



# SAFEGUARDING OUR STABILITY

Mia Amor Mottley

# “SAFEGUARDING OUR STABILITY”

**Address by Political Leader and  
Leader of the Opposition  
The Hon. Mia Amor Mottley, QC,MP  
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A blessed good afternoon to members of the BLP family, to our distinguished invitees and to Barbadians and friends of Barbados everywhere.

I have delivered hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of speeches in my 25 years of public life and public service, but never have I had such great difficulty in formulating a presentation, as I did on this occasion.

It is not that I did not know or did not have enough to say...far from it! Thanks to Freundel Stuart and his drifting, DLP Government, every single Barbadian can speak for hours on the trends and happenings in Barbados today that concern them.

The reality is that never before have so many been so worried and distraught over the state of affairs in this fair land. Yes, there are a myriad number of social and economic issues of concern to the population, but for perhaps the first time since the introduction of self-governance in Barbados, there is growing doubt in the society about the ability of Barbados to bounce back from this current spiral of drift, inertia and indifference in the management of national affairs. To many, it's as if we are acting out the title to Chinhua Achebe's seminal work - Things Fall Apart.

So trust me, Comrades and Friends, my challenge on this occasion was not about having a shortage of things to say or not knowing how to say them. My difficulty was incorporating the views and submissions of hundreds of volunteer speech writers! Believe me, I never knew so many people in Barbados could write as well as I observed this past week. I never knew so many people were thinking as deeply as I observed in recent days. I must have received at least 300 texts, emails and phone calls, advising how I should approach this address and what I needed to make sure was included.

Let me tell you something, Brothers and Sisters, Barbadians are quiet...but they are not sleeping! They may not be walking up and down the street, blocking traffic, but there is a growing anger in this country that only Freundel Stuart and his cabal of parliamentarians, cannot sense or realize. Red Plastic Bag said it - Something is Happening...and For the Barbados Labour Party, that something is so exciting!! But I will return to that a little later.

Every single person I met and spoke with in the last two weeks had a take on how I should frame this address. Some wanted me to say just enough, others wanted me to say everything. Some said i should advise the government what to do, others say i should leave them alone and let them stew.

Many persons, and I am not only talking about known Labour Party supporters - persons, of all political persuasions, went to the trouble of actually penning me a few lines and sending me notes on just how I should say this and how I should say that. Even the editorial in the Nation and Barbados today gave pointers on how this speech should be approached. It is as if the entire country is eager today to hear someone articulate a position that makes sense - a perspective that reflects their true fears, concerns and aspirations.

Barbadians are today not asking for much. All they want is a little hope. A little assurance that Barbados, when it finally escapes the clutches of this Freundel Stuart nightmare, can be saved...can be turned around...can return to a land of beauty, a land of splendor...to a land they are proud to call home.

That's what my people yearn for this evening, Comrades and Friends. And that is the message that must emanate from this 76th Conference of the Barbados Labour Party. The people of Barbados want to know that the Labour Party is up to and ready for the challenge!

So I wish from the outset to thank the many persons who saw it as their duty to lend a hand in the preparation of this address.

As all of you may know, my comfort level is with speaking from my head or with the help of a few notes, but on this occasion the view was held that I needed to reduce the bulk of what I am saying this evening to writing, as for many, this is no ordinary speech. Barbados and Barbadians need to hear and know that someone is willing to stand up for them....that someone is willing to stand in the breach and offer this country the type of leadership that it so desperately needs and deserves. The question was therefore asked "Who Will?" and the answer, overwhelmingly this evening is "I Will! Mia Mottley and the Barbados Labour Party will stand for Barbados and for the attainment of the hopes and aspirations of all Barbadians!!

So let me begin by saying how delighted I am to be standing here this afternoon among those who have been like family for my entire adult life. Yes, colleagues, here I am, still standing, though never standing still, fortified by your loyalty and support, and thankful that God has given me the strength to withstand and to persevere in the service of this great Party, and on behalf of my beloved Barbados and its remarkable people.

I know the rumour out there has it that I am at death's door and that I have somehow fallen silent because my throat is diseased and my voice is no more. All that I can say, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that rumors with respect to my health are the product of someone's very fertile imagination.

As you know, I never deal with rumour and innuendo. I deal with facts. And the facts are that I am in good health and good voice. I am not being treated for nor have I been diagnosed with any illness.

I am not one for frequent flying, but a couple months ago I had reason to travel abroad in rapid succession and this sparked interest and curiosity as to the state of my health. Well let me put the rumors to rest this evening, once and for all. Mia is fine! Mia is fit as a fiddle!

As far as the frequency of my speaking is concerned, the seeming reduction is deliberate. I have appointed a Shadow Cabinet and it is my intention to give members autonomy and opportunity to function. All of the BLP Team have their assigned responsibilities and they are all very capable of speaking on behalf of the Party on matters within their purview. And unlike that other Party, we on this side speak with one voice, with unity of message and consistency of purpose. So expect to hear even more of the members of our Team in the months ahead.

Indeed I am indebted to the members of the Parliamentary Party for their hard work and dedication. Like me they are conscious of the enormous responsibility that they carry in defending the people's interests in a time of gross mismanagement and incompetence by the hapless Government we are all called upon to endure. And they are ready to step into the breach whenever our citizens say the word.

I sincerely want to thank them all, my Members of Parliament and Senators, and all the loyal supporters who have worked with me in the trenches and behind the scenes, for stepping up and defending the people and for articulating the multiplicity of issues facing this country. They have done so in spite of the many challenges of the last year that we as a Party have had. I trust that this will be the same way that we will address the many challenges that will face us as a nation. I thank you all for your dedication and commitment but I put you on notice that the pressure, regrettably, will not ease.

On the national front, however, it's another year...and that's about all. Same story! Same characters!

For Freundel Stuart and his hapless bunch, it is business as usual.

Talk is now even cheaper.

Any hopes you might have had for an improvement in the handling of our economic affairs will soon be erased by the announcement that will come that the Governor of the Central Bank has been re-appointed for another 5 years, This Government has distinguished itself by consistently rewarding failure.

Politics is said to be the art of repetition. However, there is even a limit to how much you can repeat yourself and expect a different result. That, according to Albert Einstein, is the classic definition of madness.

Every year since 2008 we have had to address the steady and continuous decline of the Barbados economy.

Barbadians do not need any more recitations of how bad things are and how much worse they will get, especially with respect to the economy.

Barbadians already know. They know – they feel it.

Daily they struggle to make ends meet.

Daily they resign themselves to the fact that they no longer recognize their own country. They feel that this is a bad dream. They want to be awoken from their awful nightmare. But the Sleeping Giant will not set them free!

In essence, Barbadians feel trapped.

Trapped by a Government that is completely out of its depth.

Trapped by a Constitution that keeps this Government in office not because of its performance, but because the power to decide when an election should be called has been vested in one man – and one man alone.

They see the gains of decades being frittered away.

There is no Government as we have traditionally known it. There is no Cabinet discipline, just a massive free-for-all. Chaos and anarchy in the extreme.

Bajans view our Prime Minister, Freundel Stuart as harmless as a human being, but more and more of them have realized that he is harmful as a Prime Minister. Yes – HARMLESS AS A HUMAN BEING BUT HARMFUL AS A PRIME MINISTER! He is so totally ineffective and inefficient in that office!

Nothing happens under Freundel's watch.

Everything IS falling apart under his watch...while our leader travels or sleeps.

