

## **Labour Day Message, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

My dear citizens,

As Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, I extend heartfelt best wishes to all of you and, in particular, to all the Leaders and members of our Trade Unions and related Organisations and Institutions on the occasion of the 45<sup>th</sup> year of the declaration of Labour Day in Trinidad and Tobago.

There are so many similarities in respect of the rationale which led to the origins of International Workers Day in the USA and the Labour unrest which, in the mid-1930s, gripped the oil belt and sugarcane plantations of south Trinidad

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1937 records the most crucial point of an era during which working class people of Trinidad and Tobago, led by Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler, agitated relentlessly and vociferously to press their demands for socially acceptable terms of employment as well as their right to work under environmentally friendly humane conditions, among which included the demand for a shorter work day without loss of pay - the 8-hour work day. To say the least, it was a period when working conditions were clearly unfit for human habitation and just as insensitive to what constituted fair and liveable wages.

Internationally, Labour Day is known to have begun in the USA in the 1860's. It was a day set aside by Trade Union Leaders to mark the height of the struggle of the working class against the capitalist overlords, especially in protest against the sight of men, women and children dying due to extremely poor terms and conditions in the workplace: in some sectors as early as their mid-twenties.

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1937 was reminiscent of the heights of that period in Chicago, USA when, on May 1, 1886 police and soldiers gunned down hundreds of striking workers agitating for the 8-hour work day.

We in Trinidad and Tobago have chosen to celebrate our workers day on a day which is of great nation-building significance to us all. June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1937 represented the critical point of the period when the Labour Movement in Trinidad and Tobago, still in its infancy, began to stamp its mark and create its impact upon the socio-economic transformation and development of the Country: a period of industrial relations consciousness and awareness which ushered in the growth, development and expansion of the Trade Union Movement forward ever, backward never.

Our country can boast of having to our credit the only Labour College in the Caribbean Region established since 1966, our highly respected Industrial Court established in 1965 which consistently sets precedents in case law for nations worldwide to follow. In addition, the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is endowed with the most wide spread range of progressive labour legislation guaranteeing the preservation and protection of workers' rights and freedoms.

Currently, work is moving apace on amendments to various pieces of legislation designed to build upon the level of protection to both employers and employees as, alongside the Government, both sectors work together, in the spirit of tripartism, to enhance the quality of life of all our citizens. I refer to amendments to the Trade Union Act, the Cipriani College of Labour & Co-Operative Studies Act, Industrial Relations Act (IRA), the Workmen's Compensation Act and the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act (RSBA). The Cabinet is presently considering proposed amendments whilst the National Tripartite Advisory Council is addressing the proposals to amend the IRA and RSBA.

As we celebrate Labour Day, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018, let us be mindful of those who gave of their lives and made unparalleled sacrifices to bring us to this pivotal juncture; let us pay tribute to those who were unjustifiably abused, accused and imprisoned so that, today, we can all enjoy vastly improved working conditions; let us reflect upon those who suffered dire consequences so that we could enjoy a five day working week, those who trekked painstakingly from La Brea to Port of Spain in sun and rain protesting against atrocious working conditions only to be antagonised by the colonial forces upon their arrival into the city or those who, in the 1940s, were sprayed with tear gas and inhumanely dispersed from around the precincts of the Red House amidst the deafening sound of fire power as they fought valiantly for a decent day's pay for a decent day's work.

Let us all join in paying tribute to the most impressive cadre of early Trade Union pioneers of the 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s who masterfully and heroically paved the way for those of us who have since followed: distinguished worker-representative stalwarts of the calibre of Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler, Andrew Arthur Cipriani, Adrian Cola Rienzi, John Rojas, George Weekes, Clotil Walcott, Kenrick Rennie, Selwyn John, Lyle Townsend, Michael Als, John Hacksaw, Nuevo Diaz, Winston Leonard, Albert Gomes, Quintin O'Connor, Bhadase Sagan Maharaj, W. W. Sutton, Nathaniel Crichlow, C.P. Alexander, Simeon Alexander, Stephen Maharaj, Mc Donald Stanley, Sam Worrell, Sydney Dedier, St. Elmo Gopaul, Vas Stanford, Donald Granado, Ulric Lee, Joseph Grannum, C.T.W.E. Worrell, Joe Young, Carl Tull, Mc Donald Moses, Clive Spencer, Clive Nunez and many more.

On this momentous occasion, I wish my comrades A Happy and Reflective Labour Day and stand by the saying Long Live the Trade Union Movement of Trinidad and Tobago.

A Happy Labour Day to all.

Jennifer Baptiste –Primus

Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development

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