiti. The Cuban people are exemplary human beings.

Five hundred years in this region have taught us all, that when we are knocked down, we get back up; we rise – more determined, more resilient, more hopeful and more resolved to overcome – and we shall overcome.

This May Day comes under totally different circumstances; and while there are no marches; no rallies – you are standing still – and you are standing firm. I stand with you.

And so, let us not just take care of ourselves – but of each other! Reach out to one another – as workers, family and friends, including and especially at this time, our nationals in COVID hotspots such as New York and London and other Diaspora communities.

LONG LIVE WORKERS!

LONG LIVE THE WORKING PEOPLE!

WE SHALL OVERCOME THE PANDEMIC!

I thank you.