



# COMBAT

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Voice of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU)

July/August, 2010

## THE BITTER-SWEET CHALLENGE - GAWU on sugar's crisis

### PAGE ONE COMMENT

#### Emancipation, Arrival - and Economic Justice

The just concluded, month of August was a period of intense, vacation-related, competitive oriented outings and sporting activities.

Tourists and the Guyanese diaspora returned home, and the children from July-August, 2010 school holidays continue to make Guyana a little more filled with human activities.

One activity of August which assumes national proportions is the anniversary activities in observance of the 1834 Emancipation of Africans from the bonds of British slavery on the sugar plantations of the colony of British Guiana. This August commemorated that event of 176 years ago. This comment cannot accommodate the multitude of historical, cultural and socio-economic implications that precipitated the Emancipation event.

Suffice to say that COMBAT appreciates the role which the Emancipation Proclamation played in fashioning the Guyana population, of which we are all now part. Emancipation caused the planters to cause the arrival of the Portuguese and the Asian immigrants for cheap replacement labour. The arrival of the workers from China, Portugal and India resulted in a demography which is characterised by diverse ethnic groups, all having made unique contributions to the socio-economic development of a nation many of us now call home.

But most of the issues of significance in modern-day Guyana of August-September, 2010 have to do with the bread-and-butter realities which affect the nation's quality of life. From crime and national security considerations, to the intricacies of trade, investment and financial/fiscal

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The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) represents thousands in the workforce employed by the Guyana Sugar Corporation (Guysuco). Those employees form the bulk of the Union's membership, and also are pivotal to the existence and success or failure of the sugar sector – still a vital component of the country's economy.

Sugar still contributes approximately fifteen (15) per cent to Guyana's gross domestic product, and is a primary foreign exchange earner.

When, therefore, the fortunes of sugar are challenged – by natural forces, by international buyers and circumstances, or by management blunders or industrial (labour) issues – GAWU is seized with concerns. This is because this responsible bargaining agent knows the implications for national development and the livelihood of thousands. Any large scale disruption or failure by sugar surely spells major socio-economic trouble for an economy under both internal and external stresses.

So what is GAWU's position on sugar's current bitter-sweet challenges? Well, as reported in previous editions of COMBAT, the union holds the management of Guysuco accountable. GAWU has been, with constructive, responsible criticisms, pointing out a variety of blunders and lapses in recent times. The inability to

meet annual production targets cannot, therefore, be placed solely or primarily on the workers. At the very least, the responsibility for shortfalls, when the reason is not weather - floods - must be shared.

#### Blunders, Lapses....

Without meaning to deny our own members' culpability, GAWU, in the following sampling, reminds all concerned of Guysuco's blunders which we had highlighted in our series "Examination and Exposure"

- Commission of Enquiry findings that water management system on the East Demerara Estates was in an extremely "poor state"
- Commission of Enquiry finds that those estates' "infrastructure was in a terrible state"; high degree of pilfering of field resources and fertilizers/pesticides due to "deficiencies" in accounting and checks and balances.
- Review Committee finding that a General Manager was tasked with preparing a Paper for Closure of Uitvlugt Estate when no official decision was taken; this affected workers' morale.
- Recent revelations about corrupt practices in procurement at the highest level, and so on

#### What is to be done?

GAWU again reiterates that it stands ready to collaborate with Guysuco's management on areas of mutual concern.

"All are involved" in the survival and success of this Guyanese socio-economic life-line. Low morale among the workforce cannot inspire high turnout for the sustained production necessary.

The Union stands ready to point out areas crying out for improvement – countrywide.

## MANAGER INSISTS ON DISCOURAGING EXTRA PAYMENT

Cane harvesters of LBI Estate struck on August 08, 2010 in support of their demand for a certain payment which was not favourably addressed by the Management of the Estate. Such payments are normally made to compensate workers for the extra time they are required to work to harvest their allotted tasks if there are matters which impede the harvesting of their tasks. The prevailing intermittent downpours which bedevil the operations of the sugar industry do inhibit the proper burning of canes. The poor burning results in much trash remaining on the cane stalks, and thus the task requires greater efforts, and thus additional payment is necessary.

The aggrieved workers were demanding as extra payment of G\$300 per opening (two rows of canes, each 17 rods in length). The management of the Estate awarded a mere G\$50 per opening as extra payment. The Manager of the Estate, on his visit to the disputed field on the morning of August 08, 2010, refused to approve a higher payment.

On August 09, 2010, the Union's Assistant General Secretary, Cde D. Thakur; the Field Secretary, Cde L. Tekchand; and the seven representatives of the LBI and Diamond harvesting gangs, along with Guysuco's CEO, Cde Paul Bhim; the Deputy CEO, Cde Raj Singh; the Agriculture Director, Cde Raymond Sangster; Cde

Francis Carryl and Cde D. J. Sukhu of the Industrial Relations Department; the Estate's Agriculture Manager, Cde Rollington Robinson; and the Estate's Harvesting Manager, Cde Aldred Griffith, visited the worksite.

Following the Management's and Union's discussions, lasting under two (2) hours the Corporation approved paying G\$200 per opening. The Union was seeking to obtain G\$300 per opening, but accepted the Corporation's last offer of G\$200 per opening

LBI Estate is targeted to produce 21,192 tonnes of sugar this year out of the industry's target of 264,063 tonnes. The present average turnout of 315 cane cutters, rather than the 600 who are required to harvest an adequate quantity of canes on a daily basis, to maintain the requisite flow of canes to the factory in order to produce 1,114 tonnes of sugar per week, is grossly inadequate. Hence, for many hours in a week, the factory is forced to be at a standstill.

