

Notes for Address by  
**Fred Mitchell MP Fox Hill**  
PLP Mini Rally Gambier House  
*15th June 2010*

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

This is not a complicated story, why we are here tonight. We are here to continue the fight for our core constituency: those who cannot fight for themselves.

On Thursday evening last, I moved an amendment to the first of the Budget Bills to increase the amount of money that is allocated in the budget of the Ministry of Social Services by 1.3 million dollars. This was to allow for the minimum amount that is now paid to those who cannot afford to bury their dead to be increased from 650 dollars to 1300 dollars. My thinking is that cremation costs \$1300 and so at least the subvention from the government ought to be able to cover the cost of a cremation.

Just today, I received a call from a family who cannot afford to pay for a funeral. The cost of the burial will be \$5000. They expect the Member of Parliament to pay. Clearly, this is unsustainable for any Member of Parliament. It simply cannot be resolved without some structural changes.

I wish to thank all my colleagues for the support given to me in moving the amendment last week.

In other words my friends, this is a real live problem for a Member of Parliament who represents poor people and who has to use his own salary to supplement the lack of support by the state for indigent citizens. This is not just a theoretical problem.

My intervention by that amendment raised three philosophical points: that the model of governance in the region and The Bahamas was wrong skewed to a dictatorship of the Prime Minister; that there was a need to address the question of the strength of Parliament vis- a - vis the Cabinet; there was a need for full time MPs with proper support for their work.

No one should have been surprised then that I would move to get this matter of support for the burial of the dead in my constituency resolved. I was able to convince my colleagues to support it.

What transpired last week by me was an act of civil disobedience and if it takes more of this kind of action to dramatize the insensitivity of the leader of the country who keeps saying that he is one of the poor but continues to deny their rights and interests, then we must do more of this kind of thing.

I intend to continue to push the envelope even further. Of that you can be assured. I speak for me and my house. I congratulate all colleagues for their stand.

I have been trying to speak over the past weeks more generally to the issues of governance. In my Budget intervention, I also spoke to the need to strengthen Parliament vis-a-vis the executive so that Parliament can be a more effective check on the power of the Cabinet.

We are also here tonight because of a failure of Parliament to check the power of the Executive but also because your PLP sought to change that trend and sought to check the power of the Cabinet. What you saw displayed last week by the PLP was democracy in its finest form. What you saw in response was a Prime Minister who is so convinced in his authority that he can overrule even the Deputy Speaker of the House who clearly has all the say in law on these matters of money bills. Not the Prime Minister.

But once the Prime Minister entered the House last Thursday night, there was a failure of the House to protect against his excesses. He moved closure in a fit of anger and the Deputy Speaker failed to protect the rights of the minority.

Having said that however the PLP's response to this has to be structural. I think that we spend too much time wondering how it is that so crude a man as the Prime Minister can be seen in the eyes of some with affection. The point is the world as it is and the PLP must adjust with the times.

I have been asked by the Leader to look at these governance issues and who the structures might be changed now or in a PLP administration to strengthen Parliament vis a vis the executive. I believe in the absence of local government this will likely mean more Members of Parliament as opposed to less so that the Cabinet does not dominate the Parliament.

Secondly, I believe that there will have to be an MP's bill of rights that will effectively spell out in law the rights and privileges of a Member of Parliament including the right to superintend and control public works in his constituency and matters of social services support.

In other words, my proposal is that as a matter of law public works and other governmental decisions will not be able to be carried out in a particular constituency unless the MP has been consulted.

Finally on this occasion, I think that what will be required is state funding of political parties. Some have called for the Opposition to provide an alternative budget but that is simply not possible or feasible in this dispensation. To rectify this, the country must in my view agree to full time Members of Parliament with the requisite salary and allowances. It must also agree to the state funding of the work of political parties.

There should be a Parliamentary office, which will be responsible for the dispensation and superintendence of the parliamentary salary and allowances. I believe that as an adjunct to this there will have to be a proper supervisory committee system.

These are my ideas.

If this is done, we might go a long way toward resolving the structural issues from which we now suffer.

Sometime next month, I expect to resume my discussion with colleagues in the Opposition in the Caribbean, all of whom face this problem and convene a special conference of regional politicians to flesh out these ideas. We all have the same British model constitution, and the model suffers this structural problem which I spoke about. I ask your support in helping to make these changes.

If God willing and by dint of hard work, not hoping that it will fall in our laps, we become the next government of the country, I will work to implement these and other ideas for good governance.

Thank you and good night.

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