



*sectoral Debate 2025*

# **CHAMPIONING CHANGE**

**with LESSONS FROM  
OUR HISTORY**

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## **LESSONS FROM OUR HISTORY**

Madam Speaker, I should really thank the Leader of the Opposition who urged me to participate in this debate, for I was not so minded; but after careful consideration, I decided to take part. Time come – or at least is coming.

Elections are due, and all things being equal, this will likely be my last opportunity to contribute to a debate in the House, having been a member for 31 years. – I entered in May 1994. Indeed, I would like to express my appreciation to the People of East Central St Andrew and to the PNP Organisation currently chaired by Dennis Gordon, expected to be the next Member of Parliament.

I thank my family, one sitting in the House, Luke, who is present in the Gallery, and my wife Sandra, who is overseas on business.

I thank the staff of the House over the years.

I thank the Speakers, from Violet Neilson onwards.

I thank the Clerks, from Edley Deans onwards.

I thank my personal staff.

Also, I would like to express appreciation to the People's National Party (PNP), and the numerous Comrades and friends who have enabled me to serve in this House (and Senate) in various Ministerial capacities, including as Leader of the Party and Leader of the Opposition. It has been a privilege and an honour.

Despite the limitations of time, I would like to share some of the lessons regarding processes of governance that I have observed over the years. I hesitate, however, because we are close to elections and in the fervid atmosphere of the times, some are going to take offence, and I have many friends in this House on both sides of the aisle whose friendship I would like to sustain.

Fundamentally, this is my starting point. It is worth sustaining our sense of collective purpose in this House. This Parliament, which emerged after Universal Adult Suffrage was achieved in 1944, was the result of a common striving for rights on behalf of the Jamaican People.

When the terms of the Jamaican Constitution were settled by a Committee of this House, the then Premier N.W. Manley invited the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Alexander Bustamante, to travel with him to London, where the final Agreements regarding the structure and content of the Independence Constitution were settled jointly. Those were our origins.

More to the point, though, the overarching lesson of our years as an Independent nation is the fact that “all our great accomplishments” have been the result of collective endeavours. Nothing highlights this more than our efforts to reduce Public debt and achieve sustained economic growth – (a task still not achieved). What are the basic facts?

- a) For decades since the global economic upheavals stemming from the oil price shocks of 1973, Jamaica has faced a problem of large current account deficits in our balance of payments
  - The build-up of an unsustainable public debt
  - Low growth
  - High levels of poverty
- b) As a consequence of these fiscal and monetary imbalances, Jamaica entered into successive IMF Programmes between 1977 and 1995.
- c) Public Debt ballooned to in excess of 200% GDP in – 1980s/90s.  
Brought down to under 80% in the mid-1990s.  
Susceptible to shocks.
  - Financial crises of the mid-1990s
  - Great Recession of 2008

d) In the face of the economic shocks flowing from the Great recession, Jamaica entered a Stand-by Agreement (SBA) with the IMF in 2010.

This Involved:

- Debt Exchange (JDX)
- Divestment of loss-making enterprises
- Fiscal Restraint
- Public Sector Wage Restraint

By 2011, the Programme went off course. This issue here is NOT to assign blame, but to highlight the factors that led to the success of the IMF Programme entered into in 2013. The fact is that while much has been focused on the contribution of Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller and myself, in my view, we miss the significance of the united national effort that was involved:

- Public Sector Workers signed up to make the sacrifice – 3 more years of a Wage Freeze.
- Bondholders committed to endure a “haircut” and loss of interest payments (NDX).
- The general population endured a major tax burden

Those are the more obvious examples of the unity of effort that was involved.

- EPOC (Economic Programme Oversight Committee) was another example of a collective effort at oversight – uniting the private sector, the labour movement, civil society and state authorities.
- The content of the epochal tax-reform effort was also the result of national effort reflecting private sector collaboration through the “Matalon Committee”
- Ministry of Finance/various sectoral groups, including the Tax Committee of Parliament (one of the few times it has been convened) for the institution of the Omnibus Incentive Legislation.

- It was this broad-based national effort and the consensus that it generated that underpinned the nation's acceptance of the programme of economic reform.

While we have achieved some measure of fiscal discipline and balance, we have not managed to secure the growth in incomes and productivity that we need in order to meet the aspirations of the Jamaican People.

Economic growth is the logical and obvious preoccupation of the entire country, which nevertheless has eluded us thus far, despite the “5 in 4” and the Economic Growth Council (EGC). Again, maybe this would be an area for broad-based institutional collaboration among the nation's stakeholders – building on earlier experiences of the National Planning Council etc.

Just like how the Matalon-led Committee on Tax Reform helped usher in a period of investment activity and profitability, maybe an analogous National (NOT one-sided political) grouping could help provide us with a blueprint for growth.

