

# National Workers Union



**Organise the Unorganised!**

## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES!

Comrades, one year ago on June 19th 2010 capitalist politicians infested revolutionary Fyzabad, the birthplace of the trade union movement. They contaminated the sacred ground, where the intense battles which gave rise to our movement were fought by the warrior workers of 1937. Some trade union leaders and some workers believed that the People's Partnership government would serve the interests of the working class. There was even a placard which said: *We in Power Now!*

Others believed that their association with the government would serve their personal interests. After all, it had served the interests of trade union leaders who had associated themselves with the discredited PNM government.

The National Workers' Union in our 2010 June 19th statement **had warned**:

*"Having "faith" in trade unionists who hold government positions to advance working class interests is dereliction of duty by labour leaders. History has repeatedly demonstrated that we have had to struggle for every gain we have made..."*

*Trade unionists holding government posts does not mean there is a labour government... A workers' party does not exist just because a few trade unionists declare it to be so. It must be built in the process of struggling to defend, protect and advance working class interests through mass organisation, democratic participation, collective action and political education."*

On this day one year ago, the then-new Minister of Labour said, to rapturous applause, that the Workers' Agenda, which the All Union Conference of Shop Stewards and Branch Officers (COSSABO) held on April 18th 2010 adopted would be vigorously pursued by his government.

He said the Master and Servant Act would be repealed; the Maternity Protection Act would be amended; the Industrial Relations Act would be overhauled; the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act would be amended. Not one of these pledges has been fulfilled!

By the time the budget was presented in September the minimum wage scandal was in full flow, with many labour leaders ducking and running and spokespersons of the government denying they had promised twenty dollars an hour. The employers won that battle hands down.

Blows rained down on the trade union movement thick and fast in the budget and after. Government announced its intention to attack workers' pensions through harmonisation; their promised thrust toward food security ended up in the bulldozing of bearing crops; the 5% wage suppression policy was implemented and mass dismissals of workers and middle managements in the state sector began, based on political criteria, particularly in URP, CEPEP, UTT and TTPOST.

The Workers' Agenda has become a distant memory and the trade union movement is in defensive mode as it seeks to brakes the blows of the government. **What a difference a year makes!** The strategy of the labour leaders who jumped into bed with the employers and the state in the People's Partnership in a futile bid to influence them into adopting more labour-friendly policies has, predictably, crashed and burned.

It is heartening to see some of the trade union leaders who were singing the praises of the government have come to reality and are now singing a different tune. **The taste of the pudding is truly in the eating!**

What are workers to do? We must defend, protect and advance our interests regardless of who is in power. We must not fool ourselves into believing that

a government made up of employers and defenders of capitalism will seek the interests of workers.

Our programme must be based on a massive campaign to organise the 80% of the workforce that is not unionised including the temporary casual and contract workers who fall within unionised bargaining units. In order to organise the unorganised the long, drawn out **process of union recognition must be reformed** so that no recognition claim should take more than 3 months.

**A minimum floor of entitlements must be legislated to apply to all workers** and must include: an annual review of the minimum wage which should be no less than two thirds of the national average wage; sick pay; vacation leave; overtime payments; payment for public holidays; the right to have a pay slip; the right to union representation inclusive of the grievance procedure; the right to a written contract; service pay for termination of any kind; the establishment of a severance fund to be funded by employers, coverage to include loss of employment when a company closes down; unemployment relief to be administered by the NIS.

**Legal discrimination against domestic workers must be abolished.** Let us congratulate the National Union of Domestic employees on getting the ILO to adopt a convention affirming the rights of these workers!

**The Industrial Relations Act must be repealed!** Workers in essential services and essential industries should enjoy the right to strike and freedom of association; restrictions on the right to strike should be removed; neither employers nor the state should be able to initiate decertification proceedings against unions; employer challenges to individual workers being represented by unions should be abolished.

**The Workmen's Compensation Act** should be replaced with the long promised Employee Injury and

Disability Act which should bring compensation for work related injury and death into line with contemporary practice.

**A food security policy** must be implemented based on guaranteed long term security of tenure for farmers and on a rational land use policy

Our trade union leaders, if left to themselves, will continue to make a mess of the campaign to institute the Workers' Agenda, particularly our immediate task of defeating the government's 5% wage suppression policy. Workers must utilise the power they have in their branches and general councils to insist that their leaders act transparently and accountably. **The COSSABO, within and across unions and federations, must be institutionalised.**

The joint trade union leaders have decided that a co-ordinated campaign must be launched to apply our power over production strategically in order to defeat the 5% policy. This campaign must include joint workplace education and mobilisations and national education and mobilisations. A **War Council** must be established immediately to guide and direct that campaign.

The battle lines are drawn. The government, serving the interests of employers; with all the resources of the state at its disposal, stands on one side systematically implementing its policy of wage suppression and job elimination.

On the other side stand the trade unions leading tens of thousands of organised workers and hundreds of thousands of unorganised workers, armed with their power over production, their potential for unity and their determination not to pay for the capitalist crisis.

We are surely in for an intensification of the great class struggle that is already underway. The critical factor that will decide who gains and who loses is the **quality of leadership**. As workers, it is our duty to ourselves and our families to strengthen our leadership and keep them on the right path.

# **INSTITUTIONALISE THE COSSABO!**

# **SET UP A WAR COUNCIL NOW!**

**19th June 2011**