

# "THE LABORER"

Monthly Publication by the Bartenders, Waiters and Other  
Similar Association of Panama, R.P.

ANASTACIO ORTIZ P.

Editor

P.O. Box 3127

Panama, R.P.

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ALEJANDRO CUELLAR

Manager

## EDITORIAL

### A MATTER OF CONCERN TO P. C. EMPLOYEES

We are pleased to note that steps are being taken to solve the problems of the civilian workers of the Panama Canal Department; and, we also note with pride, the interest our government has taken in matters affecting nationals in the Canal Zone.

These attempts to solve conditions which are inimical to these workers, were motivated through demonstrations of dissatisfaction on the part of those affected and the intelligent and formal protests submitted to the Commanding General of the Caribbean Area.

It is said that the Board appointed by Gen. Brett, and headed by Gen. Weart, will base its recommendations, among other things, on local employment practices and in conformity with established practices. We hope that this does not mean that the un-Democratic Panama Canal practices are to be adopted, and warn all interested parties to be wary of the influence that Union, (who count among their accomplishments the amendment of the Appropriation Bill which would allow aliens on the C. Z. to serve in U. S. Civil Service positions) will attempt to exert on this Board.

The considerations which it is stated, will be given to treaty provisions, if they materialize, will be another credit to Democracy as portrayed by the Army officials and through our Government's intercession.

To all appearances this Board will only deal with matters concerning Army civilian employees, which makes us wonder, how much longer are the Canal and Railroad employees going to remain silent or indolent to those ultra-nationalistic practices of the Panama Canal Executives.

The disparity between this organization's regulations and wages, and those of our territory and even of other agencies on the Zone, are so noticeable that we wonder that no protests are made. For instance: laborers on the C. Z. are paid .22¢ per hour, while in the Republic they earn .28¢ per hour; the former earn no vacation periods, while the latter are entitled to one month's rest after each year of service. These conditions not only contribute to malnutrition, but also to the delinquency of our youths and women, and should capture the interest of our nationals who work for this organization and the existing bodies who are reputed to represent Alien labor, should take the example set by the progressive employees of the Army, and seek amelioration of these conditions.

After the war is won, Canal Zone Alien workers may expect, renewed activities towards limiting the acquisitive power of non-U. S. citizens, as past and recent events have proven. Therefore all efforts should be expended NOW, in order to WIN THE PEACE as effectively as we are contributing to the winning of the War.

### A True Worker Sacrifices For His Fellowmen

In relation to the creation of a new department denominated "Board for the Study of National Problems", the chief of the Department of Ministerio de Gobierno y Justicia, has initiated a campaign, to relieve the situation of the urban worker, for which he requires precise and careful data; but as in order to obtain these he would have to employ a considerable number of inspectors paid by the Government, who would have left the work undone, as in previous cases, the workers solved the problem themselves. They immediately offered to take care of the job and have distributed among several labor agrupations, credentials, that served without delay to establish the irregularities in determined commercial sectors and for which reason a denunciation was consequently presented to the corresponding Ministry.

#### *The Worker Defends Himself In Every Way*

One of the most arduous struggles in the workers' justifications, is to get the rest-day that legally corresponds him. Among protests many employers agreed to give their employees a weekly day off of 24 hours but will not pay the salary that corresponds to one whole week. The week, generally speaking, has 7 days but legally, in relation to work, it is determined that it has six days. To evade such an insignificant payment, employers claim that their employees are under contract with them to work per day payment, evading in this way a privilege granted by the law. The Government should end such misinterpretation of the contract for working per day, because as it is understood, the worker, who at the end of the week has rendered a satisfactory work should be considered as having worked for one week and earn a seven day salary. If he works on Sundays he should receive a total corresponding to 8 days work.

It doesn't take a lawyer to arrive at such a conclusion. Anybody with common sense and a modest conscience practices this system. We refer to the Administrator and Chef of the Club Atlas Kitchen.

He and his employees have signed a contract wherein is stated that their work is payable per day. But this employer recognizes their salary as per week and pays them for an 8 day working period.

This is a fact. The contract was drawn up in our Secretarial department and was given the correct interpretation that should always prevail.

For this reason, we made out the following memorandum:

"Mr....."

Si Ud. quiere pasar un rato agradable y bien atendido

VISITE LA

Cantina Universal

(Frente a la plaza 5 de Mayo)

donde encontrará LICORES DE PRIMERA, MUSICA Y DEPORTES.

