

## Fair Treatment of Workers

In whatever sphere of employment, workers have an expectation that they will be treated fairly by their employer. This is not an unreasonable assumption, as this is perceived to be an outcome of good human relations practice. What therefore constitute the fair treatment of an employee? The basis of fair treatment is the respect shown by the employer for the employee. This is demonstrated by way of the employer's respect for the rights the employee at work; which includes the individual's basic legal rights.

The fair treatment of workers begins with a recognition that there is no room for workplace discrimination. No employer should discriminate in hiring, firing, pay or promotion of an employee on the grounds of age, gender, race, colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and immigrant status. The violation of any of these practices becomes the source of contention between the employer and employees. This is where trade unions as the representative of the workers are obligated to treat to the matter at hand, in order to protect the rights and interest of the workers.

Trade unions play a fundamental role promoting the fair treatment of workers. Inasmuch that they become the voice of workers, they promote the empowerment of workers so that at the workplace they may have a voice at work. This allows workers for a say in your pay, benefits and working conditions. The promotion of the right to join a union and to bargain collectively is to position workers to cause employers to respect workers' rights. Whereas this is intended to safeguard workers from being meted out poor treatment, the possibility of unfair treatment being served up to workers lies in the corridor of employer intimidation and interference.

Based on those things which are accepted as non starters as far as fair treatment of workers is concerned, there is a strong case to be made for fairness to be applied in the execution phase of any action. This means that the partisan and dictatorial behaviour become unacceptable. Nothing should be done to make any employee feel that he/she has been disadvantaged or is being treated unfavourably and /or unfairly. Where this occurs, the accusation can possibly surface that discrimination is some way involved.

In the United States of America, Federal and state laws prohibit employment discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, sex, national origin, age, and disability, but these laws provide no protection from other forms of unfairness in the workplace. In Barbados, the Constitution offers protection from discrimination, but it too does not specifically address the issue of unfairness in the workplace. The subject of the

treatment of workers is however reflected under the various pieces of labour legislation; namely the Employment Rights Act, the Public Service Act and the Safety and Health at Work Act. These are supported by the Protocols of the Social Partners of Barbados, which although not law, are a set of understandings which are used to inform and guide industrial relations practices.

The fact that collective bargaining agreements are concluded between unions and employers, to include government as the single largest employer; and that government, the private sector and trade unions signed off on successive protocol which identify procedure and process, it is seeming outrageous that any of the partners would deviate from following the tenants that are hailed as the ideal of what is just and fair.

Since there remains a threat to workplace fairness, then it important to continue the advocacy for progressive labour legislation that will not only ensure changes and in the legal relationship between employers and employees, but also compliance with what the law dictates.