

The National Workers' Union (NWU) calls on the government of Trinidad & Tobago to put an immediate end to the State of Emergency.

The NWU rejects out of hand the government's stated position that the State of Emergency was imposed to deal with runaway crime. We look upon this as a smokescreen to mamaguy and divert the people.

It is clear that the Emergency was invoked primarily to obstruct and derail the mobilisation by the trade union movement for a general strike.

The invoking of the State of Emergency allows the PP government, under fire for betraying manifesto promises, to appear to be "fighting crime" while at the same time seeking to gain support from some sections of the society for their assault on freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

The invoking of the State of Emergency was not taken in response to the spike in murders or to some "need to know" conspiracy that would have resulted in mass killings.

On July 21st 2011, exactly one month before the emergency was declared, the National Workers' Union posted on its website an article headlined
Government Preparing for State of Emergency

(<http://www.workersunion.org.tt/where-we-stand/nwu-news/allarmypersonnelcalledupforduty>).

We were quite aware that the government was preparing for all contingencies and are not fooled by a minute by the nansi stories being spun by the Minister of National Security and the Attorney General.

The government did not panic, they did not respond to an unexpected event. They needed a trigger to justify their assault on the rights of citizens as they scramble to hold on to their fading political credibility. They found that trigger in the spike in killings.

If this were truly an assault on crime, detention orders would have been issued for the financiers, importers, specific officers in Customs, Immigration, police service, coast guard, members of the legal profession politicians, money launderers (using casinos, the retail food trade, construction, roll on roll off etc.)

Gerry Kangalee, National Education and Research Officer of the National Workers Union, has said:

“Why don't they seize their assets, open their bank accounts and go through their business with a fine tooth comb. Of course they won't because those who control the coercive force of the state, generally speaking, serve the interests of the fat cats and big business.”

It is easy to round up the bad boys and then decide if they can be charged. That kind of activity goes on every weekend; they are accustomed. Even if the anti-gang legislation succeeds in keeping “gang members” off the streets for 120 days, the lawyers are circling like sharks and will have a field day when these matters come to court.

Once the social conditions which give rise to the foot soldiers of the criminal enterprise are not transformed there will be replacements for those taken off the streets.

The government acknowledges that economic activity will be hard hit and talks about people making sacrifices. But many business owners are in a better position to weather the storm. They have reserves. They can bear it.

Their minimum wage, largely female workforce cannot bear it, fighting up with children, with school about to open. They live from pay day to pay day, juggling bills for food, transport, and rent. Their loss of income due to a reduction in work hours is absolutely shattering.

They work in bars, restaurants, pubs, cinemas, fast food outlets, casinos, clubs, guest houses, hotels, the entertainment industry, stores and other such establishments.

Others who are feeling the economic pain are: small business folk, vendors, taxi drivers, PH drivers, and fisher folk. The crime problem is multi-faceted. Once politicians depend on the financiers of the criminal enterprises to get them into power do not expect crime to be curtailed.

The State of Emergency is not going to make a dent in the criminality that besieges the country. It is just buying time for the government while it beats back the rising tide of working class discontent by getting the masses accustomed to political repression and violation of human rights under the guise of guaranteeing safety and security.

The National Workers Union repeats its call to end the state of emergency now.

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