

EMPOWERING THE PEOPLE: RESTORING HOPE

Contribution to the Budget Debate for Fiscal Year 2018/19

**Leader of the Opposition
Dr. Peter Phillips, MP**

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Section 1: Acknowledgements

Mr Speaker,

We all gain membership in this Honourable House through the support and very often the sacrifices of others. Let me express my own gratitude to **my**

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constituents in East Central St Andrew who have kept me as their Member of Parliament for six consecutive terms.

They are represented here today by Councillors Nenna Wilson and Dennis Gordon, along with members of the executive and other members of the constituency.

Let me also thank my colleagues and comrades in the PNP – both those in the Parliament and those outside whose advice, prayers and solidarity have been a constant source of inspiration.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my wife Sandra, who is here today, and to the other members of my family for their sustained support and encouragement which enables me to devote my energies to public service.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding our differences from time to time, let me recognize your efforts to guide our deliberations for the better conduct of the people's business. To the Clerk and other members of the parliamentary staff, my sincere and heartfelt thanks for your support.

Section 2: Jamaica's Present Situation

- What is the context in which this Budget Debate is taking place?
- What is the experience of average Jamaicans after two years of the Jamaica Labour Party Administration? Are they better off today than they were two years ago?
- Do they think the economy is headed in the right direction? Are they hopeful about the future?
- How are the workers faring?
 - Many face the risk of losing hard won rights as a number of employers now regard permanent workers as contract workers, and with this new arrangement many of these workers have lost their pension rights, maternity leave rights and other hard won rights.

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- They also have to contend with the government's callous indifference and lack of respect for the principles of collective bargaining, as shown in its response to the teachers, police, nurses and other public sector workers in the current wage negotiations.

Ms Mirrie

- Take the case of Ms Mirrie, a day's worker and mother of three. Over the past two years, her little pay can no longer stretch to buy the barest necessities for her family at the new prices.
- The price of flour is now \$65 per pound. Two years ago it was \$45. This is a 44 per cent increase
- A tin of sardine is now \$160, up from \$108 two years ago
- And a tin of Betty milk costs \$268 – it was \$195 two years ago.
- Chicken neck, the only meat she can afford, has almost doubled in price in two years, from \$50 per lb to \$90 per lb. An 80% increase!
- She can no longer afford saltfish, which has gone from \$350 to \$550
- And eggs are increasingly out of her reach at \$360 per dozen, up from \$250 two years ago.

Feeding her family at these new increased prices, is only one of her burdens. She is also making every sacrifice to send her three children to school to better themselves as she knows education is the only gateway to a future for them.

She gets up every school day at 3:30 in the morning, with her son who had passed GSAT for Ardenne so he can get ready to travel from their home in St. Thomas. Many a day after she finds the money to pay the increased route taxi and bus fares, there is little left for anything else.

Those who depend on our **health services** are faring no better. The situation is now unbearable in Western Jamaica given the state of Cornwall Regional Hospital.

When the Shadow Minister for Health, Dayton Campbell and his colleagues visited Cornwall Regional Hospital they found the state of disrepair so extensive as to make meaningful health care delivery virtually impossible.

- A Teacher, who broke her hip and needed surgery urgently, went to Cornwall Regional Hospital only to find out that she could not be

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admitted because they were only doing emergencies. On her salary, a private doctor is out of the question.

- A retired policeman, who had given years of service in the Force, has suffered a stroke and needs regular physiotherapy but the service has been scaled down and he's left to suffer at home as a pensioner.
- A nurse who works at Cornwall Regional Hospital and is now pregnant with her first child had been exposed to noxious fumes and worries about the impact on her baby. To make matters worse for her, she learns that the Government is moving obstetrics to Falmouth, leaving her to worry as to where her baby will be delivered.

This is not a situation that is confined to Western Jamaica. All of us, on both sides of the aisle, know from our constituents of the deterioration in the health services islandwide.

On top of it all, Jamaicans from all walks of life experience the stress and fear that grows with the daily reports of murders islandwide, and go to bed each night with the fear that they might just be the next murder victim.

In this situation, only a cynical and uncaring Government could publish a supplement claiming achievements, and inviting the people to celebrate without one word of commiseration for the distress they are experiencing.

THE PEOPLE ARE RAPIDLY LOSING HOPE!

Section 3: Could Jamaica Have Been Better Today?

The Economy

Mr. Speaker, when we left office two years ago we left a sound macroeconomic foundation.

