

Barbados Urgently Needs a Return to Economic Growth

**by
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Chris Sinckler began his '2013 Budget' presentation by relying upon what he called a 'biblical injunction' which was rummaged from the book of Ecclesiastes at chapter 3. To be quite honest, the entirety of Sinckler's snatching away verses from the good book was unnecessary although coming from him, the brazen act was sufficiently provocative. I refuse to be prosecutor, judge and jury all at the same time. In this submission, the attempt is to lay bare the facts, substantiate claims made, and leave the verdict to those who have been whelmed by blows delivered by Sinckler, Sealy, Stuart, Boyce, Jones, and company.

Realistically, the pronouncements and policy measures that were articulated in and followed the 2013 budget gave the general public the ensuing sense and feelings of grave uncertainty. There has been a continuous and unrelenting slew of widespread confusion thrown to many different publics. Constantly is the cry that the Cabinet is inconsistent in its policy positions; and that it may largely be due to several Ministers being more in tune with spin and disguise than with forthrightness and Barrow's traditions.

Hence, Barbadians have been on the receiving end of falsities, contradictions, impracticalities, woeful clarifications, and policy reversals coming from the parched lips and twisted tongues of Cabinet ministers. Surely with the Prime Minister recently suggesting that with some fortune he has "been getting little dribbles of information from ministries and ministers" which would indicate their realisation "that we can get the cuts we want without having necessarily to affect employment in the Public Service," is as farcical as it shows up the incompetence of the Minister of Finance. How could Minister Sinckler bring measures of serious adjustment to the public without having done the necessary research or fully exploring the gamut of available options open to the government? Was it sheer laziness, a vain callousness, or incompetence?

There is anxiety in the public service regarding a 0.7 % '*municipal*' solid waste tax - certain misnomer - placed on the non-improved value of the land. Equally annoying are other taxes such as a "temporary consolidation tax on gross income of persons earning 50,000 and over" not forgetting that the VAT had attracted a temporary increase from 15 to 17.5 % for an end date of 18 months. Other financial cuts and expenditure cutbacks by departments in government have to be implemented but the prime minister still tells Barbadians of their job security.

To worsen the petrified state impacting negatively on civil servants are the many meanings that spring up with 'temporary employment' in the public sector. The to and fro regarding official political rhetoric, notwithstanding Prime Minister Stuart's feeble and churlish attempt to throw scratch grain at the fowl, has left many in the private sector wondering if the invitation for more public-private partnerships by the Minister of Finance was genuine given the DLP's usual course of making an about turn on almost every major issue confronting the country. Do you remember the twists and turns that came with privatisation, and the way that the DLP tried to relegate the private sector? When did the DLP become aware of the role that the private sector ought to play in national development? In that regard, reflecting on the last general elections a few pertinent questions come to mind.

- Was the 'old lady from St. George' wrong when she was at pains to admonish the BLP for colluding with private interests to overturn social entitlements that redound to pensioners, school children, and less fortunate persons in the Barbados society?
- Were the advertisements and statements emerging from the DLP's appetite for masquerade another signifier of blatant

concealment? Was there ever the suggestions from PM Stuart, Sinckler, Inniss, Jones and others that the people would be creating a self-inflicted wound if they elected Arthur and the BLP?

- Was there a facade being erected by a group whose 'Despicable Lurch for Power' was bent on hiding the fact that the fiscal and total macroeconomic situations in Barbados were so dismal as to warrant *en masse* people driven from the world of work and earning a livelihood once the elections were won by the DLP?

Barbados urgently needs a return to economic growth. *Neither Sealy, Sinckler, nor Stuart appear capable of redirecting the tourism sector to fulfil the economic needs of the country.* The pride and industry of Barbadians, in the meantime, have come under targeted scrutiny if not outright attack from government, the private sector, and some labour union bosses working in tandem with members of Stuart's DLP Cabinet. While cooperation is to be encouraged and the national agenda ought to be prioritised, Barbados can ill afford to accept the soft-pat on the back that is being exchanged by friends and acquaintances.

Just imagine the Prime Minister is calling for employers to "engage our employees to higher levels of effort,

output and commitment," all though these and similar virtues are perceptively absent from the Cabinet given the situation Barbados finds itself. Dr. Worrell summoning labour without chastising government, said that "labour is charged with an urgent need to improve productivity and quality of service in every area of activity." This writer is cautioning that co-option of the corruptible kind is often to be found in high places of negotiation and governance. Barbadians have to become aware that the actual presence and the day-to-day interests of the working class are perceptively and visibly absent in Sinckler's 2013 budget. One must therefore seek out the capitalists, accountants, and other business concerns that took precedence over health and education, or more pointedly over labour, the QEH and the UWI.

So that although the Central Bank Governor would venture to say that "Barbadians have every reason to be confident that we can cure *the foreign exchange imbalance which has emerged in the last three months*, and revive the growth of our economy," this writer sits with the many more doubting Thomases that have emerged since PM Stuart's June 2013 consultations with national stakeholders, and the back pedalling that occurs almost daily since the Sinckler 2013 budget. There is an abeyance that has descended on the Barbados Cabinet, and with every

Sinckler proposal there is an imbedded dread that swipes away at the middle and working class people of Barbados.

Dr. Worrell, while asserting that "Barbados ranks 44th in the 2013 Global Competitiveness Index, on the strength of its well-functioning institutions, good infrastructure, high quality educational system, high use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and a fairly sophisticated business community," he has failed miserably to isolate the current fiscal problems, runaway public expenditure, and the ballooning national debt presided over by Chris Sinckler and the DLP Cabinet. This is a fumbling Cabinet that is hand-picked by Prime Minister Freundel Stuart.

The macroeconomic problems and fiscal difficulties are to some extent structural; but these have been made worse by the DLP. That administration's propensity to borrow at alarming rates for non-productive activities such as expanding social entitlements are, for the most part, only capable of boosting the DLP's chances for electoral success at the expense of governmental prudence.

Free bus fares for school children, summer camps spoiled by ministerial privileging, the David Thompson football tournament, and the political surrogates that are planted in the constituency councils immediately come to mind. These entities were dangled by

the DLP to a public gallery in which some persons found themselves either being too gullible or vulnerable to complain against the sordid sense of prioritisation from the DLP administration.

Why has the same Dr. Worrell not rejected the adverse policy prescriptions mandated in Sinckler's collection of austere budgets since 2010? Why is the independent and expert advice of the Governor of the Central Bank seemingly strangled between a disconnection that is at once politically sound if one is the government, but imprecise and contradictory if praxis in economic theory and practice are to be achieved for the people of Barbados in the quests for national development?

Has Minister Sinckler, probably aided and abetted by Dr. Worrell, sought to unceremoniously encroach upon the *good infrastructure* or the *high quality educational system* acknowledged to be fundamental in Barbados' developmental successes since independence? Several persons, drawn from the electorate in Barbados, are fast becoming a majority that are finally willing to give silence or protest against the backdrop of the DLP's draconian measures and austere policies that will become more impactful by September 2014.

As each issue merits, the current administration has attracted increasing

petulance from a people now perceiving themselves to be deceived. People power recognises that there is "*a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*" Finance Minister Sinckler could have simply built his sad story to the nation on one sentence - '*to everything, there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ...a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.*'

The Right Excellent Errol Barrow's foothold, following the foundations laid by the Right Excellent Grantley Adams for the provision of accessible social services inclusive of universal healthcare and education for the masses, once paid from the public purse given Barbados' 'high' taxation levels, have become eroded and on the way to extinction. The DLP is surely plucking up that planted by our forefathers.