So today I will speak not about statistics, numbers and formulas, failed economic policies, deficient fiscal and growth strategies, ruthless retrenchments, rising unemployment, escalating acts of violence, the ruination of health care and education, draconian taxation, or looming interventions by the IMF.

I am here to ask how much more can you take before you lose all that you love? And also, whether you are ready to articulate and demonstrate that feeling of entrapment.

You have heard the sordid saga of this country's current and worsening state of brokenness in vivid detail over the course of these last six years. In particular you have felt it over this last summer of discontent. As members of the Opposition, my colleagues and I have examined the issues from every angle, and we have not failed to keep you informed of the precarious position in which this country finds itself based not on any global economic crisis, but on the abysmal, almost criminal, lack of leadership, capability and compassion displayed by our present administration.

Given the Government's determined refusal to accept any sort of good counsel from any quarter during its six years in office, I am now fully and finally persuaded that the most pressing challenges facing this country extend deeper than the economic and fiscal quagmire in which we now find ourselves.

Our problems are rooted in an absence of vision. And the Bible warns us in Proverbs 29 "where there is no vision, the people perish". ... Fellow Barbadians, our nation surely is perishing.

It is perishing because it is broken.  
 What is broken in Barbados is hope,  
 What is broken in Barbados is confidence,  
 What is broken in Barbados is pride.

And as Barbados flounders many have little choice but to pick up and leave. Stripped of the opportunities that once kept them here Barbadians on whom we need to rely to rebuild are now reverting to the emigration patterns of old and seeking their future further afield. Weren't you shocked to hear this past week how many Barbadians are now living in Trinidad...of all places?

Barbados is broken because we have saddled ourselves with an administration bankrupt of the ethics, values and principles of good governance that peace, stability and progress demand. The book of Ezekiel warns of the judgment awaiting those leaders who exploit and abuse their people [NLT 34:2-4].

**"What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. ... You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty."**

These verses aptly describe this Government.

While the Government's harshness and cruelty have played a role in our present predicament, our problems are also rooted in its incompetence, its inability to implement decisions and to lead.

No amount of policy planning, no strategic formulations, no conferences, meetings, consultations, no amount of money, no raising of the debt limit, no analyses or prescriptions from a Central Bank Governor who has lost his way can bridge the gap created by an absence of vision, ethics, and leadership.

So I have not come to quote statistics to you today, nor to recite the endless litany of broken promises and failed strategies that shall be the legacy this Democratic Labour Party Government leaves as an inheritance for us, for our children and for our children's children.

Rather, I have come today to pose a series of questions to you concerning what the last several years might tell us about who we are as a nation, who we have become as a people. I want to know who you think we ought now to aspire to be.

I am here to ask you whether you think the Barbados of today truly exemplifies the fields and hills beyond recall the architects of Independence would be proud to call their very own.

I want to know whether the heritage this DLP administration has so callously created over the short span of six years is the sort of which you choose to be the guardians, the sort you are content to pass on to the generations now here and the generations yet to come.

Would the Father of our Democracy the Right Excellent Sir Grantley Adams believe that Barbados has so descended in the Eyes of our neighbours and the international community that we are no longer seen as leading from in front as we have

Would the Father of our Independence, the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow, be at ease with how the party he founded has treated the people of this country over the last several years?

Would that stalwart of the labour movement in Barbados the Right Excellent Sir Frank Walcott be satisfied with the manner in which it is now perceived that our unions have allowed the Government to ride roughshod over the public service workers of this country while yet seeking to hold the private sector to a higher standard of behaviour than that to which they have held those responsible for designing, ratifying and enforcing the laws of this land?

Would that great humanitarian, entrepreneur, and member of the élite of his time, the Right Excellent Charles Duncan O'Neal, applaud the silence and, indeed, the apparent collusion, of so many members of Barbados' privileged class in the face of the ongoing decimation of the hopes and dreams of the poor and working class in this country?

Were she with us now, would the Right Excellent Sarah Ann Gill, a woman of exemplary Christian faith and charity and devotion to the principle of religious freedom not now be exhorting all Church leaders to take a stand against the injustices being perpetrated on the poorest and most disadvantaged members of the flock by the present Government's callous, unapologetic and repeated breaches of faith against the people whom they were elected to serve?

Our national heroes, and countless men and women like them, sacrificed their comfort, their safety, some, their very lives, to build a nation where we might enjoy the advantages denied them in their lifetime.

As architects of our freedom and democracy, and ultimately, of our Independence, they dreamed of a democratic, independent, just and equitable society where our values, ethics, choices, and actions might justify the griefs they endured so selflessly all those years ago in order that we might survive and thrive, with the courage and the will to bind our hearts from coast to coast in preservation of true nationhood.

Today, we have people in command who do not know what it means to be truly Barbadian. They have wrecked the essence of our Barbadian way of life and are robbing us of our identity.

It is not your birth certificate that determines if you are Barbadian.

Rather it is whether your soul and your actions reflect those things that matter to Barbadians. And they are reinforced every time we interact with one another. And you would either have to

keep to yourself (which our Prime Minister does so well) or be extremely insensitive and callous to the legacy you have inherited and to the people with whom you interact daily to put at risk the soul of our people.

For is that not what this Government has done?

Everything that is germane to who we are and what we feel strongly about has been put on the auction block or gutted. We have been infested by political ticks – sucking the lifeblood out of our people, and out of everything that is distinctly Barbadian.

Let us look at it in detail.

## Fairness and Equity

1. Barbadians believe in fairness and protecting those who are least capable of taking care of themselves. We do not believe in sacrificing the vulnerable and the disadvantaged. We have had over our life as an Independent country the greatest wage equity in the public service between those at the top and those at the bottom.

But who has this Government sacrificed?

When the Budget of 2013 was on course to fail, as was the case with the Medium Term Fiscal Strategy and the Revised Medium Term Fiscal Strategy, the Minister of Finance announced the layoffs of 3000 Government workers. And from where were they chosen? From the very bottom of the ladder!

People earning \$300 and \$400 per week. And contrary to what members of the Government say, the majority of these Barbadians were not spending money at Hennessy Artistry or buying Remy. They were struggling to pay Barbados Light and Power, picking up and putting back down goods at Popular, buying food to prepare lunch for their children at Sawh's Shop or Quimby's shop in the evening, one day at a time, when they had money.

And should we mention how they were informed. From the Drainage Unit on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 to other departments across Government, workers were told not to work that day or not to report to work on the next day! Shameful! Scandalous! As if the welfare of their families meant nothing!

And worst of all: how were they chosen at the NCC and the Transport Board? Employees with 8 and 10 and 15 years service— some even more – were unceremoniously removed from their jobs while others with 2, 3 and 4 years only remained on the job. Those remaining in work were hired from constituencies represented by the relevant Ministers since 2008 and among them were some who were brothers and sisters of Ministers or children or family of former DLP candidates. Political tribalism. This is happening in Barbados – in the second decade of the twenty first century! Shameful! Scandalous!

And while the workers of the NCC have been left to their own devices to seek redress from the Employment Rights Tribunal (which cannot hear a single case in the 6 months since the filing) the members of the Employment Rights Tribunal continue to receive a monthly pay cheque! Can this be fair? Can it be fair that some of these dismissed workers in their late 40s and 50s are to suck salt and be deprived of ever reaching a full pension? Shameful! Scandalous!

