

NFM workers protest stalled wage talks



National Flour Mills employees protest the delay in wage negotiations and other concerns outside the company on Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain, yesterday.



Seamen and Waterfront Workers' Trade Union (SWWTU) branch chairperson Nazreen Haynes-Davis speaks to Guardian Media while NFM employees demonstrated along Wrightson Road, Port-of- Spain, yesterday.

PHOTOS BY ANDREA PEREZ-SOBERS

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Workers at the National Flour Mills (NFM) staged a protest in front of the building on Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain yesterday, over stalled wage negotiations.

The workers are now calling for heads of the management team to roll, accusing them of deliberately impeding the process.

The workers gathered during their lunch break at 11.30 am armed with placards chanting "The CEO must go." Seamen and Waterfront Workers' Trade Union (SWWTU) branch chairperson Nazreen Haynes-Davis said the union and management started negotiations in December, but to date, the company has not laid a proper percentage on the table.

She said good faith negotiations are not taking place, and the union also has a problem with the style of management, as she claimed they are not following the collective agreements.

She said the last thing that probably broke the camel's back was that the negotiations were not running on time.

"So we are within the third year of the negotiation it's for 2022, 2023, 2024 into 2025, so that's the period we complain about. We would have submitted proposals in April and today they say that they haven't gotten the approval from the board, but this is 14 months after the fact," Haynes-Davis lamented.

The union's branch chairperson claimed it appeared to be delayed on purpose. She said a fair wage offer must be given as the state-controlled NFM in its financials for 2022 made \$6 million, in 2023 \$35 million and in 2024 saw \$45 million in profits.

"So something reasonable for the workers."

Asked what a fair offer was, Haynes-Davis indicated between 10 and 12 per cent.

She said the workers will protest daily until management meets with the union. If nothing is resolved, they will head to the Labour Minister to report a break-down in negotiations.

Contacted for comment, NFM's chief executive officer Ian Mitchell said that management is awaiting the board of directors' approval for a revised offer for negotiations.

"I understand that this is an emotional situation as negotiations have been somewhat protracted.

However, my team and I are doing what we can to bring this to a close in the shortest possible time. I still love them," Mitchell stated.

Labour Minister Leroy Baptiste, when contacted, said he would have to get familiar with the situation before commenting.

Meanwhile, the National Trade Union Centre of T&T (Natuc) called on NFM to immediately address long-standing issues surrounding stalled negotiations with the SWWTU, an affiliate of Natuc.

Natuc said it has been advised that the company has refused to move beyond an offer of a one per cent wage increase per year for the 2022-2024 bargaining period, despite inflation rates.

"The offer of 1x1x1 is a clear signal that the management is out of touch with the realities facing working families. This amounts to starvation wages and cannot be accepted," Natuc stated.

Natuc alleged the company has been creating new positions and rushing them through board approval without any consultation with the union, a direct violation of established industrial relations norms.

"Natuc is calling on the management of NFM to immediately cease these unfair practices and engage in meaningful, good-faith negotiations with the SWWTU," it added.

In its financials in April, NFM reported an \$8.8 million or 25 per cent increase in year-on-year profits after tax, from \$35.4 million for the financial year ending December 31, 2023, to \$44.1 million for the same period in 2024. However, NFM also saw a nine per cent dip in overall revenue down to \$523.4 million in 2024, in comparison to \$577.3 million in 2023.