

REMARKS BY FRED MITCHELL MP

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Gambier House

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I wish to start off by expressing my condolences to the family of late Latore Mackey, the former Deputy Director of the Bahamas Information Services. Mr. Mackey served the government with all his talents and abilities. He was loyal and dedicated. In the run up to the 2012 general election, I sought to persuade him to come in from the cold as an activist and join us in the Progressive Liberal Party and he did. Once he joined he took to the role in the public relations and marketing arm of the PLP, working out of the War Room like a fish in water. He carried out excellent work at the Bahamas Information Services and in the Office of the Prime Minister. He was the future of our party. Now we have lost him all too soon. I am saddened by it and I use this occasion to mark his passing. May God bless him.

Tameka Thompson who is a writer at The Tribune posted on a Facebook page on the evening of Wednesday 20th August just after Andre Rollins, the MP PLP for Ft. Charlotte sat down that it was a good thing that Perry Christie was out of town because he was going to get the worst present in his life for his birthday the next day in the form of a Tribune headline.

That headline would record what Mr. Rollins had said that new leadership was required in the PLP.

She was later joined that evening on Facebook by well-known anti- PLP writer Candia Dames who is in a management position at the Nassau Guardian, she chimed in the following on Facebook: *Our prime minister faces a series of matters of grave importance as he prepares to celebrate his birthday tomorrow. These are serious times for the country. People are angry over VAT, the constitutional referendum appears doomed, there is another murder tonight, a stone's throw from the Nassau Guardian, and the back benchers have become a force unto themselves, challenging Christie at every turn, and one concluding tonight the country needs new leadership.*

I have some more personal experiences which I will share with you. One day minding my own business I am in a drug store shopping for toothpaste. A reporter comes up to me from the Business Section of the Nassau Guardian and asks me some questions which I answered. On my way out, I passed the counter and asked the clerk if I could make an observation about the product which I could not find in the store: to sell a smaller tube of toothpaste. Next thing I know the reporter has posted on her Facebook page the whole episode with her spin that somehow I was some sort of curmudgeon and then adopting the FNM propaganda line about travel by connecting that with my observation about a small tube of toothpaste.

She saw nothing wrong with that obvious breach of privacy.

Recently, a story appeared in the press which quoted what I had to say in response to some possible diplomatic changes and appointments. If you read the story you would have the impression that I was The Tribune's source for the story. The only thing is I was not and I only answered what they put to me. The suppositions that they advanced in the first paragraph were never put to me, instead they were printed as a Tribune source and then quotes from me were used to support the story. This gave the clear impression that I was the source of the story.

Another issue, the inability of reporters in this day and age to know the difference between what is a private conversation, off the record and when something is on the record. Or to know that it is improper for someone to tape a conversation for attribution in a report when you have not notified the person on the other side that you are taping the conversation.

This is the atmosphere in which we deal. There are no lines it appears between private and public life, and it appears that reporters do not know that there are certain comments that they should not make because it compromises their independence in writing a news story.

We who are public officials are in an intense period of scrutiny unlike any other in my political experience where before the public gets to digest one fact, there are others thrown at them and opinions come a mile a minute. The fact that this is the milieu within which we operate, does not change this immutable fact, I and I now say "we" are responsible for our own image. We decide what our image is or is

not going to be. There are rules of conduct which should guide public discourse and the printing of public information and how you access public officials. It is important for us to counter this narrative of a PLP that is not fit to govern, spun by the FNM and its fellow travelers with a counter narrative where we challenge the ethics of those who run and write newspapers and call them to account for their ethics or the lack thereof in the same way they challenge public officials. Social media provides us the space to do so.

Another example to which I refer is that of a story written by the sister of a then sitting Assistant Commissioner of Police accusing the PLP of abusing her brother as a policeman and that reporter did not think that there was anything wrong with her writing that story. If the shoe had been on the other foot and a politician had been protecting his relative imagine the howls of protest that would have come from the press.

The question then is what can NPI do to help.

FIRSTLY

If Latore were around, he would be able to tell you that a favourite saying of mine with which he agreed is that the PLP allows too much empty space to get filled with nonsense.

In this milieu there is plenty of space to fill and if we do not fill it with our news, it will be filled with the news of those who oppose us. So we should fill the space.

There is another reason for doing so and that is filling the space provides the information in a public sense to give our supporters the ammunition

they need to fight those who oppose us. So everything that we do, we should have something to say on it, to comment on it in order to be sure that the space is filled with our view of the facts and also to provide the support for our own troops. We are too lackadaisical when it comes to filling the space.

SECONDLY

When I spoke in the House of Assembly following the comments of Andre Rollins who said that he was dedicating his comments to Edmond Moxey who he alleged had been abused by the Progressive Liberal Party, I asked people not to adopt uncritically what is said by the other side. I said going back to first principles that you must assume that the PLP and those who ran the PLP were rational people and did not simply act because of some irrational reasons. I saw this morning where the wicked writer at The Guardian were trying to invent some fight between the Moxey family and myself but there is no fight. My only point was and is that no one should not adopt uncritically the propaganda from the other side without hearing the other side and knowing the other side. And there is always another side. It is not my business what the other side was. Pindling went to his grave without saying.

