President General Ancel Roget’s Address to the
70th Annual Conference of Delegates

OWTU Paramount Building, San Fernando
24 July, 2010

- Comrade Carlton Gibson, First Vice President and Chairman of our 70th Annual Conference of Delegates;
- Our feature speaker, President of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine & General Workers Unions and President of the National Union of Mine Workers of South Africa which represents 300,000 mine workers, Comrade Senzeni Zokwana
- Delegates to this 70th Annual Conference of Delegates
- Former President General & Honorary General Council Member - Comrade Errol K. Meleod
- Specially invited Guests, Friends, Well wishers
- Comrades Sisters & Brothers! Good Evening

Comrade Chairman looking back, the last year can be described as a year of two sides. On one side you can argue that it was a year of crisis both internationally and nationally, but on the other side you can also argue that we witnessed the rise of people’s power and the forward march of progressive labour with events such as:

The mass demonstration and Rally on July 18th and the September 8th Day of Resistance last year; the People’s Summit with protest Demonstrations & Rallies in April this year; The Progressive Labour Platform for Labour Day with its Progressive Labour Rescue Mission for workers.

But as I stand before you this evening, we have to admit that indeed our country is in crisis. When I spoke on Labour Day I clearly identified this. Well it is not just that the country is in crisis, but the rate of its deterioration is accelerating.

You know they say that the universe is not just expanding, but the rate of expansion is accelerating. So today July 24th the crisis in Trinidad and Tobago is not the same as when last I spoke on Labour Day, it has actually gotten worse and will continue to get worse every single day. Before you could wrap your head around one major issue, the next day in the news it’s another crisis.

Comrade Chairman, when I spoke on the FITUN Labour Day Platform in Fyzabad already 255 people were murdered for this year. Now just 38 days later the murder rate stands at 304. This means that in just over one month over 50 people were murdered.

Now you tell me if our country is not in serious crisis? Well remember when we spoke about crime plan after crime plan and the millions of dollars for these plans. And do not forget that over the last four years they have spent over 12 Billion Dollars on the ministry of national security.

We must never forget these things. Remember there was Anaconda, Community Policing on Motor Bike, riot police with riot gears, who do not stop the criminals but they are
sent to stop law abiding citizens and workers from legitimate protest action. Remember CCT Cameras, Eye in the Sky and remember the Blimp.

Today it seems that they just have absolutely no more ideas on how to deal with this runaway crime problem, so they have started all over again, so it’s back to the streets on bicycles for policemen. More than that they have now gone back to the ABC of crime fighting.

Remember two Mondays ago, in Woodford Square, when the Prime Minister told about 800 of his supporters, whom he said he was giving political education, that they will try A and if that don’t work then they will try B and if that don’t work then they will try C. With the murder rate reaching the highest ever, could you believe that? But what he did not say – is, that since it was the same Minister of National Security with all the crime plans that did not work, then they should remove him and try another one.

But Comrade Chairman, have we fully grasped the seriousness of our crime problem? Well let us put it into some perspective: To date as of July 24th 2009, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 8th in the world for murders per 100,000. This is higher than countries like South Africa, Somalia, Pakistan and even Colombia. Yes Colombia. Are we beginning to get the real picture? And then the Minister has the nerve to tell us, that in a few years the efforts of the Government’s crime strategies will then start working.

Let us try and understand the logic behind this. From 2002 to present there has been a steady increase in the murder rate, a total of 2,702 persons murdered during that period. In 2007 we recorded 392 murders and in 2008 we recorded 550 murders. That is 550 human beings murdered in just one year. That is a 40.3% increase in just one year. If we continue at this rate Comrade Chairman, in just two years from today the murder rate could stand at over 1,000 per year. That is over 1,000 human beings; men, women and children being murdered in one year.

The Minister is telling us that we will see a reduction, but the reality is, that in a few years it will be doubled. Is the Minister really telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not expect to feel safe or secure for the next few years because it is only then his crime strategies will start working?

He does not realize or accept the gravity of the situation, where people are being gunned down on a daily basis; where even our little children are strangled; where driving into a police station is no longer the safest thing to do, where even the police are now renting their guns to the bandits.

