



GOVERNMENT OF SAINT LUCIA
DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR
MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE, PORT SERVICES, ENERGY
AND LABOUR

MINISTER FOR LABOUR – LABOUR DAY ADDRESS 2017

Fellow St. Lucians; historically the first day of May is observed in countries throughout the World as Labour Day or May Day. It is a day rich in history, full of meaning and eternal relevance. It is the day that workers pause for a moment, off the job, to reflect on the journey once travelled, to celebrate the achievements of workers and to promote and encourage the cause of the working class. It is an historic occasion, promoted primarily by the international labour movement, which presents workers a symbolic opportunity to understand and appreciate the evolution of the working classes in our society. It reminds us, as workers, of the struggles and sacrifices made by the trade union movement, and the declaration in 1904, made by the International Socialist Conference in Amsterdam, calling on “all Social Democratic Party Organisations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on the first of May for the legal establishment of the eight hour work-day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace. It is important that we understand and appreciate the historical significance of the journey once travelled, for unless we know from whence we came, we know not, indeed, we are absolutely ignorant of where we are heading. It was Marcus Garvey who once said, “A people without knowledge of their past history, is like a tree without roots”. Therefore, we cannot afford to remain oblivious of our history as workers, otherwise, we may be doomed to repeat the failures that once plagued us - so revisit, we must our past. As a modern technologically advanced society we must not relive the sad tales of workers toiling twelve hour work days, and even seven day weeks to earn a basic living. The often extremely unsafe working conditions, with insufficient access to fresh air, sanitary facilities and breaks, must never be experienced in this modern time, while Child labour, exploitation and slavery through strenuous and laborious work must be eliminated in all its forms in our society.

We are fortunate as a small independent nation to have enacted the Labour Act, which addresses the issues of Fundamental Principles of Employment, Terms and Conditions of Continued Employment, Occupational Safety and Health, Equality of Opportunity and Treatment in Employment, Recruitment of Employees for Overseas Employment and Work Permit, Trade Unions and Employers Organisations, and Principles and Procedures in Industrial Relations and Industrial Disputes.

The Act, which is probably the most referenced pieces of legislation in Saint Lucia today, establishes the industrial relations framework for social partnership among workers, employers and workers representatives. It was intended to consolidate and reform legislation applicable to labour and industrial relations in Saint Lucia, and applies to all employees and all work places. In fact, the provisions of the Act prevail over any other enactment where there may be conflict. It serves as the most important legislative framework that is designed to preserve the rights of workers and address the modern day issues of employer/employee relations, employment and decent work for all.

In keeping with the intent of the Act and in response to today's challenges, a commitment was made on my part at the NWU's Annual Congress of Delegates in June of last year; two weeks after assuming office, that a number of initiatives will be pursued, to ensure that the gains won by workers through the trade union movement are safeguarded. Among the initiatives mentioned were:

- Ensuring that the legal framework that provides transparency and fairness to workers and employers is sound, through a review of the

Labour Code and that attention will be given during this first year of my stewardship;

- That a mechanism – a tripartite arrangement, must be established to ensure that the gains won by workers through the trade union movement are safeguarded and to increase the level of communication among all three parties, to stimulate and establish a stable, conducive industrial climate;
- Undertake an assessment of the capacity and operational efficiencies of the Department of Labour; and the need to develop a strategic plan for the Department with an appropriate structure to execute the plan put in place.
- The full development of a Labour Market Information System to facilitate the role of the Department of Labour as a provider of information on the labour market;

I am pleased to indicate that all of those initiatives have been initiated and it's my hope that by the end of this calendar year with the support of all stakeholders; including the ILO, we will have achieved the agenda previously established.

However, of symbolic significance to today's observance of Labour Day is the official launch of the National Occupational Safety and Health Policy for Saint Lucia, last Friday. This means that the Government, employers and workers of Saint Lucia are guided by the ILO standards on Occupational Safety and Health, that provide essential tools and guidance to establish sound prevention, reporting and inspection practices to provide for maximum safety in the work place.

This action on our part signals one more step in the fulfillment of the requirements of the Labour Act and one step closer in achieving our international obligations towards the attainment of Goal #8 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to transform the World, through the promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

Therefore, on this Labour Day, let us reflect on our achievements together, and at the same time look purposefully forward to the future, to the opportunities which present themselves for creating an even more conducive environment for workers and their relationship with employers and civil society.

Therefore, with those realities confronting us and a renewed commitment to the cause of workers, let us continue our engagement in the process of reconstruction and strengthening of the industrial environment.

My fellow St. Lucians let us follow a plan of action that would promote smoother relationships, greater productivity, and satisfaction at the workplace. Undeniably, this endeavour is more than worthwhile.

Therefore, on this memorable day, I exhort all workers of our beautiful country to engage into some introspection, and plan a response, that will only redound to the benefit of ourselves, our workplace, and our country.

Please accept my very best wishes for Labour Day 2016.

I thank you.