

REMARKS BY FRED MITCHELL MP FOX HILL

Majority Rule PRAYER BREAKFAST PLP

9th January 2010

Mr. Party leader, members and guests, it is my honour to have been asked to speak here this morning in substitute for Dame Marguerite Pindling who has asked me to say how much she regrets not being able to join you all here this morning. She will be speaking at a panel discussion at the Yamacraw Branch tomorrow evening on this subject.

This subject of Majority Rule and the coming to power of the PLP has been my life's work. It is a strange feeling today that I have speaking about these events because I remember all too clearly sitting in the Cabinet office in 1976 at the Churchill Building talking to Sir Lynden Pindling about Black Tuesday, an event which had always fascinated me in my childhood.

The interesting thing about this is that you discover more and more about this as you talk more and more about the subject.

I am the first to confess that the particular construct is not one that I thought of on my own. My role had largely been to popularize a view of the political history of The Bahamas to make it easy to digest and understand, as a recitation of events. One young man once asked me after my telling the story in about ten minutes: did things actually happened as simply as that. The answer is no but one hopes that by giving the bare bones, it will encourage others to go out and study and amplify the details.

The construct actually comes from Dame Doris Johnson's book *The Quiet Revolution* in which she looks at the modern political history of the country as a journey from the Burma Road Riots in 1942 to Majority Rule Day 10th January 1967.

The riots of 1942 were the start of the political awakening of people of ordinary means largely those of African descent in The Bahamas. George Mackey added that the story actually begins with 1st August 1834 and the emancipation of slavery and culminated 133 years later with 10th January 1967.

In between 1st August 1834 then, we have 1st June 1942, Burma Road; 1950 the founding of the Citizens Committee and the fight to show No Way Out, Sidney Poitier's first film; 23rd November 1953, the founding of the PLP by Cyril Stevenson, H.M. Taylor and William Cartwright; the election of the Magnificent 6 Messrs. Sammy Isaacs, Cyril Stevenson, Randol Fawkes, Lynden Pindling, Clarence Bain and Milo Butler to the House of Assembly in 1956; the General Strike of 1958 led by Sir Clifford Darling; the bye elections of 1960 which saw the increase of the party's seats in the House of Assembly; the disappointing loss in 1962 and women voting for the first time; the constitutional change of 7th January 1964 which created a Premier and Cabinet and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, Black Tuesday on 27th April 1965 and then the general election of 10th January 1967.

The observers of the day said that they were surprised that an election was called at Christmas time 1966. The then Governor Sir Ralph Gray said that he had tried to persuade the Premier not to call an election but that the Premier Sir Roland Symonette had said that given the allegations of corruption against the UBP government, the government thought that it could not continue without a fresh mandate. Others say that it was called by the UBP because they thought that the PLP was not ready to fight an election. But the elections were called which Dr. H.W. Brown dubbed the first day of the first month of God leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. Sir Lynden was in London at the time of nomination day and his wife Dame Marguerite nominated him for the South Andros seat, which he won.

What is the importance of all of this? History is important not to dwell on the past but as the building block for the future. Sir Lynden Pindling told me that when they planned Black Tuesday for example, they were very much aware of how the riot of 1942 got started. He was 12 years old at the time of the riot, a boy in Western Junior School.

The story was that someone took a bottle of soda off a Coca Cola truck parked in Bay Street in 1942 and smashed a window and the riot began. So when he and his colleagues planned Black Tuesday, they ensured that as soon as they made the point, they would lead the people off Bay Street and off to the Southern Recreation grounds.

Also, when you talk to Effie Walkes who sat on the PLP's Council at the time, you got the sense of how the PLP planned and executed strategy in those days, which is instructive of what we ought to be doing today. The fact that the media is against us is not new and Sir Clement Maynard says in his book Put On More Speed that they met that problem in their day by public meetings and telling the story by word of mouth. I say the words that Billie Holiday sings: “hush now don’t complain” Let’s move to the streets.