- Debt was down
- Inflation was 3% for the fiscal year 2015/16 - the lowest in 40 years
- Employment was trending upwards
- There was increased foreign exchange reserves
- Jamaica's international credit ratings were upgraded successively

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- World Bank ranking for Doing Business had improved

We had also returned the economy to growth and left a platform for further growth with a number of projects already started or scheduled to start. These included:

- 10 new hotels that had been negotiated and either completed or work well underway
- JISCO (re-opening of the alumina refinery at Alpart)
- The South Coast Highway for which the Cabinet had given approval for the land acquisition for key projects
- Naggo Head Technological Park
- North South Highway development projects that were negotiated by the previous Minister of Transport
- And completed the privatization of Kingston Container Terminal (KCT)

In addition, before leaving office, the PNP administration had defined Jamaica's new strategy that would transform the energy sector and lead to lower energy costs which included:

- The construction of the new JPS 190 MW energy plant at Bogue to replace the inefficient units at Old Harbour, and,
- Reduction in the reliance on fossil fuels through diversification to wind energy in Wigton Farms and solar energy in Clarendon

We had also established 9 Agro-parks.

Interestingly, the Minister of Finance borrowed 4 of our projects among the 6 that he claimed in his budget speech as "Growth Promoting Platforms".

What the Minister can justifiably claim is that he has remained committed to the central objective of the Economic Reform Programme, which is to reduce the nation's debt to manageable proportions, and I applaud the government on this achievement. Let me also acknowledge, that the trend of increasing employment that begun in 2013 when the Economic Reform Programme was started, has continued.

Low Growth Now

Where Minister Shaw has not been so successful is in exploiting the full potential for growth, which the last PNP Administration projected at 2.9% on average for the period 2017-2020, compared to the current government's projection of 1.8%.

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By 2015 we had also put in place measures to improve the collection of taxes, which now account for over \$40 Billion of additional revenue.

These increases in revenues could certainly go a far way to pay the additional wages to teachers, nurses, the police and other public sector workers. Indeed, there would even have been enough resources to reduce GCT as our Shadow Minister on Finance has said.

Based on the platform for growth that we put in place, the JLP Government predicted '5% growth in 4 years'. This projection has already been revised downwards but to-date the growth achieved is less than 1%. Prosperity, it seems, is for a chosen few.

It is clear that the deterioration in critical services and the hardships being experienced by the Jamaican people have their roots in the approach to decision-making by this government, which places partisan political advantage over the national interest. This approach has led to a number of decisions being taken that have been bad for Jamaica.

They have not put Jamaica First.

Bad Decisions

Imposition of the \$31 Billion Tax Package

The most glaring example of the Prime Minister's preoccupation with partisan political advantage was the election promise to deliver \$18,000 in the pockets of voters with no new taxes.

We warned him that it would take a massive tax package of \$31 billion to deliver on that promise which would set-back the potential for growth and make life hard. The IMF did the math and confirmed the numbers. The JLP government went ahead, secured their partisan political point, and imposed the \$31 billion tax package.

In the end, less than half of the PAYE taxpayers benefitted, and less than 100,000 benefitted to the full extent of the promised \$18,000, while they and all the rest of us had to pay the increased taxes.

The blow was hardest on:

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- the poor
- the pensioners, and
- the working class for whom some 80% of the household expenditure is on food.

As our Shadow Minister on Finance pointed out eloquently, the most harmful consequence of a bad decision was the imposition of a huge tax package to pay for the \$1.5 million promise. This is why there was no money for social services, like:

- health
- and education,
- and why national security remains underfunded.

Tax the People, and Tax Breaks for Big Multinationals

To make matters worse, while the government was imposing this massive tax burden on the people of Jamaica in order to fulfill a misconceived political promise, they were giving tax-breaks to those who didn't need it by abandoning the bauxite levy which had delivered fundamental benefits to the Jamaican people for this depleting mineral resource.

And speaking personally, Mr. Speaker, I believe the effort of Michael Manley and his team to secure benefits for Jamaica through the bauxite levy scheme represents one of the high points of Jamaica standing up for itself.

Yet now, according to one of the companies, the government has stated to the companies "its commitment to the removal of the bauxite levy scheme in the medium term".

We fully accept that in times of crisis such as Jamaica faced in 2008/9, there can be a basis for an emergency renegotiation of tax rates for bauxite/alumina companies. However, no one can claim that time is now, when prices on the global market are at a high, with one of the companies in Jamaica reporting a significant increase in profits for 2017.