And what would it have taken for this to be resolved? Simply that the Chairman of Cabinet, the Prime Minister, instruct his Ministers at the NCC and at the Transport Board (both Government entities subject to general policy instructions of the line Minister according to the law) that he as Head of Government had made a public commitment to the country that in the execution of any layoffs it would adhere to the "Last In, First out" policy and would not target sole breadwinners in a household. Consequently any decisions made by any Board breaching these commitments must be reversed. That is all the Prime Minister had to do. But in a choice between the NCC workers and Minister Lowe he chose to sacrifice the workers!

I am happy that the Transport Board workers have finally received their severance pay even though it took 6 months, but what happens to their expectation of working until retirement so as to get a full pension or at least a better pension? Where are

they and the other workers to turn after the Unemployment Benefit and Severance runs out?

That is the record of this Government. One that cares little or nothing for the plight of the people!

But equally, where is the passion of Ministers to be

found? What are the promises they have made, to whom and what have they delivered? In whose interest have they acted and broken new ground? Do they show up at Cabinet every Thursday to formulate policies for the advancement of Barbados? Or do they show up at Government Headquarters just to park their new big rides in full view of the all the passers by on Bay Street and all the struggling Government employees who work in the building?

Let us consider the unprecedented incentives and tax concessions for Sandals. Not just for duty free access for all building inputs or food and beverage, but also for concessions and work permits for their non Barbadian employees, creating two classes of workers in the tourism industry. Special terms and conditions to allow a few to maintain a standard of living not just, but far, beyond the imagination of the others whose misfortune is simply to be born in Barbados. These special few will get a duty free car. The non-Barbadians do not have to go to Courts or Massy or Standard and buy furniture, probably on hire purchase – they will get theirs duty free. 2 different Barbadoses!

And while I am on this matter of Sandals we need clarity on the recent amendments to the Tourism Development Act.

Where is the fairness in telling local hoteliers that they are getting the same benefits as Sandals were given when neither they nor the Barbadian public nor Parliament have ever seen or been made privy to the content of the MOU signed by Chris Sinckler and Richard Sealy with Sandals? I repeat they did not sign it for themselves but on behalf of the people of Barbados and it will bind Governments long after they have retired – or shall I say been removed – from Government.

Where is the fairness when the “TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN” letter giving Sandals the tax concessions gives it to them as of right for 25 years in the first instance and then at 50% of the waivers for the next 15 years. The local hoteliers must apply and wait for a discretion to be exercised. No clear timelines are given for the exercise of the discretion – and time is money. And if granted the concession is for 15 years – not 25 or 40! And what about the range of products? Those listed for Sandals appear to be wider because of the way in which it is drafted generically while those allowed under the Tourism Development Act are specific by name and still have to await the exercise of a discretion by the Minister. If this is a level playing field, then Death the Leveller shall be the fate of many!

And where is the fairness for the restaurants which cannot or will not be considered as tourism providers by the Minister? First they wait and then maybe yes or no. If no, they buy a bottle of wine at over \$10, duty paid, but the hotel benefitting will pay at just over \$3 per bottle. If yes, then as a restaurant they too will have a benefit that the vendors at Oistins or Kermit’s Shop or Marshall’s Bar in Holders Hill are unlikely to receive. Where does it begin and where does it end? 2 Barbadoses!

And where is the fairness for the Barbadian producers and farmers and fishermen? Will hotels bypass local fish vendors and source fish cheaper from outside? What about those who may want to buy Budweiser beer instead of Banks because duty free it is now cheaper? Or what about the Farmer’s Choice bacon from HI-PAC? Will they import it from overseas at a cheaper price again? What will happen to

these local jobs? Will they run off the DLP's Pathway to Prosperity to their Pathway to Poverty.

Clearly this legislation required far greater thought than these cavalier Ministers were capable of giving. Have they even projected what will be the loss of revenue to the Government at the very time that the Government needs it most to help close this unsustainable deficit? What will be the impact on local jobs in other sectors? The MOU that has been signed between the hoteliers and the farmers and the manufacturers is not even worth the paper on which it is written! Once again time will tell. 2 Barbadoses!

Let me be clear.

We support the Sandals investment, but it cannot be at the expense of the rest of the hotels and restaurants or the jobs in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors and fishing industry. However, as you will hear over and over from me, it is not only what you do but how you do it. This Government may well have scored an own goal and opened a can of worms that will haunt us for years. Cheap shots by Ministers like Donville Inniss towards Barbadian Hoteliers surely cannot be the mature type of dialogue required on these issues.

How do we sit back and see ordinary Barbadians sucking salt while the not so ordinary ones reap benefits that cause you to wonder how the public interest could be so badly protected? How do we have a young lady from Bush Hall with two young children laid off a few months ago by Government and last Thursday given 21 days to move out of the house she has been renting? How does Government build low income housing at Country Park Towers at the astronomical price of \$348 per square foot and if that were not bad enough at Valerie at the "out of this world" price of \$548 per square foot – and, to cap it all, not even a fire exit is built for the multi storey buildings?

How do we get an HIV+ man moving from pillar to post because the Welfare Department stopped paying his rent in December last year after doing so for more than 3 years, while the Bushy Park Development is given extraordinarily generous tax concessions in August of this year?

How does Cost You Less still maintain these extraordinary tax concessions when their competitors must fight up and pay duties on their imports?

How does Government pay one contractor its full payment of almost \$24 million in one fell swoop for the construction of Valerie Housing Project when they will not pay other creditors for months and years and they will not give back people or businesses their income tax or VAT refunds?

## Investment in Social Capital

2. Barbadians see education and health care as basic rights. As a former slave society, education has always been the primary means by which our people have lifted themselves out of poverty. It has delivered major economic benefits to the country while assisting in the maintenance of an orderly society. In the year 1900, we had over 200 primary schools on 166 square miles. We had six secondary schools and we had Codrington College affiliated to the University of Durham.

With the sudden and backward decision to force students at UWI to pay tuition fees, this Government is presiding over the greatest betrayal of our young people. Their rash action will inevitably affect our stability and our economic prospects.

The Global Competitiveness Survey ranks Barbados as No. 15 in the world with respect to its educational system. How do we now sacrifice that sector in which we are the most competitive globally? Are Barbadian young people now to suffer as a result of this Government's incompetence and lack of creativity? Are we to throw away our stability and competitiveness because this Government does not know any better and worse still, does not know that it does not know?

And as if that were not enough up comes Minister Jones, not to be outdone! Announcements and pronouncements – statements on which the students and their families ought to be able to rely upon and plan out their business. First, 3000 bursaries will be given. Then 1500. Then maybe 700 or 800.

Not a word from Ronald Jones now that he has to find the money having given hope to these students and families. And when the Nation newspaper breaks the story of the unwillingness of the Ministry of Finance to provide the funds for these bursaries more than halfway after the semester has started, still not a word from him! Within 24 hours he is on a fast plane to China! He has returned and the students and their families are still waiting. Some may argue the first head that should be “cracked” from Cabinet is that of Ronald Jones.

With this move they have destroyed one of the key planks of Errol Barrow's legacy. How he must be turning in his grave to see the very people that his policy helped educate push down the ladder of opportunity for the next generation.

And in health care we are no better off. Horror stories abound of persons in agony having to wait for inordinately long periods before being seen, far less treated. Patients having to rely on basic sanitary supplies from their families and friends. Reports of hospital infections out of control. And when Maria Agard brings a definite matter of urgent public importance to the House of Assembly, the Minister of Health promises the country that the QEH will receive \$22 million within 2 weeks. Almost 4 months later, the QEH has not even received \$14 million. How many more people must suffer before we properly prioritise Government's spending?

