

## CAPACITY BUILDING - PREPARING CARIBBEAN PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS FOR AN ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT IN TRANSITION

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*The working class never goes away; it is the vast majority, but it frequently goes unnoticed by the media that frame our perception of society*

*Kim Moody, 1997*

### INTRODUCTION

**I**ncreasingly international developments are posing a number of challenges to the labour movement that include falling union membership across the industrial world and a perceived lack of interest by young workers. Added to this, some experts are proclaiming the working class to be a thing of the past as they present a diagnosis of “paralysis due to globalisation, fragmentation, [and] flexibilisation.”<sup>1</sup> In actual fact within developing countries as labour becomes more urbanized, the one commodity these persons have to sell is their labour, thus creating a population that is more working class.<sup>2</sup>

There appears to be no question in the minds of workers and indeed the society at large that the trade union movement in the Caribbean has lost its power base. In speaking to trade unionists across the Caribbean, both young and senior on the issue has the Caribbean labour movement lost its power base? There is a resounding yes. It has been opined that yes they have lost their power base and what wounds have been inflicted are self-inflicted. There is also the view of a leading Caribbean trade unionist that the movement has allowed politicians to take over the union compounded by the fact that<sup>3</sup> changes are taking place in society and the trade unions are failing to deal with them.

Currently there are several major external and internal environmental forces that are impacting negatively on Caribbean trade unions, specifically Caribbean public sector unions. This paper will focus on Caribbean public sector unions (CPSU) since for the most part literature on their development is both limited in quantity and scope.

One may argue, and with good reason, that the paucity of literature on CPSU is connected to the fact that these organisations have for the most part failed to maintain adequate archival records, especially those relating to the various phases of union development. Moreover there has been a tendency to emphasise the contribution of the working class unions to the overall political, social and economic development of the Caribbean.

There is a distinct need to correct the imbalance in the treatment of private and public sector unions, particularly as history would show that CPSU are a key element in the social, political and economic tapestry of the Caribbean. Added to this is the fact that the process of rectification of the imbalance is interwoven with the important task of rejuvenating CPSU. As the rectification of the problem is discussed a number of external and internal challenges must be taken into consideration as we address the issue of *“Capacity building – preparing Caribbean public sector unions for an economic environment in transition.”*

No solutions are written in stone, and CPSU must be navigators of their future, working with their members and allies to chart their course. The nature of this research therefore demands that a socio-historical background be provided in order to understand the current difficulties confronting the public sector unions of the Caribbean.

## **SOCIO HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The emergence and growth of the trade union movement in the Caribbean in essence is the history of the liberation of bonded labour – former slaves and indentured workers. Caribbean labour did not create history under chosen circumstances but under circumstances created by the plantocracy.

The British West Indian Colonies were organized to produce wealth and not contentment. This resulted in keen competition for the West Indian colonies as it regarded sugar sales in the British home market. For the British colonies this economic factor was also compounded by the Emancipation of slaves on August 1, 1834.<sup>4</sup> This historic Act did not change the lot of the predominantly black working class in the British West Indies and it left them still facing social economic and political conditions that were atrocious.

With the 1838 enfranchisement of 800,000 former slaves in the nineteen (19) British West Indian colonies the local authorities, planters and the merchants failed dismally to improve the lot of these workers.<sup>5</sup> The late nineteen century witnessed increased unemployment, lower wages and heightened suffering due to the 1890s depression on one hand and the reorganization of the sugar industry on the other.<sup>6</sup> This economic hardship continued into the early twentieth century. In many of the British West Indian colonies many demobilized soldiers on their return home from World War I faced unemployment and were badly

disillusioned with the racial discrimination they faced during their tour of duty for the 'mother country'. These men swelled the ranks of the discontented and were not afraid or easily intimidated by the standard show of force.<sup>7</sup>

The great Depression of the 1930s was also an internal catastrophe for the colonies shattering the mono-crop economies of the Caribbean.<sup>8</sup> During this period there was often widespread discontentment and this was reflected in the occasional uprising that occurred with considerable loss of life at times.

The underlying factor for these disturbances was the economic inequities that were supported by colonial rule, and compounded by the issue of race. The workers of the day did not have a voice. The colonial administration viewed social conflict as a matter for the police and trade Unions at this time were illegal, as a result the colonial states strengthened its police forces with a view to coerce and quell disturbances.<sup>9</sup>

However, it would be between 1933 and 1938 that a series of social political disturbances would witness the emergence of the trade union movement as it is recognised today in what is now referred to as the English Speaking Caribbean.