The Union kept cautioning the Corporation, at its yearly wage negotiations, of the inadequate adjustments to its wage rates, which are not competitive to secure and maintain an adequate number of workers, especially cane cutters, who are required to harvest canes within a timely period in each crop.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Guysuco engages in slipshod work

Dear Editor,

The Corporation continues to waste much of its financial resources. At LBI Estate, weeks have passed for a ninety (90) foot revetment close to the Estate's factory, along the central navigation canal (CNC), to be in place. Posts and wailers were installed, but no planks were placed to complete the revetment. The earthen dam continues to be eroded as laden cane punts traverse the canal.

The dimension of the wailers is 1 inch by 10 inch of board material, rather than the usual 4 inch by 6 inch, or 6 inch by 6 inch. What an absurdity and wasteful expenditure! Addition-

ally, instead of using greenheart or wallaba, the known wood for such work, mora was used. Greenheart is known for its strength and durability in the construction of wharves and revetments.

I take the opportunity your paper allows me to invite/request officials of Guysuco to inspect the unfinished revetment to verify how the Corporation's dollars are being improperly utilized, and to take note of the continued deterioration of the dam, which requires unnecessary expenditure to keep repairing it.

Yours faithfully,  
**Dennis Ramsule**

## GAWU seeks more \$\$ for sugar workers

On behalf of almost 18,000 sugar workers, the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) has tabled wage/salary claims to the Guyana Sugar Corporation Inc (Guysuco). The Union is seeking a fifteen (15) per cent hike in pay, along with improvements in fringe benefits, for the industry's field and factory workers, who are in one bargaining unit, and the field foreman/forewoman, who are in another bargaining unit.

Over the last few years, the workers' pay increases have failed to keep pace

with the rate of inflation; thereby diminishing workers' purchasing power. The Union has constantly argued that the Corporation, being no longer engaging workers at competitive rates of pay, is faced with a shortage of labour; especially in the crop seasons, when the full complement of labourers is required, especially at this time when climate change presents volatile weather.

Last year, the ire of sugar workers was brought to the fore as they engaged in strikes, demonstrations and protests denouncing the miserable three (3) per cent wage hike.

## GAWU & BBCI commence negotiations on CLA

The Management of the Berbice Bridge Company Inc (BBCI) and the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) are currently negotiating a Collective Labour Agreement (CLA) following the recognition of the Union, on April 13, 2010, by the BBCI when the Recognition and the Avoidance and Settlement of Disputes Agreement was signed between the parties. The approval of the CLA will complete the requisite agreements which ought to be in place between the Union and the Employer.

The Union, at two (2) sessions, clarified and supported its proposals for the thirty-two (32) clause CLA. Just three (3) clauses, including a pay rise clause now need resolution to have the CLA appended. The Company's counter proposal on the wage/salary increase of 2.5 per cent has been rejected by the Union, and the Company's negotiator would seek guidance from his principals to propose a new offer.

Clauses already agreed upon include: Equal

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policies, Guyanese are concerned with employment, earning for domestic livelihood; then health care, and education, and transportation - arising from all the larger national enterprises in nation-building.

Allegations of inequitable distribution of what is available from our natural resources, and how they are managed, make for investigation and indepth scrutiny. A trained, educated populace, with youths and other human resources available, cry out for equal opportunity. The lack of a fair economic/employment playing field will always fuel justifiable crises of discrimination, favouritism, and corruption. Descendants of emancipated persons - whether of original slaves

Opportunities, Hiring and Employment, Individual Contracts, Probationary Period, Hours of Work, Payment for Overtime, Payment for Sundays and Holidays, Promotion and Promotional Increments, Meal Allowances, Acting Allowance, Annual Leave, Leave Passage Assistance, Sick Leave, Industrial Injury Leave, Maternity Leave, Special Leave for Funeral, Union Training and Sports, Severance or Redundancy Allowance, Medical Discharge, Use of Company Facilities, Time off for Union Meetings/Consultations, Education and Training, Occupational Safety and Health, Provision of Uniforms, Jury Service and/or State Witness, Bursaries, Night Shift Premium, along with Pension and Medical Schemes.

On agreement of the three (3) outstanding clauses. The Union and the Company will then outline each clause, to have it signed by the Union and the Company, and countersigned by the Chief Labour Officer.

or immigrants - cannot be truly liberated in a country where their contemporaries are either favoured or frowned upon in terms of equal opportunity.

The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) represents the interests of this country's working-class whose concerns are as listed above. The Union's Founding Father and Inspiration, Dr Cheddi Jagan, amidst all his life-long dedication in pursuit of social justice, also worked assiduously for the socialist egalitarian principle of economic justice for all.

Nothing is wrong with that ideal today. COMBAT and GAWU are still committed to that pursuit as we represent sugar-workers, those in the sectors of fisheries, rice, beverage, timber production, and elsewhere.

# GUYANA:

## A brief historical overview

### Colonization

The first inhabitants of Guyana were the Amerindians. In the early stages, they obtained their food from hunting, fishing and gathering. They gradually added the planting of crops, and moved from one place to another as the soil declined.

They remained isolated from the other regions of the world until the Europeans came, towards the end of the 16th century. European interest was strongly influenced by the rumours of the existence of El Dorado – the city of gold – greatly enhanced by the adventures of Walter Raleigh. The Dutch were the first to establish a presence, with a number of trading posts. Permanent settlements were subsequently developed along the Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice rivers. These were later organized as three distinct colonies.

