



ON BOARD

As retrenchments continue across the public service, attention has now shifted to The Bridgetown Port which is said to be on board with the layoffs and is currently contemplating sending home scores of workers.

PORT CUTS?

AUTHORITY LOOKING TO SHED OVER 100 EMPLOYEES

by George Alleyne

The Barbados Port Inc wants to cut 110 employees from its total workforce of 392, according to correspondence dated April 08, which was sent to the Barbados Workers Union (BWU), the bargaining agent for the workers.

In the letter to BWU General Secretary Sir Roy Trotman, Port Authority CEO David Jean-Marie referred to a February 10 presentation to the Union in which it was made clear that the Port was affected by "declining revenues resulting from a reduction in cargo activity, compounded by a mixed performance in cruise over the last five years".

"Despite efforts to control expenditure (including the rationalisation of senior management posts) the company is still challenged by excessive payroll costs, outdated labour practices, high debt service and an unsustainable pension deficit," the letter, a copy of which has been obtained by Barbados TODAY, said.

"Faced with the above financial difficulties, Barbados Port Inc. must now set out a viable but critical path for its sustainability and survival. Consequently, we formally submit the following proposals to turn around the fortunes of the Bridgetown Port," he added.

Efforts today to reach Jean-Marie for further comment were unsuccessful.

However, in his response dated April 24, Sir Roy promised the BWU would convene meetings of its various committees to study the document before replying.

The Port Authority CEO has proposed a number of measures that essentially amount to reducing the number of shifts, movement of tasks from 'low productivity hours' to other shifts, and reductions in staff in the interest of greater efficiency.

"Our national duty and responsibility mandates that we take action now to safeguard our only seaport in the interest of our citizens, now and into the future," Jean-Marie said in his layoff proposal to the union.

The proposed retrenchments at the Port were highlighted last weekend by Opposition MP Edmund Hinkson, who was the first to publicly release the figure of 100 workers for layoff.

The St James North representative said the management of the port had already notified the Barbados Workers Union of its intention and the two parties were due to begin negotiations. Since then Sir Roy has confirmed that lay offs are on the table.

"The port is going to be taking out its Marine services as part of its operations. We are going to be discussing that with them shortly but that is not to say that we have settled down on any discussion about anything with anybody. They have written to us to say we want to have another series of rationalisation talks and we're ready to begin those talks," Sir Roy said.

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Summary of the proposed changes to the staffing level:

SECTION	Current	Proposed	Change
Marine Services	85	48	-17
Engineering Workshop	83	43	-20
Maintenance	95	48	-20
Terminal Ops Direct	108	89	-28
Terminal Ops Indirect	81	62	-28
TOTAL	392	288	-110

Conclusion:

The above proposals have been tabled in the interest of ensuring the viability of Barbados Port Inc. without increasing port charges to prohibitive levels which would only serve to increase the cost of living in Barbados and reduce our competitiveness. After exhausting every conceivable effort of cost control including elimination of discretionary expenditure, deferral of plant and equipment maintenance as well as improved procurement practices resulting in reduced operating expenditure, Barbados Port Inc. still finds itself unable to pay creditors in a timely manner. Additionally, our National Duty and responsibility mandates that we take action now to safeguard our only seaport in the interest of our citizens, now and into the future.

We therefore look forward to the continuation of our discussions on the operational efficiencies as our two parties work toward a viable and sustainable approach for the survival of the Port.

Yours sincerely,

DAVID JEAN-MARIE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

P.C. Chairman, Barbados Port Inc.