

12th July

Union Leader Defends Dues Increase

By Darrin Culmer

Following the recent hike in membership dues for members of the Bahamas Public Service Union (BPSU) union president John Pinder sought to reassure them Tuesday that the 67 percent increase was a move that will ensure to their benefit.



BPSU President John Pinder

BPSU executives informed union members in a notice circulated in daily newspapers that effective July 1st, 2006 general membership dues would increase from \$15 per month to \$25 per month.

According to the notice, the decision to increase the dues came during a special call general meeting held on June 22nd.

In a separate notice circulated to union members BPSU

executives said the additional funds would be used to increase the death benefit for members by 50 percent, increase pensions by 50 percent, lower by 5 cents the already reduced rate which members pay for gas at the BPSU's service station, increase by 50 percent the payout to members for education at BTVI and pay a stipend to active shop stewards.

Stating that the dues increase was also necessitated because the union's expenses have increased recently, BPSU President John Pinder said executives have held back for some time from increasing the dues.

According to Mr. Pinder, the volume of work which the union is required to do has increased significantly and consequently the BPSU has had to take on additional staff, a move he said has increased the union's recurrent expenditure.

"Our constitution gives the union the right to increase dues by five percent anytime there is a general increase or anytime salaries are increased," he said.

"We had five (salary) increases for members since 1995. The last time we had a dues increase was in 1995 so when we calculated it (the dues) should have been somewhere around \$22, but what happened is that in speaking to the general membership in the general membership meeting about the dues increase a motion and then a resolution were passed to increase the dues to an even \$25."

Mr. Pinder conceded that although the increase was duly ratified pursuant to the union's constitution only a fraction of the BPSU's membership was in attendance at the meeting when the vote was taken.

He said roughly 70 or 80 persons were at the meeting. The constitution requires the attendance of only 30 members to make up a quorum.

Mr. Pinder noted, however, that, as required by the constitution, executives advertised the meeting for 14 days prior to when it was scheduled to be held.

He also pointed out that notwithstanding the increase the BPSU's dues are still lower than those of other trade unions like the Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union, which stands at \$10 per week, and the Bahamas Union of Teachers, currently set at \$36 per month.

Not all BPSU members seemed satisfied, however, that the increase was justified.

"I think \$25 is too much to pay for dues," Sherry Forbes, an employee at the general post office said.

"I could see them going to \$20, but not to \$25. What I would tell Mr. Pinder is that he needs to negotiate more for our salaries then he could implement that increase in the union's dues. If we got more on our salaries then we wouldn't have a problem paying the \$25."

Other BPSU members like Byron Payne, however, had a different view.

"I think \$25 is a good price," Mr. Payne said.

"The increase is long overdue because if the union is going to go anywhere it is going to need the money since it does not have the members. If more people would join the union it would have more money therefore they wouldn't need to increase the dues."

Greg Smith also supported the dues hike.

"I don't think there is any place else where you will find benefits being increased by 50 percent so the increase in dues is worth it," Mr. Smith said.

"Retirees have been complaining for a long time. Now you have the retirees receiving an increase of 50 percent – I think that's excellent... If persons take time out to either go to union meetings, speak to their shop stewards or take a look at what's going on with their union they would be more than happy to sign off on \$10."

The decision by union executives to increase membership dues always won the approval of Charlene Saunders, a supervisor with the Post Office Department.

"I think the additional benefits will justify the dues increase because at least you would save an extra 5 cents for gasoline," she said.

"I think (the increase) will balance out as a result of the other benefits, but only if the non-members pay some kind of dues because when we benefit they benefit too so I think they need to be paying a percentage as well based on that."