

NEWS

# UWI workers protest over backpay

TYRELL GITTENS

OWTU president general Ansel Roget and union officials met with management of The University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus, for over two hours on Wednesday, to continue discussions on a deadline for daily and monthly paid UWI workers to receive outstanding backpay. "We met with UWI's management earlier this month on January 7.

"At that time we got certain commitments (on a deadline) and today we came to ensure that all of those commitments are intact," said Roget after the meeting. He, however, did not reveal what was discussed at the meeting and what were the potential deadlines that were discussed.

Disgruntled workers protesting outside the UWI's principal office, while the meeting was being held, claimed they were told they would receive outstanding backpay by March however it does not seem likely following conversations with university management.

On Thursday, a senior management team of the university met with officials of the OWTU to continue discussions related to the processing of the back pay for ad-



EDUCATED PROTEST: UWI workers during a protest at the St Augustine campus on Wednesday. PHOTO BY VIDYA THURAB

ministrative, technical and service staff and daily and weekly rated workers.

During the meeting, in order to expedite the funding process the parties agreed to sign a copy of both the daily and monthly paid collective agreements.

The UWI, in a release, said it is aggressively pursuing the recovery of the GATE receivables from the relevant agencies, as this is required to fund the back pay. The University remains committed to make the initial payment to employees by the end of March 2020 for all active Administrative, Tech-

nical and Service Staff (ATSS) and Daily and Weekly Rated Workers.

Last November, the industrial court ruled in the OWTU's favour when the union took UWI management to court over backpay and other salary issues for the period 2011-2013, for daily paid, and 2012-2014, for monthly paid workers. In the ruling, a date for UWI to make payments was not specified and it was required for all parties involved, to negotiate a date.

"The university, its line minister and the minister of finance should have seen it fit to ensure all outstanding retroactive payments

were made to workers. "We have had Christmas, New Years and are now approaching Carnival. They are yet to tell us in a definitive way when these workers are going to get their backpay," Roget said during the protest on Wednesday.

Roget said the backpay is now long overdue as workers have expected to receive the monies since November.

He said while UWI is willing to ensure that a definite deadline is provided for the payments it is also dependent on the ministry of finance and Education Minister Anthony Garcia.

"There are also two additional periods of collective agreements to be negotiated.

"Saying UWI workers and OWTU members are running out of patience with the situation, he said it also indicated the plight of other workers in the country today who are facing issues backpay and salary issues.

"We are saying for them (UWI management) to ease the burden and the strain on the UWI workers. Make good on the outstanding retroactive payments for the court settlement that was delivered on November 2."

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