

History of the Barbados Union of Teachers

The history and development of the Barbados Union of Teachers can be traced to 1895 with the formation of the Barbados Elementary School Teachers Association (BESTA). Elementary school teachers in Barbados were among the first workers to organize themselves.

Prior to 1910 BESTA functioned mainly as a friendly society. Members received sickness and funeral benefits and a Christmas bonus. At monthly meetings members engaged in discussions on personal matters.

In 1912 the school inspectors were able to convince the Board of Education to accept BESTA's Management Committee as its consultative committee in educational matters.

Later the school inspectors invited BESTA to form a salaries committee to consider teachers' salaries. Hence teachers' salaries were raised slightly. BESTA continued its agitation and in 1925 the first Teachers' Pensions Act was enacted.

As a result of recommendations of the Moyne Commission after the 1937 riots, elementary teachers were incorporated into the Civil Service. This incorporation became effective in 1944 when teachers became Civil Servants. They were now subject to the "Colonial Regulations" of the Government rather than to the various Church Codes.

According to the pamphlet: "**A Case for the Independent Union**", the 1944 development had absolutely no special meaning for the organizational life which teachers wanted for themselves. They belonged to BESTA which continued in the early 40's to be their professional and negotiated body.

During this period BESTA agitated and won a major victory for female teachers. Female teachers were granted the right to be married and remain in the profession. Also female teachers could now reapply and be reinstated into the profession after having a baby.

BESTA continued as the professional and representative body for teachers, but not without some struggle and conflict with the other body representing civil servants at the time, the Civil Service Association (CSA) now (NUPW).

However in 1949, because of Government's reluctance to bargain with separate groups of civil servants (namely teachers in Primary Schools) a strategic 'entente' (alliance) took place between the CSA and BESTA.

However despite the alliance, it was agreed that the BESTA's separate identity was understood to be guaranteed. As part of the arrangement to safeguard the identity of BESTA teachers paid a dual subscription, 50 cents to CSA and 50 cents to BESTA.

In the 1950,s with the establishment of Secondary Modern Schools BESTA changed its name to the **Barbados Union of Teachers** and remained as a division within the CSA.

During this period the CSA increased its subscription to \$1.00. Given that teachers could no longer afford the dual payment, the BUT's financial base was substantially reduced. However the most substantial measure was a 'gentleman's agreement' within the CSA that the teachers' division should retain 30% of their contributions to spend on their own development.

With time this arrangement became eroded and by 1968 it was no longer in existence.

As the teachers base dwindled and the BUT started to lose its separate organizational and professional identity, conflicts developed between the teachers division and the CSA.

Teachers felt that they were being underrepresented and short changed within the organization. There was a consciousness among teachers and eventually the leadership of the BUT launched a massive independent campaign for an independent union, an independent Barbados Union of Teachers.

The independent campaign culminated in a successful referendum held on **May 27th, 1974**. There were 1819 positive votes from teachers in the primary and comprehensive (Government) schools. Negative votes amounted to sixty- four in a referendum which took in approximately 90% of the total teacher population in the Government owned sector.

This referendum transformed the Barbados Union of Teachers from a division of the NUPW into an independent trade union. This ended a 25-year association with the Civil Service Union. An independent Barbados Union of Teachers was born.

The late **John Cumberbatch** who was in the forefront of the fight for an independent BUT and its president at the time wrote the following on April 5, 1975 as part of the foreword in the first Annual Report of the Barbados Union of Teachers.

The overwhelming success of the independent campaign itself was eloquent proof of the extent of disillusionment the teachers felt with the performance of the Civil Service Trade Union- The National Union of Public Workers. The massive 90% vote from the total teacher population (2300) in the Government Service indicated also that teachers were confident in themselves and in their leadership to entrust their professional and industrial destinies to an independent organization of teachers.

On June 29, a special General Meeting ratified the BUT's new constitution, trade union registration was achieved on **August 2, 1974** and Government recognized the Union as the sole bargaining agency for teachers in the Public Service on **September 5, 1974**.

