

**STATEMENT BY THE HON. MIA AMOR MOTTLEY, Q.C., M.P.**

**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

**ON THE**

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SITUATION IN BARBADOS**

These events with the BWA Strike and the consequential locking down of the Sea and Airport is another example of what happens because of the callous attitude to and the contempt of this Government for ordinary workers who simply do not score on the Government's Richter scale.

The workers' interest are not their priority! The Government believes that they can put the workers' concerns on a lay way plan to be dealt with either when Government gets around to it or when the workers are forced to bring the country to its knees to get the Government's attention.

This is NOT how Barbadians can go forward with confidence.

The BWA must engage its workers with respect as their claim is legitimate, even if daunting. I trust, however, that the BWU will not be unreasonable in their immediate demands. But we will never know that if the parties are not talking.

The water security of Barbados cannot be assured without the workers of the BWA. You can have all of the infrastructure that you want being built out but without the workers, you have little or nothing. This is more worrisome given the desperate water woes being experienced in the north and the east of the island, with certain communities still complaining of no water now for many days. This had to be the MOST urgent task of this Government in the last week! But yet we find ourselves where we are today with other sectors and people being affected.

Many of these people were robbed of their Christmas. Now, regrettably they face the specter of a waterless Easter. The jobs of Ministers - all three involved - and that of the Prime Minister are NOT 8 to 4 jobs. It is clear that the BWA is in urgent need of resources.

Today is Cabinet.

This meeting should not finish without the Prime Minister requiring a clear commitment on the part of the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Water (who continue to spar over financial resources for the BWA) to provide the necessary funds. This will allow the BWA to meet with its workers and the Barbados Workers Union under the chairmanship of the Minister of Labour, tonight if necessary, with a credible proposal such that there may be hope of there being bargaining towards an urgent settlement.

This is not the Government's favorite pastime of politics. This is dealing with people's lives. And while the Government may not have this at the top of their agenda, the people of Barbados and the Opposition do. The country cannot afford a simultaneous situation of dealing with a drought, waiting for water infrastructure to be built out and workers off the job on matters that are clearly within the Government's capacity to resolve. The Minister of Finance was adamant last week in the Estimates Debate that the Government's fiscal situation has improved.

This Government must deal firstly with national priorities before it embarks upon discretionary spending.

Office of the Leader of the Opposition  
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