

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES COUNTRY PAPER

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Public Service Union

Caribbean Sub-regional Seminar on Employment and Collective Bargaining in the Civil Service Held in Antigua and Barbuda: 19-23 May 2003

INTRODUCTION

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has adopted the best practices approach of industrial relations and currently enjoys a very favourable industrial climate. The unions are vibrant and workers are more cognizant of their rights. Many workers are free to join a union without being pressured into doing so or vice versa.

The functioning trade unions are the Commercial Technical and Allied Workers' Union (CTAWU), the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union (SVG TU), the Public Service Union (PSU), the National Workers Movement (NWM), the LIAT Workers' Union, the Windward Islands Farmers' Association (WINFA), and the Medical Association, Nurses' Association and the Employers' Federation – registered under the Trade Union Act (Cap. 154 of the revised Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

NAME OF UNION/ ASSOCIATION	NUMBER OF MEMBERS
CTAWU	3000
PSU	1200
NWM	950
SVG TU	1700
NFU/WINFA	800
LIAT Workers' Union	20
SVG Nurses' Association	270
SVG Medical Association	70

Fig. 1 – Number of workers

registered under the unions and associations

Types of Industrial Relations Practices in SVG/Bargaining Process

St. Vincent and the Grenadines practices volunteerism and the 'Best Practices' approach of industrial relations.

Volunteerism

Unions and employers should settle differences in a friendly way as the State looks on. Workers voluntarily choose to be unionized.

Best Practices

The 'Best practices' approach aims at creating better industrial practices for a stable and productive working environment, thereby enhancing the growth of industry and ensuring greater economic returns.

A number of mechanisms have been put in place under the 'best practices' approach. A few are outlined below:

Appeals Board: An appeals board was established to listen to the testimonies of workers and supervisors and then make a judgment that ensures that there is equity on the part of both the worker and the supervisor.

Performance Management Development System This system intended to improve the quality of the public service is currently being tested. A pay by performance measurement system in which employees are remunerated based on an assessment of their performance over a give time period. Employees will usually be assessed on their productivity, appearance, punctuality, etc.

Health and Safety Committees: Health and Safety committees are established to enhance health and safety issues at the workplace.

Education Award Committees: Education award committees consist of employees and employee representatives. These committees are set up to award scholarships to members' children based on their academic performance, for example, at Common Entrance examination, CXC and or GCE O'level.

FACTORS AFFECTING INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

There is a lack of knowledge on the part of both leaders and members of unions. Members tend to see the union as only to defend the workers' interests and nothing more. As a result, the trade union movement is unable to achieve its objectives.

The recruitment of members in the trade union movement proves difficult. Government is the single largest employer employing some six thousand (6000) workers but only twelve hundred (1200) are members of the Public Service Union.

The union movement is unable to attract highly educated leaders, and there is a lack of commitment on the part of the leaders. Most leaders work part time as they hold secular jobs.

The Union is at times unable to employ people full time because of the lack of funds to pay wages and salaries.

Legislation

The Trade Union Act (Cap. 154, Vol. 4) of the revised Laws of SVG, the Protection of Employment Act #16/1980 (Cap. 150, Vol. 4), the Minimum Wage Regulation and the Essential Services Act, Chapter 49 of the Laws of SVG, the Trade Disputes Arbitration and Enquiry Act (Cap. 153, Vol. 4) of the Revised Laws of SVG are the main laws governing industrial relations in SVG.

CHALLENGES

While there is enjoy a stable political climate. Political changes globally can adversely affect industrial relations. Decisions of the mega blocs (e.g. EU, G7, WTO) on trading issues will pose a serious challenge for the small island. The WTO ruling is already having a negative impact on the once thriving banana industry.

The challenge is to revive the *National Labour Congress*, which was formed in 1994 with a view to establishing a common position on industrial relations and the sharing of information. . It is now virtually non-functional.

Free Trade Area of the Americas and the advent of globalization trade unions will have to reorganize – their roles will have to be broadened.

Adherence to laws: The adherence to industrial relations laws by the social partners is essential to the development of harmonious relationships of all parties.

Social partnership: The challenge is for the union to educate its members in this regard.

Workers education: Workers education is of paramount importance. National programs for human resource development and knowledge transfer can be effectively executed, given some vision and planning. This investment in the human capital can be implemented at the level where it counts most, that is, in enterprises where it can impact upon the ability to create products and render services of the highest quality.

Certification of Workers: The certification of workers, for example, electricians and hairdressers, must now be placed on the agenda of industrial relations organizations.

Occupational standards are improving and the working environment is becoming more and more competencies and skills based. This is a challenge for the recruitment personnel in organizations. Employers are now looking at the employees' level of competence rather than a long list of qualifications.

There are plans in the pipeline for the establishment of a national productivity center, which will have a national productivity index against which organizations' productivity levels will be assessed. An assessment of this could result in increased levels of profit sharing among workers.

Marginalisation of Workers: When workers are marginalized - retrenchment, lock-outs, strikes and pay claims - management is always faced with the threat of industrial unrest.

HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Workers today are refusing to work with their HIV/AIDS stricken counterparts. This has in more recent times become a real challenge for the trade union movement. Combating this will mean educational campaigns for members to provide information on the disease and its impact - positively or negatively - on organizations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dialogue and a commitment to action are important to the further development of industrial relations best practices.

There is need for a revitalizing of the trade union movement and a greater voice in the country's political and economic decision making.