Comrade Chairman, Martin Joseph must be living with the Mannings’ in “La Fantasie” totally disconnected from the real world, where we the people of Trinidad and Tobago have to live without police escort. Where we are living in fear, living in jail behind burglar proofing and razor fences, where the bars and rum shops are no longer a safe place for social interaction, where children cannot venture out to run a simple errand for their parents and return home alive.

Comrade Chairman, you go to the banks or the fast service, the grocery, or on any lawful legitimate business there is a sense of fear of the person behind you because you believe every other person is a murderer. Remember how we could have left our houses and our cars open and go out for the day and the only thing we were worried about was the rain.
Today honest, law abiding citizens are rubbed, raped, butchered, murdered in their homes. Nobody feels safe anymore because absolutely nobody is safe anymore in this once sweet Trinidad and Tobago.

Comrade Chairman, it is only when it reaches home where our family is affected, it is only then we will feel the pain and trauma that we witness on a daily basis and which we are now callously dismissing, simply because we have become so numb as a society. Comrade Chairman, it is only a matter of time before any one of us becomes the next victim.

But that is just the crime situation. Let us look at the state of the health services in this country.

Comrade Chairman, we read about the nightmares and the horror stories everyday where our men, women, children and our senior citizens go to our nation's hospitals, with serious pains or ailment of one kind or another and do not get adequate medical attention and in most cases none at all.

Imagine, after 24 hours people are still not even warded. There are limited beds. And when you finally get a bed there are no doctors or medications. Just pay a visit to the Point Fortin, San Fernando or Scarborough Hospitals and see for yourselves.

This is what is so typical of this Administration. They have lost their sense of humanity and compassion. They treat the rest of Trinidad and Tobago like their subjects.

Crime rising, they spend billions of tax payers money on numerous crime plans, and then the Minister says we would not see any progress for the next few years, and we just have to take that.

Health services deteriorating, instead of medical doctors we have no shortage of spin doctors who try to make us believe that everything is okay and we just have to take that too.

Comrade Chairman, as if all of that is not bad enough, once again they denied us our right to voice our dissatisfaction at the local polls. So we must talk about the Local Government Elections too. Remember, it was postponed not once, not twice, not three times but this will make it the fourth time.

Once again they are showing their level of arrogance, by just presenting to the parliament a bill that postponed the local government elections for a fourth time. What is even worse Comrade Chairman is the flimsy excuse that the Emperor’s wife presented.

It is only because of the make up of our political system and our parliament, that this bill was passed. The Opposition voted against it, but the Government MPs who have the majority in Parliament voted for it simply because they owe their allegiance to the Emperor.

Rest assured Comrade Chairman, if we had a people’s parliament, there is no way in hell, someone could postpone any elections and deny the people their right to vote. Comrade
Chairman if we had a worker’s parliament, such proposals will be rejected in the strongest of terms, it just would not have seen the light of day.

Their only argument is that Local Government needs reform and that it will take quite some time. But we know that there are too many examples of important reforms that did not require the postponement of an election. The reform taking place at the Tobago House of Assembly is just one such example.

Could you imagine the Chief Secretary telling the Assembly that they will have to postpone the THA elections in order to implement the reform that is currently taking place? Many local government systems have undergone significant reforms and changes without postponements, far less postponement for four consecutive years.

So what could be the real reason for the delay? The real reason for the delay it that they have lost and continues to loose their support daily as crime, food prices, corruption and nepotism, deteriorating health care services, arrogance in governance and general cost of living continued to rise.

What definitely worried the PNM was the 2007 General Election results, which showed that combined votes that opposed them would have outnumbered them by over 40,000 votes.

What made the 2007 results interesting is that it was at a time when the country was benefitting significantly, from the high oil and gas revenues the likes of which we have never seen or experienced before.

The people are realizing that the real vision of the PNM is not in the interest of the masses or the working class. If they were to call a local government election now, the people would reject this failed model of growth and development being pursued by the government.

It is clear that the government is choosing to ignore the voice of the people by denying them the right to express their dissatisfaction through the local polls. Well, if that is their position, then the people will have no other choice but to use their other powerful voice-the streets.

The Emperor has badly miscalculated the power of the streets, and if he continues to deny the population their voice, then they will join the progressive labour movement on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now Comrade Chairman, let us turn our attention to the two Independent senators, or are they Government’ senators? Senators Gail Mehair and Michael Annisette. Take note they were the only two independent senators who voted for the government’s bill. One representing private sector, and the other one purporting to represent labour.

