

Behind Jamaica's Garrisons

The following are excerpts of the July 1997 Report of the National Committee on Political Tribal-ism. The Committee was chaired by Political Ombudsman the Hon. Justice James Kerr.

The Primary Causes

Patronage

Patronage has been defined as "the disbursement of the discretionary favours of Government" or as in the submission of the National Democratic Movement (NDM), "the monopolisation of power by the party which forms the government and the use of that power to manipulate state resources to perpetuate its control. The concentration of power provides a strong motivating force to the politicians because if they are outside of the "power loop", they are rendered ineffective and impotent despite the fact that they may be duly elected representatives of the people. The manipulation of state resources provides strong motivation to party supporters since for many it offers the means to their existence and survival."

Gleanings from academic studies and submissions written and oral indicate indubitably that what began as mild clientelism in the decades of the '50s developed into a blatant display of favouritism including nepotism for the supporters and discrimination against others. It is now a case of "to the victors the spoils" and a contributory cause to gun violence as a form of political rivalry. At every forum and in the many submissions, oral and written, the discriminatory allocation of what has been euphemistically called "scarce benefits" has been urged as the fundamental cause of political tribalism.

Scarce Benefits

Housing schemes

The practice of the party in power allocating houses to supporters in order to establish a homogeneous voting community resulted in recent proliferation of garrison communities - seven in Kingston and St. Andrew and one in St. Catherine. This method of the allocation must be condemned and discontinued.

The cessation of the creation of garrison communities will not solve the problem as the established towns will continue to exist with their outreach influence and the violence between garrison communities of different political persuasion. The dismantling of the garrison communities by relocating some of the residents was discussed, but the committee is of the view that this would involve the removal of persons from their homes, the break up of families, the economic realities of finding comparable accommodation.

The impracticality of the method precluded feasible proposals. It must be left to the removal of the causes with attendant diminishing of the dominance of the don and the advent of political tolerance.

Proposals and recommendations

1. The committee approves of the criteria and method of allocation of housing schemes under the control of the National Housing Trust.
2. For housing schemes not under the control of the National Housing Trust, including slum clearance schemes, the allocation should be entrusted to an impartial committee.
3. The committee commends to the Government the adoption for areas in similar circumstances the "Strategy for Revitalisation of Blighted Areas" as set out in the 'Report of the National Inner City Committee' and implemented in 1993 in Jones Town.

Land settlement schemes

The widespread belief in political preference in the allocation of lots under Government land settlement schemes has been strengthened by recent complaints to the Ombudsman for political matters and the public outcry of the farmers of Holland in St. Elizabeth that their applications for the purchase of lots will not be given the promised priority, because of the publication list of an approved list of approved purchasers who were not

farmers from the area.

The committee has considered the statement to Parliament on February 22, 1994, by the Honourable Prime Minister on the disposition of land and unreservedly approve of the process for disposition, the criteria for disposal and the proposed membership of the committee to consider and recommend applications of potential purchasers thus:

"...When Government is preparing to sell or lease lands, the process of disposition will involve a sequence, along the following lines:

- A. A sub-division survey.
- B. Valuation of the lots.
- C. Advertisement of sale of lots.
- D. Issue of prescribed application forms.
- E. Receipt of completed forms.

The criteria for disposal for lands will include:

- A. Making lots available to the landless and to small farmers to the extent possible.
- B. The encouragement of youth and women in agriculture.
- C. Favours viable production, especially for exports.
- D. Minimising use for speculative purposes.
- E. Ensuring security of tenure for those to whom lands have previously been allotted and are in good standing.

Once applications have been received, they will be considered by a committee comprised of the following:

- * Two (2) representatives of the RADA Board for the parish in which the land is situated.
- * One (1) representative of the Ministers (of Religion) Fraternal for the parish.
- * One (1) representative of the Jamaica Agricultural Society (JAS).
- * Three (3) persons selected from a panel established by the Contractor-General, two of whom must be residents of the parish.
- * The Commissioner of Lands or his/her representative."

We are of the view that the recommendations of the Land Disposal Committee to the Minister of Agriculture should be submitted through the Permanent Secretary rather than the Commissioner of Lands, as proposed by the Prime Minister. These recommendations, once approved by the Minister, will be made public with information as to price and size of lands and other terms and conditions of sale or lease.

The committee has also taken note of the complaint of the Contractor-General at the delay in establishing the Parish Land Disposal Committee.

In light of consistent criticisms of Operation PRIDE, we share the Contractor-General's concern at the delay in implementing measures to ensure that there will be equity and fairness in the disposal of Government Land Settlement Schemes in word, appearance and deed.

Contributory Circumstances

After three decades of independence the deplorable conditions in the inner cities continue - notwithstanding the

manifest improvement of living standards in some parts of the Corporate Area. Many politicians have benefited from the unrest and displacement which are features of communities with high levels of unemployment, a proliferation of unskilled and virtually unemployable youth, pervasive poverty of purse and spirit. The focus of positive attention on the needs of these persons could elevate their self-esteem and no doubt define for them a purpose beyond their usefulness as partisan puppets.

Poverty

The living conditions of the people in most of the "tribalised" communities (some which we visited) reek of abandonment and neglect. Sub-standard housing, poor sanitation and numerous environmental hazards are immediately visible. The National Inner City Committee highlighted these conditions in its 1993 Report on Strategy for the Revitalisation of Blighted Youth. Similar observations were made by the Centre for Population, Community and Social Change in its Study on Urban Violence and Poverty in Jamaica (**They Cry Respect**) published in 1996.

Poverty facilitates the development of political tribalism. The slum communities around the parish capitals, particularly, Kingston, St. Andrew, and St. Catherine, continue to grow as unemployed and under-educated youths migrate from rural communities in search of a better opportunity.

