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GTU strike: Opposition trying to mislead teachers for political agenda – VP

February 2, 2024

Vice President Dr Bharrat Jagdeo is contending that the countrywide strike action called by the Guyana Teachers Union (GTU) is part of the Opposition's tactic to mislead teachers for its own political agenda.

At the helm of the Guyana Teachers' Union leadership is General Secretary Coretta McDonald, who also is an Opposition Member of Parliament (MP).

During his press conference on Thursday, Jagdeo



Vice President Dr Bharrat Jagdeo

underscored that under the former APNU/AFC coalition, the GTU had suffered from rescinded benefits introduced by the former PPP administration, among other issues. “This is the same Coretta Mc Donald who used to come to my office as Leader of the Opposition and complain that she couldn’t even secure a meeting with the Minister of Finance or anybody in the APNU Government...Who complained that APNU was taking away the benefits that we had given to the Teachers Union. She has no credibility whatsoever, and (is) vilely trying to mislead the teachers of this country in pursuit of her own political agenda,” he asserted.

Calling the proposed strike political, Jagdeo is urging teachers not to fall prey to such traps, even as he highlighted the 27 initiatives taken by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government to improve the lives of teachers, among other meaningful interventions.



*GTU General Secretary and
Opposition MP, Coretta Mc
Donald*

The Vice President said, “This is a political strike... Just recently, the President approved 4,000 graduates that will move to the top of the scale now. That will cost us \$1 billion more. That is apart from the 6.5 percent [increase for public servants] that they got... Teachers are also eligible to go on the GOAL programme now, so we’re spending \$11 billion on training now. They’re saying don’t build schools, but the teachers are going to be the ones working in these same new schools, and being paid more money.

“The grievances there are not real, and we constantly have to engage the teachers. We’re investing more and more (into) education, training and teachers’ improvement. I would urge every teacher in this country...that they should not fall prey,” he added.

The GTU has planned strike action from February 5 to 16, 2024. In fact, the union has reportedly adopted scare tactics, threatening to fire teachers and block their promotions if they fail to participate in the strike.

Already, Labour Minister Joseph Hamilton has said the GTU does not have the authority to take such actions against any teacher, and has also called the planned strike illegal – something which was reiterated by the Education Ministry in a public notice issued on Wednesday.

Chief Education Officer Saddam Hussain had this to say in an open letter to all

headteachers and teachers, “The decision to strike is illegal, and goes contrary to the agreements signed by the MoE and GTU (10th April, 1990)...This threat of industrial action sets a bad precedent, since this is the final term before the NGS (National Grade Six Assessment) and CSEC (Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate) exams. Any disruption to the teaching-learning process could affect individual children and their entire future, thereby hampering the ability of families to use education to exit poverty... Consequently, I call on all head teachers and teachers to reject GTU’s call to strike.”

According to Hussain, this call for strike action is “quite unexplainable and incongruous”, considering the relationship between the Education Ministry and the GTU, who only met on Wednesday morning in a pre-arranged engagement to address a number of issues.

Previously, the GTU had proposed 41 areas identified for better working conditions for teachers. Over the three years, the Education Ministry has fulfilled 25 of those requests, and of the 16 proposals remaining, two are specifically for the benefit only of GTU and its Executive Members, and two others are contrary to the laws of Guyana.

The areas in which the Ministry and the Union have not reached an agreement include: salary increases for some scales (MoE has gone above GTU’s request for some scales), allowances, rehired teachers being paid at the scale that they retired at, housing fund (which the Union has repeatedly failed to give a way forward for, although the fund has a few hundred million dollars put there by the Government), and salary scales for different HODS and Sixth Form Deputy Heads, payment for the marking of SBAs, and house lots for teachers in each new housing scheme.

Moreover, 12 unresolved issues are currently being examined for their practical implementation and sustainability.

The Education Ministry has taken several actions to simplify the teaching process, while reducing the burdens of being a teacher – all of which are outside of the GTU’s requests. Among these interventions are: the removal of the Child Development Index Card (CDIC) as a required school document; the removal of the General Scheme of Work as a curriculum document; the weekly preparation of lesson plans, rather than daily; all trained teachers being eligible to be Senior Assistant Master/Mistress after six years, rather than seven years; 50 duty-free vehicles for teachers per year, PLUS

the granting of a duty-free concession to all senior teachers who have three years left to serve and have not received a concession previously; all teachers being provided termly with grants to purchase teaching materials; and all Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) pre-service trainees being paid \$90,000 rather than a \$10,000 stipend per month, except a trainee teacher refuses same.

In addition, the Education Ministry requested the Teaching Service Commission and the School Board Secretariat to do two senior promotion cycles per year, so that more teachers can be promoted and earn higher salaries. Other inventions include: a general waiver letter to allow teachers to travel abroad without collateral; the issuance of one waiver letter to cover the teacher's contracted period; the holders of the Technical Teachers' Certificate being appointed as Assistant Master/Mistress; the creation of more senior vacancies in nursery, primary and secondary schools; the reduction in teaching periods for secondary teachers; the assignment of an assistant teacher to senior teachers in primary and nursery schools; the appointment of floating teachers to schools to reduce the workload and substitute for teachers who are absent; and the implementation of the EMIS system which would eliminate most aspects of manual record keeping. (G12)

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