

Letter to the Editor
by Senator Philip C. Galanis
July 2, 2006

There are elements in this society that masquerade themselves as conscientious practitioners of their trade. And the disturbing thing is, many, many people believe them to have the best interests of the nation at heart. But I have recently thought about their deepest motives and what I have found really troubles me.

In the past month, I had the occasion to take issue with an article published in one of the dailies. I wrote what I thought was a painstaking critique of the contents of that article and sent it to several of the nation's newspapers. Eventually it was excerpted in one and, *after three weeks*, published in full in the paper in which the original article had appeared.

Much to my surprise, my letter provoked a four-day long display of bitter editorial invective. Day after day, the editor attacked certain parts of my letter over and over, not being fair enough to respond cogently to each point I made, something that confirms to me that my points were well founded and there was no credible rebuttal possible.

Day after day, this Editor hammered away at my personal beliefs, as she saw fit to interpret them, and ignored most of the salient points of criticism I had listed. And, day after day, possessor of the bully pulpit that is a newspaper, she continued to affirm my belief that some of the Fourth Estate in our nation are doing Bahamians and others a grave disservice in this era of instantaneous transmission of information.

My concern now has transcended the topic of my letter and of the article that it addressed. My concern is the constant, vitriolic attack – because it has gone far beyond journalistic free speech and criticism – that continues on a daily basis in this country. It was not so much the words that were in this article, although they were steeped in contradiction, inaccuracy and false generalities; it is the whole tone and intention of this article and what it represents to the national spirit and growth.

Why do people believe that the only way to build a nation is to constantly knock those who are trying their best, day after day? Whether it is students, bus drivers, hotel workers, politicians, trade unionists or taxi drivers, as portrayed by these journalists, none of them ever do anything well enough, expeditiously enough or with the proper motive.

One of the responses to my letter was a long letter to the editor that decried my comment about how the article's unfair criticism looked to tourists and investors. To that I would reply, if this constant unfounded condemnation and censure looks bad – and I believe it does – to the tourists and investors, about whom we need to be concerned as a tourist economy, how does it look – and feel – to us, to our children, our parents and our friends? What kind of profound damage does it do to the collective psyche of a nation and its people?

How can you build a society while constantly telling its members that they are not good enough, not professional enough, not ethical and not trustworthy? How can you expect a child to learn when he is constantly bombarded with messages that the school he attends is part of a “defunct” educational system?

How can our ambitious, law-abiding young men and women who are striving to become successful continue in the face of constantly being labeled as “a massive block of nigh unemployable under-achievers, many of whom made a living through drug dealing and gun crime” and being described as losers “with no skills in the language or mathematics, no work ethic and no sense of responsibility?”

And, after reading about how “growing numbers of young Bahamians can expect no place in the employment market, meaning many more will turn to crime to make their way in the world” how can they muster up the initiative to go job hunting?

The written word has power and, with scathing and destructive words and ideas like this appearing daily, how can we expect not to see a self-fulfilling prophecy in action? How can we fail to produce resentful, bitter young people who know in their hearts that they are not like those descriptions but who cannot convince employers who believe what they read in these purported unbiased and fair-minded papers?

As a Bahamian who has worked his whole life to provide for his family, I resent the fact that I can rarely, if ever, read a positive story about my country, its people and its governance. I object to being characterized in consistently negative terms. I object on behalf of myself, my family and my country.

I also wonder why it is that it has become such a grave provocation to take issue with a foreigner who expresses opinions about my own country, opinions with which I happen not to agree. It is alright for him constantly to criticize us but not alright for us to criticize him.

All of a sudden one is regarded as a xenophobe. I am not a xenophobe. In fact, I fully appreciate the many fine foreigners who have come to my country and have helped us to build what we now have. I have had the pleasure of working with and learning from many of them.

What I dislike, however, is the attitude of those arrogant foreigners who take every opportunity to scoff at everything Bahamian and to tell us how lucky we are to have them in our midst. I believe that we will always have need of persons from abroad who come to our country with the right attitude, not those who believe that without them we will be reduced to a nation of conch divers and coconut pickers. Bahamians are capable of a great deal more than that.

As I said in my letter, I suggest that the journalists who work at our newspapers today endeavour to gain a clearer picture of the true Bahamas by acquainting themselves with some of our local high school and college graduates, our young, bright business persons and our professional men and women who are all a part of building this nation that they appear to be so abysmally unaware of. I would suggest that, before they paint us all with their broad brush of negative rhetoric again, they do some deeper research into our culture and our people.

I would again challenge our journalists to take a good clear look at our people and our nation and recognize the good as well as the bad, the positive as well as the negative. I would challenge our journalists to be fair and balanced and tell the whole story, not just one side. I would challenge our journalists to truly shoulder their responsibilities as nation-builders and not just nation-criticizers. I would challenge our journalists to behave as though they have a glass that is more than half-full, rather than as they behave now – as though they have no glass whatsoever.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Philip C. Galanis". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Respectfully submitted,".

Senator Philip C. Galanis