And as if that were not enough we are now in the midst of a Dengue and a Chikungunya epidemic rapidly fuelled by the failure of Government to treat to its cuts from the public service in a sensible and sensitive manner. What do you expect when you send home the workers from the Drainage Unit, Beautify Barbados, Environmental Health Inspectors and persons from the Vector Unit? How can it be acceptable that we still pay political consultants to do nothing other than to fulfill the DLP's agenda when, consequent on the job cuts, there is only 1 person in the Vector Control Unit to receive complaints about mosquitoes and investigate? And one person as well with respect to rodents. What can the citizens of Barbados look forward to when the dry season comes?

Recently the BLP Parliamentary Party took yet another decision to offer our services on a matter of critical importance to the national wellbeing. I refer to the devising of a comprehensive plan to minimize the chances of an Ebola outbreak in Barbados. This disease is too deadly to be taken lightly and has the potential to threaten the very essence of our stability as a society.

There will be no time to play with should there even be the suspicion of a person infected with the virus. The consequences will be too fast and too dire. In that context I shall be writing the Prime Minister formally on this matter to express our concerns and to request a meeting to discuss how our Party can contribute its advice and expertise to the national effort. I trust that on this issue he will find time to reply. I shall not comment any further publicly at this stage other than to say that we have already made our position known on the matter of the siting of the Isolation Centre in a densely populated area and right next to where hundreds of children go to school.

## Aspiring to Home Ownership

3. We told our people in Barbados that the greatest and best investment that they could make was in “owning a piece of the rock”. So much was this central to the Barbadian DNA that we developed almost 100 years ago a mechanism called a Foreclosure Suit that allowed persons to get title for their land even if passed seed to seed. Now we want to penalize them disproportionately and inappropriately through the levying of a Municipal Solid Waste Tax.

How do we adhere to Conventions that state that the “Polluter Pays” but we focus the tax on the ownership of land alone? How do we do that in all conscience? And what about those who rent (like many banks) or those who have large lots of land without houses, with bush contributing to our current mosquito infestation. They will not pay a cent but pensioners who live on tenantry land will pay.

This is a bad tax and the BLP will repeal it whenever we become the Government. We repeat it is ill-conceived and disproportionate. Its timing was paradoxically curious and reinforced both the incompetence and insensitivity of the Government. For no sooner than it had been hurriedly introduced, Barbadians could not get their garbage collected, sometimes for weeks. This has served only to compound our risks in the area of public health. No one visiting our country today would know that we have had one of the best public health records in the developing world for decades.

## Transparency, Fiscal Prudence and Accountability

4. Barbadians have always been known for maintaining order in the society, doing the right thing and taking pride in what they do. We believe in putting our best foot forward especially in a crisis.

The notion that you can no longer rely on the accuracy of the data put out by Government is unheard of. Whether it is the Central Bank withholding data or publishing data that is so far removed from that of the Statistical Services Department, there is serious cause for concern. Just imagine this: The Central Bank records that our economy has only declined by about 3% since 2007 while the Statistical Services have numbers reflecting a decline since 2007 of 24% - eight times worse than the Central Bank admits publicly.

What we want to know is why they are hiding the fact that there is such a wide gulf between the data from the Central Bank and the Statistical Services Department? And why does the Central Bank continue to ignore the figures of the Statistical Services Department which is actually the department responsible in law for the collection of Barbados' economic data?

I know whose data I trust. But who do you believe? Whose figures more reflect our reality on the ground?

Then there is the issue of Ministers and Ministries failing to or refusing to follow the sensible and prudent rules that have protected us over the years. Significant expenditure is being incurred without the knowledge and/or agreement of the Ministry of Finance. Persons were being hired without the knowledge and/or approval of the Ministry of Civil Service and Ministry of Finance. MOUs and contracts are being signed without the required clearance from the Attorney General or the Solicitor General, as was the case when no less than 4 Ministers signed the MOU with Cahill Energy for the US \$300 million Plasma Gasification Plant (that is still hidden from the public eye).

## Legality, lawfulness and due process

5. Barbadians believed in obeying the law – in maintaining law and order.

We have known for sometime of the parachute landing of Arnie Walters from the Cabinet to Executive Chairman of the Barbados Water Authority, a post not recognized by the BWA's statute; and of the unlawful sale of diesel by the Transport Board to the minibuses and ZRs after the unconscionable and astronomical increase in the price of diesel.

However there are three matters of grave concern that I now want to highlight in the public interest:

In the Central Bank Quarterly review earlier this week there was an admission that in an effort to bridge the deficit the Government drew down on \$235 million of deposits from the commercial banks. Now if the Government had money that could have been legitimately used there would be no need for the Central Bank to be printing money. **It is clear now that the Government and/or Central Bank has been taking money out of the Government's Sinking Funds which have been established solely for the purpose of debt.**

**It is a sign of their desperation BUT it is against the law to use these funds in this manner. Let me repeat: It is illegal. And it must stop! And stop right away.** Now we may better guess why the Governor has not subjected himself to questions from the people whom he serves and who pay his salary. Interestingly the various funds managed by the Central Bank (like the Industrial Credit Fund and the Export Credit Insurance) are now purchasing Treasury Bills to finance this Government's spending rather than keeping the funds liquid to being used for the purposes for which they were created.

The second matter relates to the conduct of the Police Services Commission. The Constitution of Barbados guarantees every citizen the right to legal recourse. It cannot be a coincidence that in this instance all of the persons who have pursued their legal rights have not only been overlooked but, in some cases, have had to revert in rank. This is preposterous and worsens the morale in an already beleaguered Force. I honestly did not think that they could trump their action to suspend and thereafter get rid of the Commissioner of Police more than one year ago.

There can be no justification. We cannot accept that the Police Services Commission, an arm of the Government of Barbados and one so intimately related to the maintenance of law and order, can be permitted to act with such impunity!

Finally, the Barbados Revenue Agency continues to act without reference to the law. Having tried to introduce by circular a requirement for a Tax Clearance certificate for the transfer of property, it is now refusing to allow villa owners the 25% Rebate to which they are entitled under the Land Tax Act.

Barbadians have never seen the flagrant disrespect for the law as exhibited by this Government

## Living within our means

6. Barbadians have never believed in spending more than they earned. Indeed that example of thrift has served us well as an independent nation.

Earlier generations of leaders of this country would be horrified to learn of this Government's borrowing money month after month to pay salaries or to meet its monthly expenditure.

It is this callous disregard for sound fiscal management that is placing tremendous pressure on the stability of our exchange rate. The average Barbadian recognizes the folly of this approach. And the Government keeps introducing plan after plan to correct it. But on each occasion the plans are ill-conceived and ill-fated.

How many more failed plans must we endure from this Government? They are not correcting the problems for they are so intent on hiding the data that they are way off target in their prescription. Again this week the Central bank continued the charades.

Why is it that the Ministry of Finance continuously misses all of the projections that it gives to the Parliament and to the international financial institutions and the credit rating agencies? As recent as Thursday Standard and Poors used diplomatic language to describe the Government's Adjustment Strategy as being "off target". That is another way of saying it is not working at all!

Now we are being told of the need for additional revenue and expenditure measures that are more than twice greater than what Minister Sinckler announced last December. For \$175 million in 6 months translates to \$350 million over a full fiscal year. His measures last December when 3000 were sent home were to save \$143 million in a full financial year.

There is also the issue of time lag that is associated with the introduction of any new revenue measure. It is simply reflective of a Governor and a Minister that are out of their depth. This may be why there is an exodus of trained economists from the Central Bank.

