

National Workers Union

Workers of the world unite!

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To: All Trade Unions in Trinidad and Tobago

Dear Comrades

THE CRISIS FACING THE WORKING CLASS

The working class in Trinidad and Tobago is under the most sustained attack from the employers and the state since the early 1980's. Some may remember: at that time, with the oil boom running cold, the then boss of the *Employers' Consultative Association*, Emile De La Grenade, stated that there were no safe havens for workers. The battle field, he said, was everywhere.

This ushered in a decade of intense class struggle characterised by massive strikes, lock outs and occupations throughout the country, but especially in the East-West Corridor. Major job losses took place at *MTS*, *PTSC*, *Caroni*, throughout the light manufacturing sector and in the energy and heavy manufacturing sectors. Public sector workers felt the full force of government cutbacks in their wage packets.

These massive social conflicts led to the defeat of the PNM in the 1986 General Election, the splintering of the NAR government, the imposition of the neo-liberal structural adjustment programme of the *International Monetary Fund*, the staging of the glorious general strike of 1989 (Day of Resistance), the formation of the *Summit of People's Organisation* (SOPO) and the Muslimeen military adventure.

The exhausted working class, suffering from structural adjustment fatigue, went into retreat and the neo-liberal agenda reigned supreme. The trade union movement reflected that retreat and the quality of our representation and leadership went into decline. Our membership decreased and for the first time since the 1930's the trade union movement ceased to be a significant player in shaping the political contours of the society.

Comrades, we are facing a situation today that could mean either the revitalisation of the working class movement and the trade unions or the imposition of a regime of repression upon working people and the utter marginalisation of the trade union movement.

The neo-liberal project has collapsed in the face of the accelerating crisis of international capitalism. It is not just a financial crisis. It is a crisis of the capitalist mode of production which is based on profit maximisation, concentration and accumulation of capital at the expense of everything else, including the destruction of the human ecosystem. The continued existence of the capitalist system is a danger to the continued existence of the human race.

The political system and the institutions of social control have lost credibility among the masses and we are once again heading for a decisive clash of social forces which may decide what kind of social settlement will emerge or be imposed.

President: Frank Sears :: **General Secretary:** Dave Smith :: **Treasurer:** Sylvester McLaren :: **Assistant General Secretary/Treasurer:** Withheld
National Organisation Officer: Willock Pierre :: **National Education and Research Officer:** Gerry Kangalee :: **National Equality Officer:** Rae Samuel
National Health and Safety Officer: Withheld **Trustees:** Alston Francois, Simeon Humphrey :: **Legal Advisor:** Clyde Weatherhead
Registered Office: 43 Fifth Street, Barataria, Trinidad & Tobago :: **Union Registration No:** 501

The masses have lost faith in the ability of the capitalist economy to satisfy their aspirations. They are restless and everywhere you look you see a low intensity insurrection already under way as working people and the poor try to defend themselves against the deterioration of living conditions which are becoming worse as thousands of workers are retrenched.

The manufacturing sector that exports to *CARICOM* is already shedding jobs because their markets are drying up. Jobs are already being eliminated in the energy and heavy industrial sectors. Workers are on the chopping block in the public service, at *WASA*, throughout the manufacturing sector, the construction sector, the transport, equipment rental, engineering, labour supply sectors and the supply of services sector, restaurant, retail and wholesale commercial sales, financial and clerical sectors.

The State has already signalled that it is quite prepared to resort to naked militarisation to ensure that working people and the poor do not create more space for themselves. The recent *Summit of the Americas* revealed the extent of the militarisation of the police force and recent events involving *TSTT* workers, members of the *Communications Workers' Union*, suggest that the State is eager to inflict violence upon the masses.

When people refuse to collaborate in their own exploitation; when the institutions of social control neither command respect nor intimidate the masses; when the system is stripped to its bare essentials it goes back to basics: the heart of State power is the ability to enforce policy through armed force!

CLR James advised us to seek the future in the present and what we see is certainly not pleasant. We see more than two dozen workers dismissed at *WASA*. The Chairman of *WASA*, who is well known to many unions in the country, is reported to have said the Government has "deep pockets".

