

The Exploitation of Labour

In small economies like Barbados, the creation of employment to ensure that a high percentage of its working population is engaged, is a matter in which Government and trade unions are expected to have a vested interest. It follows that the trade union movement should be at the forefront in pressing the government of the day to devise policies and strategies that will lend to the bringing on stream of projects that will spur new employment opportunities. In the interest of ensuring the capitalization of new business ventures, the labour movement is expected to press the government of the day to develop market conditions that would be attractive to foreign business investors. If this clearly understood, then Government, the trade unions and the business sector should be well aware that the key to successful and productive business activities, rest with the ease of doing business, the provision of quality and sustainable jobs, worker productivity, good working conditions that include wages and salaries.

It would seem that of those key variables which lead to a successful and productive business, the one which becomes a contentious issue, is more often than not the payment of increase wages and salaries. For whatever reason, Government boasts of the millions of dollars that individual sectors of the economy generate annually. Not to be out done, the private sector which is known to be driven by profits, would make public declarations of the millions of dollars realized in annual profits. It would be logical to conclude, that based on the declarations of both government and the private sector, it cannot be ignored that they have benefitted significantly from the productivity of labour. It seems rather interesting but more so, disturbing, that as soon as it comes to the point of sharing with the workers, so that they benefit from the fruits of their labour, there is usual national outcry about low worker productivity.

To some, the actions of government and the private sector may appear to have one thing in common; with that being a semblance of the exploitation of labour. On the one hand, Governments use the excuse of not being able to afford pay increases because of their high level of expenditure on social services and capital works projects. Their counterparts within the private sector, resort to making investments

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in some local and overseas business ventures. The extent to which this is beneficial to the local economy is questionable. This contention is made from the point of view that by investing with a global corporate interest, this does not mean that this contributes to business ventures being established locally; which result in an uptake in jobs for locals. As a matter of fact, where they are new projects, foreign workers are said to be heavily engaged; very often on contract for service. Governments stand to benefit from the registration of offshore companies and the subsequent collection of corporation taxes that are payable.

What seems to be the norm, is that workers must struggle to get pay increases. It appears as if the notion of worker exploitation is taking on a new meaning. It is accepted that words of affordability and the capacity to pay are the watch words of the employer when it comes to the negotiation of pay increases for workers. There seems to be a more liberal approach taken when compared to general public spending that include strategic financial handouts or gifts of deeds. These in most cases can be excessive, and usually, there is justification provided for this expenditure. Sad to say, workers are accustomed to hearing the familiar tune of the country sick, it isn't well, the economy is sluggish, and better yet, things brown... the company is making loses.

When will the exploitation of labour stop? When will employers including Governments take to proper planning, so as to give workers a fair deal, rather than giving with one hand and taking with the other? When will this charade and mock sport of the masses stop? A successive productive operation in government and the private sector, requires that a good business model is developed. In that model, provision ought to be made for inducements to drive worker productivity. Simply put, if a car don't have fuel in the tank, it would be wishful thinking to expect it to drive an inch. To cry about low productivity but not to incentivize workers, so that they can be more productive, is tantamount to accepting that you pay for what you get.