You see, this is their true vision of the tripartite arrangement between Government, Private Sector and the sell out fraction of the labour movement. But look at the result of this threesome? Elections are postponed, and once again citizens are denied the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction through the polls.
This is the danger we have to be careful of and therefore, we must do everything in our power to reject and change it.

When the goodly lady senator, could say that it is not the role of independent senators, to thwart the will of government, she knew very well what she was saying. The fact that she stands by her statement up to now shows that she is very clear about her position.

This is serious and dangerous times Comrade Chairman. We maintain our call for her resignation with immediate effect. If she does not want to resign then we call on the President to do at least one right thing, that is, to revoke her appointment. She has lost all credibility as an independent senator.

But all of that is not the real crisis Comrade Chairman. I want to suggest that the real true crisis is the in the response by the people of this country. There is a deafening silence that covers this land.

As our children are killed, as integrity becomes just a word, as democratic systems are eroded, as workers come under heavy attack, as we watch a man try to convert himself into an emperor and convert the country into his little empire. Whilst this happens there is a very chilling and scary silence from the majority of citizens.

With the exception of a few, the majority sits, wait and hope that somehow a challenge will rise up against this failed model of progress being pursued by the government. We have not realized as yet that we are actually waiting on ourselves. It is only when we as a collective take action, we can then bring an end to injustice and inequity. Have we lost the idea of freedom?

Have we become so complacent simply because we have bought into the idea that we are free? And that there is no need to continue the journey which started some 72 years ago? Have we abandoned the goal of working class liberation?

Well, to do so would be to give up our right to self determination, our right to define our own path. We would be giving up our future and our children’s future to those who are uncaring, corrupt, arrogant and disrespectful to, not just the working class but to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This general response of silence, sends a message that all is okay to pursue a model that will collapse, and leave the people of Trinidad and Tobago vulnerable, and leave the working class with nothing, not even their dignity.

Comrade Chairman, one thing is for sure. A message has been sent and that is, that the OWTU will NEVER remain silent while anybody takes the country down a road of repression. We will NEVER remain silent while the working class is under attack.

We will NEVER remain silent as corrupt practices deny the people of Trinidad and Tobago their just due. We will NEVER remain silent, and allow the Emperor to do as he please and ignore the cries of the people.

NEVER EVER comrade Chairman, we will not be silent. To say quite frankly we are not only going to raise our voices but we will raise the entire Blue Shirt Army.
This is a call for the troops to gird our armor because we are in battle mode and I assure you the battle is going to be fierce, bitter and intense. We have 72 years of experience in struggle. This is longer than all of the political parties that ever existed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Comrade Chairman, there is a saying that a people get the government they deserve. Today I beg to differ because our honest and law abiding citizens, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they did absolutely nothing, to deserve this type of governance by this government or any other government.

On June 19th we declared that we will be on a rescue mission for Trinidad and Tobago. We stand by our word Comrade Chairman. Remember we said that within one month we will begin a series of mass actions in solidarity with workers under attack.

Last week Friday, we joined with the other FITUN units and picketed WASA, and then in strong solidarity with our other comrades from CWU we marched on TSTT House.

Our next target is in support of the farmers on the 5th August at Nestle and the Ministry of Agriculture. We will then visit T&TEC on the 14th August, to expose the corruption and demand the T&TEC corruption investigation report. On the 26th August we will be going to Petrotrin. All of these worker solidarity actions Comrade Chairman are meant to build momentum as we then go into the communities.

We will also mount an attack and campaign against contract labour. Contract Labour is a double edged sword. On the one hand it is a means of exploitation of workers, and at the same time it is used to undermine and eradicate trade unions.

At our first action last week Friday, we had hundreds of workers on the streets at WASA and TSTT. We sent a clear message to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we are serious about our rescue mission. As we said before, we never intended for WASA workers to be part of that protest action.

The mission was successful in highlighting the corruption at WASA. It was also to lend solidarity to the dismissed workers and to all other workers at WASA who are not being properly represented, because their unions are in collusion with Sultan Khan. The action was successful because now they are all exposed.