This means that the Government has decided to break the trade union movement by dismissing officers and activists whether the dismissals are held up in court or not. *TSTT* has made it quite clear that they have adopted the "*WASA model*" as the President of the *Transport and Industrial Workers' Union*, Comrade Roland Sutherland, so aptly described it.

The foreign manager of *TSTT* has been clear about two things. He said that workers would be dismissed and he has since suspended scores of workers under conditions which the *Communications Workers' Union* has described as constructive dismissal.

He also described the relationship between the union and *TSTT* as having nothing to do with industrial relations but was in fact a "power struggle". What this signifies is that if the trade union movement wants to mount an industrial relations response to this vicious all-out assault on the rights, benefits, entitlements and, more importantly, freedoms of workers, the state and the capitalists are certainly not going down that road.

They understand clearly that the industrial relations arena is no longer capable of containing the class struggle. They are upping the ante and are quite prepared to wage an economic, political and military struggle against the working class and the trade union movement in order to secure their class interests, which depend on the continuing exploitation of labour and the suppression of the political rights of working people and the poor.

Comrades, we fully support the position of the *Transport and Industrial Workers' Union* when it stated in a recent media release: "*The trade union movement must unite solidly behind the CWU and the TSTT workers as they exercise their right to protest against oppression. If we do not, our ability to engage in collective bargaining and our right to assembly and to free speech will be eroded and eventually removed as the state militarises the society in an effort to shore up a crumbling economic and political situation.*"

The *National Workers Union* suggests that as the first step to uniting solidly behind the *CWU* and the *TSTT* workers, all trade unions in the country, whether affiliated to *NATUC*, *FITUN* or non-affiliated agree to convoke a national Convention of Shop Stewards and Branch Officers (*COSSABO*) so that the widest cross section of the "shop floor" leadership of the trade union movement could bring their collective experience, wisdom and energy to bear on the immediate question of defence of *TSTT*

workers and their union.

The COSSABO should also tackle the broader question of developing a fight back programme to beat off the assault which we all know is already under way and which is going to intensify as the crisis deepens and the government squanders its financial and political capital.

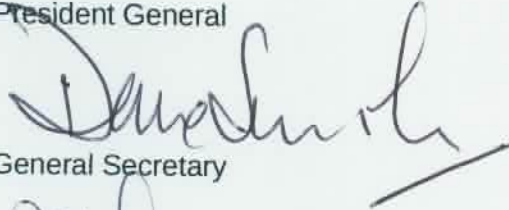
Comrades, let us be clear: "industrial relations" alone is no longer going to cut it. We are once more engaged in an all-consuming social struggle for the defence and protection of the hard-won space that the working class enjoys today. As trade unionists we have to revert to first principles.

The basis of trade unionism is collective action and solidarity. These are the weapons we must deploy in defence of the *TSTT* workers and the *Communications Workers' Union*. Without employing these weapons we are nothing but watchmen for the employers and the State, warning them when the workers get restless and pacifying the workers instead of organising them for struggle. An injury to one is an injury to all! Trade union leaders who no longer uphold these first principles will surely become casualties as our members battle to survive in the face of this renewed assault by the capitalists and the State. **One Movement! One Struggle!**

Yours in struggle

frank sears

President General

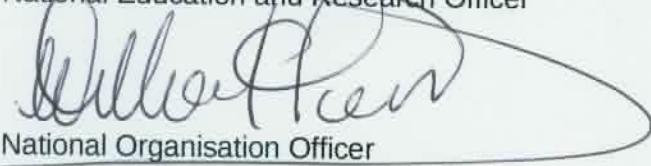


General Secretary



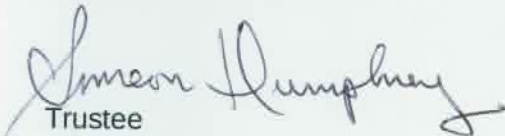
Treasurer

cos hampden
National Education and Research Officer



National Organisation Officer

Rae Samuel
National Equality Officer



Trustee