The political and constitutional break with the Colonial masters that resulted from the 1930s uprisings of the working class was a struggle for a democratic society and nationhood. It was an attempt to break the economic and psychological dependence of a people - a dependency that was grounded in colonialism. This created the context for a corresponding socio-economic revolution. Of note, there were a number of Regional developments other than the trade union movement that emerged out of the disturbances, one of the more relevant being the West Indian Royal Commission by Royal Warrant on August 5, 1938 with the following terms of reference:

To investigate social and economic conditions in Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Windward Islands, and matters connected therewith, and to make recommendations.<sup>10</sup>

In its final report the Commission made a number of important observations and recommendations with respect to trade unionism in the Caribbean. Key observations made were that nowhere did the Commission "encounter opposition to the principle that relations in industry should be governed by agreements between the employers and trade unions....", and practically all the witnesses that appeared before them agreed that "collective bargaining [was] both necessary and desirable."<sup>11</sup>

Significant recommendations made by the Commission called for legal obstacles to be removed, and legislation put in place to protect "trade unions against actions for damages and legalise peaceful picketing;"<sup>12</sup> the prohibition of

the employment of children under the age of (fourteen) 14 and that stringent penalties be inflicted for the infringement of this prohibition; the establishment of workers compensation schemes based on the Canadian practice established in 1915; and the passing of legislation providing for the establishment of Wages Boards to consider questions relating to hours of employment, wage rates and other conditions of labour, particularly in Agriculture and other areas of the private sector.<sup>13</sup>

In its closing chapter the Commission recognising that it ought to become more difficult to attract also recommended that salaries and conditions of service of civil servants in the colonies should conform to the general colonial level with a view to attracting suitable persons to fill the higher professional and administrative posts.<sup>14</sup>

Sir Walter Citrine, a prominent member of this Commission and Secretary to the British Trade Union Congress was one of several British trade Unionists and Labour Members of Parliament who would influence the development of the British Caribbean Trade union movement through the furnishing of information, lending advice and offering scholarships to selected persons.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of the organized labour turned out to be the foundation for the subsequent political developments in the 1940s and 1950s and it was these consequences that gave the labour rebellions of the 1930s their distinct socio-historical meaning.<sup>16</sup>

## CONTEXT

At a glance labour worldwide remains predominantly organized in trade unions. Hence any new roles the movement adopts will be linked to the traditional areas of protecting workers rights, better preparing persons for work by educating them about their rights and responsibilities and those of the employer, and the struggle for wider liberation and social liberation.<sup>17</sup>

The trade union movement worldwide is at a crossroads. Industrial societies are experiencing a period of economic consolidation that has had an impact on political, economic and social stability resulting in dramatic structural changes occurring in regional and international markets. In recognising these factors the international labour movement has also consolidated its resources to better fight for the rights of workers.

The birth of the Global Union Federation (GUF), Union Network International (UNI) in 2001 is one such example that has had a direct impact on the CPSU. This GUF is a merger of four International Trade Secretariats: Fédération Internationale des Employés et des Techniciens (FEIT), Communications International, International Graphics Federation and Median Entertainment International. CPSU affiliated to this GUF have been afforded the

opportunity to build the capacity of their membership in such areas as information and communication technology, negotiating and organising skills, and project writing.

Despite this consolidation, it is perceived that the trade union movement has been unable to assert itself with respect to representation as it regards employment conditions, influence and strength. Moody argues that mergers are an inadequate response to the problems of trade unions. In his opinion two of the most essential tasks for Unions in the era of crisis and globalization are first, to mobilize within their already existing ranks and second, to organize the unorganized.<sup>18</sup> This argument is supported in part by a senior Caribbean trade unionists when he suggested some what harshly that trade unionists are spending too much time fighting against each other (poaching) and ignoring the thousands of workers that are suffering and unorganized, adding that Organisers of today though lettered lack common sense and they are lazy.<sup>19</sup>

History will show that this is not the first time that the labour movement has been dismissed as obsolete, and today similar to the rest of the society is faced with the challenge of sustainable development with the feminist vision providing a number of new perspectives for trade unions.<sup>20</sup> According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in spite of the fact women participation in the workforce is on the increase and they constitute most of the new members in trade unions, they remain under-represented in unions. For example, out of the total membership of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) of 156 million in some 148 countries, women account for about 61 million.<sup>21</sup>

As it regards trade union leadership in the Caribbean women are seriously under - represented with only two females holding the leadership position.<sup>22</sup> This is supported by available figures which also reveal that women worldwide are seriously under-represented, comprising only once percent of the decision making bodies even though they make up 39 percent of the global trade union membership.<sup>23</sup>

## **REGIONAL CONCERNS**

At present there are a number of key developments that can be readily identified as issues of concern the CPSU. Out of these key developments there are four issues that will continue to attract the resources of the labour movement, and which must be successfully approached if the CPSU are to meaningfully influence the social and economic policy of the region. These issues can be easily identified as:

- Globalisation;
- Constituent representation;

- Institutional strengthening; and
- Public-private partnerships.