How can a government which gave up over \$4 billion in revenues in the past 2 years from bauxite companies, now claim that they need to impose new taxes in order to pay increases to the teachers that are being negotiated?

Whose interest does the Jamaica Labour Party Administration defend?

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Bad decisions have bad consequences for the people of Jamaica.

Corruption

In addition to costly poor decision-making, this Holness Administration has failed to take a firm stand against corruption.

The corrupt practices in the implementation of the:

- \$600 million Bushing Programme,
- was followed by the \$243 million USED CAR scam, where to-date the majority of cars already paid for have not been delivered.

In neither case did the Prime Minister take any action, much less appropriate action.

- Corruption saps the energies of the public;
- Weakens confidence in political authority; and
- Wastes resources.

This failure of political leadership to take a strong stand will only serve to normalize corrupt practices in the society and open the door for the further proliferation of crime.

It is equally important that we understand the relationship between corruption and poverty. Corruption is one more barrier in the way of those who want to 'step-up' in life. As a result, our efforts to give the poor a chance to move up are made ineffective when political leadership refuses to take a strong stand against corruption – and officials “eat a food” at the expense of the poor, trying man.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, there are some specific issues that if addressed with dispatch will make a difference.

1. Implementation of the proposal by the National Integrity Agency (NIA) that no contract is too small to fall in the ambit of the Office of the Contractor General (OCG) or now the Anti-Corruption Agency. The issue of corruption does not vary with the size of the Contract (if you steal one dollar you will steal one million dollars) and no Contract should be excluded from his/her review.

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2. The criminalization of breaches of the Political Code of Conduct and the strengthening of the powers of the Political Ombudsman.

Crime

Mr. Speaker, let us turn to the most pressing issue in Jamaica today – crime in general and in particular, the alarming murder rate.

In 1962, the year of independence the homicide rate was 4 per one hundred thousand. In the 56th year of independence this has increased 15 fold to 60 per one hundred thousand. This is twice that of the international benchmark for countries having a Civil War. In the rural parish of St. James, and our tourism capital, the murder rate is in excess of 100 per one hundred thousand.

How did we get here?

There is no doubt that the murder rate was given a decisive push with the political tribalism which surfaced in the first two decades of independence. However, forty years of low growth plus the failure to build a more inclusive Jamaica has been at the root of the explosion of violent crime in independent Jamaica.

Together with the weaknesses in the education and training system, this has created a cohort of 325,000 between the ages of 15-34 who are neither working nor looking for work. It is from this cohort that the most vulnerable boys quickly degenerate into ready recruits for a life of crime by profit-seeking criminal organizations.

The present range of organized criminal activities to which they are being recruited includes extortion, lotto scamming, smuggling and human trafficking. These have been added to transshipment of illegal drugs as the main drivers of the criminal economy, and it is the competition between the organized gangs engaged in these activities that is driving the murder rate.

Who are the Murderers?

Recent research from our on university shows that some 53% of murders are committed by repeat killers. Some 90% of these repeat killers are nurtured in broken homes. Fathers were absent, and the boys were abused by their mothers, with 73% of these mothers having been either raped, tortured or abused in their early years.

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The evidence suggests that whereas boys more readily excuse the absence of, or abuse by their fathers, the feeling of ultimate betrayal comes with abuse by their mothers whom they saw as their one source of love and affection. This sense of betrayal is at the heart of their degeneration into sociopaths and repeat killers.

In the short term, we have to close down the breeding ground for crime. The interventions required go well beyond a ZOSO or temporary employment.

The situation requires the immediate recruitment of an army of trained social workers, to target potential drop-outs from our schools for further training and re-socialization, both in their schools as well as in their communities. There is also need for targeted interventions to support the healing of these mothers so abused. We have to stop the cycle.

While the interventions for reducing the breeding ground for crime are being implemented, the training and equipping of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) to manage crime more effectively must proceed apace. This training however, needs to be radically different from that which presently obtains and recognizes that effective policing in today's world is intelligence-led and underpinned by technological capacity.

Most of all, as a country we must recognize that effectively overcoming the crisis we face in relation to crime, requires a unified national effort.

