

Need for Militant Struggle by Workers

By JANET JAGAN

On the labour front, in the past two years, there have been some very significant developments. Firstly, with unemployment and the cost of living rising, life is much harder for the working people of Guyana. Two budgets, those of 1966 and 1967 have increased considerably the cost of living for the working class.

The virtual wage freeze that now exists has caused a further worsening of the situation for the working class. For unskilled workers there has been no wage increase. In fact, wages outside of Government have not kept pace with the minimum for government employees — \$4 per day. Sawmill and quarry workers, for example, have had their minimum wages prescribed by the Government at only \$3.50 per day.

A number of unions have charged that officials of the Labour Department are taking sides with the employers in trade disputes and charges have been increasing that the Labour Exchange is discriminatory in placing workers in the few jobs they find. There has been rising retrenchment both in the public and private sector. There have been a growing number of charges on this score from unions catering for public works employees and other departments.

Housing has worsened in the city and the promises of a solution to this problem has not materialised. In fact, there are fewer and fewer buildings and rooms being rented to the

lower income groups as more and more properties are converted to higher rentals.

Workers have not been protected by their union on the issue of mechanisation. Thus on the waterfront and on the sugar estates, mechanisation has thrown thousands of workers out of employment.

The threat by the government to introduce anti-strike legislation in the form of compulsory arbitration has caused grave dissatisfaction among the working people. Government eventually changed its position on this issue and retreated to voluntary arbitration. However, voluntary arbitration is much the same as compulsory arbitration. Both will severely limit the workers' hard-earned weapon — the right to strike.

Social services such as medical, educational, old age pension, etc. are all declining. This decline means a further burden on the working class which now has to pay for certain services which once were free and are now requiring payment, or are inadequate.

All of this means that the working people of Guyana have to be more alert to the inroads being made on the gains they have fought for and won over many years of struggle. The workers and their unions must be vigilant and must be prepared to struggle ceaselessly to hold on to and win more rights and better conditions for their class.

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