Consideration of these issues is central to tabling a number of recommendations that will provide for a more meaningful, influential and sustained Caribbean public sector trade union movement.

## GLOBALISATION

The Caribbean economies are operating in a 21<sup>st</sup> century market place that is still being driven by 19<sup>th</sup> century economic practices. The current economic trends in the region continue to be informed and influenced by developments taking place in the United States and Europe. However, it must be pointed out that such influence is nothing new and has been in place since the arrival of Columbus in 1492. Historically, the Caribbean area has been dominated by the expanding European political economy and within the last 50 years the region has increasingly come under the sway of the United States hegemony.<sup>24</sup> Hence it may be argued that the Caribbean economy has been experiencing the effects of globalisation for more than 500 years. Whether we refer to it as mercantile rule, colonial rule or the new world order, the integration of Caribbean markets with respect to goods and services into the world economy has become fundamental part of the history and future of the Caribbean.

Today much of the new market-driven world order is politically negotiated, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) to name a few are negotiated by national governments.<sup>25</sup> Economically the world remains uneven, fragmented and nationally divided. Moody argues that the process of the crystallization of international economic integration has actually increased aspects of fragmentation and inequity between nations.<sup>26</sup> One may therefore agree with Kiely when he writes, "globalisation refers to a world in which societies, cultures, politics and economics have come together," thus lending to the fragmentation.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless there are three distinct features of globalisation that can be readily defined. These are:

- the globalisation of communications and information technology,
- economic liberalisation, and
- political globalisation.

Of these three features this paper will examine the first two.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

For 24 hours a day 365 days a year the entire world is connected in real time with unlimited information available electronically to any person or entity who wishes it and can access it through the internet. The Caribbean trade union movement must be able to utilise this technology to their advantage without obstacles. But there are obstacles and they are real.

The prerequisite for being on line is a line. However in the Caribbean where lines are available, but out dated computers are in place making access to the Internet virtually impossible. President of one of the leading CPSU opines there is a need to reform the way business is done in terms of the technology; it is no longer that unions are without technology but it is obsolete and instead of supporting the base of the union it is hindering their development.<sup>28</sup> Technology has become a key element in the development of the Caribbean trade union movement. It is not only a question of solidarity any more it is a question of survival.

Technology is fuelling change in public sector employment and this is manifesting itself in the public sector reform initiative taking place across the Caribbean. Adequate access to information and communication technology have equipped CPSU to not only provide alternative strategies within the public sector reform process, but be an active player in the decision making process of the public sector reform exercise as members of the public sector reform committees.

A well-defined example is the recently concluded Job Evaluation Exercise of the Barbados Public Service. The National Union of Public Workers drew heavily on information posted on the Canadian Union of Public Employees website, was well informed by the Public Services International via electronic mail, and with financial assistance the NUPW was able to acquire technical assistance from Sis Daina Greene, Labour Advisor.<sup>29</sup> Technical assistance received was in the form of training, a critique of the Job Evaluation report, and an evaluation of the job evaluation process, with much of the information being exchanged electronically.

English language dominates the Internet; the use of electronic mail continues to increase and language is becoming less of a problem with computer software companies offering decoders for many languages. International labour institutions are developing their Web pages in different languages making them more user friendly to the worldwide labour movement. Nevertheless for the CPSU the language barrier is a concern. Though electronically connected it is difficult to deal with facsimiles or for that matter phone calls from affiliates in languages other than English. There is therefore a need to either train present staff in languages other than English or employ persons who are bi/multilingual.

## ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is driving economic liberalisation. Then United States President, William Clinton in delivering a speech in 1997 on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Multilateral Trading System stated "[g]lobalisation is not a policy choice - it is a fact".

Fundamentally, the WTO is the only organisation that deals with the global rules of trade between nations. Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. The WTO sees as its goal "to improve the welfare of the peoples of the member countries."<sup>30</sup>

The order of the day is extensive trade liberalisation. Member states of the Caribbean have become signatory to the GATT/WTO agreement. In so doing they have increasingly exposed the numbers of private sector workers whose jobs are directly or indirectly dependent on trade in this open world trade regime. However, the jobs of public sector workers remain protected since services provided by the public service are in the non-traded sectors.

The Caribbean, similar to other developing countries wishing to improve the standard of living of its people is economically vulnerable due to external shocks that may occur in the international financial markets and the shifting world commodity prices for its agriculture produce, for example bananas, sugar and rice. Disadvantages in trade lead to little or no economic growth and development with resulting adverse consequences for the most vulnerable in those societies of developing countries: the aged, unorganised women, the young workers, and children.