We have always offered our cooperation in a national effort to fight crime. There are some essential elements in the reform process that must get underway:

- Strengthening the accountability of the JCF by unifying the Police Services Commission and the Police Civilian Oversight Authority.
- Similarly, we need to strengthen the accountability of the Judiciary by re-designing the role of the Judicial Services Commission. This was mooted in the proposals for Constitutional Reform made in the 1990s
- We need the Department of Public Prosecution to fall within the ambit of such oversight structures which apply to the judiciary

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- Legislative reforms regarding Intelligence Agencies are also necessary. Despite the passage of the Interception of Communications Act and the Act establishing the FID etc., there is no overarching legislation governing the operations of Civilian Intelligence operations.
 - This needs to be done so as to ensure the appropriate oversight of these activities and to provide protections against improper manipulation, especially given the tremendous technological advances made.

These are some of the issues that we are prepared to discuss at the Vale Royal Talks, but quite frankly Prime Minister, for this part of the discussions we should have other stakeholders too – the private sector, churches, trade unions, criminologists and other relevant experts. Now more than ever we need a unified national effort.

Our Shadow Minister of National Security will cover the other critical issues, including the implementation of these proposals arising from the strategic review of the JCF in 2007-8.

THERE IS AN URGENT NEED TO RESTORE HOPE!

Section 4: No More Tinkering, Time for Radical Transformation to Restore Hope

Mr Speaker, we on this side are convinced that the transformation of the economy and the restoration of hope will not flow automatically from macro economic stabilization. Our own experience, together with the lessons learned from countries which have achieved developed country status, shows the futility of tinkering and of a trickle down theory of economic and social engineering.

We will have to dismantle and transform the social arrangements which continue to form barriers to the advancement and upward social mobility of the poor, and continues to create social and economic inequality. What we need is a radical approach to social transformation, not piecemeal tinkering.

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To this end, one of my first actions as Leader of the Opposition was to establish three Commissions to develop a policy framework to guide the process of social and economic transformation.

- The first was the “**Land Ownership Commission**”, chaired by eminent attorney Norman Minott, with a mandate to recommend radical and effective strategies, systems and mechanisms to significantly improve and facilitate a legal path to land ownership for the majority of Jamaicans as a means of establishing, homes, communities and enabling enterprise development.
- The “**Youth Employment, Innovation and New Economy Commission**”, chaired by highly successful investment banker Gary Peart, to design an appropriate economic framework and a new economy action plan to modernise and transform globally competitive areas of the Jamaica economy.
- The Commission “**Education Reimagined**” chaired by eminent educator, Mrs. Elaine Foster-Allen, to review policy and recommend strategies to address the gaps, and to enhance and release the capacity of every Jamaican to contribute, innovate, create and lead in the building of a Jamaica that works for all, and not just a few.

All three Commissions have submitted preliminary reports and I am now able to share some of their recommendations.

OUR MISSION IS TO EMPOWER THE PEOPLE!

Section 5: Education Re-Imagined

Education has always been viewed by us, on this side, as the main mechanism for creating a more equitable society.

The decisive assault on the old educational arrangements which left the majority of Jamaicans behind was undertaken by Norman Washington Manley in 1958, when the Common Entrance Examination was introduced, and which opened the doors of the traditional high schools to children from families that did not have the financial ability to pay school fees. Subsequent measures by

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Administrations drawn from both sides of this House have continued the effort to extend educational opportunities to children from poorer families.

Yet, despite all of the efforts, including the initial efforts in the 1970s to open up university education, despite having more than 40,000 or almost all our children getting access to high schools, the two-tiered system remains intact in our society. Data for 2017 show that there is one level of performance for traditional high schools and another level of performance for the so-called non-traditional high schools.

If we consider the acceptable standard of performance at the high school level to be 5 or more passes, including Math and English at a single sitting, then traditional high schools do much better. At the traditional high schools 77% of each cohort achieve this level of performance, i.e. the median level, while for non-traditional high schools the median level was 14% of the cohort.

- 45 schools were classified as traditional and 118 as non-traditional
- 81 of the 118 non-traditional high schools, that is 69% of them, had 20 per cent or less of the cohort passing five subjects, including Maths and English.

No wonder every year our parents and our children go through the trauma and stress of GSAT, because it is the sad truth of Jamaica today, that if you get a chance to go to a traditional high school, your life-path is going to be very different from the child who goes to the non-traditional school.

We are literally leaving the vast majority of our children behind each year, and it is out of the 86% of the students in the non-traditional schools who do not get the five subjects, that we have those who either have to seek remedial education from HEART or one of the other institutions.

It is out of this group too, the so-called unattached youth, that we find ready recruits for crime and hopelessness.

We simply cannot go on in this way.

This area of our national life requires a unified national effort.

