

***“Putting Barbados Back On Track”***

**Feature Address**

**By**

**Hon. David Thompson M.P.**

**Political Leader**

**Democratic Labour Party**

**Delegates Conference '07**

**26<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

- **Chairman**
- **Members of the Executive and General Councils**
- **Fellow Parliamentarians and Candidates**
- **Specially invited guests**
- **Members of the great Democratic Labour Party**

**I want to make clear today that I am not in contact with nor have I colluded with the leadership of Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners or any other agency in the health sector.**

**My association with hoteliers is to bring them business or give them leads on how to attract new business. I do not advise them on their industry communications!**

**I am partial towards teachers and appreciative of the job they are doing, but not since my days as a student nor since**

**I was a member of the BSTU when I was teaching, have I sat with teachers or their unions to strategize on how to approach issues of the day.**

**Calypsonians and others in the culture industry are my clients but I do not advise them on what to sing or how to agitate for better conditions of service.**

**We have in our midst two authorities on local agriculture, but none of them craft the messages, concerns and expressions of farmers.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, I have set forth these disclaimers because I want you to know and understand that the sentiments and lamentations you are get every day from civil society in Barbados are authentically theirs and are not influenced in anyway by the promptings of David Thompson or the Democratic Labour Party.**

**This Conference is being held against the backdrop of widespread, national discontent - bordering on bitter anger - with the management of state resources and the direction in which our country is headed.**

**I want you to know and understand that civil society in Barbados is crying out because it has had enough! Doctors,**

**teachers, farmers, hoteliers, entertainers, retired persons, sick persons and persons in need of medical care are all exhibiting signs of frustration and despair because they cannot understand how a Government that was so popularly elected for three terms could become so indifferent and disconnected from the people it was elected to serve.**

**Today I call the family of the Democratic Labour Party to arms because I sense that many Barbadians and Barbadian institutions are at their wits end.**

**Thankfully, however, much of what we have been saying and doing as a party in recent months is resonating with the public of Barbados and has served to imbue new hope and optimism in the country.**

**I sense today that Barbadians have had enough of the incumbent administration and that voters are looking to the Democratic Labour Party to once again step to the mantle and fill the breach.**

**It was to us that they turned in 1961 when the new Barbados needed to be fashioned!**

**It was to us that they turned in 1986 when consolidation of that growth path was necessary.**

**Now, it is to us that they are turning once again...this time for a major rescue plan to reclaim our country for its people.**

**I want to proclaim to the country and the world today that the Democratic Labour Party is ready for the challenge!**

**We have heeded the voice of wisdom. We accept and appreciate the interventions of thousands of well wishers who said to us 24 months ago...'*Stop misbehaving in public...go behind closed doors and resolve your issues*'. We value the wisdom of those who said to us that we need to portray an image of unity; an image of togetherness and an image of shared vision and focus.**

**I am saying to all within the hearing of my voice today that this Democratic Labour Party team of candidates and well wishers is now focused, united and deliberate in its efforts not only to win the next general elections, but more so, to rescue Barbados from its current slippery slope of division, stagnation and malfeasance in public administration.**

**Today I wish to thank the thousands of Barbadians, resident at home and abroad, who stayed the course! Those who never flinched in offering their prayers, paying their dues, sending emails and offering words of advice!**

**I also want to thank constituency activists who remained focused on the goal.**

**Those sponsors and other friends in the business community who remained steadfast to the cause, in spite of the gloom and doom that was preached in the press and elsewhere.**

**I want to thank one and all for believing in us...for staying the course...for seeing this party through a most turbulent period of its existence.**

**Today I also want to thank the team of magnificent candidates that we have endorsed to carry the party's banner in the 30 constituencies across Barbados.**

**I am saying without fear of contradiction that man for man, woman for woman...each of these is qualitatively better than his or her opponent.**

**I am saying that this is a fine team of patriots that has stepped forward to rescue Barbados and serve as its principal servants over the next five years. They are bright, they are talented, they are successful and they are visionary in their outlook for Barbados.**

**I have a place for every one of them in a Democratic Labour Party administration.**

**Nowhere was the focus, unity and new attitude of the Dems more ably demonstrated than in George Pilgrim's magnanimous withdrawal from the race for General Secretary last Saturday evening.**

**George said to me the day before he did not want a drop of political blood spilled on the image of the party the morning after, and for that reason he declined the nomination.**

**George has been replaced by a most able Chris Sinckler; and our Comrade and sister Verla Depieza is very much on board and reported for duty the moment the contest ended as she always has in the past.**

**This is the new Democratic Labour Party...Ladies and Gentlemen!**

**This is the Democratic Labour Party that Owen Arthur and his strategists in the Labour Party fear most!**

**They know they cannot contend with or triumph over a united and focused Democratic Labour Party. That is why**

**they are trying and doing everything to create fissures where they are none.**

**David Estwick was not feeling well a few weeks ago and they hailed his absence from Parliament as indicative of “*fundamental differences*” between him and me. That is the propaganda they spread. That is the only scenario on which they can hope to win.**

**They have interpreted George Pilgrim’s withdrawal as a sign of divisions. But what would they have said had he run and lost; or if Chris lost. I recently watched a televised debate between the Democratic Presidential candidates in which the argument was put in relation to Hilary Clinton that no candidate with so many negatives has ever been elected President. And some Democrats were repeating it. Hilary Clinton’s response was that that was precisely what the Republicans wanted them to be doing – savaging each other - and that it was sad that her colleagues didn’t understand their strategy.**