Consequently the CPSU supported the call made in 2003 at the Annual Caribbean Public Services Association Conference held in Antigua, for greater transparency and the involvement of the labour movement in new rounds of WTO negotiations. It is the view of Bro DePena, General Secretary of the Caribbean Congress of Labour that there is a need to have a greater say in the negotiation process presently taking place, and argues that there is a "need to crash the party" at the international trade negotiation level as well as the need to make informed statements challenging what is happening and its impact on labour and social policy - there must be social consensus.<sup>31</sup> For the CPSU to "crash the party" the development of a strategy for the way forward is necessary. The strategy is yet to be considered.

As it regards the establishment of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) which will include the Caribbean, United States of America, countries of Central America and Canada, social consensus is very important, especially in the protection of the rights of labour and to ensure the region is competitive as it regards the efficient production of quality goods, the development of quality product differentials.

These negotiations are viewed as being highly technical and closed in nature. There is a measure of concern as it regards the potential impact of this agreement on the delivery of public services, labour rights, the rights of women and the environment.<sup>32</sup> "It is suggested that the FTAA will be a WTO plus, that is it will seek to include areas in its negotiations that are not currently covered by the WTO".<sup>33</sup>

The FTAA is viewed by the Government of Barbados as a tool for progressive liberalization and this brings to the fore a number of legitimate concerns. The FTAA must qualify under the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and it is the foreign actors in the form of Multinational Organisations that dominate the sectors that are being negotiated. Countries of different sizes and levels of development are involved and there is a need to protect the labour of the region by ensuring that existing labour standards of the Region are not eroded.

The Caribbean Policy Development Centre point out the Caribbean region continues to hold that labour standards should not form part of trade agreements. The Caribbean has for a long time distinguished itself as recognising and implementing core labour standards and is more than capable of meeting any reasonably established standards in the agreement.<sup>34</sup>

The General Secretary of the CCL is concerned that when considering the trading blocs, CSME, FTAA, WTO and the Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) that workers are asking what do these acronyms mean to the region? Unless the ordinary men and women understand what they mean they will not work to the benefit of the society. In his opinion many citizens of the Region see these issues as belonging to the ambit of the politicians, that is, leave it to the political directorate to do what they deem best.<sup>35</sup> To date the CSME has reared its head in an ugly way, the Daily Nation Newspaper reported Barbadians believe persons from the OECS countries and Guyana are going to come in and take away their jobs, or that there will be an influx of persons fleeing the stark economic conditions in their countries.<sup>36</sup>

The 1989 Heads of Government Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) Conference took a decision by way of declaration - Grand Anse Declaration - to move towards the creation of a CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). This decision was taken with a view to strengthening the Caribbean States economically and politically. With in such a structure the Community would be better placed to face the global economy on a sound footing. In addition the opportunities for investment, employment and trade would be immensely improved within the Community.<sup>37</sup>

The Public Services of the region and its Quasi-Governmental organisations are recognised as being central to the implementation and operation of the CSME since they are the agencies responsible for carrying out Government mandate and the implementation of Government policy.<sup>38</sup> The

creation of the CSME is being facilitated by way of the implementation of eight chapters. This paper will take into consideration Chapter III that provides for Macro-Economic and Sectoral Policies Coordination.

One may argue that Chapter III will not impact significantly on the public workers of the region. However, when implemented Chapter III will deal specifically with, "Cross border employment of natural resources, human resources, capital, technology and management capabilities for the production of goods and services on a sustained basis."

Areas of immediate concern that will emerge for public workers will relate to qualifications, employment opportunities and social security. A number of social security schemes are already part of a CARICOM Reciprocal Agreement on Social Security and are paying contributory pensions. This Agreement provides for the Totalisation of contributions. Fundamentally once a worker has made contributions in two or more CARICOM territories in which he/she has been employed, they will receive their pension based on their total proportionate contributions.

The CPSU have more than a vested interest in ensuring viable social security schemes, especially given the region's aging population, the effect of inflation, and the desire to consistently improve living standards. CPSU must insist on having a say/seat on the boards of social security scheme.

Media personnel, university Graduates, cultural workers and sports personnel are travelling freely within CARICOM. All workers will need to have the necessary qualifications to work in CARICOM. To this end Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados have been in the vanguard of developing Occupational Standards and National Vocational Qualifications that will eventually facilitate the easier movement of Labour.