- It should not divide us politically
- It should not divide uptown from down town, and

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- It should not divide us whether you are a church-goer or you don't go to church.

We will never create a modern, vibrant progressive Jamaica as long as we leave two-thirds of our children behind in the search for education and knowledge in this “The Age of Information”.

The problem does not begin at the high school level, it goes back to Early Childhood Education. We support the efforts started in our time to upgrade Basic Schools into Infant Department. The truth is that 68% of all early childhood teachers are untrained and lack the skills, resources, and often the appropriate disposition to deal with the special needs of children – 30% of whom have been determined to be unprepared for educational instruction.

Our Shadow Minister of Education will deal more fully with our proposals to bring our educational system, as quickly as possible, to the required standards.

Simply put, many families find it impossible to meet the expenses for their children's education. Indeed, basic data from the Survey of Living Conditions point to the fact that meeting the needs of the child at school is taking up to 14% of the household consumption of the poorest 10% in the country. To keep three children in school takes up to 42% of the household income, not leaving enough for the rest of the family. It is not surprising therefore, that many families do not send their children to school all the days of the week.

A future PNP administration will:

- 1) In order to prevent this scourge of absenteeism, we will make one simple commitment to **provide one (1) meal per day to every student in every Jamaican school**. Hungry children cannot learn and poor families cannot meet the costs. We must answer their cry;
- 2) Implement a three-year programme to **train 5,000 teachers** for our Early Childhood Institutions,
- 3) Prepare a **cadre of social workers** to work alongside them to provide support for parents regarding proper nutrition and proper stimulation in homes. This is essential if our children, from the earliest years, are to absorb the benefits of education.

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- 4) Embark upon a programme of **leadership training through an Institute of Excellence**. This will mobilize the resources, guidance and mentorship for the leadership of our non-traditional high schools, so that classroom by classroom, staffroom by staffroom the non-traditional high schools, one by one, can raise their standards within 5 years.

There would be no distinction between the so-called traditional and non-traditional high schools in the country. We know from experience that there are schools among the non-traditional high schools that have reached these standards.

“Leadership makes a difference”. We are committed to provide the leadership that will transform our schools into zones of excellence of high achievement.

- 5) Education for the 21st Century will only be realized by a national crusade that optimizes the contribution of the church, private sector, the community, parents, Alumni Associations and the diaspora. A future PNP administration will mobilize this national partnership.

These measures will go a long way to finally eliminate what one journalist calls “Apartheid in Education”, to create an environment which would allow Jamaica and Jamaicans to step up and take our place within the ranks of the developed countries of the world.

NO MORE TINKERING – TRANSFORMATION NOW!

Section 6: LAND OWNERSHIP AND HOUSING – Homes, Communities and Enterprises

The present distribution of land ownership, together with the arrangements for access to land for both agriculture and housing, reflects a pattern of inequality that has persisted since Emancipation.

Over 700,000 Jamaicans or one-quarter of our population live in so-called-squatter/informal communities. In addition, approximately 60% of small farmers who farm the land have no titles for these lands. As a result, most are

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unable to secure the capital from financial institutions to modernize their farms.

In fact Mr. Speaker, there is no single area of our national life that requires a more radical treatment than the issue of land and land titling.

LAND TITLING

Many efforts have been made along the way to modernize the basic framework for land titling contained in the Registration of Titles Act which was passed in 1889 and has been amended twice in its 129 years of existence (Adverse Possession and Vesting – sections 85 & 155).

We are determined to remedy the injustices which have long existed and which continue to be perpetrated against our people. Land reform has been one of the tenets of any progressive country, and it will be a priority of a future PNP administration.

Other Efforts To Update the Legal Framework

- There has been the Local Improvement Development Act of 1914 with its several amendments.
- Then there is the most recent piece of legislation which established LAMP. The aim and purpose of LAMP is to fast-track applications for Titles. Despite all of these efforts, the basic inequality in the distribution of 'titled land' to land remain. More than 75 per cent of the applications for Titles that have been made under Land Administration and Management Programme (LAMP) as of 2015 has been rejected because of technical issues relating to requests for sub-divisions.

Based on the recommendations of the Land Ownership Commission that I established, **the next PNP Administration will:**

- Prepare and pass new overarching land titling legislation which brings into one statute the many pieces of Legislation covering the Titling of land.
- Separate the issue of sub-division approval from titling
 - This will allow people to get a title without having to wait indefinitely on Parish Council approval.