The records of the Union show that the Executive Committee of 1974-1975 comprised the following:

President:	John Cumberbatch
Vice President	Harriet Jones
General Secretary	Alfred Trotman
Dep. Gen. Sec.	John Haynes
Treasurer	Kenneth Agard
PRO	Rudi Gibson

Executive Members	Odulia Regis
	Anthony Hinkson
	John Lovell
	Carl Springer

These executive committee members were among those who worked assiduously in mobilizing teachers during the campaign for independence. Others worthy of mention included Majorie Marshall, Edweena Armstrong, Gwen Mattis and Bertram Murray.

With the gaining of independence the Union started to build its infrastructure and established the Outlook Magazine, a Stewards Body and also Grievance, Sports and Entertainment Committees.

The Union became a hive of activity and attracted a good blend of youth and experience persons willing to serve.

These included such individuals as Stanley Mayers, Winslow Phillips, Cobin Hinds, Carl Hall, Pat Corbin, Winston Gibson, Barbara Brathwaite, Amril Kinch, Jennifer Watson, Cameron McCarthy, William Skinner, Grantley Elcock, Derek Ames, Dennis dePeiza, Dennis Murray, Tony Lovell, Peter "Adonijah" Alleyne and the list goes on.

Independence for the BUT was just the beginning of the many struggles and battles that lay ahead. Shortly thereafter the union was confronted with many battles which tested its strength, meddle, fortitude and certainly its commitment and resolve.

The first test came in June 1974, before the dust could settle on its independence victory. It was the famous **St. Leonard's Case**. Forty (40) teachers of the St. Leonard's Boys Secondary School staged a placard bearing protest against an English contract teacher who had allegedly kicked schoolboys on the compound of the adjoining girls' school. The Public Service Commission moved against 28 of the teachers dismissing 14 of the unappointed, and charged the other 14 who were appointed with a view to dismissal. The Union intervened (July 1974) and after a demonstration of solidarity by over 1000 teachers, the dismissed teachers were reinstated. However they were redistributed to schools throughout the system, some of them to primary schools. The appointed 14 were penalized by being transferred. They were to be tried by the Public Service Commission

but the trials never started since the Union's lawyer, Henry DeB Forde faulted the charges.

Then in 1975 the Government of the day moved to **retrench all unqualified teachers** who had been recruited at a time when there was a serious brain drain. These teachers some of whom had only one certificate, English Language, had worked hard to prop up the system during the brain drain, but were dumped with indecent haste.

The Union closed ranks, secured a stay of execution and held classes at the BUT Headquarters to assist those teachers to qualify for the service. These classes were held for as long as it took those teachers to qualify.

The new Government in 1976 continued the retrenchment policy. The BUT however continued its agitation, stood firm and demanded the reinstatement or compensation of their colleagues who were dismissed because they were unqualified.

In 1978 the Government decided to compensate the dismissed teachers and to find places elsewhere in the Public Service for the others.

In 1976 the Government **legislated public servants salaries** without settlement, for the first time. The BUT demonstrated outside of Parliament (Tuesday 22 June). It was the only public protest against government's breach of the principles of collective bargaining.

In the 1978 negotiations Government tried to exclude the BUT from the Negotiations table. They accused then President, the late **John Cumberbatch** of breaching "confidentiality" in the negotiations. However the union held firm against this scare tactic and prevailed in the circumstances.

Also in 1978, there was the **school meals issue**. When the school meals programme was introduced teachers were told to perform the duties and they did. This issue arose because teachers were being deprived of their lunch hour while doing school meals work; they were burdened with the associated clerical work and were treated as if school meals duties were rightfully theirs.

The Union argued at the time that school meals duties were not in teachers' job description, that secondary school teachers did not have such duties even though the terms and conditions of service were identical, and that by doing school meals duties teachers were contributing to unemployment by doing work that should be done by others.

The BUT announced that from April 10, 1978 that "teachers would cease to be involved in any aspect of the school meals operation." The rest is history.

