President General Ancel Roge’s Labour Day 2010 Message
Charlie King Junction, Fyzabad
June 19th, 2010

Comrades welcome to Fyzabad!! Welcome! Welcome to this most sacred and hallowed grounds! It is on these grounds on this junction some 7 something years ago, workers with a big dream laid down with blood a foundation for a new Trinidad and Tobago!

We are here today to celebrate that moment. We cannot for forget that that is what Labour Day represents. It is not just to create a platform to talk about grievances no!! It is the space where we celebrate our founding fathers and mothers! It is where we remind ourselves as what the 19th June 1937 was really about!

We have to remind ourselves because as the years go on, our memory seem to begin to fade, some amnesia begins to kick in, but we cannot in these times begin to lose our memory, these are the times where we celebrate and recognize the long road taken by those before to help us to reach where we are this afternoon!

Labour Day used to be called Butler Day! Workers recognized the importance and celebrated the day long before the state, acknowledge the day officially. In other words it was workers who were clear as to the meaning of June 19th and they understood why it was necessary to keep June 19th Alive in celebration and reflection.

Every time we march to this junction, every time a labour leader mount this sacred platform, it is a continuation of a great tradition when Uriah ‘Buzz’ Butler mounted a make shift platform to address workers who marched from all over to assemble on This Junction.

The attempt of Charlie King to arrest Uriah Butler was not simply an officer of the law attempting to arrest a man. No it was the colonial state attempt to silence the mass movement, it was a power struggle between those who ruled and ordinary men and women. It was a battle for the soul of a country; it was a battle for the soul of a people.

And on that evening of June 19th 1937 the mass movement won, the people won. Ordinary working men and women changed the course of history, they actually made history. They made a moment that would transform the lives of ordinary people. We were not about to be silenced and so they defended their hero, they defended their dignity, they defended their worth.

They knew at that moment that they count and were not going to allow a colonial state to take that away. To allow Charlie King to arrest Butler would be allow the state to take away their dignity, take away their soul.

They set alight Charlie King and burned him to death, they set alight the colonial state and burnt it to death. They shattered 300 years of exploitation within one moment. This is what June 19th is about and this is why it is sacred and it is where why we celebrate it.
Comrades, there is more! Oh yes there is more. Let us be clear that the June 19th 1937 platform which Uriah Butler stood on was a political platform. It was the launch of a political movement which strengthened an already existing labour movement which was taking shape. It was a platform that spoke to freedom! So comrades I say to you this day that this platform today June 19th 2010 echoes that great call for freedom!

This Labour Day Platform is a continuation of the 1937 Platform.

Today we have much to celebrate, not just what has gone in the past but what is happening in the present. Last year on this Labour Day Platform the labour movement embarked on a mission to rescue Trinidad and Tobago. We recognized and highlighted that we had no other alternative but to intervene in a real way.

We talked about the attack by the Patrick Manning PNM government on Trade Unions.

We highlighted the various issues facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago such crime, health, lack of water, neglect, we continue to show the dictatorial tendencies of the Prime Minister,

When the people of Trinidad and Tobago went to the polls on May 24th they were very clear as to what they were going to do and why. Comrades I do want to remind you that this was the 5th General Elections in 10 years.

This is a clear example of a governance system that is dysfunctional. It is also clear that the governance system prior to independence remained intact even though we lower of the union jack and raised the red, white and black. That post independence governance system was bound to collapse under the pressure of a people still seeking to achieve a society that best meet their collective needs, dreams and aspirations.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago have elected Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar as the first woman Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. This is a remarkable achievement and must not be underestimated considering the immense role played by women building our great country and the level of marginalization, discrimination and violence meted out to our nation’s women. This is an important victory not just for women in Trinidad and Tobago but also in the Caribbean.

Comrades from our perspective what makes this election historic is that for the first time since self-government in 1962 progressive politics has entered the corridor of power. The inclusion of the Movement of Social Justice with a seat in Parliament. Representing the people of Point-a-Pierre is none other than the OWTU former President General Errol K. McLeod, Minister of Labour. It is my pleasure as President General of the OWTU to congratulate Comrade McLeod and to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the OWTU is happy to give you one of our sons.

I would also like to recognize the other leaders of the Partnership Winston Dookeran, Makendal Daaga and Asworth Jack.

I want to give our analysis of the results of the elections. Whilst there was a strong anti-Manning, anti-PNM sentiment, we need to see below the surface what that really meant. There are those who are trying to say now that the problem is Manning not the PNM or that there was some PNM internal conspiracy for the PNM to lose. I want to say that that is an attempt to re-write the truth and hide the real issue.
The people rejected Patrick Manning and PNM, but we have to be clear that they did not just reject the person or the organization. No it is what they represented which transcended for the first time since 1956, race. It is the approach to governance and the economic model as presented by the PNM under Patrick Manning that the people of Trinidad and Tobago rejected.

The Patrick Manning’s approach to governance was one where the maximum leader pronounced and defined the path without feeling the need to consult with anyone. They were of the view once elected there is no need to continue connecting with the people, the community or workers organization.

They attacked ferociously mass organizations, in particular the labour movement and any one that challenged their decisions and directions. Decision making was centralized and the use of the forces to suppress decent was without any check or balance. Their approach to governance began to resemble a fascist state. The people decided that such an approach to governance is not to be accepted and so rejected it outright.

The second aspect of the Patrick Manning PNM regime was an economic model that resembled a neo-liberal state. The emphasis placed on the city building the waterfront project, tall buildings, establishing an International Financial Centre, contract labour was the order of the day and turning an entitlement to a privilege, transforming pension to a grant. Hosting mega summits and showing off Trinidad and Tobago to the world as a developed first work country.

