

## **Forrester Carroll - Ingraham Is No Robin Hood...**

“Reckless endangerment of the welfare of the Bahamian people” and “Breach of Trust” ought to be the charges brought against Hubert Ingraham, and his band of nincompoops, for destroying the lives of the citizens of this once envious nation.

Ingraham ought to be arrested and led away in handcuffs for “Breach of Trust” in that this is the second time he has led this nation to the brink of total economic collapse. Despite being warned, months ago, about this potential economic tsunami coming our way, his government failed to take the necessary steps to cushion the anticipated fallout and now, in his proposed budget for fiscal period-2010/2011- he and his government are proposing to literally break the backs of us all when, in fact, he and his cabinet ministers ought to be the only ones who should suffer and be made to pay the penalty of their goof-ups. He should be relieved of the governance of this country forthwith.

For about two years, the PLP has been sounding the warning bell but they would not listen. As a matter of fact they kept assuring us that it wasn't as bad as the PLP kept saying it was or that it would come to be. In their mid-year budget debate, recently, they told us, as well, that things were getting better. Laing said that the recession had stalled; that it had bottomed out and that things could only improve. But on Wednesday last, when the budget for fiscal period 2010/2011 was delivered to parliament, the die was cast; a reality check appeared to have been taken and Ingraham had no choice but to tell the truth, for once. He dropped the bombshell; a budget of despair; a budget of hopelessness; a budget of misery and pain. I might as well admit to you, my people, I am angry as hell; why am I angry as hell you ask? Because we didn't have to come to this, if Ingraham had only listened and use common sense in exploring the possibilities of what the PLP had advised him.

This mess is primarily of Ingraham's making and now he comes, veiled behind the office of the country's finance ministry, to gouge the very ones who can ill-afford to be gouged. He is no Robin Hood that is for sure.

Ingraham's budget proposals include, among other things, an increase in customs duties on all cars ordinarily imported into the Bahamas by a whopping 30%; all trucks and off the road vehicles by 25%. It proposes tax increases on departure tax, for all passengers leaving the country, by 35%; hotel room taxes by 70%; locally produced beer by 300-500% and drivers' licenses and vehicle registration fees are all slated for huge increases. At the same time, the budget proposes a reduction in the amount of subsidies given to Family Island mailboats by some 10% or \$4000 per month in most of the cases; private school allowances by 20% and exemptions for returning residents will be reduced by 50%, I am told.

The budget seeks to increase the stamp tax paid on real estate transactions by an additional 2% and reduces the allocations to social services by approx. \$3 million. The College of The Bahamas and all the various supported youth programs are not spared

Ingraham's knives either and all bank transactions will see a 15% increase in government fees. And get this, he wants to borrow another \$235 million, this fiscal period, claiming that if he is unable to secure this loan, his government will not be able to pay civil servants' salaries; well whoopee!! If I were a cabinet minister, unlike the health minister Dr. Minnis who only threatened to resign, I would have no doubt resigned already to avoid having to get up in parliament and lie to the Bahamian people.

Any of the ministers, who claim to possess any kind of compassion for the less fortunate, at this time, should be hard pressed to debate this budget with the intentions of voting for its approval. So far in the debate all of them seem to think that it is a wonderful budget; well we will see. We shouldn't forget that it was only in 2008 that this "tax, borrow and spend FNM government" raised customs duties, across the board, on about 160,000 items by between 3-18%.

With the subsidy of ZNS radio and television slashed by 50% from \$8.5 million to \$4.25 million, you can be sure that 66% of the staff will be let go and I predict that the facilities in Freeport Grand Bahama will be shut down. ZNS, as we know it, will be no more and while I agree that the regime ought to have been changed on the advent of private broadcasting, I cannot accept that we should dismantle the facilities, here, in the nation's second city.

We've been sounding the "danger bells" for sometime now, but Mr. Big Stuff thought he and Laing had all the answers and we didn't know what we were talking about. When this \$235 million loan is secured, which I fully expect them to succeed in getting, this will bring the total amount of this government's borrowings-in three short years in office-to more than \$1 billion. This is criminal and someone needs to be made accountable to the Bahamian people for willy-nilly increasing the national debt beyond our ability to service it. Nurses, I can assure them, can kiss their proposed health insurance coverage good bye and the only way they will ever get health insurance is when the PLP is back in power come 2012, Lord willing. We, in the PLP, believe that all Bahamians should enjoy full comprehensive health insurance coverage-from the cradle to the grave-and not just the privileged few. The FNM, on the other hand, believes that the masses don't deserve full medical insurance coverage; that you deserve exactly what you are getting right now-bad treatment and daily abuse at the Rand and Princess Margaret hospitals.