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- Use modern cadastral technologies to undertake an island-wide mapping of lands necessary for an effective land administration system. This would assist individuals in obtaining cheaper surveys, and would benefit the poor in particular.
- Establish a special regime to liberate mined-out bauxite lands and other government owned lands for productive purpose, to ensure that these are used for agricultural production and housing. This will help to grow our economy and provide jobs in rural Jamaica.

LAND FOR HOUSING

None of us can take pride in the fact that nearly centuries after the abolition of slavery, over 700,000 of our fellow Jamaicans have not found a place in the land of their birth to live and raise their families in a healthy, safe and orderly environment. This must change.

The squatter communities are, for the most part, without access to the modern amenities of life such as potable water, electricity, sanitation, sewage as well as the basic physical infrastructure of roads that would enable effective policing, garbage collection systems, etc.

In relation to housing, the matter will be dealt with more fully during the Sectoral debate, but **the PNP is committed to:**

1. Release government lands for titling where communities exist or to replace the squatter communities
2. Investing at least \$10 billion of uncollected National Housing Trust (NHT) Refunds to finance an island-wide **Squatter Community Transformation Programme**. This programme will include:
 - Survey of existing housing sites
 - Assistance with the provision of ownership certificates and titles
 - Assistance with building units to enable them to meet minimum standards
 - Upgrading the infrastructure such as sewerage facilities, water supplies and work with the Jamaica Public Service Company (JPSCo) to regularize electricity supply.

Many people in these communities have been contributing to the NHT for years, but have not been able to secure an individual benefit from the Trust.

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We are committed to finding creative ways so that they too can benefit from their contributions.

RESTORING HOPE THROUGH EMPOWERMENT!

Section 7: Building the New Economy

None of our objectives in transforming education, or community upgrading can be achieved unless Jamaica is able to build a modern, inclusive and globally competitive economy.

Based on the preliminary report submitted by the New Economy Commission, I can now indicate the lines along which the next PNP government will transform and modernize the economy, and make it more inclusive.

Small and medium-sized businesses are the key.

- They provide the bulk of the employment.
- Yet, they have great difficulty in accessing capital at reasonable interest rates.

Another obstacle to the growth of this sector is that our banks, for the most part, don't lend against intellectual property. Even today after our years of experience of superstars, like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, if either of them came with their catalogue of music it would be highly unlikely they would get a loan against their intellectual capital.

Our small enterprises are held back also by:

- The fact that 60% of holders of small plots of land have no title to their land
- Government, while being the largest owner of land, has not defined productive uses for these lands and keeps most of it idle
- In addition, there is the inability of entrepreneurs to access capital despite the significant liquidity in the financial market.

The **next PNP Government will** enable the flow of capital throughout the productive sector by:

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- establishing a **Credit Insurance Scheme** to incentivize the financial system and reduce the risk to banks to lend or invest \$200B in small and medium sized businesses. This Credit Insurance Scheme will initially be funded by leveraging some of the reserves in dormant accounts being held by banks
- This will be paralleled by a massive expansion of business advisory services to provide training and mentorship for the small business enterprises, including entrepreneurs in agriculture.

These new sectors and enterprises would include:

- The Creative Industries, such as music and entertainment, where we continue to achieve global success but continue to export raw material, instead of structuring the industries to optimize our returns from the design, production, marketing and distribution of the services and products.
- ICT including animation
- AirBnB tourism activities came to our attention by a study commissioned in 2015 by the former Minister of Tourism, Wykeham McNeil.

Air BnB accommodations range from a couch, to a room, an apartment, a townhouse or luxury villa and prices range from US\$14 per night in Port Antonio with Rasta Harry US\$25 in Manley Meadows, US\$30 in Darliston, Westmoreland with Bigga as your host, Trench Town at US\$50 and up to US\$1800 per week in Discovery Bay.

The number of rooms offered for this experiential tourism has grown from 2,000 in 2015 to 5,600 in 2017 and is well positioned to become the engine of growth for a major service sector in rural Jamaica. *Any attempt to impose a tax on the smallest operators who earn less than US\$75 per night would undermine the potential for inclusive growth.*

THE ROLE OF LABOUR IN THE NEW ECONOMY

Finally, as we seek to modernize the economy and to facilitate economic growth and job creation, we have to recognize the specific place of the Jamaican worker in this endeavour.

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In May, we'll be celebrating the 80th anniversary of the 1938 labour rebellion and the founding of the modern labour movement. The rights won by workers over this period include:

- the 1970s Equal Pay for Women
- Maternity Leave
- The enshrinement in the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act of the rights of Trade Unions to organize

The rights of labour unions to secure better wages for workers, protect them against arbitrary dismissal and provide for an appropriate dispute resolution mechanism are all part of the important gains made by Jamaican workers.

