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2nd August 2010

The Editor

Dear Editor:

The BahaMar Chinese Saga

I have, like just about every reasonably aware person in The Bahamas, been giving this BahaMar situation a lot of thought.

In brief, the press would have us believe that the government will be asked to approve some 5,000 to 7,000 work permits for Chinese workers to build the various hotel properties involved in the proposed mega resort on Cable Beach. In return some 2,000 to 3,000 Bahamians will concurrently get full time construction jobs and up to 6,000 Bahamians will get permanent jobs in the completed project.

The Prime Minister says that he will bring the authority for the decision to the House of Assembly- I suppose there has to be a first time for everything. Will the House of Assembly be asked to review the individual files for every applicant with the attendant Ministry of Labour report, as one expects is done before a decision on whether or not to provide a work permit? Or, will the government give the employer what will effectively be 7,000 blank work permits and say 'fill in the blank'?

In the future, when the farm operator applies for work permits for a few hundred farm workers will the government bring the files to the House of Assembly for the review of members and their approval? Will the government bring the files of applicants for work permits in the hotel industry and financial services sector for review and approval by the members of the House of Assembly? Is this a one off occasion or just the first until another circumstance where the prime Minister is afraid to make a decision? Or, is it possible that he is playing games?

The completed BahaMar resort will apparently mean an additional 3,500 hotel rooms in a number of hotel properties situated in the project area. There will also be a new, very large casino as well as restaurants, clubs and other activity centres.

3,000 construction jobs at even the helper level would be very good. 6,000 new resort jobs at even the basic service levels would be a good thing. If the average income level per week for the permanent jobs is only \$300.00 per week or \$15,000 per annum this would mean \$1,800,000.00 contribution to the country's economy each week or \$93,600,000.00 per annum. Some 8% or

\$7,488,000.00 per year of this would be paid to National Insurance. Another \$10-\$20,000,000.00 of the annual payroll would be paid to the government in the form of customs duties and other taxes the average citizen pays to the government. Both of these would be very good. The multiplier effect of these dollars would be beneficial to the economy. If skilled builders are employed the income levels will be even higher. If skilled Bahamian resort workers and managers are employed in the finished properties then the income levels will be higher.

Now, since BahaMar says that they will build everything over a four year period, we will see an average of 875 new resort hotel rooms added to the New Providence room inventory each year for four years but in reality, the likelihood is that in the first new hotel will open in 2012 at the earliest with all being planned for occupancy during 2013 and 2014- this will mean an annual average of @ 1,200 new rooms per year for three years. We now have some 7,300 resort hotel rooms in the New Providence room inventory. When you deduct the 200 odd rooms that BahaMar says it will destroy from its present active stock, we will have to find an additional 16.9% (7,300 rooms minus 200 plus 1,200 new rooms or 8,400 rooms in 2012) in the number of stopover visitors during 2012 just to maintain the present average occupancy levels. During the third year- 2013- we will have to find another 14.3%; and, in 2014 we will have find another 12.5%.

Between the start of building and 2014 our room inventory will go from 7,100 to 10,700 rooms. In four years we will increase our room inventory by more than 50%. To maintain the average occupancy levels we will have to increase stopover visitors from about 1,500,000 per annum to over 2,250,000 in 2014- an increase of 750,000 additional hotel staying tourists! Good luck with that.

These large stop over visitor numbers were not nearly realised with the wondrous Atlantis resort- it is most unlikely with the planned, undoubtedly wondrous, BahaMar resort. It would be great, though, to have an additional 2,000 air arrivals each and every day at the airport in Nassau. The additional jobs would be grand.

Mr. Dionisio D'Aguilar, the president/owner of Superwash Laundromats; member of the board of directors of a number of local companies; a recent President of the Chamber of Commerce; and a continuing media personality, says that there will be no more than 2,500 Chinese workers in place at any one time- he knows something that the government does not yet know? Or maybe BahaMar or the Prime Minister told him but did not tell the rest of us. Not very likely, I submit.

Mr. D'Aguilar may want to be an apologist for the FNM government and may want to threaten politicians who are not FNM but one has to question his objectivity and his loyalties. Mr. D'Aguilar seeks to scare people with his red herring as a means of offering support to Hubert Ingraham as Mr. Ingraham seems to seek to avoid making a tough decision.

Now, if I wanted to place a herring of a different colour to the mix, I could suggest that maybe this is all a convoluted play by Mr. Ingraham to find a way of denying approval of the BahaMar project and blaming it on the PLP so he could then approve the Atlantis project as he seeks to serve the interests of his newly knighted friend Sir Solomon Kerzner- heaven forbid that I should go so far as to refer to Sir Solomon as Mr. Ingraham's master but I know some would.

Remember that it was Mr. Ingraham who said in the House of Assembly recently that he would not be prepared to have the government approve ***BOTH*** the BahaMar project and Atlantis' newest phase of project development. Why not? What's the real difference between 3,500 rooms and @ 4,000 rooms- the probable total for both BahaMar and Atlantis?

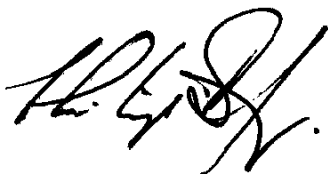
I would be very happy if some objective Bahamian Economists, Sociologists and Resort Specialists would consider this whole matter and offer some independent commentary to the public. After all, foreign construction workers building hotels, roads, docks, industrial plants and even private homes is not alien to our economy- just look around you. Chinese construction workers are not a bad idea in and of themselves but between 5,000 and 7,000? This does seem to be the wrong ratio- ***one Bahamian job for each three Chinese workers?***

The government really must find out what is happening and share this information with the people. Since they haven't told us and they say that they operate with transparency, I am able to reasonably conclude that they do not yet know- they can't be lying, can they?

The government has the responsibility to make decisions on work permits but always in the interest of the Bahamian people. Everything that we have heard so far is troubling on so many planes. The worst part is the apparent disinterest of the Prime Minister and his suggested threats particularly about not approving both BahaMar and the next phase of the Atlantis resort. The Prime Minister's reluctance to report to the people on his recent visit to South Africa and his dinners and meetings there with the newly knighted Chairman of Atlantis (a gift from the government of The Bahamas) while the Chairman's company is awaiting a decision from the government is quite troubling.

Is there anyone out there who respects the Bahamian people and believes that this is their country and that decisions are to be made by the government and businesses in the interests of the Bahamian People?

Thank you for your interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P.P. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Philip P. Smith