The Dutch remained in full control of the three colonies for almost two centuries; and then, from 1781, Guiana had to endure a 50-year period of colonial hopscotching which brought the following colonial powers in control:

**1781:** Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice were captured from the Dutch by the British

**1782:** The three colonies were captured by the French

**1784:** French passed over control to the Dutch

**1796:** British invaded and took control for the second time

**1802:** The three colonies were handed back to the Dutch by the Treaty of Amiens

**1803:** British invade during British-Dutch war and take control of the 3 colonies for third time

**1812:** Demerara and Essequibo were united

**1831:** Essequibo, Demerara and Ber

bice were united and called British Guiana.

British Guiana remained under British colonial rule until political independence was achieved in 1966.

### Sugar, Slavery and Indentureship

By the 1630's, the Dutch, influenced by the development of sugar plantations by the Portuguese in neighbouring Brazil, introduced sugarcane cultivation in Guyana. This led to a huge demand for labour, which the colonial powers provided in different periods through slave and indentured labour from Africa, Portugal, China, and India. This led, by the 19th century, to the transformation of Guiana into a multi-ethnic society within which the original Amerindian people became a very small percentage.

The importation of labour was characterized by intense brutality and exploitation. By 1658, people captured in West Africa and shipped under the Slave Trade were introduced as slave labour. This inhumane system dominated until the slaves were freed in British colonies in 1835. After slavery was abolished, labourers were brought from Portugal from 1835, India from 1838, and China from 1853. The system of indentured immigration from India continued until 1917.

Exploitation, brutality and dehumanization were the hallmarks of the Slave System. Indentureship, which succeeded slavery in 1838, displayed little difference; "paper chains" replaced the "iron chains". The prevailing pattern during the period of Slavery and Indentureship was a vicious circle of punishment and rebellion.

The plantation system under Slavery and Indentureship in the early colonial period was an aggravated form of master-servant relationship – a rigid social structure based on class, colour, race, and religion to buttress foreign domination under an underdeveloped dependent capitalist and semi-feudal economic system of exploitation.

# New Planting Methodology



**GAWU's President, Komal Chand, and Guysuco's Human Resources Director, Jairam Petam, display the signed agreement in the presence of the Chief Labour Officer, Yoganand Persaud, GAWU General Secretary Seepaul Narine, planters' representatives, and other Guysuco officials**

Consultation between the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) and the Guyana Sugar Corporation Inc (Guysuco) culminated on August 10, 2010 with an agreement outlining approved rates and a varied methodology in manual planting of cane.

The Agreement was reached after three (3) sessions between the Union and the Corporation. The planters' representatives from the eight sugar estates were fully involved in the exercise. Through them, the approximately 1,700 planters on the various estates were consulted. The new rates that the Union got the Corporation to approve were influenced by consultation among the rank and file.

Prior to 1997, the Corporation was planting thirteen (13) cane tops of three-eye cuttings (pieces) along one rod (12 feet 4 inches) in parallel and a staggered way. From 1997, the Corporation adopted what was called High Density Planting. Twenty-five (25) pieces of two-eye cuttings were planted in parallel and staggered

over a rod.

The new arrangement requires the planting of eighteen (18) pieces of two-eye cuttings in parallel and a staggered way along one rod.

The latest methodology, the Corporation contends, is to allow more nutrients to be available to the budding plants. In high-density planting, the fifty budding plants are considered too many vis-à-vis the available nutrients. Utilizing less cane as planting material also allows for more canes to be available for conversion into sugar.

The Corporation is also engaged in semi-mechanical planting, which is restrictive during wet conditions. The Corporation's policy requires fresh planting of its canes after a reaping cycle of five crops. Thus, every year, the industry ought to retill and replant twenty (20) per cent of its cultivation, which is approximately 46,000 hectares. Over the years, the Corporation has not been able to reach its planting target, resulting in poor yields from the aged ratoons.

# MAUDE BARLOW: THE WORLD HAS BEEN DIVIDED INTO RICH AND POOR AS AT NO TIME IN HISTORY



As world leaders gathered in Toronto for the G20 summit last June, leading activists from around the world joined thousands in Toronto's Massey Hall to oppose the G20 agenda. Three thousand people packed-in to the Toronto event. This was at the same time the G8 and then the G20 met. Between 900 and 1,000 people are believed to have been arrested, the largest mass arrest in Canadian history. Among them many journalists. More than a billion dollars were believed to have been spent on so-called security, the most expensive security event in Canadian history. Among those who spoke was Maude Barlow. She heads the Council of Canadians—Canada's largest public advocacy organization. She's founder of the Blue Planet Project. This is a part of what she had to say:

"Let's look at a few facts. Fact, the world has divided into rich and poor as at no time in our history. The richest 2% own more than half the household wealth in the world. The richest 10% hold 85% of total global assets, and the bottom half of humanity owns less than 1% of the wealth in the world. The three richest men in the world have more money than the poorest 48 countries. Fact: while those responsible for the 2008 global financial crisis were bailed out and even rewarded by the G-20 gov-

ernments gathering here, the International Labour Organization tells us that, in 2009, 34 million people were added to the global unemployed, swelling those ranks to 239 million, the highest ever recorded. Another 200 million are at risk in precarious jobs, and the World Bank tells us that at the end of 2010, another 64 million would have lost their jobs. By 2030, more than half the population of the megacities of the Global South will be slum dwellers with no access to education, health care, water, or sanitation. Fact: global climate change is rapidly advancing, claiming at least 300,000 lives and \$125 billion in damages every year. Called the silent crisis, climate change is melting glaciers, eroding soil, causing freak and increasingly wild storms, displacing untold millions from rural communities to live in desperate poverty in peri-urban centres. Almost every victim lives in the Global South in communities not responsible for greenhouse gas emissions and not represented here at the summit.