Unfortunately, many of these rights are being eroded.

A key aspect of the erosion of the workers' situation is the increasing spread of the practice of designating full-time employees as contract workers.

- This is happening not only in the security guard sector
- but also in Tourism and Manufacturing
- and in government employment.

The consequence of all this, is that these workers are denied basic benefits, including pension benefits.

They are also denied access to the protection provided in the collective bargaining arrangements which enable them to get better wages.

The net effect of all this is that they are trapped by low wages, and it leaves the majority of them in the situation where they simply cannot manage from pay-day to pay-day.

Many of these issues were supposed to have been dealt with in the Labour Market Reform Commission which we established with diverse partnership including the private sector, trade unions and the government, under the leadership of Professor Marshall Hall and the late Lloyd Goodleigh. The Commission presented the Report to the government over eight months ago, but in the meantime nothing has happened.

Prime Minister, present the report of the Labour Market Reform Commission to Parliament. Ignoring tough issues doesn't make them go away.

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We recognize that the world of work has been affected much by changes in the world economy, and that new approaches to worker protection will have to be designed. But at the same time, we have to protect our workers.

I want to assure the workers of Jamaica that **the next PNP Government will put a legal framework in place to protect contract workers:**

- From the present level of exploitation that they face daily;
- Against unfair dismissals and;
- Against the misuse of contract work provisions.

RESTORING HOPE THROUGH EMPOWERMENT!

Section 8: WE HAVE TO MAKE OUR DEMOCRACY WORK

It is essential if we are to achieve our objectives, that we make our democratic institutions work. No doubt one of the factors behind the country's failure to make adequate progress over the years has been our collective inability to find common cause in our Parliament around fundamental national issues whether involving Educational Policy or our Security Policy.

Put another way our political culture has been just too tribalistic and divisive. But there is evidence in our history as a country that we can find ways to achieve common purposes.

- Trade Unions used to be politically divided – but they were able to find common cause in the Confederation of Trade Unions
- In the 1970s, we were able to find common cause in the establishment of the Electoral Advisory Committee (now the ECJ) although sadly the old habits of extreme politicking are re-appearing.
- Over the years we have found agreement in deepening our Parliamentary democracy by establishing the Standing Sessional Committees of the Parliament under the Chairmanship of the Opposition.

All these examples remind us that our Democracy, while it rests on the practice of free and fair elections, is in fact more than just elections.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

It involves a culture of respect for the Constitution and laws, and respect for the rights of those who have different views and interests. And it involves respect for the basic institutions of our constitutional order:

- the Parliament
- the Courts
- our Trade Unions, etc.

Recent developments highlight the dangers and risk to our democracy:

- The disregard of collective bargaining procedures with Teachers, Police and other groups. It cannot be right to unilaterally decree a four year negotiation cycle to the workers when they have not accepted it at the bargaining table.
- It is disrespectful. It smacks of dictatorship. The Unions won't stand for it and the we wont stand for it.
- The disrespect to Parliament and the failure to answer questions
- The Probationary appointment of the Chief Justice
- Disregard of the Contractor General's reports

There is a pattern of threat to our democracy – a creeping dictatorship.

Reverification of Voters' List

Mr Speaker,

I am forced to comment on the matter of the re-verification of the Voters' List. I think we would all agree that a clean and reliable voters' list is essential for the safeguarding of Jamaica's democracy. When the Representation of the People Act was amended to allow for continuous registration of voters, promises were made for a regular re-verification of the voters' list at intervals not less than seven (7) years by way of house-to-house re-verification.

A re-verification exercise was undertaken in 2006 which had approximately 170,000 persons fewer than was on the previous list – a reduction of approximately 10 per cent – not an inconsiderable number in the context of the usual electoral margins.

Now some twelve years have passed since the last re-verification and serious questions arise as to the integrity of the Voters' List.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Last year, the Minister of Finance and the Public Service announced that the government was going to allocate approximately J\$2.5 Billion over the next two years for this purpose. In the Budget in 2017, \$700 Million was voted to begin the re-verification exercise; it was never paid over. During the debate on the Supplementary Estimates, we raised the matter again, and this Parliament was assured by the Minister of Finance that the funds would be replaced in the Budget this year to ensure that the re-verification exercise would be facilitated by the Ministry of Finance. This has not been done.

