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Charles Memorial Home receives food hamper

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IMPASSE CONTINUES

Trade Union accuses T&T company of trying to spark national shutdown

By Rawle Titus

THE Technical and Allied Workers' Union (TAWU) has accused the Trinidad and Tobago-based ANSA McAL Group of Companies of seeking to provoke a national shutdown.

TAWU President, Chester Humphrey, levelled the charge as an industrial dispute rebounded to boiling point between the union and the Grenada Breweries Limited, owned by the ANSA McAL Group.

TAWU is angry that about 100 striking workers of the Grenada Breweries Limited (GBL) remain off the job even after Thursday's agreement brokered by Prime Minister Tillman Thomas.

"We are poised at a situation where certain grave things may have to occur with respect to a solidarity action,

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Riot police clash with protesters. (Picture by Nicole Best)

GBL: Workers denied entry over vandalism concerns

By Rawle Titus

THE Grenada Breweries Limited (GBL), locked in an escalating industrial row, says it was forced to reverse its decision to allow striking workers back on the premises over fears of vandalism.

The GBL was reacting publicly for the first time in the face of growing industrial tensions here over its decision to deny entry to employees who attempted to return to work on Friday after a one-week strike.

The industrial drama unfolded as TAWU President, Humphrey, and minor injuries to a number of workers who clashed with riot police earlier.

"The unwarranted and violent behaviour of some of the striking workers has created a situation where the company is compelled to withdraw its earlier invitation to employees to return to work," a statement issued by the GBL stated.

"Consequently, the Company has been forced to reconsider its position on the matter and to withdraw the offer to allow the workers to resume their duties after the Christmas holidays," stated the Minister of Labour, Lennox Andrews.

Roberts, wrote to the workers' union, the Technical and Allied Workers' Union (TAWU) calling for an end to the strike which began on Friday last week Friday failed to reach a settlement on a wage dispute.

The union is reportedly demanding a salary increase of seven percent over a three-year period, which is rejected by the GBL.

"The statement from GBL, released last week Wednesday afternoon makes reference to acts of "mischief" that the company claims have disrupted operations within the Brewery.

However, the four-page release did not elaborate on the extent of the disruptions claimed.

"Over the last few weeks there have been reports that there have been several acts of 'mischief' that have disrupted operations within the Breweries plant," the statement claimed.

"Consequently, the Company strongly believes that under the present circumstances outstanding matters have been settled to the satisfaction of both parties," it added.

The statement from the GBL also has accused TAWU of deliberately acting in ways frustrating the negotiating process, though both parties recognise that there is an urgency to the resolution of such disputes, the workers have unfortunately become engaged in industrial action contrary to the provisions in the collective agreement with the GBL, owned by ANSA McAL Group of Companies based in Trinidad.

"The Company deems this to be unacceptable and contrary to our belief that our employees should not resort to premature escalation of the matter and to engage in an act which we believe is clearly the purely part of a wider Union agenda."

However, police armed with shields and batons used force to remove the workers blockade which was set up in order to prevent delivery trucks from blocking the supply lines of the local brewery company.

"Grenada's Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Honourable Tillman Thomas has denied authorising the use of armed forces against striking workers of the Grenada Breweries Limited (GBL) on Friday.

A statement from his office said that reports that there was there is never an attempt to tell the police force how to perform its duties.

Several workers were reportedly beaten by riot police as they attempted to cross a picket protesting workers

Issues must be resolved before workers can come back, says GBL's chief negotiator

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something which we tried strenuously to avoid," Humphrey told reporters following mediation talks late on Friday.

A national Christmas Eve ceasefire was thought to have been averted during Thursday's series of meetings between Prime Minister Thomas and the Brewery and union officials, which led to a signed agreement.

The union claims the deal was for the immediate lifting of the blockade of the company's premises that was hindering the transportation of supplies and workers to work.

However, GBL's chief negotiator, Patrick Antoine, says the workers remain off the job because of the impasse.

"The workers are not yet on the job because we do not have a legal obligation in law to bring workers back onto the job. What we have to do is to work through the issues, so that we can bring workers back as quickly as possible," Antoine told reporters.

"We have been running a very unusual operation where our management team has now become the front line workers who just can't hold the strain anymore. What we are trying to do is to ensure that we abide by the labour code and bring workers back on to the job in reasonable time," he claimed.

Thomas is strong indication that the Grenada Breweries Limited has no plans for allowing the workers back in before the New Year, unless a legally binding trial action has formally ended.

Humphrey is accusing the GBL of reneging on a deal signed on Thursday and is insisting that the workers have been locked out, a charge the company has denied.

"We have actually today having signed this agreement, the company continues the lockout of the workers. The workers are not able to access their jobs, they are not able to access their employees," the union leader stated.

He signed an agreement which should allow the workers to return to work. Dr. Antoine insists, however that he represents continuous to lock the workers out. No reason was addressed that, no matter what scurrilous reason you gave, you would not be allowed and is not interested at this time in a settlement in this matter."

Meanwhile, the Grenada Breweries and the union representing its workers were up to late on Friday locked in salary negotiations, one day after they failed to resume broken down talks.

First truck leaving after riot police cleared the entrance. (Picture by Nicole Best)

PM denies authorising use of armed forces against striking workers

PRIME Minister Tillman Thomas has denied authorising the use of armed forces against striking workers of the Grenada Breweries Limited (GBL) on Friday.

A statement from his office said that reports that there was there is never an attempt to tell the police force how to perform its duties.

"Several workers were reportedly beaten by riot police as they attempted to cross a picket protesting workers from blocking the supply lines of the local brewery company.

"Grenada's Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Honourable Tillman Thomas, has not authorise, advise, nor did he direct the Royal Grenada Special Services Unit (RSSU) or the Royal Grenada Police Force to intervene in the current industrial impasse affecting the Grenada Breweries Limited," said the statement released just after 5 p.m. on Friday afternoon.

"The independence of the Royal Grenada Police Force (RGPF) to make decisions in the interest of upholding law and order is sacrosanct," the Grenadian leader stated.

Police, clad in riot shields and batons, had on Friday used force to clear the entrance to the facility when they showed signs of being interested in holding a one-week strike.

The Grenada Breweries Limited (GBL) and the Technical and Allied Workers' Union (TAWU) are deadlocked in wage negotiations amidst an unfolding industrial drama which threatens the spectre of a national shutdown.

According to the Grenadian Prime Minister, "no employer would not" attempt to direct the police force in the lawful execution of its duties.

"Dr. the Most Honourable Thomas has expressed concern over the ongoing industrial dispute between GBL and the Christmas season and has called on all sides to use the negotiating process to solve the situation.

"He encourages our efforts to work with all sides to achieve an amicable resolution to the matter," the Prime Minister said.

"In the most serious manner Grenadians who depend on the brewery for jobs over the Christmas season for livelihood, are not adversely affected."

(RT)