



## **GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING**

18<sup>th</sup> August, 2010

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# **GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The General Secretary's Report is submitted to the meeting of the General Council of the St. Lucia Civil Service Association (CSA) of 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.

Contained herein is an account of the activities and achievements of the Secretariat and the National Executive Committee (NEC) since the General Council meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2010. The report covers the period, 20<sup>th</sup> May to 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2010.

Included in the report are the status and/or accomplishments of activities on: Industrial Relations (Collective Agreements, Grievances, Representation), Benefits, Training and Education, Organizational and Administrative issues.

### **B. INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

#### **1. Collective Agreements**

The achievements of the CSA in finalizing Collective Agreements were mixed. During the period only one (1) Collective Agreement was finalized when the signing was conducted with St. Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority (22/6/10).

A large degree of achievement in the status of Collective Agreements was the increase in number of proposals prepared and submitted. Eight (8) proposals were prepared and submitted to: -

- Bel Jou Hotel
- St.Lucia Sports Inc.
- Canadian Bank Notes St.Lucia Inc.
- National Skills Development Centre (NSDC)
- Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC)
- Advance Building Maintenance Services (ABMS)
- St.Lucia Civil Service Cooperative Credit Union
- St.Lucia Electricity Services Limited (LUCELEC)

Of these, negotiations were started with ABMS only. The CSA expressed concern about the delay in commencement of negotiations with the Government of St.Lucia (GOSL). In response to CSA's concerns, the Ministry of the Public Service had indicated that some of the Public Service unions under the umbrella of the Trade Union Federation had not submitted proposals.

There were also delays in starting negotiations with the Water and Sewerage Company (WASCO). In response to the Union's queries on the matter, it was indicated that a Board was not in place. There were some agencies that were awaiting the negotiations with GOSL to influence their directions.

## 2. Grievances

From the grievances which the Union sought to resolve in the period, three (3) outstanding ones had to do with health and safety concerns. These included: Registry of the High Court, Environmental Health Department, Marine Terminal/Vieux-Fort.

### **(a) Registry of the High Court**

When it was thought that the last of problems were resolved, in June (2010), employees were again complaining of discomfort and itching. A report on an investigation conducted by the Consultant in the Labour Department revealed that the offices at the Registry of the High Court were contaminated by traces of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, fibre glass and dust, among others.

While it was yet to be verified, suspicions were, these pollutants caused an employee to collapse at the workplace. Others had suffered from various

ailments. Employees were alarmed about the situation and expressed grave concern about their safety.

After a meeting of union representatives, officials of the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of the Public Service and the Consultant from Department of Labour, it was decided that employees would work for a half day while samples of air were sent for analysis. A report of the analysis was awaited at the time of writing of this report.

### **(b) Environmental Health Department**

For the better part of three (3) years the Union was making representation to resolve health and safety concerns at the Environmental Health Department. Promises made by the Ministry of Health to find suitable alternative locations were never kept.

Infused by the procrastinations in relocating the Department, the employees met among themselves (on May 29, 2010) and agreed unanimously, as follows: -

- The present building housing the Department of Environmental Health was unsuitable and as such arrangements must be made to find alternative office accommodation.
- Adequate security must be provided for offices.
- A time frame of one week to be given to the Ministry of Health for a response to related correspondence.
- The further granted of one month upon expiration of the one week during which time suitable accommodation should be obtained.
- The union must issue a notice to the Ministry of Public Service indicating the intent of staff to undertake industrial action.

Considering the length of time the issue of relocating the Department was tabled and the empty promises that were made, the Union did the bidding of the employees. The Ministry of Health was written to (on June 4, 2010). There was no response to the correspondence. Notice of intended industrial action (dated 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2010), under the Essential Services Act, was issued with the following reasons: -

- ✓ The deplorable working conditions which exist at the Department of Environmental Health and which threaten the health, safety and security of employees who are required to work there;
- ✓ Failure of the authorities to finalise arrangements for the relocation of the Department of Environmental Health, as promised, and;

- ✓ Failure to respond on the stipulated date to the St.Lucia Civil Service Association's letter, dated 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2010.

In keeping with the one month notice 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2010 was the day for the intended action. We were oblivious that it was carnival day. A meeting was held with the workers on Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> July. The meeting discussed correspondence received from the Labour Department and the Ministry of Health which indicate that agreement was reached to relocate the Environmental Health Department to the Global Building in Marisule within two to three months.

