

We are not safe!

“Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.” - Frederick Douglass.

Many of the events occurring over the last few weeks, together tell a sad story of my Barbados. It now seems placidly clear that Barbados is precariously lodged on the edge of a cliff – waiting either to be quickly saved or pushed to the point of no return. Unfortunately, it is with recurring regularity that Barbadians are experiencing incredible tragedy and life-altering trauma instead of promised safety and prosperity.

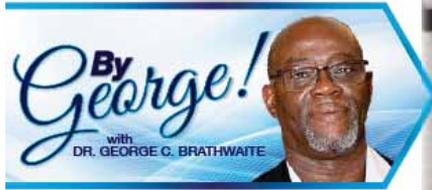
In this our 50th year of Independence, Barbadians no longer feel safe in their homes; safety and well-being are being challenged at school, in the workplace, and on the streets of Barbados. In the society, rather than the spreading of hope, there is the show of grave consternation. Rather than positive pronouncements from our officials, there is absurdity laced in denial and excuses. Furthermore, the strong linkage between fashioning a strong economy and building a just society has been ripped apart by alleged ploys and cunning seemingly perpetrated by political pirates.

In all of this turmoil, one senses a Cabinet concentrated more on protecting its turf than on being sufficiently creative to truly be strict guardians of our heritage. Around the street corners and the remaining shops, many are suggesting that the moribund Democratic Labour Party (DLP) politicians have fixed their gaze on winning the next general elections, more so than on curbing the problems which have been depressing national growth.

For its part, and notwithstanding the most recent ‘no confidence motion’ followed by the ‘march for justice’, the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) appears less robust on the societal decadence than may be expected from a political party that has achieved numerous unprecedented successes when in Government. Admittedly, the boys on the block keep asking, ‘why is the BLP so low keyed when hardly a thing is working in the country and there are no jobs in the offering?’

The plain and untarnished truth is that today, Barbados is trembling from many social issues that have erupted from the long economic drought – not self-made but self-sustained. Barbados’ productive sectors have not fired, although one can easily mount an argument telling why the current administration ought to have considered a self-firing. Alarming though has to be the fear that pervades the society. This fear has become embedded and is scaring locals in their villages, communities, and terraces. One can hazard a guess as to the situation in a few months when the next tourist season opens and the crime trends and factors continue to be dismal, even for foreign investors.

This year alone, the painful impact of murders occasioned by gun violence have startled several persons to the reality that somewhere, the country has taken a wrong turn. Barbadian families are stressed and distressed by the lingering stain of domestic violence that has thrown families into mourning. Our youth are falling by the wayside to joblessness. There appears to be a willingness to fall to the temptations that shoot out from the belly of poverty, and in which



survival triggers the undergrowth of deviance. There is now greater uncertainty coming to children left behind as a result of a broken education system in which there is no longer the appreciation for highlighting excellence.

In a general but alarming way, the many sad and disturbing events continue to flood the psyche of Barbadian people with rivers of tears. The national discourse contains an abundance of choice words – in no particular order - inclusive of: victim, target, vindictiveness, kill, spite, retribution, shooting, woe, reprisal, greed, death, corruption, bad, and revenge. The imagery found in these words have stirred immense concern for the direction that Barbados appears to be travelling.

Barbadians have reached the proverbial crossroads. It is at this crisis juncture that it becomes urgently necessary for us the governed, to tell the ruling political elements that we have had enough. We need to immediately stop, and reset our course. Law and order is a must, and living in a just society is essential. The great Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.”

Barbadians have to be firm craftsmen and craftsmen once again if we are to achieve the progress that our forefathers and other pioneers of development forecasted. We have to take control of our collective destiny and overcome the tribulations that are being manifested in the gruesome forms of violence and protracted neglect. The malady is both in the public administration of Government and the sprawling of the wider society. There can be no more neglect or mismanagement of the economy; there can be no more excuses from those who walk around in the shadows indicating their unawareness of the plight of the poor.

It is imperative that Barbadians demand



from their political representatives the reforms which are vital to oust those wavering from their fiduciary responsibilities. In fact, as the Prime Minister goes around Barbados incognito and, therefore, aware of the hardships, pain, and poverty being experienced by people from all walks of life, this writer hopes that he would become proactive. The national desire has to be for the Prime Minister to begin to show genuine sympathy and empathy for the many thousands of Barbadians reeling from the plunder of the powerful and the fear of criminal elements. Barbados requires at this serious juncture, leadership that cares and is inspiring.

How often have we witnessed ministers of Government marking time in a state of oblivion to all that pains this nation? In the last few days it was the Minister of Education stating that he is “not aware of any incidents”, when reports in the press indicated that one teacher was allegedly beaten by a student and another was physically assaulted. The teachers’ representative unions have pushed the necessity to address the violence in our schools, but such is minimized by the Prime Minister in the flippant terms of ‘minor friction’.

Additionally, one must wonder if the Prime Minister can save his credibility when he says that he has been ‘hit for six’ after seemingly being unaware that bail has been granted to persons while waiting to face homicide cases (manslaughter and murder)? Regrettably, the Prime Minister remains out of touch with the socioeconomic realities that result in depressing situations for Barbadians. Indeed, Mr Stuart had the gall and gumption to stress that “none of the orchestrated or engineered

excitement” around him can ruffle his “feeling of calm”. Surely this leader was exemplifying delusional behaviour rather than his claim of being energized and “getting Barbados right”.

Perhaps by travelling incognito, the Prime Minister has somehow been blinded by the garbage that has piled up all across Barbados. As *prima inter pares*, does he not have the voice to sound the disquiet of the nation regarding the badly depleted fleet of trucks at the Sanitation Services Authority (SSA)? The SSA is operating at less than 50 per cent of an acceptable and optimal level. Why is the minister still there and drawing a salary? Why should Barbadians put up with this recurrent low down situation, thereby inviting a major health catastrophe to happen?

Effective leadership requires much more than the little that Stuart and his Cabinet have delivered. It is important that the Prime Minister comes down (or steps down) from his lofty stage and reach out to Barbadians in caring and meaningful ways. Surely he must remove the disguise and ensure that his presence with the people can make a positive difference. Mr Stuart must place himself at the level of the ordinary man and woman, and he must impart on his Cabinet that time is getting very short and 2018 may be out of sight if better cannot be done in short order. We are not safe Mr Stuart!

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