Bajans are in for a massive shock. Many who were outside of the tax net may well find themselves back in. We shall await the actions of the Minister of Finance in his 2014 budget, although given the pace at which he proceeds it might more accurately be called the 2015 budget! But it will be interesting to see what Minister Sinckler does in response to the Governor's clear statement of what gap remains as he stated very clearly on page 15 of the same Ministerial Statement of December 13<sup>th</sup> that "as a country we cannot hope to cut or tax our way out of this economic decline".

Last night I received by email from the Ministry of Finance a copy of the IMF Tax Study and we thank him and the Cabinet for breaking new ground and sharing it with us. I commit that we shall review and submit our views in the interest of the country.

Suffice it to say, however, the Government is not only still spending more but by its profligacy and mismanagement it is putting at risk everything – all that we hold dear.

The NIS has become a beast of burden to resolve Government's cash flow and Barbadians of all ages and stations are duly concerned.

The Government has to urgently settle what it owes the NIS which is now at the horrendous level of almost \$180 million. This is for unpaid contributions, reimbursement of pensions and the rental of buildings. Of greater concern is the

rate at which the debt is accruing – about \$15 million per month! Left unchecked this will affect the cash flow of the NIS, which is already unable to meet benefit expenditure from the contributions it receives. It must rely on using some of its investment income to supplement what it receives in contributions to pay benefits.

As if that were not of sufficient concern, there is separately the state of the Unemployment Benefit Scheme. To meet the large number of claims from persons laid off in both the public and private sector the NIS is paying out \$5 million and receiving \$2.5 million in contributions. On current trend, this Fund will be broke by early next year. Adjustments have to be urgently made for its replenishment. And we expect them to be made according to the law, and with full transparency.

There are so many issues that are affected by this pattern of spending more than we earn. There is great speculation that in spite of an undertaking at the time of the Estimates Debate this year that the Government's deficit was only so high because the Government was clearing most of its arrears, the arrears are at a level of approximately \$800 million. This is almost another 10% of GDP and much of it is recurring expenditure for NIS, NHC, QEH etc. This is clearly acutely unsustainable.

But as we were taught as children you can hide and buy land but you cannot hide and work it. The media and the public must demand the true state of our finances as we must know what we truly face as a nation, not just what is being brought to book. We have no monthly Financial Statements from Government beyond December 2013 and that came this week. This is unacceptable in an economic crisis.

Let us be clear. None of the development institutions will lend us money until we achieve some level of macro-economic stability and fiscal sustainability or if they are satisfied that we are on course to achieving it. Nor will we access funds from the international capital markets easily in the absence of an independent assessment. The Central Bank is not that independent source. Typically. The views of the IMF and the Credit Rating Agencies do matter and cannot be ignored and labelled as "rubbish". That will not stopping them from reporting to the markets on us!

What is so sad Comrades is if the Government were ever to call upon the IMF as Sir Lloyd did in 1991 there will be no help from anyone including the IMF until an agreement is reached. Liquidity support typically takes at least 6 months and more likely 9 to 12 months.

**So all who may be calling for the intervention of the IMF must appreciate that the call for help does not deliver to us immediate assistance. It is like being in need of critical medication but whenever you decide to make the call you have to wait for it to arrive from the other side of the world. You cannot abridge the necessary work that has to be done to reach the terms and conditions of accessing that help.**

## Civility and Good Manners

7. Barbadians believe that “Manners maketh man”. That when someone writes you a letter you should acknowledge it and respond –even if that person is the Leader of the Opposition writing to the Prime Minister.

But we all know that if we had to rely on the Prime Minister communicating for us to eat, we would starve. I can do no better than to be inspired by Duke Check ED Shirt when commenting on the things done or not done by a previous leader of the DLP–

“These are the things that Freundel said” ----

“These are the things that Freundel said” ----

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Truthfully, Freundel has so distinguished himself that he deserves to be recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records as the most silent Prime Minister ever to have served as Head of Government in the Commonwealth.

We keep looking to him for a response from the economy to Ebola – NOT A WORD is spoken that can calm Bajans or give us that rare currency of confidence. I say to you today “Do not hold your breath.”

Bajans or human beings anywhere do not expect stoic silence from anyone with whom they have a relationship. You do not expect it from children, from your parents, from your boss - from anyone. We demand that children speak in school or at home. We demand it from employees in their workplace. Refusing to speak is unmannerly. But worse than that there is a heightened state of anxiety in the country and it will only be further compounded by this stubborn stoic insensitive silence. If we were describing a marriage it would be aptly referred to as mental abuse.

## The value of honesty and integrity

8. Barbadians do not like being deceived.

“No layoffs, no sell offs, no Students’ Fees”

The salt in the wound came for Bajans not only at the realization of this deception BUT in the memory, the vivid memory, of the posters of the General Election of January 2008 that dotted the landscape of Barbados, “I shall not lie, I shall not steal, I shall not cheat.”

This Government’s entire rule has been one rooted in Deception, Lies and Propaganda.

This is an illegitimate Government with absolutely no mandate to do what they are doing to the people and economy of Barbados.

Do not forget the facts. The last statement David Thompson made to the DLP Conference before he became Prime Minister was in 2007. It is littered with assertions that we knew then to be false. Bajans have now learnt they were simply empty words.

We were told then that the DLP should be elected as there was growth but no development. Now we have neither growth nor development.

We were told then elect the DLP so that they could turn Kensington Oval from a white elephant to a cash cow. Now we have Kensington as the poster child of the DLP’s cash flow problems - not a cent has been paid of the \$8.4 million for more than 5 years and counting to the BCA under the agreement that the DLP negotiated and signed in 2009.

We were told then elect the DLP so that they could introduce Code of Conduct, a Declaration of Assets, new Integrity and Public Accountability legislation and the strengthening of the Public Accounts Committee. Instead we have had a Bill to repeal the Public Accounts Committee Act, no declaration of Assets, no Code of Conduct, no accountability to the public and little integrity in the Government’s actions. I should tell you that the PAC has been meeting regularly over the summer recess taking evidence even though the issue of publication of evidence has still not been resolved.

We were told then elect the DLP so that they could save Barbadians from the plan of the BLP of leaving education to fend for itself. Instead we now have the students fending for themselves.

We were told that land must not go to the highest bidder. Now we have Ministers trotting around the globe to get foreign investment that they cried down in 2007 here with all the fervour of a real estate agents looking for commission.

## Betrayal of Barbados and Bajans

From Adams to Barrow, Sandiford to Arthur there were values uniquely Bajan that were held dearly. This is what Bajans believe in. From the markets to the churches, from the schools to the playing fields, from the rum shops to the dance halls – in our homes these have been the values that were reinforced in us that have made us distinctive as a people.

It may easily be said that many of the supporters and members of the Democratic Labour Party of the Barrow, Sandiford and even some in the Thompson era shudder at what their party now represents and how it has so utterly failed the Barbadian people. Indeed they find more comfort now with the actions and words emanating from here this afternoon!

### WHERE DO YOU STAND?

I say to them as I say to you - We need Barbadians from all walks of life to come forward and join together in a movement to save Barbados, and to safeguard our stability. For truly our only asset is our stability.

So I have come to ask whether you count yourselves among those strict guardians of our heritage, those firm craftsmen of our fate upon whom the future now depends. Do you still have dreams; do you still have 'expectations great' for yourself, for this country? Do you have any hope left for your future and your children's futures?

