

Remarks by Fred Mitchell MP Fox Hill  
'The State of Things'  
26th August 2010  
Pineridge Branch of the PLP

It is my privilege and honour to be in Grand Bahama for these days and for this day.

Today we began the day by paying tribute at a special service organized by the Leadership here in Grand Bahama: Senator Michael Darville, Greg Moss and Assistant Secretary General Michelle Reckley to honour the late founder of our country Sir Lynden O. Pindling. Today marks 10 years ago that he died in Nassau. We are all privileged to be here today.

Inevitably, some will ask the question: why do we remember him or mark the occasion? Quite frankly, he is what we have to anchor us to our roots and our past. It is a great past and it was his work and those of his colleagues that caused us to be where we are today.

Many of the organs of the modern Bahamas were established during his time: the College of The Bahamas, Bahamasair, the Social Welfare programmes, the tourism and banking economy, the National Insurance Board and the Royal Bahamas Defence Force.

There is a lot of revisionism going on today about who established what but it is clear that this state which we enjoy today was established under the leadership of Sir Lynden Pindling.

Those of us who live in Grand Bahama should recall that he was arrested in 1965 while part of a demonstration here for the rights of Grand Bahamians.

It was here in November 1969 as he opened the then new Borco facility in Freeport that he told the then establishment here in Freeport that if the social order did not bend it would be broken. Following that speech there was a rapid transfer of wealth from the non Bahamian to the Bahamian in this city and it was set on the path to becoming a Bahamian city.

But tonight as we celebrate all the things it is not the past on which we dwell but the present and the future.

As you look west from here, there is a tall building that stands abandoned in the centre of city. It and its companion building across the street used to be two thriving hotels; the former Oasis, which we knew for the longest time as Princess Hotels. A foolish decision by the Free National Movement administration led to the hotel being bought by people who did not have the best interests of Grand Bahama at heart. When the hurricane came and damaged the building, the enterprise folded, and they who have now bought it appear to have neither the means nor the mind to do something about the refurbishment of the buildings and returning them to economically productive capacity.

With five FNM Members of Parliament representing this island, those buildings stand as a testament to the great failure of the FNM administration. They cannot even act to help their own people.

One of the legacies of Sir Lynden was that he believed and the PLP believes today that the government should use its resources to intervene in the economy to provide work for the Bahamian people.

This government believes in standing by and letting things happen or in putting people on the dole or on welfare, not finding productive work for our people. How else could you explain five FNM MPs sitting on their duffs in Grand Bahama and doing nothing to get that hotel going?

Or for that matter sitting back while the air lift into Freeport continues to decline month and after month and they do nothing. There is a report that the direct flight to this city from Charlotte is to end next month.

Or for that matter sitting back while the disputes rage in the Grand Bahama Port Authority, which authority is central to the future of this island and city and they the FNM MPs and government do nothing but make threats in speeches.

Instead of intervention, the FNM believes in sitting on their hands. Instead of intervening to get the hotels back in Commission, they are passing an act to abolish the Hotel Corporation which was created by Sir Lynden Pindling to intervene in the economy when no one else would.

In the United States U.S. President Barack Obama intervened to save General Motors and Chrysler because it was in the national interest of the United States to do so. Tourism is the number one earner for our country, central to our present and future existence, yet the government of The Bahamas sits on its hands and does nothing. The government ought to intervene to get those hotels back up and running and providing jobs for the people of Grand Bahama.

How long will the FNM continue to allow the lack of promotion of the Our Lucaya facility to go on and on and on? How is it that resources can be tied up on the southern shore here in Freeport at Our Lucaya, with occupancies in the low teens and the government not intervene to ensure that the owners of the resort get the point that something needs to be done?

I believe that intervention is so necessary by the government. I have called for the Minister of Labour to intervene to save the jobs of the people of City Markets. I have visited the stores in Nassau and here in Freeport and the workers are worried that the company is going to fail and they are going to be left holding the bag. They are concerned that their pension funds are at risk if the company fails. The Minister of Labour cannot sit on his hands. He must find out what this company is doing.

And as we talk about the future of our country, we must be concerned about the education of our children. School opens on Monday 30th August. The Minister of Education Desmond Bannister has a good public relations machine going and the idea being sold in the press is that schools will open on time and with a minimum of problems.

I have done a tour here of some of the schools and I can tell you that nothing assures me that there is going to be a smooth opening of schools. But in any event, some questions have to be raised.

