

**Address to the Police Civic Committee (Mandeville) by Peter Bunting,
Member of Parliament for Central Manchester, on May 19, 2008**



Political Landscape

Ladies and Gentlemen, the national political landscape is interestingly poised, fascinatingly so. The People's National Party came away with an unprecedented number of seats (now 28) to form the Parliamentary Opposition.

The recent outcome of one of three Dual Citizenship cases now before the courts has created electoral uncertainty. The ruling of the Chief Justice has established without a doubt that non-Commonwealth dual citizens should not sit in Parliament. Some persons posit that in the era of globalization this requirement is arcane and should be removed, others like me feel that a review may be necessary to examine whether the distinction between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth citizens is still appropriate. For example, a citizen of Pakistan or Canada, not holding Jamaican citizenship at all but resident here for 12 months could be eligible for election

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as an MP. While a Jamaican born and raised here with dual citizenship with a non-Commonwealth country is ineligible (so long as they took out a passport from this country as an adult).

The current situation can be resolved either by holding another general election or by both political parties finding a principled but less dramatic way to remedy any current violations, perhaps by holding by-elections in the affected constituencies. National polls suggest that Jamaicans are election weary and I believe that a poll amongst Parliamentarians would prove likewise.

At the same time there are many challenges facing the country and the government. All the usual suspects: general consumer price inflation is at 20% and for the categories which cover food, housing, and utilities increases are closer to 30%, suggesting that most working persons have seen their standard of living deteriorate sharply. Since the start of the year nearly 600 Jamaicans – including the elderly, women and children, - have been brutally murdered. Economic growth is anemic at 0.2% for the first quarter of 2008 and there are signals from our major Spanish investors that they are not finding the investment climate as welcoming as it used to be, and may be reviewing their investment plans.

Government's Performance in the area of National Security

Let's turn to the Government's performance in National Security over the last eight months. During that period we've already had two Ministers of National Security and two Commissioners of Police.

Let me refer to an article from Lloyd B. Smith which was published in the Observer on May 6 headlined "IS THE JLP TOO SOFT ON CRIME?" Mr. Smith, a parliamentary candidate for the JLP in 1997, did not mince words as he flayed the Golding administration over its failure to tackle crime effectively. The columnist is of the view that Jamaica "*is on the brink of descending into anarchy*".

He laments that the Golding administration has failed to carry out its election promise to move decisively to break the back of crime. To support his argument, Mr. Smith quotes from Mr. Golding's budget presentation that "*the high level of crime remains one of our pressing problems*".

He notes that these were the introductory words of the nine paragraph section in the Prime Minister's 32 page budget presentation. It's interesting to note that the Prime Minister spoke for well in excess of three hours and spent less than two minutes on crime.

He devoted much more than two minutes castigating me for certain comments I had made (elaborate if you so desire). Talk about political will! Despite Mr. Golding's claim that crime is one of Jamaica's most pressing problems, however, the Prime Minister devoted less than a page of his text to deal with the issue.

Mr. Smith quite correctly asserted that, quote: "*murders continue unabated, robberies are up and the general state of lawlessness in the land is all-pervasive*" end of quote. And in the face of this terrifying state of affairs, Mr. Smith asks a very cogent and relevant question: "Can the men and women (of the force) be expected to deliver if they are overworked, underpaid and are

subject to an ailing justice system that seems more to favor criminals than law-abiding Jamaicans?”

Lloyd B. Smith complains that the Bruce Golding-led Jamaica Labour Party gave the impression in the lead-up to the September 3 General Election that it had some, if not all, the answers to deal with the crime crisis.

Mr. Smith is not alone in his ruminations.

Another columnist, Kevin O’Brien Chang, also complains in an article in the Sunday Gleaner that the Prime Minister quote: “*inexplicably ignored the elephant in the room – crime – devoting less than one out of ‘29’ pages to it.*”

Mr. Chang asserts that the page comprised a collection of clichés that we have heard many time before.

He argues quite correctly, that crime is so obviously the biggest issue on Jamaicans’ minds that when Don Anderson takes polls nowadays the pollster chooses to ask, “Other than crime, what is the greatest problems facing the country, hardly a surprising development as the murder rate shows no signs of declining.