Barbados is broken. There is no disputing that fact. And I fear that the spirit of the Barbadian people is equally crushed by the political and economic trauma visited on us by the present DLP Government over the course of the last six years.

Faced with such brokenness and despair, what is it that as loyal sons and daughters we all ought now to do to salvage our nation and restore it to good fortune? Will the majority continue to stand in collective silence as the Government remains deaf to the cries of the people?

**Are we willing to be placed on the charge sheet as co-conspirators with this Government in our own demise and in the demise of this fair land?**

If so, what then shall we tell our children and our children's children?

What are we going to say to God in defence of our stewardship? How do we justify to Him our abdication of responsibility for the state in which this country now finds itself?

When I was growing up, I often heard the old people warn, "God will not do for you what you will not do for yourself." Even now, I believe God is watching closely to see what we are going to do as citizens, as loyal sons and daughters all, to restore this country to good governance, to responsible, fair and ethical government. Will we continue to be silent, to conspire with the Democratic Labour Party to 'mash up' everything Grantley Adams and Errol Barrow and all who came after held dear?

### CROSSROADS

Make no mistake, our country now stands at a crossroads as critical as that at which it stood on March 31, 1938, when the founding fathers of the Barbados Labour Party met at a home in Bay Street to form a political movement to fight for the birth of our democracy out of the historic national disturbances of 1937.

Our country today stands at a crossroads as momentous as that at which it stood on a rain-soaked evening in November 1966 when the Union Jack was lowered and the Broken Trident raised, signalling the birth of a nation and the formal beginning of the first phase of a compelling journey towards national self-determination.

During those periods in our history, we were blessed with visionary leaders who acted fearlessly to champion social justice, free education, improved health care, better housing, and political expression for all Barbadians unburdened by fear or threat of reprisal. Our leaders of that generation worked to reform the industrial relations climate in Barbados, providing critical leadership for the working class at a time when their very survival was under threat.

For 25 years, with these empowering markers as my guide, I have had the privilege of serving the people of this nation in various capacities within and outside of Government.

I have done my best to serve with humility, with joy, and with commitment and passion, ever conscious of the solemn pact a leader must make to the people she is called to serve.

Leadership is not a right. It is a responsibility.

Leadership is not a career. It is a calling.

Leadership is not for the faint of heart nor the small of mind.

In this, I am acutely aware that God Himself holds leaders to a far higher standard than that to which He holds those whom we would aspire to lead.

## READYING THE BARBADOS LABOUR PARTY

As such, I stand before you today more sensitive than ever to the weighty mantle that rests upon me as the Political Leader of this Party and the Leader of the Opposition in a nation now beset behind and before by challenges largely of our current Government's own making.

As Political Leader, I cannot ignore the departure from our ranks of a former popular leader, Owen Seymour Arthur, but if we are to remain true to our roots and guided by our responsibility to our families, friends and neighbours then I must focus on the future. But even as I do so I would want to wish him a speedy recovery and God's blessings on behalf of the members of this party and myself whom he led.

We must look forward as a Party to the huge task that lies ahead of us and leave behind the things that may distract for our people do not have the luxury of distraction.

Sadly, I have lived to see every marker that guided my life in politics now carelessly shattered.

This is the challenge that confronts us all as Barbadians and in particular the Barbados Labour Party.

We must convince the public that when given the opportunity we as a Party will not only manage the people's affairs but we will undertake the task of transforming this country.

This requires of us unity, discipline, commitment and empathy.

We are a family. This Party is yours and you must own it.

Be proud of it and do not be intimidated by anyone – this is your family. Families stick together and stand up for each other.

And let us be real. All families have problems. There is nothing new or unusual about that. However, the public of Barbados expects us to deal with them internally.

Never once have you heard me seek to address any conflict or disagreement in the public domain either as a member of this Party or indeed as a leader in this country – now or in the last 25 years.

I lead by example in this regard. And this is what I will expect from loyal members of this party.

Suffice it to say, we have heard the views of the public.

For the first time in 76 years, I am happy to report that the Parliamentary Party of the BLP settled and agreed over the Summer Recess Standing Orders governing a range of issues including how we resolve our differences. This Conference was given the details this morning by the Secretary of the Parliamentary Party.

We do not want to stifle people's creativity and expression but there must be discipline if we are to remain focused and inspire confidence in our ability to lead this country. Of this, I am certain.

I know we can and we shall.

Similarly, we have completed and presented to the National Council a Paper entitled "CANDIDATES SELECTION CRITERIA". I wish to thank the other members of the Candidate Selection Committee - Sir Richard Cheltenham and Senator the Hon. Jerome Walcott, our General Secretary. The BLP was able to start this process of selecting new candidates last

Sunday with Colin Jordan – a fine young man who has been raised by a community with whom he has remained close and for whom he has a passion to serve. He is above all caring, competent and articulate.

I give you the assurance that the BLP will continue apace with our selection of candidates. I am heartened by the interest being expressed by many persons who recognize that this country needs good men and women to step forward and offer themselves for service at this most perilous of times.

Our team will reflect experience and youth, professionals and community persons. It will mirror the Barbadian society. But above all else it will be a team that will value at its core how we relate to and treat people, for without that caring and heart we can never properly represent our people.

This is a solemn commitment I make to you.

Our Barbados Labour Party family must come to be regarded as people who by their actions believe in the upliftment of others – not just by our words and our policies for Government and Parliament but by our Good Works for people too. This was the Call to Action I made on the occasion of our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We must be committed to easing the pain of our neighbours in whatever small way we can – so that they may rest easier at night. For it is in the little things that we do that we come to be known. It is also the little things that inspire people to join us and to be confident that working together we can wrestle down the large problems.

We have started this by letting you know what matters.

Rubbing Shoulders with people. The Love thy Neighbour Project last Xmas helping families to learn how to sustain themselves by getting them off the ground with the rearing of chickens and the growing of vegetables. Creating a platform for all voices to contend on the issues confronting us in the People's Assemblies. And I want to salute those independent minded Barbadians who came and displayed courage knowing full well the vagaries of a small society. It is not easy to break a mould or a culture. But we are committed to creating a space of public discourse for all Barbadians.

These are all initiatives that will be a feature of a BLP Government for I was taught and still believe as you start so shall you finish.

We must build bridges with people on issues. We must not believe that everyone in the country must agree with all that we say or do for us to cooperate. We must never seek to use fear as a tool of intimidation nor to demand blind loyalty from anyone. I have never done it nor will this Party while I am leader. We must accommodate dissent as our Standing Orders now provide. The critical issue is how we manage dissent, not the suppression of it.

My style may be different but my principles and philosophy are those to which I referred earlier which were nurtured by my family, those who mentored me in my political and professional life locally and regionally and my constituents and many members of this Party who guided me through my early adult life.

And let me tell you that I believe that principles only mean something when it is inconvenient to stand by them. Even if it means you suffer temporarily from holding fast to them.

Indeed in committing to and following this path, we the members of the Barbados Labour Party will rebuild trust and regain the public's confidence. Trust that as a party the BLP is a political institution that is truly bigger than any individual or any generation. Trust that as a party we can and will chart a different path for the country. Trust that there is a better way. Trust that with good governance, ability, integrity and vision Barbados will recover from its present downfall. Trust that with the right leadership and example, the system can work again. Trust that not all politicians are to be disbelieved.

## Doing it Differently

Many of you have asked and continue to do so “But what can you do differently?”

It is critical that you know that there is a different path and a different way.

Yes there is.