"The atmosphere has already warmed up a full degree in the last several decades, and is on course to warm up another two degrees by 2100. In fact, half the tropical forests in the world, the lungs of our ecosystem, are gone. By 2030, at the present rate of extraction or so-

called harvest, only 10% will be left standing. 90% of the big fish in the sea are gone, victim to wanton predatory fishing practice. Says a prominent scientist studying their demise, "There is no blue frontier left." Half the world's wetlands, the kidneys of our ecosystem, have been destroyed in the 20th century. Species' extinction is taking place at a rate 1,000 times greater than before humans existed. Ac-

According to a Smithsonian scientist, we are headed toward of biodiversity deficit in which species and ecosystems will be destroyed at a rate faster than nature can replace them with new ones. Fact: we are polluting our lakes, rivers and streams to death. Every day, two million tons of sewage and industrial agricultural wastes are discharged into the world's water. That's the equivalent of the entire human population of 6.8 billion people. The amount of waste water produced annually is about six times more water than exists in all the rivers of the world. We are mining our ground water faster than we can replenish it, sucking it to grow water guzzling, chemical-fed crops in deserts, or to water thirsty cities who dump an astounding 700 trillion litres of land-based water into oceans every year as waste.

"The global mining industry sucks up another 800 trillion litres which it also leaves behind as poison; and fully one-third of global water withdrawals are now used to produce biofuels, enough water to feed the world. Nearly three billion people on our planet do not have running water within a kilometre of their homes, and every eight seconds, somewhere in our world, a child is dying of water-borne disease. The global water

crisis is getting steadily worse, with reports of countries from India to Pakistan to Yemen facing depletion. The World Bank says that, by 2030, demand for water will outstrip supply by 40%. This may sound just like a statistic, but the suffering behind that is absolutely unspeakable. Fact: knowing there will not be enough food and water for all in the near future, wealthy countries and global investment pension and hedge funds are buying up land and water, fields and forests in the Global South, creating a new wave of invasive colonialism that will have huge geopolitical ramifications. Rich countries faced with food shortages have already bought up an area in Africa alone which is more than twice the size of the United Kingdom. Now I don't think I exaggerate if I say that our world has never faced a greater set of threats and issues that it does today. So what are the twenty leaders going to talk about? By the way, their summit costs \$1 million a minute. By the way, we figure it's going to be closer to \$2 billion when it's finished, and the annual budget to run the United Nations is \$1.9 billion. I assure you, they are not going to tackle the above issues in any serious way.

"The declarations have already been drafted, the failures already spun. Instead, this global royalty, who have more in common with one another than they do with their own citizens, and are here really to advance the issues and interests of their class, are also here just to advance the status quo that serves the interest of the elite in their own countries, and the business community, or the B-20, the new term, a community that will get private and privileged access to advance their free market solutions to these eager leaders. The agenda is more of the bad medicine that made the world sick in the first place. Environmental deregulation, unbridled financial speculation, unlimited growth, unregulated free trade, relentless resource exploitation, tax cuts for the wealthy, cuts to Social Security, and a war on working people. In other words, savage capitalism. Now, let's look at our own country here and the assault that has been launched on the work of generations of Canadians toward a just society. Stephen Harper's government has cut the heart out of any group that dissents: from First Nations people, to women, to international agencies and church groups like KAIROS, Alternative, and the Canadian Council for International Cooperation."

# FLASHBACK: Women's Day

What is "Women's Day"? Is it really necessary? Is it not a concession to the women of the bourgeois class, to the feminists and suffragettes? Is it not harmful to the unity of the workers' movement?

Such questions can still be heard in Russia, though they are no longer heard abroad. Life itself has already supplied a clear and eloquent answer. 'Women's Day' is a link in the long, solid chain of the women's proletarian movement. The organised army of working women grows with every year. Twenty years ago, the trade unions contained only small groups of working women scattered here and there among the ranks of the workers' party... Now, English trade unions have over 292,000 women members. In Germany, around 200,000 are in the trade union movement, and 150,000 in the workers' party; and in Austria, there are 47,000 in the trade unions and almost 20,000 in the party. Everywhere -- in Italy, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland -- the women of the working class are organising themselves. The Women's Socialist Army has almost a million members. A powerful force! A force that the powers of this world must reckon with when it is a question of the cost of living, maternity insurance, child labour, and legislation to protect female labour.

There was a time when working men thought that they alone must bear on their shoulders the brunt of the struggle against capital, that they alone must deal with the 'old world' without the help of their womenfolk. However, as working-class women entered the ranks of those who sell their labour, forced onto the labour market by need, by the fact that husband or father is unemployed, working men became aware that to leave women behind in the ranks of the 'non-class-conscious' was to damage their cause and hold it back. The greater the number of conscious fighters, the greater the chances of success. What level of consciousness is possessed by a woman who sits by the stove, who has no rights in society, the state or the family? She has

no 'ideas' of her own! Everything is done as ordered by the father or husband... The backwardness and lack of rights suffered by women, their subjection and indifference, are of no benefit to the working class, and indeed are directly harmful to it. But how is the woman worker to be drawn into the movement? How is she to be awoken?

Social-Democracy abroad did not find the correct solution immediately. Workers' organisations were open to women workers, but only a few entered. Why? Because the working class at first did not realise that the woman worker is the most legally and socially deprived member of that class, that she has been browbeaten, intimidated, persecuted, down the centuries; and that, in order to stimulate her mind and heart, a special approach is needed, words understandable to her as a woman. The workers did not immediately appreciate that in this world of lack of rights and exploitation, the woman is oppressed not only as a seller of her labour, but also as a mother, as a woman... However, when the Workers' Socialist Party understood this, it boldly took up the defence of women on both counts - as a hired worker and as a woman, a mother. Socialists in every country began to demand special protection for female labour, insurance for mother and child, political rights for women, and the defence of women's interests.