However, this completely was opposite to what people needed since on the other hand there was no water in their taps, facilities in their communities were run down, no beds in hospitals, food prices continued to rise unabated and no sense of job security and of course a dilapidated President’s house.

This contradiction was beyond what the people could bear. In other words it became the collective feeling that people were no longer at the centre of the PNM government’s development plan.

Many people did not feel that the 2020 vision as espoused by the PNM was really going to improve their quality of life in a real way. Faced with such a choice the people of Trinidad and Tobago wanted a government that placed people at the centre in a real way. The people of Trinidad and Tobago wanted something that made them feel that they counted and their dreams, aspirations and potential can be realized.

This has been the journey of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but it is not completed with the victory of the People’s Partnership. We have much to do still and whilst this was an important step we have many more steps to make and many more mountains to climb in our long journey to freedom. Let us not maintain our vigilance and persistence to guarantee that future generations will live a better and improved quality of life.

One thing we are sure about is that the Workers’ Agenda is about quality of life. When 500 Officers, Shop Stewards and Activists came together 18 April, 2010 it signaled a new era for the labour movement. It is an era when labour will take its traditional place on the political landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. The agenda outlines so clearly demands for changes in the IRA, an instrument which has been used against the working class. But the agenda is also about youth, the elderly, health, education etc.
Comrades we cannot continue the Workers’ Agenda without a strong vehicle which can guarantee it coming into reality. The Movement for Social Justice is such a vehicle and what makes it even more significant is that it belongs to us, workers. We have always spoken about the need for the working class to organize ourselves in such a way that we not only protect our collective agreements but we can protect our interest both in and outside the workplace.

This is not new but is a continuation of the Butler tradition. Have we already forgotten the British Citizens and Home Rule Party? The early Butlerites were clear that they needed a political vehicle to further the political and social interest of ordinary men and women.

They could not depend on the existing political organizations which was serving the interest of their class. They also knew that the society of Trinidad and Tobago had to be transformed in order that their quality of life was improved.

Throughout the Caribbean the labour movement gave birth to political organizations what further a political agenda of workers. A workers agenda was tied to a people’s agenda, both intertwined with each other and therefore could not be separated. It other words they recognized that they needed a political vehicle to further a workers agenda.

This is the importance of MSJ, it is our vehicle to continue the workers agenda, to make good the promises made to working mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, promises made to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Comrades MSJ was an obvious next step in labour’s intervention to rescue Trinidad and Tobago. It came as a surprise only to those who have not been listening carefully to our statements on radio, at rallies or during our pickets, or reading our vanguard.

MSJ gives us the independence and strength to negotiate on our own terms and depend on the whims and fancies of other political parties representing other interests. But this can only happen if we make it strong. We have a responsibility to get involve in reshaping the system of governance that places ordinary men and women to the mercy of the owners and managers of capital.

With our own political vehicle we will see the difference around the bargaining table. Employers will have to treat with trade unions in different way. They will have to think twice, three times even four times before they violate collective agreements.

Comrades note that the difference in approach to others who simply integrate themselves within other political parties who have a different class outlook and seek their own interest. We decided that our political intervention will not be simply supporting or endorsing the other political parties. No comrades we have our own party which can negotiate with others on an equal basis as a political force.

**Outstanding Negotiations**

T&TEC
PETROTRIN
YARA
UWI
TCL
Although in fact the sun is beginning to set, the truth is that this is a new dawn, a new dispensation that we have helped to shape. Having shaped it, we must continue to provide leadership and direction.

The labour movement must be at the forefront of defining how our country is governed since it is labour that creates wealth and it is workers who make the wheels of the economy roll.

To stand at the sideline is not an option. It is said that Revolution is the carnival of the people, so how can we sit in the stands and watch the carnival bands parade themselves in front of us. No we are the carnival, we are the revolution! How long should be move governments only for others to reap the benefits of our work?

We hit the pavements, raise the issues, we wore out the rubber in our shoes. No longer will we lay track for googie to run; no comrades we are running in our own track.

We must continue the workers agenda, as it is our blueprint for a better Trinidad and Tobago. It is a future for our children and grandchildren and so it must be a cornerstone as continue to build Trinidad and Tobago. Whilst much of the Workers Agenda has been incorporated in the People’s Partnership manifesto thanks to MSJ, we do have a responsibility to pursue its implementation in its entirety.

Labour has intervened and look at the results- No more Patrick Manning, No more PNM. Now that we have intervened we must hold the course keeping our eyes always on the prize. Never waiving always consistent, always vigilant always determined. Yes this is a new day, but we have to cease the moment and not let it slip through our fingers. We have to be focused on building our party, a Workers party, a party that the working class can call their own.

As the last Labour Day signaled a key step in the labour movement rescue of Trinidad and Tobago this Labour Day must signal a new beginning building on the gains made in the general elections. With our political vehicle in place we as workers have the opportunity to become drivers in charting our destiny.

Comrades we cannot shape our destiny if we do not have the means to do so! We sing over and over until labour holds the reins of power! I would like to be in that number when labour holds the reins of power! Well we have to put action to those words. Let us make those words real! The vehicle is ready come on board and together will build a society that has the power to determine its own destiny on the basis of equity, social justice and a decent standard of living for all!

I do want to say that one of the modifications on this vehicle is that we will take out the reverse gear so that whilst it may take a left or a right or even swerve, it will go forward ever!

Backward never! Forward Ever! Backward NEVER!