Comrade Chairman, we said that these unions were in bed with the management and we were right, if you do not believe, then take a look at the full page Add they jointly published.

Whatever Sultan Khan, NUGFW and PSA are saying, ask any WASA worker and they will tell you a completely different story. Indeed the workers quietly thanked us for coming and protesting in their defense.

We cannot afford to have short memories in these vicious times. We must be ever vigilant. Remember it was the same Sultan Khan who was the chief architect of sending home the Bwee workers. It is the same Sultan Khan today who is talking about transformation and is now in partnership with these unions.
Yes Comrade Chairman, that is the real transformation. These unions who are supposed to represent the workers’ interest, have all sold out and now they are completely transformed.

We have seen how they all operate, look at what the UNC and PNM did to the sugar workers. And under the PNM they have started with BWee and now they will target WASA, BIR, Customs & Licensing.

I could tell you this much Comrade Chairman, they dare not put God out their thoughts and think about PETROTRIN or TTEC because it will be a horse of a different colour.

Over the past few months PETROTRIN tried to create mass confusion around the issue of Variable Pay. This was done with the expressed intention to deny workers their variable payment for the financial year 2007-2008 as clearly stated in all of the Collective Agreements.

The union has ALWAYS insisted that there will be no compromise with the payment of Variable Pay, this is monies which workers have already earned. All monies owed must be paid immediately and in one payment.

PETROTRIN has declared a loss of 600 million dollars over the last six months and they want to give the impression that it is the workers who are to be blamed. Well we the workers call on the Petrotrin management to account for this loss.

We call on Malcolm Jones to explain to the people of Trinidad and Tobago how under his leadership one of the most viable state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago ran such a loss.

The emperor has often stated publicly, that other than his wife his best friend is Malcolm Jones. Maybe that is why he does not have to account for the state of PETROTRIN today. But let us examine his stewardship and the legacy he has left at PETROTRIN.

Under his watch he has had no less than four industrial fatalities, increases in serious accidents, rampant corruption in the contract system, the collapse of Human Resource and Industrial Relations Departments.

Political favouritism and nepotism in the hiring of persons for top management positions. People occupy these top positions with absolutely no experience or expertise or competence, it is just jobs for the boys, a feeding frenzy while the company suffers.

Under Malcolm Jones, there was a reduction to the retirees medical benefits, drastic fall in land and marine crude oil production, with Trinmar’s production falling from 36,000 barrels per day, to a paltry 23,000 barrels per day; with land production falling from 18,000 barrels per day to under 14,000; And the cancellation of major drilling and work over programmes. Instead of increasing our indigenous crude oil production to its fullest potential, so that we will purchase less foreign crude for the refinery, the opposite is now the case.

Most of the major projects at the Point-a-Pierre Refinery are way over budget and beyond their time of delivery.
Comrade Chairman take for Instance:-

1. FCCU Upgrade Phase 2 & MEROX Unit.
   Original contract price US 160,142,900 Dollars. This cost has now moved to US 256,805,083 Dollars. And now they are saying the cost to complete this project US 345 million Dollars

2. Isomerisation Complex.
   Original contract price US 64,585,297 Dollars, already over budget, And on completion they would have spent US 86 million Dollars

3. CCR Platformer Complex.
   Original contract price US 201,653,084 Dollars, again already over budget. To complete this project they will spend US 220 million Dollars

4. New Acid/Alkylation Unit:
   Original contract price US 216,314,250 Dollars, already over budget. And when completed this project would have cost US 300 Million Dollars.

5. Utilities and off site:
   Original contract price US 10,198,080 Dollars. Money spent so far US 38,509,668 Dollars. And they are now estimating to spend up to US 270 Million Dollars to complete this project.

Comrade Chairman, the total original contract price for all of those projects is US 652,893,611 Dollars. And to complete all of this they are now projecting the final cost of US 1.283 Billion Dollars. Almost 100% over the original contract. But what is responsible for that?

They are not explaining or accounting for this. Instead Mr. Jones is given an honorary doctorate from the University of the West Indies. While he refuses to account for PETROTRIN’s downfall and the workers variable pay, he made sure that he gets all of his in one full payment and not in tranches. How much more arrogant can they get?