The more clearly the Workers' Party perceived this second objective vis-a-vis women workers, the more willingly women joined the party. And the more they appreciated that the party is their true champion, that the working class is struggling also for their urgent and exclusively female needs. Working women themselves, organised and conscious, have done a great deal to elucidate this objective. Now, the main burden of the work to attract more working women into the socialist movement lies with the women. The parties in every country have their own special women's committees, secretariats and

bureaus. These women's committees conduct work among the still largely non-politically conscious female population, arouse the consciousness of working women, and organise them. They also examine those questions and demands that affect women most closely: protection and provision for expectant and nursing mothers, the legislative regulation of female labour, the campaign against prostitution and infant mortality, the demand for political rights for women, the improvement of housing, the campaign against the rising cost of living, etc.

Thus, as members of the party, women workers are fighting for the common class cause, while at the same time outlining and putting forward those needs and demands that most nearly affect themselves as women, housewives and mothers. The party supports these demands and fights for them... The requirements of working women are part and parcel of the common workers' cause!

On 'Women's Day', the organised demonstrate against their lack of rights. But, some will ask. Why this singling out of women workers? Why special 'Women's Days', special leaflets for working women, meetings and conferences of working class women? Is this not, in the final analysis, a concession to the feminists and bourgeois suffragettes?

Only those who do not understand the radical difference between the movement of socialist women and bourgeois suffragettes can think this way. What is the aim of the feminists? Their aim is to achieve the same advantages, the same power, the same rights within capitalist society as those possessed now by their husbands, fathers and brothers. What is the aim of the women workers? Their aim is to abolish all privileges deriving from birth or wealth. For the woman worker, it is a matter of indifference who is the 'master', a man or a woman. Together with the whole of her class, she can ease her position as a worker.

Feminists demand equal rights always and everywhere. Women work-

ers reply: we demand rights for every citizen, man and woman, but we are not prepared to forget that we are not only workers and citizens, but also mothers! And as mothers, as women who give birth to the future, we demand special concern for ourselves and our children, special protection from the state and society. The feminists are striving to acquire political rights. However, here, too, our paths separate.

For bourgeois women, political rights are simply a means allowing them to make their way more conveniently and more securely in a world founded on the exploitation of the working people. For women workers, political rights are a step along the rocky and difficult path that leads to the desired kingdom of labour.

The paths pursued by women workers and bourgeois suffragettes have long since separated. There is too great a difference between the objectives that life has put before them. There is too great a contradiction between the interests of the woman worker and the lady proprietress, between the servant and her mistress... There are not, and cannot be, any points of contact, conciliation or convergence between them. Therefore, working men should not fear separate Women's Days, nor special conferences of women workers, nor their special press.

Every special, distinct form of work among the women of the working class is simply a means of arousing the consciousness of the woman worker and drawing her into the ranks of those fighting for a better future... Women's Days and the slow, meticulous work undertaken to arouse the self-consciousness of the woman worker are serving the cause, not of the division, but of the unification of the working class.

Let a joyous sense of serving the common class cause and of fighting simultaneously for their own female emancipation inspire women workers to join in the celebration of Women's Day.

By Alexandra Kollontai

## EDUCATION PROJECT CONTINUES

The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) and the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE), in association with Britain's General Union (GMB) through its project entitled "Promoting Legal Rights and Building Union Capacity in Guyana", are implementing its special training project with the completion of four (4) of its six (6) A-Session courses.

The four courses were held from June 28 – July 02, 2010; July 06 – 10, 2010; July 26 – 30, 2010; and August 03 – 07, 2010 with an aggregate attendance of 122 participants. The last two courses will be held on September 13 – 17, 2010 and September 20 – 24, 2010. The six (6) B-session courses will commence in October, 2010 and conclude in March, 2011.

Participants noted that the training is beneficial and has significantly enhanced their knowledge. They reported that they would share the knowledge they acquired with other members. The training will enable representatives to be knowledgeable, and thus be more able

in their representation of workers at the workplaces, like in grievance cases and health and safety issues, therefore improving their conditions of work, and, by extension, assisting to stabilise the climate of industrial relations in sugar.

The objective of the programme is to train 180 union members on the following labour legislation: the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act, the Trade Union Act, the Prevention of Discrimination Act, the Trade Union Recognition Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The participants are divided into six groups of an average of 30 persons each, who will work as a group during the training, which will be delivered in two sessions: "A" and "B". Session "A" is of a more general nature; Session "B" will allow an in-depth discussion of issues identified by the participants. Between Session "A" and Session "B", there will be an interval of at least three months, during which period, the participants will apply on their daily work, based on necessity, what they learned from the training.

## STORIES FROM THE GROUND | STORIES FROM THE GROUND | STORIES FROM THE GROUND

### IMPRESSIONS

### BY FAZIL KHAN

#### Field Foreman at Blairmont Estate

Let me start by thanking the GMB for the wonderful work they are doing by making the ongoing courses available for members of GAWU and NAACIE in Guyana.

My name is Fazil Khan, and I am a member of GAWU. I am a shop steward and a Field Foreman on Guysuco's Blairmont Estate.

**Question: How does the training help me?** **Answer:** The training has helped me and other participants to have a wider knowledge of labour legislation in Guyana. It helped us to understand our legal rights, so as to give better representation to workers, like in grievance cases and health and safety issues.

**Question: Do I think Social Dialogue may help the industry?** **Answer:** Yes, I think that it will help to have fewer industrial relations' actions by way of social dialogue. As it was rightfully said: "Knowledge breeds understanding, and understanding is a basis for social dialogue."

**Question: What do I think of the other topics dealt with in the training?** **Answer:** I think the other topics in the training were related to labour legislation; they showed how the legislation came into being, from slavery to the present.

