



STATEMENT TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

By the Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport

The Honourable Olivia Grange, CD, MP

Tuesday, 23 October 2018

Mr Speaker, 153 years ago, on this date — October 23, 1865 — George William Gordon, member of the House of Assembly and the man in whose honour this Honourable House has been named, was hanged.

The following day — October 24 1865 — Paul Bogle, Baptist Deacon, the man who led the war in which George William Gordon was implicated, was also hanged.

Today, a grateful nation recalls with a mixture of pride and humility the fierce determination and selfless dedication of these two Jamaicans.

Mr. Speaker, words penned by George William Gordon on the day before his execution in a letter to his dear wife Lucy, bear great significance:

“It is... the will of my Heavenly Father that I should... suffer in obeying his command to relieve the poor and needy, to protect, so far as I was able, the oppressed”.

This, I believe, Mr. Speaker, sums up very well his own sense of the mission to which he was called by his Creator and committed as a politician. George William Gordon saw the role of the parliament as an instrument and agency of the voice of the poor and oppressed - a voice for justice, social upliftment and overall national development. This was in contrast to the perception of the role of the House of Assembly by the British slave-owning establishment. Gordon was vociferous in his protestations and demanding of answers from the colonial powers, for which he suffered the ultimate sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, Gordon’s mission is one which we ourselves must uphold as we continue in this Honourable House, to build upon the institutions of governance we have inherited, ensuring throughout that they work to the greater benefit of our people. Indeed, it is a tacit reminder of our cause to dedicate ourselves to the upliftment of the poor and needy, to protect and empower the vulnerable, and provide opportunities for sustainable prosperity for all our people. This we must do by ensuring that Parliament remains the agency of action for the creation of legislation and policy that enhance the

quality of life of our people, assuring thereby that their creative imagination, industry and craft will achieve economic success within their personal and collective lives. To do less would be to dishonour the names of these our National Heroes in this George William Gordon House.

Mr. Speaker, in like manner, Paul Bogle, who commandeered the larger struggle that culminated in outright war in October 1865, points us to the levels of social and political activism that we must be prepared to replicate in the interest of the prosperity of the people. Bogle led hundreds of grassroots Jamaican people to confront the State in their search for those rights and freedoms they assumed would have accompanied Emancipation from enslavement in 1838, but which remained elusive decades later. By way of a litany of protests, those who had emerged from slavery and their descendants refused to live in a society that simply continued the slave relations of production. They lobbied, petitioned and protested for equal rights and justice, even marching from Stony Gut to Morant Bay and from Morant Bay to the capital in Spanish Town to seek audience with Governor Eyre.

Mr. Speaker, this level of political action has been replicated throughout the history of modern Jamaica, causing us to reflect on the challenges that our

people continue to experience and our role in confronting and remedying them. As we pause to reflect on these our two National Heroes and their role in the Morant Bay struggle and war, their selfless devotion to the improved condition of the masses of the people, we are called upon to model in our own representation and management of the affairs of our people the examples of caring, consistency, sacrifice and gallantry exercised by Gordon and Bogle as they took to the trenches on behalf of the masses of our people.

Mr. Speaker, today, we pause in this Honourable House, on behalf of a grateful people, on this 23rd day of October 2018, 153 years later, to salute and pay homage to the Right Excellent George William Gordon and the Right Excellent Paul Bogle for their tireless and selfless dedication to the cause of the poor and propelling our nation to the makings of a new social, economic and political order, the forerunners of what we hold dear today.

May we who continue here in this Honourable House reflect on their sacrifice even as we also recognise that our stewardship is also within the will of our Heavenly Father. May we pledge our sweat, our tears and our lives to the greater good of the people of Jamaica, at home and abroad.