What about that much-vaunted McMillan plan that Mr. Golding commissioned when he was Opposition Leader?

Mr. Obrien-Chang noted that that the report had severely castigated the former PNP Government for being gutless on the issue of crime. Where is the political will now being shown by the Golding administration, almost nine months into its political term, even as the blood of numerous Jamaicans continue to be shed?

So where do we go from here?

Well last week, the Prime Minister rushed to discard his Minister of National Security for another. Derrick Smith has been a Shadow Minister for the National Security portfolio from 1993. He was allowed to stay in the post of Minister for a mere eight months. He was replaced by a man who undoubtedly attempted to professionalize the Police Force but failed to put a dent in crime when he served as Commissioner of police between 1993 and 1996.

Was the Prime Minister seeking to appease certain interests when he appointed Colonel Trevor MacMillan Minister of National Security? Is it simply another knee jerk reaction from the Government? Is it a combination of the two?

Since coming to office, the Government is yet to articulate specific crime-fighting strategies. The singular conclusion that can be drawn is that the nine month old Golding administration is without a plan to combat crime.

Election Violence in Central Manchester

This brings me to a related matter. Manchester has always been a relatively peaceful parish. When I first started to campaign I checked the murder statistics about mid-June and there had been eight murders in the entire parish for almost the first six months of the year, divide that by four constituencies and we had averaged two murders per constituency for the first half of the

year. However, only three months later five persons were murdered in Central Manchester in one weekend with a sixth victim left battling for life.



September 2007- Campaign Town Crier car riddled with shots from a high-powered weapon.

On the Friday night before Monday's September 3 general election, in what I have described as an act of political terrorism, my campaign vehicle was shot up while parked outside a bar and grocery in the PNP stronghold of Georges Valley. The terrorists drove up with two AK-47 assault rifles firing from the front and rear passenger windows. Their vehicle stopped and one gunman got out and walked around the vehicle shooting it up from all sides and then proceeded into the shop. Thankfully at that point it appears that the gun jammed or we may have had many more fatalities. The terrorists then drove away leaving four innocent bystanders dead. Three of the victims young mothers leaving nine children, killed for just happening to be in the vicinity of the campaign vehicle.

Two days later, on election morning, two young men from a well-known PNP family in Comfort were shot multiple times while sleeping in their beds. One died and the other amazingly survived seven shots.

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The week before these murders, Don Anderson polls were released which showed that I had taken the lead amongst Central Manchester voters for the first time in what, up to then, had been described only metaphorically as a battleground seat.

On Election Day, many of my PD workers, who are mainly women, were terrified and afraid. This was also the case with many supporters. The strategy of the terrorists almost succeeded.

Even though I was on the crime scene within a few minutes after the shooting in Georges Valley and no one could identify the shooters or their vehicle, by early news the following morning many persons were issuing theories and all consistent that it was not a political shooting. One suggestion was that the driver of the vehicle had gambling debts, yet the man doesn't even buy Cash Pot!

Eight months later – to my knowledge no one has been charged, no one has been held accountable, and the police don't have any leads. In fact, a friend of mine in the Police Force has advised me to leave it alone. Edmund Burke's famous quote responds appropriately to that suggestion: "All that is needed for the forces of evil to succeed is for good men to remain silent."

I will not be one of those remaining silent. I have an obligation to advocate for justice for those nine motherless children from Georges Valley and for the families of the young men in Comfort, and for all the peace-loving and law abiding citizens of Central Manchester.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, if we are going to change the paradigm in the fight against crime, the political leaders will have to lead from the front. We must have moral authority and credibility to provide political leadership in this battle. We can't be sending any mixed signals to the public and the police force with any inconsistency between what we say and what we do. I tell my constituents that if any one of their family is arrested, don't come to me at that time – what they need is a lawyer. I am not bringing any Burger King or Kentucky to the Mandeville lockup, not because I don't have compassion, but the Police must be clear where I stand. I encourage the Police to do their work, within the law, and I don't attempt to tell them where they can and can't go.

And finally, I encourage the good men and women of the Police Civic Committee, to continue their work in support of the Police, and to speak out and be actively against crime so that the forces of evil will not succeed.

Thank you.