I am also thankful because the training

introduced me to computers, of which I had no idea of how to use. Being also a member of the local support team, I had to take basic computer classes, which will help me to stay in contact with my colleagues, and to send reports through e-mail.

**Question: How what I learned in the training helped me to talk to my co-workers?** **Answer:** Before the training, I used to see workers doing things that could bring harm to themselves. I can now be able to clearly explain to them the dangers and the harm they could be doing to themselves. For example, like not to stand on the steps of a labour lorry while it is moving, and wait until the ramps on the labour punts are properly set before embarking and disembarking.

I have also shared my experience with computers with my co-workers, and tried to teach them what I know about computers.

I also wish to say that the training has helped me to feel more confident in doing my work as a representative.

*Fazil Khan is Chairman of the GAWU Blairmont branch and a member of GAWU General Council. He is part of Group 1, which held the Session "A" of the training from 28 June to 02 July, 2010.*

## SUGAR PRODUCTION DROPS

- target now 264,000 tonnes

Harvesting of canes of the second, or autumn sugar crop, commenced on week ending 6th August, 2010 at Guysuco's eight (8) estates, except for Skeldon, which started a week late.

The crop began in unseasonal rainy condition which prevailed. For almost one year, there was an El Nino weather condition, which ended last May. The opposite weather condition now prevails

The rains are causing unnecessary water levels in the cane fields, which inhibit the best sucrose content of the cane stalks. The mainly earthen roadway in the backdam of the plantation, which is used to transport labourers and which facilitates tractors that tow the cane punts from the fields to factories, is far from an ideal state, because of regular downpours. The bell loaders, which significantly assist in the loading of the harvested canes from the fields to the cane punts in the canals, are also hindered in their operations.

It is most unfortunate that the industry has to endure long months of extremely dry weather, to be followed by the present unseasonal wet weather. Such conditions are most inimical to cane harvesting. It is of grave concern to learn that the weather forecast throughout the year will be unfavourable in the months ahead. For the coming September-November, season the weather forecast indicated, "Overall, based on model predictions and current observations of the ocean surface and subsurface, the probability for La Nina conditions is approximately 95 per cent; while throughout the remainder of 2010, probabilities remain between 90 and 95 per cent." If the predicted weather forecast holds, it would probably be the unkindest weather the industry has ever known.

At the commencement of the current crop, which will last between fifteen (15) and nine-

teen (19) weeks, depending on the particular estate, the industry had announced that the year's production is targeted at 264,063 tonnes. This is in contrast with the target of 280,000 tonnes announced by the Corporation at the commencement of the year. It had been predicted by the Union, during the harvesting of the latter part of the first crop this year, that the industry's target of 280,000 tonnes would be adjusted downward. It was pellucid before the end of the crop that the industry would fall short of the first crop's target. At the end of the crop, the production was 81,862 tonnes. The target of 91,675 tonnes fell short by 9,813 tonnes. It was the lowest first crop production since 1991.

The decrease in the industry's sugar production by almost 16,000 tonnes is depressing news for the beleaguered industry, which has witnessed unacceptable levels of production since 2005. It will be a further blow to the industry if the revised target is not achieved.

Low sugar production, juxtaposed with the full implementation of the European Union's thirty-six (36) per cent price cut, coupled with the fall of the Euro from its high of US\$1.42 = €1 earlier this year, would result in poor revenue for the Corporation.

Sugar production close to 300,000 tonnes would have allowed Guysuco to sell some of its sugar in the world market, where the price is expected to remain between US17 and US19 cents per pound during this year. Sales on the world market would be most beneficial to the industry on account of the prevailing price

Sugar workers, who are still peeved over the lowly three (3) per cent wage hike last year, expect a wage increase this year which will improve their purchasing power, which has been declining over the years by higher inflation rates than wage increases.

## GAWU IN CARACAS

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The Manifesto emphasized that unity of workers is a necessity, and is essential to confront the offensives of the ruling classes.

President Hugo Chavez Frias addressed delegates during the Closing Session. He stressed that it is time for the working class to be on the offensive, and noted that "in Venezuela, the workers have been taking stronger positions in the process of change."

He noted that a revolution is taking place in Venezuela, and the building of a socialist model has angered many Western powers. He referred to Colombia's intervention at the Organization of American States (OAS) when, at a meeting at its Headquarters in Washington D.C., Colombia accused his government of allowing Colombian gueril-

las to operate in Venezuelan territory. The President accused the US of orchestrating the allegations.

President Chavez reiterated that the Colombian guerrillas should consider the call made by the Venezuelan government to disarm. He reminded that "it's not the same world as of the 1960's. There are several examples of our leaders who are facing the Empire as legitimate representatives of their peoples. I believe that, in Colombia, there are no conditions for the guerrillas to seize power. Instead, they have become the main excuse of the Empire to attack its neighbours."

He said Venezuela is bound to consider the possibility of war. "The coup against Zelaya, was a blow to all of our Latin American governments. Therefore, it is essential that, in this battle, the working class wins."

# FITUG held 3rd Delegates Conference



Left: A section of the audience attending the Opening Session of the Conference; and Right: Delegates and observers picketing the Pegasus Hotel following the Conference

The 3rd Delegates' Conference of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG) was held on July 13, 2010 at the Umana Yana, Kingston, Georgetown under the theme "United Representation to Achieve Social and Economic Progress." The Conference reviewed the work of the Federation since its last Conference, discussed matters affecting the Trade Union Movement, and identified issues which are to receive its representation in the ensuing months.