We are clear that our most urgent priority must be the stabilisation of the Barbados economy while laying the foundations for the return to growth of this economy. It is like a patient who has colon cancer but is bleeding out. You need to stop the bleeding immediately if the patient is to survive the next few days but once you do that you have to deal aggressively with the cancer, if not the patient will still die in a few years.

It is not a simple exercise and requires many different inputs and skills. The public finances would be akin to the bleeding and the ridding of the body of cancer would be akin to the restoration to health and growth of both the foreign reserves and the economy.

Accordingly the economic team of the BLP has been working assiduously for the last 18 months monitoring and analyzing what we can and planning for what we know will inevitably befall the nation. We understand what has to be done and we are prepared and ready to do it whenever the people of Barbados say that they are ready for us to do so.

The first thing therefore that has to be done is to deal with the Public Finances of this country.

Any serious effort to address the issue of public expenditure management that will necessitate multiple approaches. What is the purpose of Government in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Barbados? What is absolutely essential? What is highly desirable? What is optional and may be better delivered by someone else? What is optional and may be deferred?

This is an urgent exercise that must be undertaken and will be undertaken with our guidance across all sectors of society. And there is a very good reason for this. There is no doubt that there must be sacrifice but the burden must be fairly shared across the population according to what each individual can bear. It CANNOT be done simply by arithmetical cuts as if there is nothing to defend in this society and economy or as if there is not a distinctive Barbadian DNA to be protected.

When an inclusive and transparent process is undertaken people are vested with the will to work towards the attainment of the goals set. For it is not only what we set out to do but HOW we do it. Life is about hard choices and we must make those choices collectively as a people for they will affect us all.

Similarly, we must urgently reduce the cost of our debt service. We are now spending the same amount on servicing our debt as we spend on wages and salaries in Central Government and our statutory Boards. We need to refinance our debt (without making haircuts) to give us the elbowroom we will require in the next 3 years to restructure our economy. We will still have to borrow BUT it cannot be for wages and consumption. It has to be for developmental purposes as we consistently did as a country prior to 2008. We need to ensure that we pay for our current expenditure out of our revenue and that we generate sufficient revenue to contribute to our capital projects that are so necessary to fuel growth.

We must also make serious decisions on what assets and services may be better owned and managed by others in this society. We need to enfranchise ordinary Barbadians across the board to step up to the plate and grasp the opportunity to assist in building out Barbados. It cannot be and must never be the preserve of a few as this Government is intent on doing in its

divestment programme. We have engaged in the process of enfranchisement as a nation across both political parties for the last 75 years – political enfranchisement, worker enfranchisement, social enfranchisement, economic enfranchisement. The mission is not completed and must now be pursued in a manner that is consistent with the empowerment of Barbadians across the board.

In so doing we will bring back stability and confidence to our public finances. This will allow us to access the capital that we need to fuel growth across the board. For the denial of access to credit is starving not just the Government of oxygen but also our private sector which must take the lead in growing this economy

We are confident that these actions will give us that elbowroom that we so vitally need to restore stability and lay the platform for transformation.

Equally as we work to do these things we must address a few key matters.

First and foremost is the issue of our energy policy.

The cost of energy affects every business, every household. It impacts on the state of our foreign exchange. It must be a holistic policy that seeks to keep the costs realistically affordable, that builds out both our offshore and onshore drilling and that develops our renewable sources to the benefit of Barbadians as investors and consumers.

We have already indicated that our pricing and taxation policies must reflect the first goal of making the costs of electricity, diesel and kerosene affordable. It is for this reason that we have warned Barbadians that the sale of Barbados National Terminals Co Ltd is likely to lead to an increase in prices at the pump and for electricity as the mark up in our current pricing structure only allows BNTCL a tiny return on capital – or or about 2%. This is unlikely to be acceptable to any private sector investor.

This is the consequence of selling this particular asset at the very time when Barbadian businesses cannot absorb any further hikes in their cost of living. We are already baffled as to why the continued decrease in energy prices internationally has not led to a substantial reduction of prices at the pump and in the fuel adjustment clause in the electricity bill.

We are also clear in our minds that tourism will lead our recovery effort. But there must be clear goals and strategies to arrest a decline that has now become chronic. We need to believe in ourselves and know that we can set a goal of 1 000 000 long stay tourists by 2020 and a minimum of \$4 billion in earnings from the sector. This will necessitate improving existing product and building out new product - not promising to do so every 3 months for the last 3 years. To do this we have to aggressively unlock access to capital through creative means. We have already announced our commitment to the establishment of a National Tourism Refurbishment Fund. We need to properly provide for the funding of our marketing and be creative in how we do it. Similarly we will address the issue of airlift capacity. Creating new institutions and overlapping layers of bureaucracy is not the answer. Smart and technologically savvy approaches can be found. It is not beyond us.

Similarly our whole approach to agriculture must change. Yes - we must maintain a sugar cane industry for it is vital for the maintenance of our ecology, for crop rotation and to extract the greatest value added from the manufacturing of sugar and rum. However, we need to create the environment where Barbadians see farming and fishing as viable entrepreneurial activities to assist in our goal of food security. Similarly all must and will be done to ensure that persons are not robbed of the fruit of their labours. This has to be undertaken through dedicated enforcement and a re-education of our people as to the stake we all have in farmers being able to legitimately benefit from their labour by reaping what they sow.

I could go on and on with respect to international business and the need to diversify into niche sectors like asset management and arbitration especially as we face continuous global assault on our policies and tax regimes. Or why we must become a major hemispheric transport hub. Or how our manufacturing must be premised on the symbiotic relationship that already exists with our history or our way of life – rum, Bajan sugar, furniture, sea island cotton, peppers – but we must take it all to a new level in terms of re-engineering and design while guaranteeing access to capital so that small and medium sized businesses working collaboratively can change the profile of the sector.

Equally fundamental to our transforming the economy and its costs is a deconstruction and a reconstruction of our regulatory environment. What is the public mischief we are trying to correct and given the substantial improvements in information technology and our commitment to e-Government, can it be done in a manner that reduces the costs and burden on the person or entities being regulated?

All of this we can expand upon at the relevant time and with the access to current data which we do not have for we are not in the business of idle promises. **But what matters is not only what we do but how we do it and who does it. This is the critical point. Equally there must be an urgency and a responsiveness in all that we do.** Because as a country we are almost out of time.

There is never a shortage of good ideas, but we define what is it that we value and that we want to protect and build upon. Why it is critical that as we attract foreign capital to rebuild our nation we creatively find opportunities for persons and businesses with local savings to invest here and indeed in the wider region. Why there cannot be a continuation of this Government's policy to concentrate wealth creation in the hands of an absolute few who are already flowing in cash. Why it matters that we commit to the provision as of right to the unfettered access to education for all young Barbadians for our future's sake.

Similarly, in case we forgot, we now know that Barbados must have a robust public health system if we are to survive and thrive. And it is a priority on the public expenditure as is the maintenance of a safe society. In this case we must meet our commitments here and with respect to the alleviation of poverty through undertaking capital projects that are better suited to small contractors by their definition. We benefit both in terms of our social goals and the stimulation of economic activity.

And equally we must wrestle the difficult issue of the financing of health care as an absolute imperative for Barbados must cease being a country where having money determines who will live and who will not. There are only 4 options for the financing of health care and we must settle as a people once and for all on which one we want to pursue.

Yes, colleagues, there is much that we can do differently, and that we can do better.

Ask yourselves a simple question: what do we expect when we elect a Government to run the affairs of our nation?

