

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Corrections Officers On St. Croix Stage Job Action; Union Rep Says Bryan Administration Has Made No Attempts To Negotiate

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ST. CROIX -- When a Bureau of Corrections employee showed up for work at the Golden Grove Correctional facility on Monday, this employee met an unfamiliar sight: B.O.C. corrections officers staged what this employee called a sick out, leaving the facility void of its normal level of security. The sick out continued into Tuesday, though a few corrections officers came to work today.

The job action, this employee said, disrupted the traditional flow of operations at B.O.C. Recreational time for inmates, along with programs, were placed on hold as there were

no corrections officers to secure the facility.

At least two of the B.O.C. employees at Golden Grove who were part of the sick out, told the Consortium the action was taken in protest of the lack of negotiations for a new salary agreement between the Seafarers International Union, which represents the corrections officers, and the Government of the Virgin Islands. The officers are currently operating under an agreement that was signed in 2009 and expired in 2014.

The Consortium reached out to B.O.C. leadership on Monday afternoon with a number of questions, but as of 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, a response was not received.

Meanwhile, Eugene Irish, vice president of the Seafarers International Union, told the Consortium Tuesday that he was not aware of any job action, and would not have sanctioned such.

"I am currently investigating because I don't have all of the facts as to what happened, if anything did happen," Mr. Irish said. "We have not sanctioned a strike. We've had no conversations with our membership as a whole about the job action. I can't converse about something that I don't have information on."

Late Monday, the union was furnished with a document that listed over 20 B.O.C. employees at the Golden Grove Correctional Facility who on Monday did not show for work. These employees, according to the document, gave varying reasons as to why they either stayed home, or came to work and left. B.O.C. has over 70 corrections officers territory-wide, which means if the numbers are to be split equally between districts, almost all of the St. Croix corrections officers did not show up for work on Monday.

Mr. Irish said the union was served this morning with a Temporary Restraining Order from the Office of Collective Bargaining for the job action -- an action he continued to stress that he was not aware of.

He said, however, that if the action did take place, "I will say to you that they took an illegal action which violates Virgin Islands Code and the contract. So if any member of this union expects that I as a leader is going to sanction violating the law, that's not going to happen. Not under my watch. We represent officers in St. Croix, we represent officers in St. Thomas, and we are under the same contract. We represent the officers that work at the Youth Rehabilitation Center. So if there was such disdain, why is there no such action being taken in St. Thomas?"

The contract that Mr. Irish is referring to was signed in 2009. Following the expiration of the contract in 2014, the parties -- the government of the Virgin Islands and the Seafarers International Union -- agreed in either 2016 or 2017, according to Mr. Irish, that the employees should be paid at the levels agreed upon in 2009, which suggests that even after the agreement was signed in 2009, the step increases were not fully realized until 2014.

The parties were supposed to negotiate in good faith following the agreement reached between 2016 and 2017, for a new bargaining agreement that would see B.O.C. correction officers receiving salary increases. Mr. Irish said negotiations were ongoing in 2018 during the Mapp administration with former Chief Negotiator Natalie Tang-How.

However, since the Bryan administration took office, negotiations have halted.

"The same Office of Collective Bargaining who went before the Legislature on August 20 and said that they are going to negotiate to completion a contract on behalf of the Bureau of Corrections before the end of the fiscal year that we're in, which finishes in two weeks," Mr. Irish said.

"To this day, September 17, I have yet to receive a phone call, an email or letter through fax or US mail from Ms. Springette as it relates to dates to bargain," Mr. Irish added, [referring to Joss Springette](#), chief negotiator for the Office of Collective Bargaining under the Bryan administration.

He added that B.O.C. Director Wynn Timerman has said during staff meetings that B.O.C. and the Office of Collective Bargaining have been trying to get in touch with him but have been unable to, comments that Mr. Irish dismissed as untrue.

"Same way they sent the TRO this morning, same way they sent the letter yesterday afternoon and I responded to them, I'm always available to respond," he said.

Asked whether he could understand why B.O.C. corrections officers are infuriated with the current situation, Mr. Irish said, "I can see why they are upset because I'm upset for the same reasons. Because I'm being lied to by the administration."

He added, "We were in negotiations up to last year, so I can't say that the Mapp administration wasn't negotiating. And I can say that up to the day, Sept. 17, 2019, the Bryan administration has made zero movement to advise the union about dates to negotiate. That I can say."