Prime Minister Samuel Hinds, who briefly addressed delegates and observers, noted that FITUG's Conference was being held at an interesting time of challenging issues, some of which required workers' organizations to adopt changes in their strategy. He correctly alluded to the international economic and financial crises which have effected greater hardship on the working people.

The Prime Minister also said that, although the worst seems to have passed, there are questions that a second dip might be on the way. He added that some analysts are sensing the approach of some significant change in the international arena. He pointed out that the old basis for most economic activities, growth and development is that the demand for material goods would keep rising and there would always be growth in production of goods and services.

He stressed, however, that there are limits to growth in production, especially in an era of climate change. This, he explained, could affect one of the fundamental assumptions of economic activity, in that growth, development, production and consumption are not confined.

Cde Komal Chand, one of the Vice Presidents of FITUG, who chaired the proceedings of the Conference, stated that a Union's strength lies in its active, militant, vibrant and democratic organization; and in such circumstances, Unions will be able to defend and protect the in-

terests of their members. He pointed out that the recession, now completing its second year, has not shown any signs of abatement. He said job losses continue unabated, unemployment has reached astonishing figures, and pay cuts and longer pension periods are being imposed in many Western countries.

The President of FITUG, Carvil Duncan, said that the Federation recognizes the need to embrace other trade unions that are weaker. He invited other unions to get onboard with FITUG. Duncan stated that FITUG respects the act of solidarity as very important. He cited the Federation's support of the GB&GWU in its recent imbroglio. In reference to growth and development, he hinted to the Organization's expected affiliation to the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) and the International Trade Union Federation (ITUC).

Referring to the theme of the Conference, Duncan said that FITUG continues to seek to have unity in the Movement. He extended an invitation to other unions to join FITUG if the Guyana Trades Union Congress continues to refuse engagement with FITUG on reconciliation.

Delivering the Feature Address, and issuing several challenges to the delegates of the four unions that make up FITUG, Ralph Ramkarran, Speaker of the National Assembly, touched on the history and struggles of some unions. He spoke of the vision of former President Cheddi Jagan, of the need for statesmanship to heal the rift of trade unions in Guyana, and its development. He pointed to ethnic polarization in the past, and the need, then and now, to apply the law to support workers' rights.

The guest speaker also defended FITUG's stance of supporting the views of the administration, and of its apparent involvement in politics. He stressed that the days of captive trade unions and

captive trade union leaders, "which are forced to make their choices based on political consideration", are long gone.

"There is nothing wrong with trade unionists having political views and prosecuting those views," Ramkarran said. He added that this situation exists worldwide, and what also exists is that these organizations must represent the interest of their members first and foremost. He opined that the FITUG has not faltered in any way in representing the interest of its members.

Ramkarran noted it is important to recognize that Guyana's workers are woefully under-organized, adding that a serious deficiency is that too few workers belong to trade unions. "The world is changing, and so must trade unions. The old rhetoric must give way to new reality," Ramkarran declared.

Pointing out that Guyana needs investments of all kinds, Ramkarran added that trade unions and workers also need investments of all kinds. He suggested the setting up of a partnership which would accomplish those objectives.

Ramkarran stated that FITUG needs to utilize the Parliamentary Committees to join the national debate on the direction of the economic and social policies of the country. He referred to the Committees of Economic and Social Services, in which FITUG can make its positions known on certain issues. Doing this, he says, FITUG could influence decisions towards the development of the country.

During the Business Session, delegates and observers received the report of the General Secretary, Cde Kenneth Joseph, which outlined the work of the Federation on important issues since the last Conference. Delegates discussed many important issues which flowed from the report. Finally, delegates unanimously approved resolutions on the National Insurance Scheme, Tax Reform, Recovery of

the Sugar Industry, Unity of the Working Class, HIV/AIDS, Local Government Elections, Climate Change, Crime, Minimum Wages, Solidarity with CCWU at Pegasus Hotel, and Trade Union Unity. The Conference concluded with the election of the following persons to constitute the new Executive Committee to manage the affairs of the Organization for the next two (2) years: Carvil Duncan, President; Komal Chand, Vice President; Sherwood Clarke, Vice President; Kenneth Joseph, General Secretary; Althea Lindo, Principal Assistant Secretary; Sookranie Singh, Assistant Secretary; Derek Thakur, Organizing Secretary; Michael Stephens, Assistant Organizing Secretary; Aslim Singh, Education Secretary; Jagdeo Paul, Press & Publicity Secretary; Committee Members are Narda Mohamed, Irma Glen and Bhagmat Hochand, while Trustees are Victor Seegobin, Premchand Dass and Grantley Culbard.

In an act of solidarity with one of its affiliates, the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union (CCWU), delegates and observers mounted a spirited picketing exercise outside the Pegasus Hotel, protesting the union-busting tactics of the Management to rid the Hotel of unionism. The picketers walked from the Conference venue to the Hotel, which is a short distance away, to engage in the picketing demonstration, which caught the Management by surprise.

Since then, the Trade Union Recognition and Certification Board, has met with Hotel's owner Robert Badal. Mr Badal is reported to have informed the Board that the CCWU is still the recognized bargaining agent for the workers at the Hotel, and has indicated that he is willing to meet with the Union to discuss its concerns and those of the Union's members. It has recently been learnt that the Union has written the Hotel, seeking a meeting to discuss improvements in the Collective Labour Agreement.

# GAWU IN CARACAS



**President Chavez, second from the right, addressing delegates during the Closing Session of the Conference**

The third Trade Union Conference of the Americas and the Caribbean, which was held from July 21 to 25, 2010 in Caracas, Venezuela, concluded successfully. The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) was represented by Cde Aslim Singh, a General Council Member and Research Officer. The Meeting follows the first Meeting held in Managua, Nicaragua in November, 2008, and the second in Sao Paulo, Brazil in September, 2009.