Do we not expect our Head of Government to be a strong and decisive leader, capable of inspiring confidence in those he or she leads, both within the Cabinet and in the country at large?

Do we not expect him or her to treat us like the educated, thoughtful adults that we are?

To listen carefully to our divergent views and concerns and weigh them all in the balance BEFORE devising and enacting policies that will directly impact our wellbeing?

To level with us, and give us all the facts whether the news is good or bad? Not to operate by stealth or hide the truth, distort the figures, condone corruption or break the law?

To have the sense to know that all human beings are fallible, and the courage to acknowledge mistakes and change course when the vital interests of the nation are at stake?

Do we not expect to have a Cabinet, of a size that we can afford, made up of individuals of commitment and integrity?

Do we not require that they have the competence to manage our economic and social affairs, and to do so with certainty of purpose and coherence of policy?

Do we not expect them to pull as a team, and to speak with one voice, not break for themselves in a mad dash for self-promoting headlines?

Do we not demand that they remember that their sacred calling is to serve the public good, not their own self-interest?

And when, my friends, there is a total absence of all of those characteristics which are fundamental to democratic governance, does it not become clear to all of our citizens that those who have perpetrated so blatant a breach of trust upon the electorate have no moral authority to continue to govern?

And that the only option for our citizens when faced with such a predicament is to join together in common cause to remove the incompetent abusers from office by the only lawful means available to them: the ballot box?

**Only the citizens of Barbados, acting collectively can advance the timing of this rendezvous with destiny. The power to make this happen does not lie with the Barbados Labour Party. But I wish to assure our long-suffering citizens that when they decide that they have had enough and demand that the bell be rung we are ready and we are prepared.**

**There is indeed a different path and a different way. I hope it will not be long before the people of Barbados give me and the BLP Team the opportunity to prove this to you.**

Many believe that simply by articulating alternative policies the BLP can make change happen. Well, we have been doing so since the disastrous 2008 budget, but nothing we have said or warned has been heeded.

The simple fact is that we have a fundamentally different approach to the management of Barbados, both as an economy and a society, and the people now know, through painful experience, which approach has delivered successfully for them.

But it is important for the people of Barbados to understand that, at this juncture, alternative policies can only serve as exercises in frustration when those proposing them have no authority to implement. It is up to the electorate of Barbados to entrust us once again with that solemn responsibility. Until then we are merely spitting in the wind.

It is important, too, for the people of Barbados to understand that it is not solutions that we lack. Day after day, week after week we hear suggestions from all quarters on what we in the collective must do, followed by lamentations on what has not been done. We receive thoughtful positions from the Private Sector, the Unions and Civil Society, and from credible international institutions, but little happens to translate them into action.

For, regrettably, solutions do not function in a vacuum. To bring sound ideas to fruition requires an enabling environment that responds to our most critical risk factors: the ability to inspire, the ability to mobilize, and the ability to execute.

Let me repeat: Ideas have never been our problem. We have them in abundance. The issue is not what we have to do but how we do it, and who we choose to get it done, and get it done right.

I am convinced that all patriotic Barbadians believe that they have a stake in bringing Barbados back from the brink and then taking it forward again. They want to play their part but they don't know how. They are crying out for positive, motivational leadership. And they are certainly not finding it on the Government's front benches.

## COMMITTED TO A MOVEMENT FOR A NEW BARBADOS

To the colleagues assembled here and to the people of Barbados, I come to you with one simple message. With deep humility but passionate conviction I say to you: I am ready to fill that void. For 25 years I have served my apprenticeship. I have listened, I have learned, I have formulated and implemented policy and I have managed change.

I believe, in all sincerity, that I understand a lot of what has to be done, not just to rebuild this economy, but equally to restore to the Barbadian psyche, that vibrant confidence and spirit of self-worth that six years of oppressive, unjust, uncaring and incompetent Government have stripped to the core. Above all to give the people back their hope.

I believe I know what has to be done, and I believe I know how to do it. It is not about solutions in the abstract. It is about building a platform for recovery that everyone can understand and relate to. It is about leading in a way that is transparent and participatory, that inspires others to come on board not for personal gain, but for the simple pride they feel at playing their part. It is about mobilizing the patriotism of Barbadians everywhere, about reviving the values of community, of compassion and of love for one another. It is about national partnership to create a shared vision for the future of our anguished country and its despondent people. It is about changing despair to hope and fear to inspiration.

### **It is, in short, a Movement for The New Barbados.**

I know that at the political level the Great Party that I have the honour to lead is building the right Team to take the country forward. I know that within the Social Partnership there are many constructive and innovative views just waiting to be treated with seriousness and respect. And I know from my conversations with the Tourism Sector, our large and small businesses, our farmers and fishermen, our Church leaders, our artists and sportsmen, the Youth, the Elders and other civil society partners, that they too are committed to making a difference.

Together we can do whatever we dream but we must be determined to do.

My commitment to all Barbadians this afternoon is to recreate a Barbados that we can all once again believe in, a Barbados that works, a country in which we are once again our brothers and sister's keepers. This is the Barbados that your parents and grand parents believed in and held dear, a Barbados I have worked my entire professional life to uphold, a Barbados that you can also embrace.

I commit to you this afternoon to work every moment of every day to rebuild this nation, to once again punch above our weight, to forge a new positive destiny for each and every citizen for decades to come. To shape a model for development in which each and every "Bajan" born here or naturalized can find his or her rightful place and true calling.

A nation that empowers all and limits none.

We will work hand in hand with all of our citizens to build a Barbados that that is the smallest fully developed nation in the world and the envy of those in the developed world. Our call will not be "Yes we can", but rather "YES WE WILL".

I pledge to you today to work to ensure that we have always the best people in the right places in government and to partner with the leaders at all levels of the private sector, the unions and civil society to guarantee that the same is replicated all across this nation. We will work to create a true performance based culture that rewards excellence and encourages all citizens to strive for distinction.

Our Barbados will be one in which we will choose methods of communication that are easily accessible to every citizen and in which a two-way flow of information is even and consistent. Barbados will once again become a country in which our citizens go about their daily business with a sense of urgency and purpose.

I vow today to place you - our people - at the centre of all that we do, to listen to your wants and needs and to do our best to cater to them. This is my solemn pledge to you, to walk with you always not only as a leader, but as a confidant and as a friend.

I want to make you feel safe again in this country – just as I did when the Prison burnt and you went about your daily business as usual while more than 1200 prisoners were relocated and secured in little or no time.

I want to make you feel confident that you can go about investing your savings knowing that we will not pluck them from you with new and higher taxes that leave you at the mercy of the elements.

I want to make you passionate about the Barbados we knew - the Barbados that was good to us and the Barbados that is the only home we have.

**IT IS NOT OUR FAULT THAT THIS GOVERNMENT HAS BROUGHT US TO OUR KNEES BUT IT WILL BE OUR FAULT IF WE REMAIN ON OUR KNEES.**

So tell me now, citizens of Barbados, where do you stand?

Are you ready to do your part to rescue Barbados?

Nothing can happen if you talk but do not act. For we are not a nation of factions, of political tribes. We are a people sharing a common set of values and aspirations. And we rise and fall together.

So will you stand with us to take back the land that we love? Will you stand tall, rise up in peace and dignity and reclaim your birthright? Will you join me now in the walk to freedom? For the longer we wait the further we will be from home, the harder it will be to find our way back.

Will you join the Movement for the New Barbados?

Our destiny is in your hands. You the people. The choice is yours!