I went no farther than this. I explained that in 1977, eight people lost their nominations from the PLP in one night, all were incumbent members of parliament. There is a song about what happened by Eddie Minnis called Show and Tell. They lost their nominations because some of them opposed a fundamental government policy that of the Public Disclosure Act. When the bill was being debated, the then Speaker called the House to order before the government members were back

from lunch and the Opposition and the dissident backbenchers formed a temporary majority and sent the bill to committee this day six months. That meant the bill was dead for the session. The Prime Minister had to prorogue the House to revive and pass the Bill.

Those who lost their nominations in 1977 were: Edmond Moxey, Lionel Davis, Carlton Francis, Arlington Butler, Cadwell Armbrister, Oscar Johnson Thompson, and for different reasons Franklin Wilson

I recalled that only the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister Perry Christie spoke up to save anyone's nomination and he was joined I am now advised by Sean McWeeney who is now chair of the Constitutional Commission.

I advised the House that the man who was in the chair and presided over that night, the PLP's version of "the night of the Long knives" was Hubert Ingraham who went on to lead the FNM.

My position then is that all PLPs should know their history and know what the facts are about the events which shape where we are.

The FNM has done a good job of so denigrating the PLP and its contribution to the history of this country that as Bonaventure Dean said in connection with another matter: they would want the PLP to apologise for creating the modern Bahamas.

THIRDLY

I told our younger MPs and I say this to you. The reason they were recruited into the PLP was to help the PLP make the Bahamas a more tolerant liberal democracy, where the wealth is shared and not distorted.

They were not recruited to go and hold hands with those who want to drive us back into the era of intolerance, ignorance and prejudice.

I say the same to you. This party's values are fixed in the tradition of a liberal democracy. You are to be the foot soldiers in pursuing that tradition, looking out always for the needs of the small man. No amount of FNM propaganda can change that fact or shake your faith in that. If that is not what you believe then the PLP is not the place to be.

FOURTHLY

Dissent opinion is valuable to any organization and forward movement. However, the PLP is not a drawbridge upon which people can walk and just use for their purposes. During the FNM years part of their political strategy was to seek destroy the reputation of the PLP and so effective were they that even some of our own youngsters have adopted uncritically their narrative. The bits about corruption and incompetence were part of their propaganda which is simply false.

The modern state we have was created under PLP leadership. The FNM did not do that. They opposed the creation of The Bahamas.

What I am arguing is that NPI must develop the counter narrative and keep saying it to each generation that comes in. This is an absolute must. We know that those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it. We are not asking that you be a prisoner of history but you certainly need to be seeing the signs of reversal when they occur.

So dissidence should occur within rules and regulations. We are in a volunteer organisation and we voluntarily agree to the rules. This requires discipline, loyalty faithful and trust. When people lose that in those who are their colleagues and give public voice to this without airing differences internally then it is time to look elsewhere.

The organisation itself has a role in protecting its own integrity by ensuring that its rules are obeyed and be shown to be obeyed.

I started out by talking about the press. These remarks are meant to be made public. However, I want to be clear I make no comment about the specific recent events. I say that those are matters for the leaders of the party to deal with, not for me. I only prescribe and describe what my own behavior would be in the circumstances and say that is an adequate and sufficient party model.

FIFTHLY

The narrative in the country about the PLP is too negative at the moment. To some extent this is midterm blues; in some senses it is not paying attention to filling the space that I talked about earlier; to another extent there have been some mistakes made; to another extent we are doing some heavy lifting in terms of policies; then we must remember that 53 per cent of the population voted against us in 2012—53 can make a whole of lot noise more than 47, particularly where the 53 control the press and we do not fill the space with our own noise.

We must now determine amongst ourselves that we will win the next general election in 2017. That is what political parties are to do.

I am a creature of branch politics. I started out in 1975 as the Branch Chairman for Centreville. I have held every office in local party organisations. I am saying that this party must go back to the old time religion. The branches have to be fixed and firm. There must be a convention every year. The little things in the constituencies should be done. In fact, it would be wise for us to do a constituency by constituency audit to check our specific standing on the little things that need to be done. They used to say in the United States; all politics is local. That means voters do not care for the bigger issues, they care only about their own interests.

Right now that is finding jobs for the children and grandchildren of those grandmothers and grandfathers who fought for us to win this last election.

Edison Key when he left the PLP in our last term said of us that he just didn't understand us anymore. He said that when he was a PLP, if he called Pindling, the phone wasn't down properly before what he asked Pindling would be done. He argued that we had become strangers to our friends.

I always say that whether a man is my friend or my foe I always listen to what he says to see if what he is saying makes sense.

I leave you this story. It is a Delta Airlines commercial. A businessman is talking to his staff. He tells them that sales have been falling. He says that when he called an old customer, the man said to him: I just don't

know you all anymore. So he said to the staff he was going back to basics and he bought airplane tickets for them to visit all their old customers, and you guessed it on Delta Airlines. He said at the end of the commercial. I am going back to visit that old friend.

I can think of no finer advice than that to you group of PLPs tonight.

Thank you and let us pray for the repose of soul of Latore Mackey. Let us win 2017 for him.