

Show Prudence, Let Political Ethics Be the Principle

by

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Lord Dicey argued that the legal system consists not only of the procedural enforcement of rules and precedents but also of the informal “*customs, practices, maxims, or precepts which are not enforced or recognised by the Courts, [and which] make up a body not of laws, but of constitutional or political ethics.*” In the Commonwealth Caribbean - Barbados included - most states govern using the broad pillars of a Westminster model parliamentary democracy.

Indeed, over the last year, Barbados has been celebrating its 375th anniversary year of Parliamentary life which is the third oldest in the British Commonwealth. On top of this, Barbados is now into its 49th year of independence and the challenge remains for all citizens of the country to be 'strict guardians' of the Barbadian heritage and 'firm craftsmen' of the fate of the nation.

Therefore, it is with quite an uncomfortable sense of anxiety and distress that Barbadian citizens and residents including those in the wider Caribbean diaspora are having to digest the recent happenings involving the Speaker of the House of Assembly in particular, and the political elites in general. Questions of laws, privileges, customs, morality, and political ethics have become foremost on the lips of many after it became public knowledge that the Speaker of the House, in his capacity as a lawyer, had become embroiled in a legal dispute with a former client. Mr. Carrington has thus far failed to hand over \$210,000 from the sale of land and, upon which judicial word had directed him so to do.

On the one hand, there are those who in staunch defence of the almost indefensible given that moral and ethical behaviours have minimum standards. Persons such as the Prime Minister prefer to write off serious concern as "a demonstration of monstrous stupidity." On the other hand, there are others still provocatively labouring to get the point across that a matter involving the Speaker of the House and, which "relates to a fiduciary duty" regarding his "professional capacity as a lawyer, cannot be divorced from the manner in which the public sees ... the holding of this chair as Speaker of this House."

Of course, the court of public opinion operating under the circumstances of intense polarisation between the two political parties in Barbados are unlikely to find consensus. The clear choices seem to rest against whether the Speaker should

continue to sit even in the absence of a protesting party, temporarily recuse himself until the matter is resolved since it has been forwarded to the Committee of Privileges within the parliamentary setup, or step down (i.e. resign forthwith) while maintaining a presence in the legislative chamber.

Thus, I am constrained to be absolute in my verdict since as the Speaker has intimated, he has "not been charged with anything." The Speaker further indicated that he does not "know of any resolution that was passed" by the House saying that he cannot sit in the chair; "I don't know that any procedure under these Standing Orders were gone through to say that Michael Carrington as Speaker can't take the chair. Until that is done, I am entitled to preside." Aristotle the philosopher once said that "those who lack virtue become arrogant and wantonly aggressive ... they think less of everyone else, and do whatever they please."

Perhaps, a strategy of no confidence may have engendered the type of debate that would push forward the necessary reforms that are needed so that Barbados' Parliament does not prove to have become *poorrakey*. At the same time, I would urge the Speaker of the House to contemplate on the words of Dwight Eisenhower when he warned that "a people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both."