### **Other Examples of Our Collective Effort**

Among the other examples, perhaps the most salutary and inspiring example of our collective efforts is the Electoral Commission of Jamaica. Maybe the current leadership and some in this House may not be aware of the history of the ECJ or its full significance for our system of governance.

The immediate antecedents go back to suspicions and complaints going back to the 1967 elections and before regarding;

- The integrity of the enumeration process
- The gerrymandering of constituency boundaries and the need for a fair and transparent process

All these problems and the doubt in the electoral process led ineluctably to violent confrontations, which reached their peak in the 1970s.

Thankfully, good sense prevailed – both parties, with the encouragement and prodding of other stakeholders of goodwill, established the electoral advisory committee, the precursor to the currently existing Electoral Commission of Jamaica.

The structure of the EAC and subsequently of the Electoral Commission is important: with its mix of Party Representatives (nominated members) and the Independent members (selected members), for it reflected the fact that both the political parties on the one hand, and the society as a whole on the other, had an interest in ensuring the viability and integrity of our electoral system.

Of equal importance was the impetus that the formation of the EAC gave to the transformation of the “dangerously partisan” political culture that had developed.

The countless hours spent by political representatives in the early years in identifying “acceptable” independent members, having been consulted by successive Governors General; and in charting a path of electoral reform, gave rise to an understanding that neither party when in office could or should try to exercise “ownership” over the body politic or Nation. Rather, we were simply “stewards” in a “joint tenancy arrangement”.

Not only was the culture changed, but new institutions were built. – A Peace Agreement in 1989, and the Political Ombudsman Act in 2002.

Many hours were spent between the Most Honourable Edward Seaga and me, on Prime Minister Patterson’s instructions, to find an appropriate office holder, we settled on Bishop Herro Blair.

We established conventions that required that Parliament cede its authority to the ECJ regarding electoral matters, including the determination of Parliamentary boundaries.

The result has been:

- A growing confidence in the electoral system
- The virtual elimination of political violence
- An enhanced reputation for Jamaica's electoral democracy in the international community

Against this background of history, it must be unwise for one side to unilaterally eliminate the independent office of the Political Ombudsman. Already we can see evidence of a rise in tensions.

Even more, it flies in the face of our traditions of governance for one side to abrogate to itself the authority to create a new parish, with scarcely a consultation with the other side, particularly given the implications for electoral matters and the stability of the nation generally.

## **Conclusion**

We need to learn from our history and our contemporary experience –

Nationhood is not the result of the “sharing of geographic space”. Indeed, history is replete with examples of people sharing the same territory, engaging in mutually destructive conflict with each other.

- In Northern Ireland – the basis was religion
- Palestine – ethnicity and religion
- Yugoslavia (Serbia Bosnia) – ethnicity and religion

Building the Jamaican Nation requires the application of good governance, principles of accountability, transparency, integrity, etc. But it must also be premised on principles of Participation – giving citizens an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process. Inclusiveness, equity and a sense of social justice.

The essence of nation-building is the creation of shared loyalties, and trust in authority, and political structures, but most of all a trust in each other.

Yes, the “Hardware” of the nation is essential in the roads, and functioning water systems, Ports, airports, etc.

As important, however, is the “software” of the human relationships, the shared attitudes and values of a people; the treatment we get at the bank, at the police station, hospital and government office.

How workers and management relate to each other and how we protect people’s access to good health care, good education, security, etc.

In the same vein, while all of us applaud the reduction of murders, the reduction of murders is not the same thing as peace in our communities.

There is still:

- Too much mayhem on the streets and roadways – between motorists and taxi operators
- Police and Youth in conflict
- Teachers/Parents and students
- There have been national calls for values and attitudes

Against this background, it is hard to explain why the Crime Management Oversight Committee has been abandoned by the political authorities – the long-term solutions that Peace requires will ultimately require a national effort such as that.

We should not make our differences of party affiliation, or the quest for power, blind us to the fact that, essentially, we all, for the most part, seek the same objectives, viz a better quality of life for the Jamaican People and in nation-building, to achieve great things, we need to go together. As we learnt from history, “One hand can’t clap”.



Madam Speaker, it has been an honour and a privilege to have served in this House, and I thank God Almighty and the Jamaican People who have made it possible.

I pray that as we go forward as a nation, we will remember the lessons of our history and seek to unite and NOT divide the Jamaican People on any basis: Political, Social, Racial.

Jamaican people, for the most part, simply want access to the benefits of modern society.

- A good education
- Access to first-rate Health Care
- Safety and Security;
- And the Social and Physical Environment that affirms our Humanity

We may have different views about Programmes and Policies, but ultimately, the objectives ought to be the same.

And we must learn to collaborate if we are to thrive as a Nation.

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