I leave you with some stories. I think about Elaine Pinder, nee Williams and her success against the odds of creating a Bahaman brand called Bamboo Shack. She is an example of a Bahamian who has succeeded because of what Majority Rule ushered in. Her mother whom she buried at 92 on last Friday came from Pompey Bay, Acklins, as remote a place as you can get in The Bahamas even today and yet sitting at her funeral were her children in all their economic and social success, with a cousin and former Governor General Arthur Hanna and former Prime Minister Perry Christie sitting in the congregation. That is our story of being able to move in one generation from poverty to being well off.

Sir Lynden Pindling in 1998 lamented the fact that more was not done toward economic empowerment

The difficulty we have today is an FNM political administration that is set on deconstructing and destabilizing everything that Majority Rule sought to build which is a country of equality, social mobility and justice for all Bahamians.

Of course the more glaring example was that of the discrimination against Bahamians of African descent, a fact acknowledged on no less than four occasions by no less a person than Sir Durward Knowles. In embracing the changes of 1967, all Bahamians became free men and women and could succeed in their own country

If there is any doubt about this and the relevance of Majority Rule and what it sought to achieve to what is happening in our country today, talk to the Bahamian employees at Scotiabank and the fact that the government of the day has allowed through its immigration policy the deconstruction and destruction of all the Bahamianization policies that were put in place as a result of Majority Rule, that Bahamians must have the first call on the resources of their country. The effective control of lending policies in that bank no longer exists here in The Bahamas but in Canada and the government has allowed increasingly non-nationals to come and run the bank with the excuse that Bahamians are unable to do so.

The international trade agreements that we have signed: the EPA and soon the WTO even though we support them should not be an excuse to deconstruct all that the PLP helped to build by way of Majority Rule.

If there is any doubt about this, talk to Bahamians of all races at Scotiabank and they will tell you that it is Bahamians not black or white that suffer in this bad public policy.

I mention this because history teaches us that in the run up to Majority Rule day in 1967, you may know that Sir Lynden Pindling said that the late Sir Milo Butler took him by the hand and said “Son let’s go” he took him to the Royal Bank of Canada where Sir Milo demanded that Bahamians get an opportunity to serve and work in the Banks. Is that message not relevant to the staff at Scotiabank today? Who will fight for them? Only the PLP. Yet we have an FNM administration fifty years later that is complicit in the destruction of the Bahamian in this economy.

We must also think about the two people: one FNM, one PLP who have complained to me that they wanted small loans from the Bahamas Development Bank: one for \$5000 one for 20,000 dollars. The Development Bank was part of the PLP’s strategy to empower the ordinary Bahamians, a goal of Majority Rule. One woman said she put her savings into her business only to be turned down. She was in tears. The Government has not offered help for small businesses and the empowerment of the small Bahamian which Majority Rule day was meant to resolve. The Venture capital fund, which the last PLP left in place, has no money to lend.

So we have our work to do 44 years after the fact. It is economic empowerment that must now be the clarion call. It is a call to serve all Bahamians to make them the full masters of the commanding heights of our economy.

That is why we must resolutely and firmly oppose the FNM government's plans to sell BTC in the way in which they are doing it and to support the trade unions in their fight to stop the Leviathan.

History shows us how we supported the trade union movement in 1958.

As we face the next general election and what is expected to be the most glaring attempt at gerrymandering constituency boundaries in our country's history by a Prime Minister who is simply set on a course of the destruction of Majority Rule and all that it has built in this country, history tells us that Black Tuesday was designed to end gerrymandering. Everywhere you go in this now Prime Minister's circle there is what I call this drunken talk about what line is going to be drawn against what person and even against some of his own men and women. The struggle for equality continues.

Let us commit ourselves today, to continue the battle for equality and justice. Let us be bold, let us speak clearly and firmly and let us stand up and be counted. We would not be where we are today without 10th January 1967. Let us never forget. Forward ever! Backward never!

Thank you very much indeed.

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