The Union had other battles such as the **fight for regrading** which was granted after a campaign of **rotary sick outs** for several weeks which caused serious disruptions in the schools.

There was also the **Barbara Smith case**. Mrs. Smith was a head teacher and executive member of the BUT. It was reported that she had made an uncomplimentary remark about the Prime Minister in the school yard to her colleagues.

She was summoned to the Permanent Secretary's office the next day, but informed him that the Union had called strike action for its members on that day and that she was unable to attend since she was executive member.

Mrs. Smith attended the Union strike action and was suspended without pay by the Permanent Secretary.

The authorities' actions were inappropriate and wrong and Mrs. Smith was reinstated. There were other testing circumstances but the Union rallied the causes.

Of more recent vintage was the **Louis Lynch Secondary School Case**. In this matter, teachers and students of the above school had complained from as far back as the early 1980's for a series of ailments including respiratory complaints.

The Union fought a long and hard battle, and had to seek the intervention of CTUSAB and the Social Partnership to assist in solving this matter. A series of scientific investigations were conducted and it was found that there were volatile organic compounds (VOC'S) in the atmosphere. These included tetrachloroethylene (perc), phenol and glycol. Perc is a dry cleaning agent used by laundries and it produces symptoms such as dizziness, headaches, sleepiness, confusion, nausea, difficulty in breathing and eye irritation. It is hereby noted that there was a laundry adjoining the school compound.

During the period after a number of relocations of the student body the population of staff and pupils were redistributed into the existing school system.

However after further studies of the surrounding air quality proved inconclusive, the Government finally announced the closure of the school in early 2008.

During the period 1974-2010 the Union have had many accomplishments and has achieved a great deal in developing the teaching profession in Barbados and also in enhancing the terms and conditions of teachers.

Some of their achievements are as follows.

Acquisition of BUT Headquarters at "Merryhill" Welches St. Michael. 1976.

Purchase of land at Hothersal-1976

Establishment of the BUT Primary School Sports 1974-2001.

The Amalgamation of the BUT Sports and the National Sport Council Milo Sports to form the **National Primary School Athletic Championship (NAPSAC)**. 2002-Present
Establishing of the Barbados Cooperative Credit Union Ltd.
Establishing a Health Plan for Teachers.
Establishing a Masters Scholarship for Teachers with Union College, New York.
Establishment of Annual Teachers Week (October).

The BUT has formed many affiliations during its history.

These include:

Education International (EI)

Caribbean Union of Teachers (CUT)

Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL)

Congress of Trade Union and Staff Association of Barbados (CTUSAB)

Barbados Institute of Management and Productivity BIMAP

During the period of its existence the Union has had a variety of leaders to steer it path:

These include the following Presidents and General Secretaries.

Presidents:

1974-1979	John Cumberbatch
1979-1980	Majorie Marshall
1980-1981	John Lovell
1981-1987	Victor Hutchinson
1987-1989	Desmond Browne
1987-1995	Ronald Jones
1995-1997	Jeff Broomes
1997-1998	Denise Depeiza
1998-1999	Harry Husbands
1999-2003	Undene Whittaker
2003-Present	Karen Best

General Secretaries:

1974-1977	Alfred Trotman
1977-1979	Stanley Mayers
1979-1980	Carlisle Mascoll
1980-1983	Ronald Clarke
1983-1986	Lemuel Tull
1986-1989	Stephen Blanchard
1989-1994	Harry Husbands
1994-1997	Dennis dePeiza
1997-1999	Undene Whittaker
1999-Present	Herbert Gittens

Today BUT is a well respected Union with over 1700 members. The Union's Annual General Conference is held every April and Teachers' Week is held annually during the last week of October. The highlight of the week is the **John Cumberbatch Memorial Lecture**.

At present the Union is engaged in the development of its property at Hothersal Turning St. Michael. The Union has sold 21 residential lots and is embarking on the construction of apartments and duplexes for sale. An addition aspect of the development includes the construction of a commercial complex, an auditorium and a Day Care Centre.

“Long live the BUT”

Herbert Gittens
General Secretary