

# Guyana Public Service Union

## PRESS RELEASE

The Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) welcomes members of the print and electronic media to its press conference which is called to deal with urgent matters that are exceptionally serious and ought to be similarly important not only to the membership of the Union but to every Guyanese.

Even though Article 38G of the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana guarantees the Public Service to be free from political influence, it is clear that political machinations are afoot to destabilize the Public Service. I would, nevertheless, like to thank Public Servants for being resolute and professional in the discharge of their duties of their various offices.

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought additional financial burdens for Public Servants, the employed poor. It was the PPP/C Government in the year 1993 that agreed to address this negative circumstance, but did nothing to uplift Public Servants to the level of a living wage. This situation dragged on and now financial hardships are being heaped upon Public Servants and the nation by extension.

It is now an inescapable fact that the PPP/C Government of Guyana is very reluctant to better the lot of Public Servants, as with a national budget of \$552.9B, backed by a drawdown of US\$200M or G\$41.7B has not motivated it to engage the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) in the necessary process of Collective Bargaining towards an agreement for a living wage for Public Servants.

It is important to note that this Government following its ascension to office in the year 2020 did nothing to alleviate the pains and sufferings of its workforce, other than to offer a miniscule cash grant of \$25,000 in the year 2020 and a year later a paltry award of a taxable seven percent (7%) across-the-board increase, which taken as a whole could not absorb the impact of COVID-19 price increases. To worsen matters, there was noted misrepresentation by Government about the lack of time to satisfy the legal requirement of meeting with the GPSU.

One would have thought that the Government having recognised its past blunders would have sought to correct these in the year 2022. However, amidst spiraling price increases, Government has ignored its responsibilities to Public Servants, while embarking on costly political excursions, mostly within its traditional political constituents. It has also committed the public coffers to billions of dollars in grants, aid and other financial benefits for what appears to be carefully chosen segments of the population, while allowing larger masses of the population to suffer in anguish from the onslaught of the constantly rising prices.

The action of Government appears discriminatory, given that GPSU has written severally, since the year 2020, requesting collective bargaining on Public Servants wages, salaries and allowances, to no avail. There have also been public

outcries in the visual, print and social media about the treatment of Public Servants, but Government has not shown any inclination to bring relief to its workforce. It is now the end of July 2022, twenty-four months after being sworn into office and seven months into a new financial year, without any movement towards meeting Government's responsibilities and obligations under legally binding Collective Labour Agreements, Labour Laws, ILO Conventions and workers' rights enshrined in the Constitution.

Most recently, Government has sought and used its one seat majority to approve supplementary provisions of \$44.7B to do a myriad of things, none of which is related to alleviating the burdens of the employed poor. As the largest employer in Guyana, Government is certainly setting bad and dangerous examples to the other employers it must administer through Government's regulatory body, the Ministry of Labour.

The very posture of this PPP/C Government, mirrors its predecessors, even though President Mohamed Irfaan Ali repeatedly proclaimed a theme of "One Guyana." This "One Guyana" narrative has a suspicious connotation of the "One China" claim that is currently being used to deny Taiwan the recognition as an independent country. It therefore seems that the President's utterances are merely smokescreens, obviously not channeled to good governance, but craftily created to deceive.

This belief is rooted in the fact that the President's actions are dissimilar to his spoken word in the consideration of Public Service Workers. For example, in 2016 while in opposition, he chided the APNU/AFC Government for its failure to utilize collective bargaining towards determination of salary increases, but following his assumption as President in 2020, scant regard was paid to this legal requirement. In 2021, prior to the award of the miserly seven percent (7%) across-the-board increase the President proclaimed that his Government was negotiating the outcome, but this clearly was a misrepresentation. The agreement by the President's appointed team that a COVID-19 risk allowance was due and payable to healthcare workers, but the subsequent betrayal of these workers after the cessation of industrial action, is another such example. There are other instances, which give rise to the unassailable conclusion that the wily President is not committed to good governance, free from discrimination.

It is unbelievable for a Government that openly tries to sell itself as an upholder of democratic norms to so wantonly breach the rule of law, without redress from civil society and the diplomatic corps.

On a closing note, one must consider the fact that the PPP/C Government, while in opposition decried the Granger's Administration for its move to increase the salaries of the members of the Executive and Parliamentarians. Not only did they enjoy those increases in the opposition benches, but they continue to do so now as members of the Executive, without care or concern for other Public Servants that implement its policies and administer the agencies of Government. It is

apposite to note that this hypocritical posture began even in 1992, where even after being sworn into office the PPP/C Government approved for themselves significant increases in salaries with less fanfare than the Granger Administration and concern for the working class.

It is because of the circumstances outlined above and the prevailing COVID-19 Pandemic that the GPSU has sought legal advice on the PPP/C Government's continued disregard for the rule of law, including the Constitution of Guyana, and its obligation to ILO Conventions ratified by the Parliament of Guyana and are in force, that arrangements are being made to challenge Government's obstinacy in the Courts of Law of which GPSU has its trust and confidence, hoping that justice would be served, soonest. Even as we speak arrangements are being concluded to move this process forward.

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