There are two fundamental principles that arise. The first is the need for a clean Voters' List in order to ensure elections that are free and fair. In the absence of confidence about integrity of the List we are opening the door to electoral manipulation which will inevitably lead to conflict.

Mr Speaker,

We have been down this road before as a country. You, Mr Speaker would have memories of the period when government interfered in the administration of electoral matters and the terrible consequences, including widespread violence that the people of this country suffered.

The second matter of principle that arises, in this regard, concerns the sanctity of Parliament and whether or not parliamentarians and specifically the Opposition can rely on the Minister; if the Minister can say he has been overruled by the Cabinet and he has not resigned, says he has changed his mind, then what is the purpose and significance of the Parliament. In pursuing this course, the government is moving in the wrong direction, and I am insisting that the government does not use its power over the provision of money to corrupt the entire electoral process.

With regards to the Electoral Commission, the Minister said that the government wants a legal opinion as to whether a re-verification can be done, and persons removed from the list. I dare say this is spurious in the extreme, since when people were removed from the List in 2006 there were no protests by the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and therefore precedence exists.

My second point on this is that the ECJ should be free from having to rely on a politically appointed Attorney General, in matters in which there is a political interest on the side of one party or the other. The ECJ should be free to seek relevant advice wherever it chooses.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

We are treading down a dangerous road. A word to the wise should be sufficient, Mr Speaker.

PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY IS EMPOWERING THE PEOPLE!

Section 9: CONCLUSION

The fact that Jamaica is in the grip of massive inequality, which leaves too many Jamaicans behind is not in doubt.

The citizens in one Jamaica are able to afford first world health services wherever they are available, here or abroad. In the other Jamaica, the majority are forced to languish in decrepit and run down conditions and are left to use health facilities offering less than basic standards of health care.

One Jamaica has access to up-to-date traditional high schools giving a reasonable Twenty-first Century education, while the other two-thirds of our children are left behind with little hope of overcoming the deficiencies of under-performing educational institutions.

Some live in plush surroundings, while a quarter of the population lives in substandard squatter communities, and are forced into criminal activities to access electricity, water and the other amenities of life.

We cannot continue in this way. No nation can make progress or achieve prosperity if we leave intact the basic structures that create this inequality.

Our mission must now to be to mash down this divide that sustains this inequality.

We are not saying that these conditions emerged in the last two years. And it is also true that since the right to vote was achieved in 1944, administrations drawn from both sides have made important contributions to improving the quality of life of those who have been left behind.

- God knows errors have been made along the way by both sides.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

- I spent much effort and energy, particularly between 2012 and 2016, taking this country from the brink of bankruptcy and disaster. We moved the debt down and stabilized the ship of state. I spent a lot of my political capital, personal capital and that of our Movement, getting it right for the country and in protecting people like Miss Mirrie who daily struggle to survive.
- Now that we have secured macro-economic stability, let us resolve never to go the way of unsustainable debt again.
- We must now take on frontally the mission to break down the inequalities that still scar our country and sap the will and morale of our people.
- We must now lift up the performance of our high schools and give opportunities to the two-thirds of our children left behind, with opportunity they will flourish.
- We commit to a massive land reform programme that will unlock the potential of our landless farmers.
- We commit to the 700,000 Jamaicans languishing without Land Titles in so-called squatter communities to transform their quality of life. They too deserve a chance to pursue a real Jamaican dream.
- We commit to build a new economy for our small business people, using creative techniques and \$200 Billion of credit on call.
- We commit to give respect to workers and their negotiations.
- We reject dictatorship.
- We respect democracy and good governance.
- We will build on the foundations laid to secure growth and equality.
- To our young people in particular, I want to say do not give up hope. Instead, join us in this struggle to build on the foundations laid by those who have gone before.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

- We know by the examples of Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Peter Tosh, Usain Bolt, Donald Quarrie, Shelly-Ann Fraser Pryce, Veronica Campbell Brown, Merlene Ottey; and by some of our scholars like Orlando Patterson, George Beckford, Norman Girvan, Carl Stone, and contemporaries like Chronixx, Proteje, etc.

We are a creative people, with talent in abundance.

Jamaica is a God-blessed country, with people tested and nurtured by the challenges of our history.

Let us take up the challenge of our time and join together to build a better Jamaica that works for all the people.

As Jimmy Cliff says:

“You can get it if you really want...but there are many rivers to cross.”

God Bless the People of Jamaica and God Bless Jamaica.