The fact is that the Jamaican economy has not performed well over the past 35 years and therefore the country has not been able to provide enough jobs to meet the needs of a growing population.

The conditions in the communities also reflect the failure of the education process, where young people, the regenerative capacity of the future, are graduated from schools without the basic skills required to perform in the formal economy.

It is clear that poverty and illiteracy provide the opportunity for politicians to create and nurture political tribalism. In our visit to South St. Catherine a young man defined the problem clearly when he said, "the politician makes us feel important, we have nothing else to do otherwise".

The needs of the poor are great, it is estimated that the poorest household contributed five per cent to Gross Domestic Product in 1950, by 1980 the contribution was reduced to two per cent.

We submit that any solution to political tribalism must address poverty, and unemployment by the ways and means advocated hereafter.

The committee recognises with approval the "points" system developed by the National Housing Trust in the sale and allocation of government-aided housing solutions.

We recommend however that attention be paid to those persons so far below the poverty line that they are unable to access the benefits offered by the National Housing Trust.

Any assistance offered by the government of the day in this regard should be on the basis of need. This neutral and non-parish approach may be achieved if it sought to involve non-governmental and non-partisan organisations in the process of implementing programmes for those person in need of adequate shelter. In any event, the allocation mechanism should be manifestly impartial.

Closer attention should be paid to the basic requirements of public health and cleanliness in the inner city areas. Broken sewer mains which create unwholesome and unpleasant atmosphere must not await public disturbance in the form of roadblocks, demonstrations or otherwise.

Skills Training and Unemployment

There is little or no emphasis on personal empowerment and the promotion of healthy self-esteem for the numerous unemployed and unemployable inner city residents (particularly among the youth). The large body of unskilled persons who reside within these communities must await the hand-outs of odd jobs (very often the offshoots of small parochial contracts distributed by politicians to known supporters). Jobs are regularly tied to political affiliation. The sources of work are also limited by the high concentration of persons who have no skills

and therefore form part of a very large group of common labourers. Many young males sit idly by unless and until there is a programme or development which requires labour intensive input. And the devil finds work for idle hands. Survey done by the National Inner City Committee (ante) revealed that in 1993 a mere 18 per cent of the residents of Jones Town had proper training in any particular skill. Another 53 per cent admitted to having no particular skill whatsoever.

The committee recognises the need on the part of Government to:

- * Provide safe places for our young to learn and grow. Businesses, churches and other organisations could assist by offering structured activities for young people.
- * Help young people to develop marketable skills.
- * Focus on establishing and developing community centres for skills training, youth programmes and encouraging meaningful social activity.

Job Creation/Youth Empowerment

The committee is of the opinion that the country has to commit to providing gainful occupation for unemployed youths in the inner city communities. We believe that failure to address this problem will only perpetuate political violence and crime in general. We suggest the following:

- * The Government seeks the co-operation of the private sector to spearhead an inner-city job initiative. Essentially, the programme will be funded by the State by means of a tax credit equal to twice the cost of employing and training inner city youths for a period of three years. The Church, Council of Voluntary Social Services, the NGO Community and other approved non-governmental organisations will determine the list of qualified youths.
- * Reducing the cost of national security and the savings from the National Food Stamps Programme could fund this initiative. It is also suggested that any private sector company participating in a government project or obtaining financial support from the government should provide employment to inner city youths.
- * The committee has determined that in many communities, there are few examples of good role models for young men. Presently, the politicians and the community "dons" are the models of success and masculinity. We believe that balance could be obtained by resuscitating youth programmes such as Boy's Scout, Girl's Guide, Cadet movement and the Four-H Pro-gramme. The State would encourage companies to allow their employees approved time off to volunteer in such community-based projects. These efforts could be supervised and monitored by the Council for Voluntary Social Services and other umbrella non-governmental organisations.

The Social and Economic Support Programme (SESP)

The SESP was set up in October 1990, with the aim of seeking "to mitigate the effects of major changes in economic strategy on the most vulnerable in the society". The co-ordinator of the SESP unit stated that his unit would not consider "the SESP activities to be related to allocation of scarce benefits which are usually seen from a political stand point as payback for favours and or works rendered for the party". In a memorandum dated January 13, 1997, he went on to emphasise that the focus of the programme was on "developmental issues... to pull up those persons who fall on or under the poverty line with a view to improving the quality of life."

These are obviously laudable objectives and the committee was provided with a copy of a letter dated January 31, 1997 from the Ministry of Finance to the Office of the Prime Minister, which set out detailed guidelines on the accounting and accountability requirements of the disbursement process under the programme. However, it does appear that - apart from a component for project proposals received through non-governmental organisations - the identification of projects generally is to some extent what the co-ordinator himself described as "MP-driven". Indeed, one component relates expressly to a reserve maintained by the Office of the Prime Minister (described as the "OPM Reserve"), which seeks to address requests from "Sundry organisation and institutions... [which] ... from time to time make appeals to the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, the Ministers in the

Office of the Prime Minister and other Ministers and Members of Parliament." Apparently where various requests for assistance received "cannot be fitted in other government programmes, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister and his Ministers attempt to satisfy them from the Reserve".

It does seem clear that the structure of the SESP does not insulate it from potential abuse as a vehicle for the distribution of "scarce benefits" along political lines. To this extent, laudable though it aims, the SESP remains capable of assuming a role in the machinery of political tribalism.

Recommendations

The committee having reviewed the objectives and structure of the SESP, recommends that the programme be abolished. Programmes of the SESP can be adequately achieved through the various ministries and agencies of Government without direct involvement of the Member of Parliament.