Investment in human capital will therefore become more important regionally. As globalisation takes a firmer foot-hold competition will be greater for workers worldwide. Though the CSME will offer some measure of protection for the Regional workforce, the free movement of labour within the Region may disadvantage some of the island states if quality jobs are not provided fast enough to absorb not only the University Graduates, but also professionally trained and skilled persons. This factor challenges the CPSU to implement education programmes that will assist their members in increasing their marketability and placing them in a better position to meet the skills and professional needs of the Region as well as preparing them for the impact of the full onslaught of the free movement of labour.

As the development of the CSME continues to crystallise presently and in the foreseeable future, Chapter III will have a greater impact on private sector workers as opposed to public sector workers. However, there is the tendency for governments' to divest quasi-governmental organisations and create state owned companies which are private companies set up by Government, thus leading to

more and more public workers being exposed to the influences of the CSME and globalisation.

Under the CSME there are provisions for the free movement of labour and capital. However there are a number of restrictions to the free movement of labour with only certain categories being granted free movement - university graduates, media workers, musicians and sports persons. CPSU will need to consider new ways and means of representing the region's mobile workforce, as well as providing new services. It is evident that there is a need for more cooperation and sharing of information among the organisations of the region. The hitherto anathema of amalgamations and mergers within the regions must give way to a willingness to form regional trade unions.

### **CONSTITUENT REPRESENTATION**

We are living in an age where change in the world economy is occurring faster than ever before. The resultant impact on the labour movement can be of great benefit or it can bring numerous problems.<sup>39</sup> In considering this point it has been opined by the President of the CCL that there must be an attitudinal change both from within the movement and externally from the employer, and added to this the leadership style must change in the movement to reflect the changing times. It is also his view that the trade union leadership needs to examine how to deal with the current situation and find solutions instead of fighting for the same piece of the pie.<sup>40</sup> In supporting this view the General Secretary of the CCL pointed out that the societal attitudes to trade unionists must also change; too often they are viewed in a negative light, as hooligans and obstructionists.<sup>41</sup>

Consideration of the structure of CPSU constituents reveal that the membership base of the CPSU is wide and varied and is one of the greatest assets that the Organisations have. Unfortunately they are not utilizing this asset to their benefit.

Public workers have strength that they do not recognise they have. Public sector unions and the public service for that fact have specialists in any discipline they can speak of or think about. A lot of these specialists would not go up for election in the union due to the infighting that goes on. The General Secretary of the CCL argues that public servants are specialists and will generally be sympathetic to the union even if they are not members. He goes on to point out that in the early twentieth century civil servants were of the colonial elite. Today public servants are the sons and daughters of working class people and understand where they come from and their responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

A major concern highlighted by a young trade union leader was the perceived lack of interest by young workers in the trade union. For him it appears that older functionaries view youth with a vision as trying to take over -

which is short sighted – they are not looking at the survival of the labour movement. In supporting this view he stated that “the present leadership lack the capacity to change and do not have the mental capacity and ability to move forward, they have been around for generations and they are territorial because it is about them, the status it brings and doors that are opened to them.”<sup>43</sup>

This attitude of today holds true for yesterday, what has compounded the situation is technology. The movement has done very little to attract young workers and because of their technological education young workers believe they can take care of themselves. It is only when young workers have a serious grievance they come to the union for advice and not necessarily representation.

Trade unions must accept that today the young workers are not married to their job and the employers are capitalizing on this. The theory tabled by employers is, year one young workers give of their best, year two and three their productivity falls off and by year four these young workers are doing a search again. Young workers on the other hand give the perspective of year one give of their best to their employer expecting reward and recognition. If this is not forthcoming from the employer their interest begin to wane in year two and by year three these young workers begin to look outwardly, seeking new employment. If however, upward mobility takes place then these young workers may spend more time.

The beneficial representation of women in the Caribbean Labour movement is one of the key elements in the renewal of the movement. This is not an easy task due to the socialisation within our communities and the perceptions of members.

It is suggested by the General Secretary of the CCL that “our men believe that women must play a secondary role in the affairs of the trade union and this is seen where the membership base is predominated by women” (see Appendix I). He goes on to add that this is advocated by the perception of women involved in the trade unions who mainly believe that “the trade union is a man’s world” and in his opinion women appear to be satisfied as functionaries at the lower level due to the pressures that they must endure at the upper levels.<sup>44</sup>

The reality is sadly one where society has been socialized to view women as service functionaries – they are wives mothers, girlfriends, and some will suffer domestically, it is a situation where accusations are hurled at them. Ironically it is accepted when they work a shift job – nursing – but are elected to a senior position they are accused of neglecting their female duties.

## **INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING**

Users of public services who are themselves in most cases public workers, would be better served not only by a quality workforce that sees the need to accept change, but a workforce that is committed to the success of their

respective countries, secure in the knowledge that their jobs and conditions of service/employment are not under threat. A workforce whose career paths are known and whose recruitment and promotion are fair and transparent. A workforce provided with the necessary resources to discharge its responsibilities.

