

The Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Peter Phillips, MP
LABOUR DAY MESSAGE – 2019

Fellow Jamaicans,

The annual celebration of Labour Day provides the opportunity for us as a nation to appreciate the fundamental contribution of workers to Jamaica's development.

This year as we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the 1938 Labour Rebellion we recall with gratitude the role that the workers played in challenging colonial rule and ultimately setting the stage for the emergence of the National Movement, which carried Jamaica to independence.

The commitment of the workers to a better Jamaica was evident in the success of the Economic Reform Programme that was launched in 2013. At that time, public sector workers and pensioners voluntarily endured years of wage restraint in order to rescue the economy and lay the foundations for growth.

It is only fair that now that the public debt has been reduced and government revenues improved, that the workers who have sacrificed so much, should get a fair share of the benefits.

Sadly, recent events make it clear that this is not happening. Nothing highlights the plight of workers today more than this trend that has emerged all over the economy, to call full-time workers, in private and public enterprises, contract workers.

We are seeing many employees who go to work in the same company everyday, for years and who have to take instructions from a supervisor, who are full-time employees, in a hotel or factory. Many of them are called contract workers when in reality they are for practical purposes full-time workers.

These workers are being denied the benefits that have been won over many decades by the Trade Union movement.

- * Contract workers don't get vacation leave to restore their health.
- * Contract workers don't have sick leave. So cannot afford to get sick.
- * They have no stipulated working hours and often go without a lunch break.
- * They have neither collective bargaining rights nor do they have the protection against wrongful dismissals, so cannot afford an opinion.
- * As a result contract workers who have worked in an enterprise for many years, earning a salary that their families have come to depend on, are arbitrarily dismissed and denied the benefits provided by the NHT or NIS.
- * As a result they will have no pension when they retire, and so could very well spend their last years in poverty.

A former PNP administration established the Labour Market Reform Commission to deal with this and other issues, so as to find ways to improve the conditions at the workplace and to guarantee workers their rights while recognizing at the same time the challenges that businesses were operating in a much more competitive world economic environment.

The next PNP government will pass legislation that will ensure that anybody who is effectively a full-time worker in an enterprise will get the benefits that all other full-time workers get.

We will also engage the key stakeholders on the Report of the Labour Market Reform Commission and take the necessary actions to support inclusive growth, without sacrificing workers rights.

It is not impossible for us to find a way to deal with these realities without making the working class a victim as we seek growth.

This year the world also celebrates the 100th year of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and we must use this opportunity to renew our commitment to the rights of the Jamaican workers and to safety and security at the work place.

As we all take some time on this Labour Day to work to build our communities and our various projects, let us all remember that the workers represent an essential foundation of our nation.

Let us also, specially recall this year's Labour Day theme of "Child Safety" and renew our individual and collective commitment to the care and safety of our children who are our future.

Those who in 1938, set out to bring down the colonial order and launch Jamaica on the path of nationhood, were hoping to build a country in which each citizen would see him or herself as the protector of the community and of each other. Our children, most of all, deserve our love and protection, as they are the most vulnerable in our society.

Have a productive and happy Labour Day.

We wish God's continuous blessings on Jamaica and its people.