In consideration of this development, the workers agreed to extend the notice of intended strike action by one (1) month, since it was thought to be practical to complete all the logistics in that period of time. The extended time is to expire on 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

**(c) Marine Terminal/Vieux-Fort**

Conditions at the St.Lucia Marine Terminal Limited/Vieux-Fort (SLMTL) were the other health and safety concerns pursued by the union for sometime. Custom officers and Assistants have been complaining about a host of undesirable conditions: -

- Dust on the docks and in sheds
- Flooding
- Inadequate and poor toilet facilities
- Poor lighting
- Space congestion
- Loose electrical wires
- Absence of drinking water
- Dysfunctional kitchen, and
- Other

When custom officers and Assistants determined that the conditions were unbearable, the union advised that they should report to work at the Custom headquarters, Vieux-Fort, on the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2010. That same morning, the action by the officers caused a meeting between union representatives and the management of Customs and Excise. On the afternoon of the same day, a meeting was held with union representatives, Management of Customs, SLMTL Management and representatives of SLASPA. A phased thirteen point course of action was arrived at to resolve the situation.

A mechanism of monthly meetings involving the parties concerned was set up to monitor the progress of the works to be undertaken.

(d) Other Health and Safety concerns over the period included: -

**(i) Boys Training Centre (BTC)**

Deterioration of the working environment at the BTC was a source of grave concern. The shop steward reported on the situation in writing to cause an investigation by the Health and Safety Committee. At the time of writing of this report, the findings and recommendations of the Committee were awaited.

**(ii) Audit Department**

Employees of the Audit Department suffered discomfort from a lingering stench which pervaded the offices. The employees were advised to stay away from the offices while the source of the stench was investigated.

At the time of writing of this report, the possibility of relocating the Audit Department was being looked into.

(e) Individual Grievances

**(i) Advance Building Maintenance Services**

SLASPA withdrew a members' pass to the premises at the airport/Vieux-Fort. The reason was based on the disappearance of an item which belonged to a passenger. The withdrawal of the pass meant that the member could not work.

The member was placed on suspension by ABMS with pay while the Union pursued the matter. After the intervention of the Labour Department it was agreed to stop pursuing the case. Terminal benefits were paid by ABMS.

**(ii) SLASPA**

Settlement was reached on behalf of a member who the Union believed was wrongly terminated. The union sought the intervention of the Labour Department and conciliation by the

Minister. The management of SLASPA opted to settle the matter at negotiations with the Union.

The settlement involved payment for six (6) months inclusive of termination notice.

(iii) Other individual grievances were pursued in the framework of the regular meetings with: -

- Ministry of the Public Service
- Ministry of Health, and others

### **3. REPRESENTATION**

#### **3.1 LUCELEC**

The regular meetings with LUCELEC continued during the period. At meetings held on 26<sup>th</sup> May and 24<sup>th</sup> June, the union was apprised of the status of finalization of reclassification, performance management system, job descriptions and salary scales. There was the understanding that these matters would be finalized before the start of negotiations.

#### **3.2 St.Lucia Marketing Board (SLMB)**

The restructuring of the SLMB which has been long standing came to the fore during the period. At meetings held on June 17 and 28, representatives of the CSA were apprised of the plans and implications for employees. The union was informed that plans were finalized for a Public/Private Partnership arrangement, and as a result of this arrangements, 50% of existing staff would have been retained, all staff would have been paid their severance packages.

The Union was subsequently informed that the plans were “put on hold” until further notice. The vacillation by the Ministry of Agriculture placed the existing staff under a greater state of uncertainty. At the time of writing this report, a joint meeting of Staff/ Board of Directors/CSA was arranged.

#### **3.3 Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC)**

The Union was notified of plans to restructure the Department of Custodial workers at the SALCC. The proposal entailed: -

- (a) The restructuring of the department with the possibility of changing working hours, or;
- (b) Outsourcing the services.

Both options hold implications for the workers. The matter was discussed with workers on 1<sup>st</sup> July to pave the way for discussions with management, aimed at arriving at a framework to save jobs for employees.

### **3.4 Ministry of Health**

The regular meeting with the Ministry of Health was held on 8<sup>th</sup> June after two (2) postponements. The discussions were limited to follow-up matters on: -

- Improvements of facilities at Victoria Hospital
- Vacation for daily paid employees at Soufriere Hospital

### **3.5 Ministry of the Public Service**

The regular meeting with the Ministry of the Public Service was held on 10<sup>th</sup> June and 18<sup>th</sup> June. Issues discussed and/or followed-up included: -

- Victoria Hospital and Forensic Lab:
  - regarding the transfer of a member;
- Ministry of Commerce:
  - request of payment for overtime for a member.
- Ministry of Education:
  - transfer to less stressful situation;
  - promotion/transfer
- Customs and Excise Department:
  - conditions at Marine Terminal/Vieux-Fort;
  - parking space and mobility of Assistant Customs Officers;
  - bridging of service for a member.
- Ministry of Agriculture:
  - confirmation in post long outstanding (victimization)
- Treasury Department:
  - transfer of a member under questionable grounds;
- Prime Minister's Office:
  - down grading of post

### **3.6 Health and Safety Committee**

The Health and Safety Committee, a requirement of the CSA/GOSL Collective Agreement, was established with representation from CSA, MOPS/Government Negotiating Team (GNT), Labour Department and Environmental Health Department.