This is where Ingraham and his FNM government have brought us and where they wish to keep us. They did the same-(lest we forget)-when they destroyed the economy during their first two consecutive terms in office, 1992-2002, and were sent packing, in 2002, remember?

A mail boat captain was practically in tears when he told me that he really doesn't know how he can make up the \$4000, shortfall, per month he is losing in the cuts. Privately operated schools in Freeport are labouring over the fact that they may have no alternative but to raise school fees to compensate for the 20% cut in their government subsidy. One school, with an enrolment of around 600 students has lost almost \$5000 of the \$23,000 it

received monthly from the government and the \$5000 paid about three of their teachers' salaries. They claim that they were already struggling to make ends meet, ever since the devastating hurricanes a few years ago and now this adds to their dilemma.

No promotions, in the civil service ; no increments and a moratorium on hiring will further erode "esprit de corps" and promote more "inefficiency" in the public service; of that I have no doubt.

I hate to have to remind Bahamians, but I must do so; the PLP warned Hubert Ingraham about the mess he was getting us into when he stopped the PLP approved projects; reviewed and cancelled many of them, when he came to office in 2007. S & P agreed that his actions caused an erosion of investor confidence and many who had intended to invest in our country changed their minds when they saw what the FNM government did to existing investors who had signed agreements with the Christie Administration. No fool would pump millions of dollars into a country if they didn't think their investment would be safe and that was (and still is) the position we found ourselves in with the adoption of that dastardly policy of Ingraham's of, "stop; review and cancel."

In addition to all the increases contained in the budget proposed, BEC's electricity rates are also slated for 5.25% increase this year. National insurance payments are being increased, effective June 1st and, please don't forget (as if we don't have enough taxes already) that a brand new tax is being introduced within the next six months, for garbage collection in the capitol.

I will predict, here and now, that the revenue estimates will not perform as projected, in this budget, and even if his government is successful in securing the \$235 million loan, Ingraham could in all probability, be faced with having to issue civil servants with I.O.Us in lieu of their salaries; or be forced to dismiss half the civil service without their pensions and or other accrued benefits. This state of affairs is very possible and indeed very likely, given the precarious predicament with which we are faced presently. I am concerned, as well, that the parity of our B\$ to the US\$ could be greatly compromised, given our worsening financial situation.

Only a jackass would habitually do what Ingraham and his FNM government have done, over the years, i.e. to spend more money than they earn; and only a bigger jackass would habitually spend on a scale far higher than their possible earning power could ever be. Ingraham and his cabinet are guilty of breaking both these financial don'ts.

To their credit and in attempt to dialogue with Ingraham in an effort to find out just where his head is, the Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce made four appointments, I am told, for the president and his executive team to meet with the country's CEO for talks about the proposed austere measures being taken in the budget, but the man chickened out, I am told, and failed to show up for any of the four scheduled meetings. If this is true, and I have no reason to doubt my source, it is typical of Ingraham when he wants to avoid facing the music because he is a coward. His methodology is to shout at people,

insultingly, from behind the protection of the house of assembly. There is no question that it is high time we roll this crew out of our parliament and if we are to save this nation both the FNM and Hubert Ingraham must go now.

Abaco's wedding of all weddings, took place in Marsh Harbour Abaco on the weekend (29th May) where, I am told, 300-400 Abaconians and rich visitors attended. The main topic of discussion? Not the wedding, but whether Ingraham should be made to undergo psychiatric treatment or not. The consensus, as was related to me, was that Ingraham's new budget reflects the degree of insanity that has overtaken him; he needs to see a psychiatrist they all seemed to have agreed and just think; these are his supporters; his constituents.

I would like the answer to one question; what will be the FNM's talking points when they visit people in their homes seeking their support in the next general elections. Tell me, please, what will they say to the people who they've made poor? If I were in their shoes, I would be worried-very worried-about those flying "bucket-missiles" of two-day old stale, smelly urine coming at me. But you know what? They really believe that our people, who have suffered untold misery under their governance, will still embrace them as though nothing has changed. A rude awakening is certainly awaiting them.

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