The Meeting which was attended by approximately 500 delegates from thirty-one (31) countries, the meeting focused on the adoption of proposals and actions organized by trade unions to confront many problems affecting them.

The Opening Session of the Conference was addressed by Cde Willy Rangel, Chairman of the Federation of Petroleum Workers of Venezuela, Coordinator of Social Movements Bolivarian 200 and of the Socialist Workers Central of Venezuela; Cde Ramon Cardona, head of the Global Union Federation the Americas; Cde Ivan Gonzalez, leader of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA); Salvador Valdez, Cde General Secretary of the Cuban Trade Union Central (CTC) of Cuba; Cde Juan Castillo, coordinator of the Conference; and Cde Aristobulo Isturis on behalf of the Government of Venezuela.

During the plenary sessions, delegates constituted themselves in three groups – Trade Unions, Political Organizations, and Other Organizations. Each group was required to address the core issues specifically aimed at advancing the liberation process in the Americas and the Caribbean, the creation of an institute or training center for the region, and the establishment of an organization that covers trade unions, social movements, peasants, indigenous, cultural and regional organizations aimed at defending the democratic principles of pluralism, sovereignty against the threats of the neoliberal empire, and to provide an impetus to the overall struggle for change in the region.

In the Trade Union group, more than 150

comrades participated. The delegates of this group noted that the rights of workers and trade unions are under increasing attack particularly in Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica and Peru. Delegates felt that there needs to be concerted unity and solidarity among the working class and trade unions in the region. Delegates also deemed that the predatory, abusive and nefarious practices of transnational corporations should be met by a strong, comprehensive and systematic campaign of denunciation. They called for the enactment of legislation and regulatory framework to allow for workers' control of factories and other resources, and to demand accountability for the violations of labour and human rights, environmental damage, and the thievery of natural resources.

Cde Aslim Singh, in his address, pointed out that the challenges facing workers in the Region result from the Global Economic Crisis arising from the neo-liberal model. He lauded the positive changes in some countries in the Region, which have embarked on policies aimed at significantly reducing poverty and destitution. He called on delegates to work towards fostering workers' unity and united action in confronting the harsh and inhuman conditionalities engendered by the international financial institutions, which have forced working people in the world to greater dispossession and poverty.

At the conclusion of the Meeting, delegates unanimously approved a document titled The Caracas Manifesto. The manifesto noted that, in 2009, there were more than three million newly-unemployed in Latin America and the Caribbean. It noted that the current capitalist crisis provides an opportunity to return to the ideas and revolutionary practice and resistance, and for social liberation throughout the countries in the region. Delegates resolved to ensure the widest unity of workers in the world, in order to fight for their rights against capital, and for social emancipation.

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## Stop the Threat against Venezuela NOW! - FITUG

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG) wishes to endorse the Joint Solidarity Statement recently issued by a number of international associations from Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, the Philippines, and dozens of other nations.

The statement expresses solidarity with the Government and People of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the face of the apparent military connivance between Colombia and the United States of America. FITUG, the largest trade union body in Guyana, comprising the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), the Guyana Labour Union (GLU), the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE), and the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union (CCWU), shares the view that any problems between or among South American neighbours ought to be settled right there amongst themselves, unless or until they invite third parties.

FITUG also views with serious concern the possibility of military aggression against the people of Venezuela by the Colombian Government, which could be supported by the United States of America using its seven military bases recently installed in Colombia.

This matter has arisen from the recent events when the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was accused, on July 22, 2010, at the Extraordinary Session of the Organization of American States in Washington, by the Colombian Government of promoting, supporting and maintaining a relationship with armed organizations from Colombia, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The accusations are based only on images, which have never been substantiated or subjected to verification.

These current moves by the right-wing Colombian government are clearly an attempt backed by the US to justify a pre-emptive attack on Venezuela and its people. There has been a pattern of false allegations against Hugo Chavez's government in recent years as part of the US-backed campaign to dismantle the revolutionary process taking place in Venezuela.

Since the election of President Hugo Chavez in 1998 and the beginning of Bolivarian revolutionary processes, Venezuela has posed a great challenge to the US imperialist domination in Lat-

in America, as well as capitalist establishment in the region. The revolutionary process - with a popular democratic participation in Venezuela carrying the banner of "Socialism in the 21st Century" - has been an inspiration to people around the world seeking alternatives to neoliberal capitalist world order.

Considering the historical interference of the United States in internal matters of other countries and regions, such as in Iran and the Korean Peninsula, we are fearful that the US may exploit the current Venezuela-Colombia crisis as an entry point to carry out military aggression against Venezuela, as it has done many times elsewhere in the past. The attack on Venezuela has the aim to crush the revolutionary processes taking place in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, and to re-enact US imperial doctrine in the region. We are very aware of the potential impact that these negative actions could have on the Venezuelan people and their ongoing revolutionary process, and on the international community.

As these apprehensions are very real, we would like to express our continuous support for the democratic and peaceful revolutionary process in Venezuela, and we would like to extend our solidarity to the people of Venezuela who are striving to build a better world.

We call upon:

1. The Colombian Government to stop its constant lies, malicious allegations and threats against Venezuela and engage with Venezuela, to resolve the crisis by peaceful diplomatic means, in order to rebuild its relations with the rest of the region;
2. The US Government to shut down all its military bases and installations in Latin America, as well as other parts of the world;
3. All governments with conscience to fully support the Venezuelan Government's insistence on its right to sovereignty, and strongly denounce any US-backed military action against the people of Venezuela.
4. All people and organizations that support social justice and genuine democracy to support any solidarity action that may be needed to defend Venezuela and the revolution in Venezuela against constant military threats.

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