CPSU must ensure that they are active stakeholders in the public sector reform initiatives now sweeping the region, initiatives that include performance review development systems, job evaluations and customer charters. In this vein the CPSU must be leaders, facilitators, problem solvers and coaches; and not merely carry out the role of interventionists. They must assist with the creation of a cadre of effective managers as well as a conducive work environment, where public workers are free to perform their duties in a professional and efficient manner without inappropriate intrusions and are not subject to the unfair labour practices of discrimination, victimisation and unfair promotional practices.

The CPSU to fulfill the above mandate need to look at where they have failed and consider how to create successes out of these failures with a view to strengthening the Caribbean trade unions. Several areas can be identified where the CPSU have failed. These are as follows:

- To constantly examine its modus operandi;
- To keep abreast of developments and thus the way it is doing business;
- There is not sufficient emphasis on education;
- Lack of research;
- Not sufficient being done to inform membership and the external public on what they are doing; and
- Being locked into mainly what they do best – collective bargaining.

It is the opinion of a student that in addressing these failures the CPSU must develop their own policy and negotiate around such policy especially when the business of the union is to protect the rights of the workers.<sup>45</sup>

### **PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPs)**

Moody in his analysis of the impact of globalization on unions internationally argues that corporatism has domesticated the trade unions, house broken them and fitted them into the national family as one of the tame cats; they have cajoled experienced trade unionists into partnerships where 'competitiveness', globalisation and solidarity require an alleged new spirit of cooperation for the protection of workers jobs and the safeguarding of the economy.<sup>46</sup>

In recent times, the CPSU have witnessed attempts to institute what may be described as private public partnerships in traditional public sector entities. The two most glaring examples to date in Barbados are at the Grantley Adams

International Airport (GAIA) and the General Post Office (GPO).<sup>47</sup> PPPs have been touted as the answer to funding problems in public sector entities. CPSU have been able to assert that the so-called benefits of such a system have been greatly exaggerated. In fact, the results have been disappointing with a number of shortcomings:

- Governments exaggerate the savings on both capital and operating costs.
- The cost of private sector borrowing was well in excess of the government's costs.
- Governments accept almost all of the risks leaving the private sector with little or none. This is in spite of private sector claims that one of the benefits to government is the shift of risk to the private sector.
- Private sector involvement leads to information being classified as sensitive to business interests resulting in a loss of accountability to taxpayers.
- There is a high probability that the service or building will have foreign ownership. Even if the ownership is local in the first instance it can easily be shifted to the off-shore sector as corporate interests are sold or merged.
- If user fees are to be charged there likely will be no limit on the amount of the fees or the profits made by the private sector player.
- A major motivation for government is to shift the debt of these projects off their books through lease back arrangements. It doesn't work. The liability still belongs to the government.
- Senior government personnel can be drained away by the private sector partner diminishing the human resource capacity of government. Often these senior managers were part of the group awarding the contract to the private sector in the first place. This raises significant accountability problems. Information provision and decision-making must be transparent.
- Fragility of the private sector company in a volatile market can result in meaningless performance guarantees.
- Workers pay a price in PPPs as wages, benefits and pensions can be sacrificed in a PPP agreement over which they have no control. Workloads are often increased significantly placing workers under tremendous pressure to meet service guarantees.

This list is certainly not exhaustive and the issues raised are obviously a serious concern for CPSU, workers and the Caribbean public in general.<sup>48</sup>

As it regards the representation of workers employed by PPPs, the CPSU need to ensure that collective agreements are negotiated that ensure the rights of these workers are protected.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Persons join trade unions for their individual needs and reasons whether it be collective in outlook or not. People are like sheep they follow a strong leader. Only a few will actually stop and think before they move forward. In the Caribbean the trade union is a stakeholder in every aspect of governance, whether it be at the social partnership level or at the constituent level.<sup>49</sup> The trade union must therefore command the respect of society.

Trade unions need to step out of their traditional roles and become more concerned with national issues. Being a public sector union is no longer about representation of public workers but about issues that affect the public who are themselves workers; and based on the regional concerns identified in this paper, a number of recommendations are tabled for consideration:

## **PROFESSIONALISM**

Perception though an impression is reality. Workers' organizations need to see themselves not only as their members as well. Hence the role played by workers' organizations in society must be above reproach and command the respect of their members and society. To this end officials of these organizations must set standards that workers can emulate and maintain. For professionalism is about performance, and once attained must be constantly worked at if it is to be maintained.