While he reduces medical and other benefits to retirees, he is provided with best medical attention that is paid for by oil workers’ labour.

Today the retirees are suffering as a result of what Malcolm Jones did to their medical plan and other benefits. At this point I want to announce that on Monday the 3rd August all PETROTRIN Retirees must gather at the Point of Pierre Roundabout, so that once and for all we can begin to correct the injustice that was done to you by Mr. Malcolm Jones.

We must never forget the millions of dollars PETROTRIN spent for sprucing up the Wild Fowl Trust at Point a Pierre and other environs for the Summit of the Americas. Did you even remember there was a 5th Summit of the Americas?

No wonder today they are shamelessly declaring a loss and not accounting for it. If PETROTRIN is in a loss today it is no fault of the workers. I want to correct Minister Enill when he says that the Government will have to give PETROTRIN aid, he must be
reminded that it is the workers at PETOTRIN who over the years ensured that PETOTRIN contributed hundreds of billions of dollars to the state.

Money which both PNM and UNC government mismanaged and gave away to their corrupt friends, families and party supporters. Let us be honest and call a spade a spade, Malcolm Jones has taken PETROTRIN hundreds of steps backwards.

Today PETROTRIN is worse off than when he met it. After all of this, he still remains in the position of Chairman. This is perhaps to ensure the final and complete death of PETROTRIN.

Today we call for a forensic audit into all of these major projects and the operations of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago under the stewardship of Dr. Malcolm Jones. He must be made to account.

Comrade Chairman, it was the OWTU who led the fight relentlessly for us to be in control of the commanding heights of our economy. We fought the multi-nationals; the Shell’s, the Tesoro’s, the BP’s and the Texaco’s for ownership of these assets and resources because they never acted in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The multi nationals raped and plundered our resources in their own interest for their own people. We insisted that our nationals must be in the management control of our national state enterprises.

Were it not for the OWTU Comrade Chairman, today people like Malcolm Jones would never have been in charge of a Petrotrin. But what have they done? They have made a colossal mess of it. They seem to forget that Petrotrin belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mismanagement of any state enterprises must be considered a crime against the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

They should not just be removed from office but must be investigated, charged and locked up if found guilty. We cannot let them escape unscathed. They must face the wrath of the workers and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Comrade Chairman, we see through the Prime Minister’s plan and we want to tell him if he thinks that PETROTRIN is Caroni, BWee or NBS he had better think again.

They are now trying to say that PETROTRIN is over staff by 2,000 workers when the opposite is the case and that it is operating at a loss. They are now laying subtle threats to send home workers. Their ultimate plan is to privatize or give PETROTRIN to their investor friends.

Today I want to tell the Prime Minister, the Emperor himself, if there is no PETROTRIN there will be no PNM. The OWTU has survived 72 years and going strong. The PNM is only 43 years and if they touch PETROTRIN they may not survive to see 50 years.

Comrade Chairman, it is important to understand exactly what we mean when we say that workers are under attack. Over the last few months, actually since the beginning of the year, we have seen a constant trend of retrenchment.
This is not reaching the headlines at all and we really have to wonder why. But the numbers are clear. According to the Central Bank Monetary Policy report, from September 2008 to April 2009, a number of job cuts have been announced in the energy, construction and manufacturing sectors.

For example, within the energy sector, Mittal Steel, Neal and Massy Wood Group and Repsol have retrenched a total of 192 workers. In the hotel sector, Hilton Trinidad has laid off 200 part-time workers while in the communication sector, Digicel has offered 500 employees VSEP packages.

Some preliminary statistics obtained from the industrial court indicate that employers have filed a total of 1,089 retrenchment notices. However, this is just based on the industrial court retrenchment notices, according to the same report Between August 2008 and April 2009 approximately 7,237 persons have lost their jobs. As a matter of fact for the Four Months alone January-April 2009 approximately 3,512 persons have lost their jobs.

Let me repeat what I said on Labour Day. That the government and employers are on a retrenchment drive. They are supporting each other in their bid to cut jobs. While this is occurring there is a high influx of Chinese, Filipinos and other migrant workers.

We must also reiterate our concerns about dismissals of workers without due process? We will not accept it. It is a major slap to the face of the labour movement and its history of defending the rights of workers.