## Committee To Investigate

In October 1943 President Roosevelt appointed a committee composed of 5 members, for the investigation of the cost of living and, for the revision of the methods used by the Office of Labor Statistics (one of the functions of the Labor Department) in their official estimates regarding this matter.

Said committee, which includes two labor representatives, compares its estimates with those of the Office of Labor Statistics, in order to know exactly what fluctuations occurred. In such a manner they will be able to determine if the established wage scale is in conformity with equity, or if they harm the interests of living standards of U. S. workers.

The Committee will follow, principally, 3 lines of investigation:

- 1) Actual cost of living, from month, and a comparison of the figures obtained in (a) January 1941; (b) May 1942 and (c) September 1942;
- 2) The methods of computing living costs, as used by the Office of Labor Statistics; and
- 3) Revisión or possible changes, if methods currently used are not thought convenient or have been the cause of mistakes.

The working classes of the U. S. have protested in various forms against the rising cost of living, backing their statements with the detailed reports of economists from within their own ranks, stating that salaries were not in proportion with the actual cost of living and that the working classes were overburdened with Pres. Roosevelt's anti-inflation program.

The Dock Workers Union (C.I.O.) have issued a questionnaire which will help them to get necessary data on prices of foodstuff. The questionnaire is simple and permits authorized investigators, to get daily prices from stores in the country. Periodically the investigators will return the forms to the Investigation Section, where final analysis will be made. The executives of this Union states that "in this manner we will fight the enemies with their own arms." "From now on," they say "our demands will be based on our own data, and not on those given by the government."

It is important to know that the Office of Price Administration (a federal agency) solicited several months ago an inspection of the working sectors, to have all figures referring to the price of foodstuff, within a government plan, to reduce high costs of living and to avoid inflation.

Now, what should we the Panamanian workers say, if the American workers, who are the best paid workers in the world, protest and ask their government to remedy the high cost of living?

Probably considering our inadequate salaries the Government has just created an office to investigate national problems such as the salaries as compared to the workers' cost of living. Here's hoping it is not too late.

### WORKERS ARE TIRELESS IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR REIVINDICATION

After various attempts to secure, with different authorities, a correction of the errors committed by employers of the Capital City, violating labor laws, it was decided to go directly to the Nation's First Magistrate, so that he would look into the matter. Consequently, the following letter was sent to President Ricardo Adolfo de la Guardia. We also insert the answer received:

August 17th, 1944.

Mr.  
Ricardo Adolfo de la Guardia,  
Ciudad.

Excellency:

I hereby, respectfully address you, as a Panamanian citizen, with cedula No. 47-5541 and as President of the Bartenders, Waiters and Similar Association of Panama. As a last resort in my struggle pro the re- vindication of the national worker who is imposed upon, by commerce in general, especially by the employers from other countries who deny their employees, the guarantee established by national laws based on international laws complied with in other countries.

On investigating we learned that owners of business places do not send their correct quotas as per their employees salaries, thus harming the public treasury. Others charge 10% instead of 6% on salaries of one or less, dollars. They handle their Books in the manner they think best so that you cannot be sure of what is their employee salary in case of a lawsuit. We do not get our vacations because they ignore Decree No. 38 of 1941 and stick to the law of 1931 that stated that you are entitled to vacations after working two years. We work 10 or more extra

hours without remuneration. We work on Sundays and holidays without remuneration. We do not get a 25% of our regular salaries for extra labor hours nor a 24 hour rest, to which we are entitled and then, if there are any complaints, employees are forced to sign documents stating that payment has been received for four days, when they were only paid for two days. To make matters worse, they contract as "artists" strangers, who later are employed for almost anything. We are displaced by women and minors. Then we are accused of being lazy. But how can workers comply with their duties if they are denied the necessary rest. What can they earn, scarcely suffices them in living a mediocre life with all its obligations.

Then they have no other choice but to take up vice, including drinking liquor.

For this reason, based on your declaration, promises and actuation in this sense, we address you as our only solution in our difficulty.

We present our pleas to your Excellency, in view of the fact that other Governmental dependencies have merely stated and promised that they would help us, but have taken no action in the matter. In your hand lies, the strict compliance of said dispositions as your Excellency's good Government favored our national defense pro the laborers.

Hoping that the dispositions will be respected, as in your power lies their strict compliance, for the government's good name and national benefit, I am,

Yours respectfully,

Anastasio Ortiz P.