## **SOLIDARITY**

Workers' organizations are as strong as its membership. Recognising that there will be differences in opinions among members and staff alike due to differing personalities, there is a need to combine tolerance and professionalism to enable unity on a common front while at the same time supporting diversity of opinion.

## **MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES**

The progress of trade unions is hindered by the unwillingness of older management to incorporate new ways of management. This is also due to the rejection of advice of younger staff members and this can be viewed as a form of

micromanagement that can lead to the destruction of the union. There must be a willingness to change.

### **BUILDING BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIPS**

Alliances must be strategic. Politicians do it well through campaigning and CPSU need to look at how to adapt this strategy to suit their needs. It is recognised that the CPSU do not have the where with all do the research necessary to develop sound policy concerning regional economic issues. As such consideration should be given to building alliances with such NGOs as the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) whose purpose is to develop and work towards the implementation of policies that are in the interest of Caribbean People.

### **RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG WORKERS**

CPSU are challenged with respect to the recruitment of young workers. Young workers have developed their own culture, needs and aspirations which are Americanised. This is evidenced in the way they dress, speak, preference of food an preference of music. In essence they are the generation of the twenty-first century and they are vital for the future development of the CPSU. CPSU will need to look at developing a new and different kind of relationship between themselves and young workers including those who are in the final years of secondary and tertiary educational institutions and more importantly who are the future labour force

### **REDEFINITION OF THE ACCEPTED MEANING OF PUBLIC SERVICES**

In the past CPSU have allowed themselves to be restricted to representing only those employed by government employees or in quasi-government agencies, public sector unions in many countries have expanded beyond this narrow field. There is a need to consider all services, especially the ones that are considered public services but are privately owned. A clear example to be considered is that of transportation, in what is known in the Caribbean as the min-bus culture.

### **EDUCATION**

Education is necessary to build the understanding of the masses of current issues and the response of the union to such issues. It enables the CPSU and its membership base to sing from the same hymn sheet. The people of the Caribbean cannot progress unless they understand what progress requires and it

is through education that such can and will occur. An informed trade union movement can change both political and public opinion to enable social gains to be accomplished.

## **RESEARCH**

Research is a problem for CPSU. It is perceived as some thing difficult and belonging to the academics at the University. The CPSU can no longer avoid research. This is a necessary tool. Trade union education and research can surround any issue that affects the lives of workers –workers’ rights and standard of living. Research can therefore assist CPSU to:

- understand the key issues affecting workers and worker organisations;
- enable workers to know and understand their rights;
- understand the philosophy that guides trade union positions on key issues whether at the local, regional or international level;
- make the important linkages between regional and international issues and local actions; and
- identify feasible actions/strategies to be employed when dealing with the issues.

CPSU need to develop policy documents on issues concerning Caribbean Public Services. Who better know the need of regional public workers than the regional public workers themselves? We are the ones wearing the shoes and know how they fit. It is time for the CPSU to develop their own policies rather than embracing international policy *carte blanche*. Instead build upon the international policy while at the same time striving to develop our own. That is, ensuring that there is always a Caribbean perspective.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

The Caribbean is unique in that, though viewed as one people they have different behaviours are separated by water, and as a result need to develop agendas to suit their individual island states. The agenda that may work for the European Community Labour Movement many not necessarily work in the Caribbean Community.

Succession planning should be considered as vital especially where permanent secretariats exist. For those that are elected a cadre of young persons must also be groomed to take up the helm as the old passes. Identified persons need to be exposed at the local, regional and international level to enable them to build linkages and networks

## MENTORSHIP

For those active members who join the ranks of the retirees of the Union it is proposed that they come on board and share their experiences and knowledge with young workers, specifically young trade unionists. The expectation would be for the young trade unionists to develop a sense of history and respect for said history, and how the trade union could develop an individual socially and intellectually and if so desired politically. When one considers the political history of the Caribbean almost all the leaders have come out of the trade union movement. Eric Williams and Basdeo Panday of Trinidad & Tobago, Forbes Burnam, Cheedi Jagan and his wife Janet, Guyana, Michael Manley and Edward Seaga of Jamaica and Grantley Adams of Barbados. The emergence of these political leaders speaks to the strength of the Caribbean trade union movement.

## CONCLUSION

When considering the recommendations tabled it can be argued that the full and successful implementation of the above recommendations will depend on constant, well-funded research to correct the problems identified. The Caribbean trade unions need to take research and education seriously and tackle them in a strategic manner and more importantly sustained manner.