The Committee is mandated to investigate reports on Health and Safety conditions in the Public Service and make recommendations to rectify/improve those conditions.

## **4. BENEFITS**

### **4.1 Group Medical Plan**

Following the luke-warm response to self-insurance, at the General Council meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2009, the NEC was busy finding ways on the forward movement of the Group Medical Plan. Given the tenuous position of CLICO, M&C Brokers had advised to go self-insurance or find an alternative insurer.

It was important for the NEC to know what was available on the insurance market. Meetings were held with representatives of CGM Gallagher and Beacon. Following the meeting the position of NEC, going forward, was as follows: -

- Retain M&C Brokers for one year (in the first instance);
- Mandate M&C Brokers to find an alternative insurer for a Group Medical package which includes a basic plan and major medical.

At the time of writing of this report, presentation of proposals from the insurers was awaited.

### **4.2 Survey**

In an attempt to better determine members' views about benefits, a survey/questionnaire was circulated at the branches. Some of the forms were already returned to the Secretariat at the time of writing of this report. Branches from which the forms have not been returned are urged to do so as a matter of urgency. There is also need to thank the members from the Branches that have responded.

4.3 There was some delay in the forward movement on other aspects of new benefits that were proposed.

## 5. TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The aspects of training and education undertaken in the period were: -

- (a) A symposium for young workers held on April 30, was facilitated by a Young Worker from the Barbados Workers Union.
- (b) A one day orientation workshop for new members was held, 27<sup>th</sup> May, with 20 participants.
- (c) A workshop for new shop stewards, held on 29<sup>th</sup> June, with fourteen (14) participants.
- (d) Two (2) staff members – Administrative Secretary and Accounting Officer, attended a workshop on “Conflict Management” 29<sup>th</sup> June, CSA sponsored.
- (e) Assistant General Secretary/Industrial Relations attended a workshop on Health and Safety, sponsored by the Labour Department on 6<sup>th</sup> July.
- (f) CSA’s delegation to CPSA’s Annual Conference included: -President, Assistant General Secretary/Industrial Relations, Chairman, Young Workers. Observers included: Veronica Forde, Yvonne Edwin.

## 6. ORGANISATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

### 1. General Council

- The second General Council for 2010 was held on 19<sup>th</sup> May.
- The meeting was well attended.
- Outputs of the meeting were: -
  - ❖ Approval of the 2010 budget
  - ❖ Authorities to provide an indication of time for the passing of the Labour Code
  - ❖ Committee of the General Council to review the TUF Constitution;
  - ❖ Establish/convene Committee to review examination results of CSA scholarship holders;
  - ❖ Establish/convene Committee to review and edit Policy Document on Operations of Secretariat;
  - ❖ Approval of CSA Delegation to CPSA: -
    - President
    - Youth rep/Melissa Joseph
    - Secretariat rep/Lilia Auguste

- Members of the Youth Committee paying their way/supported by fund raisers (Emmanuel Alfred, Yvonne Edwin, Finton Lubrin and Karan Montoute)
- Sis. Veronica Forde (retired civil servant) has since indicated her willingness to accompany the CSA delegation with the understanding that she will pay her way.

## 2. Branch Meetings

Meetings were held with the following branches: -

- Ministry of the Public Service
- Sir Arthur Lewis Community College Farm
- Ministry of Communications, Works, Transport and Public Utilities
- Sir Arthur Lewis Community College
- Soufriere Regional Development Foundation
- Senior Citizens Home
- Visit to Soufriere Hospital

## 3. Membership

At the end of June the membership of the Union stood at 2,619.

## 4. Review of CSA Constitution

- First draft is available for circulation and discussion
- To be discussed with relevant staff at Secretariat
- Then the NEC and Trustee must find time to read the document and make time to discuss;
- Before circulation for discussion at General Council and membership levels are brought to bear.

## 5. RCI Lease Agreement

- Alterations were made in accordance with discussions held with "Secra" Gibson of RCI;
- Document with alterations was submitted to Gibson for comments;
- He has since returned the documents with no comments;
- The Lease Agreement has since been signed.

#### 6. Maintenance of CSA Building

A meeting to prioritize work to be done for the maintenance of the CSA Building was held 12<sup>th</sup> May. The identified activities which were prioritized included: -

- Termite infestation: Breakdown stage and steps for replacement
- Build cupboard for PA system and equipment
- Replace drain pipes and face boards
- Paining interior of walls
- Repairing the gate

#### 7. Committee for CSA Week

A Committee has been charged with the planning of CSA Week 2010 and for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CSA which is due next year.

#### 8. Staff Replacement

The resignation of Sharleen Peter as Assistant Accounting Officer resulted in the employment of Sasha Gabriel, effective 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2010.