By summarily dismissing 30 workers from WASA without just cause and without due process the state has decided to set an example and instill fear in all workers. The idea is to intimidate workers to prevent them from protesting any form of injustice. Let us make it clear that the OWTU will not stay quiet in the face of this vicious onslaught on workers. Today we renew our call for the re-instatement of all 30 workers at WASA not just 8 ALL 30.

Remember for the Summit of the Americas NATUC made a commitment to stay silent amidst all the crises facing the country and the OWTU made it clear that we will not remain silent. What trade union movement could make an agreement to stay silent in the midst of crisis after crisis? They have clearly abandon their tools of trade. Protest is one of the most important tools of a Trade Union. They have not realized the seriousness of such an agreement.

Workers will NEVER forget such an act of treachery. The OWTU will NEVER make such a pact. We will never give up our tools of the trade. Let us not forget that it was demonstrations and protest action through the streets that brought about fundamental changes. And it will be mass demonstrations and mass protest actions that will bring about the fundamental change needed to build a progressive Trinidad and Tobago.

You see comrade Chairman we do not depend on governmental favours and approval for personal projects or hoping for some government appointment. We truly value our independence which was fought for by the martyrs, our former leaders and founding fathers of this noble organization.

Our independence is sacred and must never be compromised.
Comrade Chairman it was on May Day this year we said that workers are under serious attack. Sometimes I wonder if we are taking this warning seriously. On Labour Day again we warned workers about the attack and what happened? In less than a month we see the suspension of over 85 workers by TSTT management. If that is not one of the most brutal and direct attack on workers then tell me what that is? When workers take a stand to demand settlement of outstanding negotiations, riot police are called in to suppress them. It is the second time that TSTT management has called out riot police for the workers and their union. That is their new strategy in negotiations. That is their idea of a social compact.

This is just another example of the anti-worker environment we are living in. This 70th Annual Conference of Delegates must send the message that the blue shirt army stands side by side the CWU in their struggle. We call for the immediate re-instatement of all the suspended employees at TSTT. We also call for the settlement of all outstanding negotiations with the CWU. If this is not done with haste then we will hit the streets again.

**We said before and we maintain that workers under attack anywhere must be rescued by workers from everywhere.**

Comrade Chairman as we examine the current crop of workers, what is even more disturbing is that after the 1937 labour rebellion, and all the subsequent struggles for workers rights, we still have only 20% of the workforce unionised. This means that for every 10 workers 8 workers are without union representation. This is particularly serious.

It means that majority of the working class remain unorganized. There is no socialist workers party, so the only organizations left for the working class is progressive Trade Unions. If we take this further, and think of it in terms of the organizations seeking the interest of the working class which carries a progressive agenda, we cannot even say 20%.

Of this 20% there are a significant percentage of workers who are not properly represented, because either their union has limited vision, competence, resources, lacking the resolve, or they have simply just sold out. This is actually at the heart of the crises facing Trinidad and Tobago and it explains the silent response of workers. At this crucial time when the employer class and the government are pursuing their anti-worker, anti-people’s agenda – this is indeed a tragedy.

This sad state of affairs means that there is a neutralizing of the revolutionary potential of the working class. So what is to be done Comrade Chairman? Well the Oilfields Workers Trade Union, one of the last standing progressive institutions, have an obligation to ensure that all unionized workers be organized under progressive leadership and to work tirelessly to organize the hundreds of thousands of unorganized workers.

We must even go further. We have a duty and a responsibility to help build a vanguard movement. After 72 years, this is the moment we have been preparing and struggling for. This is what our experience has taught us. This is what we were born to do.

The future of the OWTU is tied to the future of the working class. It is tied to the future of Trinidad and Tobago. Once we believe in Social Justice, then we must act now. There
can be no delay in organizing workers across the country. Now more than ever we must work to build true working class consciousness and workers solidarity.

It is for this reason we have worked on strengthening our Education and Research Department. The department has as its aim to strengthen the vanguard role of the OWTU as it pursues its vision of continuing the tradition of the mass movement towards achieving a society with the power to determine its destiny on the basis of equity, social justice and a decent standard of living for all.