Chief amongst them: has the minister supplied enough desks for the schools for all the students that will be coming into the schools next week. I am advised that furniture is in short supply in Grand Bahama. I am advised that teachers are in short supply in Grand Bahama.

I am advised that the decision to create junior and senior high schools in Jack Hayward and Edward St. George Schools is a disaster waiting to happen.

The FNM in their stop, review and cancel programme, cancelled the plan of the PLP to build a new school for Grand Bahama. The PLP knew that a new school was needed. The FNM cancelled it.

Now they are using their public relations machine to say what a great thing they are doing by creating a junior and senior high school. The PLP agrees that junior high students ought to be separated from senior high school students, but is this present policy of running a fence through the school grounds, the best use of resources? We are advised that a fence is to be put up to slice the campuses in half and that junior highs will go to one half and senior highs to the next half. We are advised that this is causing confusion and double expenses, which, if the FNM had listened to the good sense of the PLP, would not be happening. The problem is that when education policies go wrong, it is the young people, our country's future who will suffer because of this lack of planning.

So I do not want the press in this city and in Nassau to be wallflowers in the matter of the opening of the schools. The hard questions must be put. I add that despite what being is said from officials of the Ministry of Education, there will be extreme pressure being put on the schools as a result of the ill advised decision of the government to cut the subsidies to private schools.

Students today are entitled to take the fact of a high school education for granted. But within the lifetime of many people here tonight, back in 1967 when Lynden Pindling and his colleagues took the reins of office: there was one Government Secondary school, the Government High School. Its intake was limited to some 25 pupils per year and you had to pay in order to go to the school. All of that was changed by the PLP. Those in the UBP who were displaced by the PLP were content to allow the situation with regard to high school education in the country to go on as they left it and this includes the infamous Stafford Sands who many people wrongly credit with constructing the modern Bahamian economy.

There is too much revisionism going on, too much rewriting of history.

My proposal to our party is that education is the key to uplifting our country out of poverty. Poverty has increased since the FNM has come to power and the quality of life of the Bahamian middle class has declined. This is the same middle class that Sir Lynden Pindling and his colleagues worked so hard

to create

I propose that our party agree to triple in real terms the amount of money dedicated to education over the first five years of our next term and to increase it by ten percent for every year after that. The two areas that need urgent attention are the pre schools for children and the support of tertiary level education.

There is a need to fully computerize the schools and to order a laptop for every child in the public school system. The PLP ought to commit itself to that.

There also ought to be a commitment to provide tuition for all students who are able to get into the College of The Bahamas and into the University of the West Indies.

I wish to commend to you the white paper on foreign affairs and foreign trade: called Vision 2020 which lays out in clear and concise terms what one vision for the future is from the PLP in the area of foreign affairs and foreign trade.

This morning these were the headlines in the newspaper in Nassau: “Symonette: No Apprehension Exercises”· “Chairman: BEC Can’t Afford To Maintain Equipment”· “Illegal Dumpsites Increasing Across Island”

Collectively these paint a picture of a set of circumstances flowing from a Government which is failing and impacting a people crying out for change.

This note came from one of the many people who send me e-mail messages every day.

I think an important point was made by him and that is the need for more effective messaging by our party of what we stand for and what we believe in.

Right now former Senate President Sharon Wilson and a committee of volunteers are working on the party’s platform. People are fed up with this government but they want some idea of what the PLP proposes to do.

Nowhere is this more urgent than here in Freeport which has the assets, the

infrastructure and the land space for our population. What is the plan for Freeport? The PLP will have to say what it will do to bring the city back, to save this city. The people of this city and of this island can expect that the PLP will expend tens of millions of dollar to get things back to where it ought to be in this city, whether in cash or in kind. It will provide the leadership to beat the bushes to get some fresh money into the island, into the city so that people can come back home and can get back to work again. That should be the PLP's plan and that is one I am committed to working to accomplish.

Today, we gather here on the anniversary of the death of the father of our nation, the founder of our country Sir Lynden Pindling. On behalf of Dame Marguerite Pindling with whom I spoke this morning, I offer you her warmest greetings and her thanks to all those who organized these remembrances. My own view is that at some point over the next year we ought to design a memorial for Sir Lynden which can stand within the precincts of this building and where we can have a suitable service in the years to come to honour him and all the fallen heroes of our country and party.

I want to also bring greetings from the people of Fox Hill to you the people of Grand Bahama and from our Leader the Rt. Hon Perry Christie. I wish to thank you again for your invitation to speak and I wish you well.

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