## NOTES

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- 1 Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*, Verso, UK 1997 at 9
  - 2 Ibid, p 189
  - 3 Interview with Bro George Depena, General Secretary, Caribbean Congress of Labour, August 26, 2004
  - 4 Ibid, 3
  - 5 Ibid, 3
  - 6 O Nigen Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934 - 39*, Ian Randle Publishers Ltd, 1985, at 7
  - 7 Bolland (1985), p 27
  - 8 Bolland (1985), p 191
  - 9 Bolland (1985), p 7
  - 10 West Indian Royal Commission Report, Cmd 6607, at xiii (herein after referred to as the Moyne Report)
  - 11 Moyne Report, at 197
  - 12 Ibid, at 199
  - 13 Moyne Report, at 201 - 214 (Wages Boards were composed of representatives of employers, workers and the general public appointed by the Government.)
  - 14 Ibid, at 452
  - 15 Bolland (1985), p 4
  - 16 Bolland (1985), p 2
  - 17 Henk Thomas, *Globalisation and the Third World Trade Unions: The Challenge of Rapid Economic Change*, Zed Books, 1995, at 235
  - 18 Moody, p 147
  - 19 Interview with Bro George DePena

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- 20 Ronaldo Munck in Labour Worldwide in the Era of Globalisation, Alternative Union Models in a new  
World Order, ed Munck, Ronaldo et al, at 18,19
- 21 The link accessed is available at:  
[http://www.workinfo.com/free/links/Gender/cha\\_2.htm#1.%20Increasing%20the%20participation%20of%20women%20in%20unions](http://www.workinfo.com/free/links/Gender/cha_2.htm#1.%20Increasing%20the%20participation%20of%20women%20in%20unions)
- 22 Sis Madonna Harford of the Grenada Public Service Union and Sis Jennifer Baptiste of the Trinidad &  
Tobago Public Service Union.
- 23 Ibid
- 24 Bolland (2001), p 19
- 25 Moody, p 7
- 26 Ibid, p 8
- 27 Kiely, p 3
- 28 Interview with Bro Wayne Jones, President, Jamaica Civil Service Association, November 6, 2004
- 29 <http://www.web.net/~dzgreen/>
- 30 <http://www.wto.org>
- 31 Interview with Bro George DePena, General Secretary Caribbean Congress of Labour, August 26,  
2004
- 32 The North-South Institute (2000)
- 33 CPDC (2002)
- 34 CPDC (2004)
- 35 Interview with Bro DePena
- 36 Daily Nation News Paper of Wednesday July 7, 2004
- 37 The CARICOM Single Market and Economy is intended to benefit the people of the Region by  
providing more and better opportunities to produce and sell our goods and services and to attract  
investment. It will create one large market among the participating member states.  
The main objectives of the CSME are: full use of labour (full employment) and full exploitation of the  
other factors of production (natural resources and capital); competitive production leading to greater  
variety and quantity of products and services to trade with other countries. It is expected that these  
objectives will in turn provide improved standards of living and work and sustained economic  
development.
- 38 Final: Work Programme to Establishment of the CSME (2004)
- 39 Phan Thuy, et al., *The Public Employment Service in a Changing Labour Market, International Labour  
Organisation*, Geneva, 2001, at 9
- 40 Interview with Bro Lincoln Lewis
- 41 Interview With Bro Depena
- 42 Ibid
- 43 Interview with Bro Dale Beresford - General Secretary, Guyana Local Government Officers Union,  
soon to be renamed Guyana General Local Government Workers Union, October 21, 2004
- 44 Interview with Bro DePena
- 45 Interview with Anya Lorde, 19 year old Student of the Barbados Community College, August 8, 2004
- 46 Moody, at 118 and 11
- It is agreed that the General Post office will be a Limited Liability Company with Workers,  
Government and the Public. However the change has not been made as a number of concerns  
highlighted by the unions need to be addressed.
- 48 National Union of Public Workers 2001 Annual Report, at 25
- 49 Interview with Anthony Springer, Chairman of the NUPW Shop Steward Division at the Arawak  
Cement Co Ltd, September 18, 2004

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Bro Wayne Jones, President, Jamaica Civil Service Association, November 6, 2004  
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Sis Anya Lorde, Student of the Barbados Community College, August 8, 2004  
Sis Sandra Massiah, PSI Sub-Regional Secretary, August 30, 2004  
Bro Anthony Springer, Chairman of the NUPW Shop Steward Division at the Arawak Cement Co Ltd, September 18, 2004

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## APPENDIX I

| Country  | 2003  |      | 2004  |      |
|----------|-------|------|-------|------|
|          | Women | Men  | Women | Men  |
| Barbados | 5239  | 3506 | 5421  | 3516 |
| Belize   | 547   | 653  | 770   | 850  |
| Bermuda  |       |      | 2741  | 1160 |
| St Lucia | 1333  | 1048 | 1315  | 1135 |
| Jamaica  | 5518  | 2242 | 6021  | 3209 |