In other words comrade Chairman, the strengthening our Education and Research department is an example of our commitment to our working class ideology of advancing our vanguard role in the mass movement by building solidarity; Improving/defending the quality of life of our members and working people as a whole; Giving voice to the voiceless through organizing, educating and political action. There will be those who will say that we are political, but in any event educating, agitating and organizing workers is political, it can be no other way.

They want to define our scope of work and they are trying to put limits to who we are. It is quite simple, the attempt is to separate the economic struggle from the political struggle.

In a revolutionary process, trade unions as one the broadest organization of the working class must become the centre of the political stage. It is the only institution that can break the backward racial politics which is being played by the ruling class to ensure that the working class remains divided. They have all run out of ideas. Fighting for their political survival they have now returned to their primordial base instinct.

Comrade Chairman, Once again they are now playing the race card to rally support for their failing political parties. On the one hand you have Senator Gopeesingh drumming up support for his party by talking about ethnic cleansing and the Prime Minister saying that he should not say that.

But on the other hand it was this same Prime Minister who spoke about ‘Petrosingh’ meaning that there were too many Indians at Petrotrin. So it was the PNM complaining about UNC getting rid of Africans at Petrotrin and now it is the UNC complaining about PNM getting rid of Indians at the POS General Hospitals. This tribal politics has never benefited, and will never benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is why they do not want progressive trade unions, because we instill a level consciousness amongst people which transcends race and ethnicity. It must be understood that progressive trade unions as working class organizations, can no longer see itself as just being part of the bureaucracy of industrial relations, but understands industrial relations as economic struggle tied with political struggle.

It is where the working class decides that they no longer need someone else to govern for them, but they themselves can govern. It must be understood as stated before, that it is only the progressive trade union movement that will break the race politics once and for all, and bury bourgeois rule forever.

But let us take a step back for a moment. Last year the leaders of FITUN member unions, agreed on a joint platform for June 19th. The theme was “labour intervening to
save the nation and our children”. On the basis of agreement on the fundamental issues facing Trinidad and Tobago, it was announced that two mass actions would be organized as this particular form of intervention.

The first was a Mass Demonstration on Friday July 18th through the streets of Port of Spain and the second was a “Day of Resistance” on Monday September 8th we called for everyone to “stay at home”. Some union leaders whilst prepared to participate in demonstrations were not willing to go further and shut down the country, simply because it will make their party in power look bad.

However, the OWTU remained committed so it was unity in action not talk. September 8th took a great amount of courage and effort to make it successful. It was an important victory as hundreds of thousands workers, from Chaguanas to Point Fortin, from San Fernando to Mayaro, workers answered the call and stayed at home. The victory is made sweeter when we think of the odds that were stacked against us. Remember we had limited support by some unions; we had the betrayal of the PSA (agreeing but on the day before openly condemning the action, telling their members to come to work); we also had the threats by some employers and with the ECA saying that workers who stay home will be breaking the law.

It was the first General strike in 20 years. It sent a powerful signal to the government, that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are fed up with where they are taking our country. It is on this backdrop, that the OWTU has to come forward and once again lead a significant challenge to this present onslaught.

But we must be the clear that the government’s model is no different to what UNC was pursuing or what the COP wants to pursue. It is the same model just different architects. We cannot just be about changing the architects we must change the entire model. We must build a house based on social justice. This is the significant difference which the OWTU has to pursue, based on our tradition.

You see Comrade Chairman, Butler, Weekes and McLeod they all understood this and today, I say to this 70th Annual Conference of Delegates with absolute clarity, that we will ensure that we continue in this tradition and will relentlessly pursue it until victory is ours and until labour hold the reigns.

Were we will have a new Trinidad and Tobago; Where we will have a different Trinidad and Tobago; Where we will have a new society, a different society; Where every man, woman and child are treated with dignity and respect; Where the people will have the power to determine their own destiny on the basis of equity, social justice and a decent standing of living for all.

SO AS WE LOOK TOWARDS THE HEAVENS WITH OUR FAITH IN ALMIGHTY GOD AND IN THE JUSTICE OF OUR CAUSE, LET US STAND FIRM AND UNITED IN OUR CONVICTION, AS WE GO FORWARD EVER, AND BACKWARD NEVER, FORWARD EVER AND BACKWARD NEVER, BECAUSE WE WILL NEVER EVER EVER COMPROMISE OR SURRENDER!!