**Today, I proclaim to this party and country that the Dems are focused! We are united and we are ready to wrestle power from the self-seekers who now form the Government of Barbados.**

**Today, Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to empathize with the ordinary Barbadian who, in moving around and reflecting on contemporary Barbados, feels like a spectator to a game in which he once had a part to play and in which he should be the main player.**

**I want more Barbadians to take note of what is happening in our country and wake up to the realities of its implications.**

**I want to state up front that everything the Barbados Labour Party has attempted, ostensibly in the name of progress, has benefited the few; and from a people's perspective has backfired to the detriment of the standard of living and general well being of the vast majority of ordinary Barbadian citizens.**

**Ladies and gentlemen, I am speaking of a form of lop-sided development that has gotten out of hand during the last 13 years. I have given the BLP the benefit of the doubt by claiming that things "*got out of hand*". But on second thoughts it may have been the result of a calculated strategy to keep the masses of people of our beloved country in a state of poverty, oppression and dependence.**

**They say that he who pays the piper calls the tune; and I know and you know who calls the tune in Barbados.**

**There are several disturbing developments that have taken place in recent years, some of which I want to bring to your attention.**

**(1) Shift in Fiscal and Economic Focus**

**There was a time in our economic development when the focus of our country's goals was essentially on reducing our dependence on others. The chief architect of our modern economic arrangements was Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow whose policies were to lift this nation out of dependence, broaden the economic base of our country, create sustainable jobs, modernize our physical infrastructure and provide for basic human needs.**

**The mantra of early Democratic Labour Party administrations was social justice and fairness.**

**As we approach our 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of independence, attempts are still being made by this government to paint a rosy picture of the Barbados economy.**

**There is a long list of statistics and so-called achievements which arithmetically may be sound but a preoccupation with**

**which ignores the human stories behind the statistics.  
Growth is one thing; development is another.**

**The tax reforms introduced by this government – have  
resulted in increased tax revenue.**

**A recent study entitled *Examining the Impact of Taxation on  
Income Distribution in Barbados* by Daniel Boamah, Sharri  
Byron and Chadelle Maxwell, published in the December  
2006 Economic review and their conclusions were,**

***“The full impact of the 1992 income tax reform occurred in  
1993 and the abolition of stabilisation taxes and various  
levies, as well as the elimination of several itemised  
deductions and allowances that had hitherto benefited the  
higher income groups the most, appeared to have shifted  
income distribution in favour of the lower income group.”***

**Those were the Democratic Labour Party’s reforms.**

***“On the other hand... between 1997 and 1998, the low  
income earners saw their share of post-tax income decline  
by 4.6 percentage points whereas the middle and high  
income had their post-tax income increase by 1.9 and 2.7  
percentage points, respectively, suggesting a deterioration in***

***the position of low-income earners relative to the other two groups.”***

**These were the Barbados Labour Party reforms.**

**This government’s tax policy is what helped create a “*working poor*” in our country. People who go to work every day and at the end of the week or month cannot meet their basic obligations.**

**This is of significance because it speaks to the plight in our economy of the middle-class and the extent to which their position had been eroded by this government’s policies.**

**We are concerned about the working poor in this country.**

**In our economic sectors, we have become more dependent on one area: Tourism. And even within tourism there is increased concentration of tourism market.**

**The more balanced distribution of tourism market in 1980s and early 1990’s has now become very concentrated with Britain being overwhelmingly dominant. This increases the risk within the structure of the tourism market.**

**There is an absence of balanced growth - all of our productive sectors need to make a contribution to growth and the earning of foreign exchange. The last Central Bank Review of the economy for the first six months of 2007 shows that despite real growth in the economy, this growth was driven mainly by the non-traded sectors. This is not a healthy development for our country. Our manufacturing and agricultural sectors are barely holding up.**

**The government boasts the largest capital account surplus on record. This, however, has been as a result largely of real estate investments by wealthy foreigners. If and when this property boom subsides, where will Barbados find itself? It is the fragility of our greater dependence on these real estate investments that is of considerable concern to those who are thinking about future generations.**

**Likewise, the level of savings by Barbadians is inadequate as a means of protecting the balance of payments and making available resources to finance new investment.**

**Our prices are too high. Land and housing are not accessible or affordable. Poverty still stalks far too many homes in our country.**

**The domestic debt and interest payments on that debt continue to grow significantly. Rating agencies and other market participants consider high public debt to one of the key weaknesses of the Barbadian economy, and the current debt path is dangerous.**

**In the face of our dependence as a nation, the main new economic strategy outlined by Owen Arthur is the removal of all exchange controls with respect to CARICOM by the end of the year and the further removal in respect to the rest of the world to follow. By doing this he is making a significant gamble.**

**Our economic strategy group is looking at this development very carefully and we will express the party's view on this shortly because liberalizing our financial system to attract capital may result in no benefit from any influx of foreign capital but capital might flow out of the country seeking better investment opportunities.**

**Finally, so flat-footed are we on the economic front, that all we do is publish economic strategy documents and hope and pray that one day we will find oil.**

**(2) Massive Projects with Huge Cost Over-runs**

**There is no greater symbol of wastage and mismanagement of state resources than the edifice now known as Kensington Oval. It is a facility that is not functional, not easily adaptable and essentially a noose for a very long time around the necks of Barbadian taxpayers.**

**I want Owen Arthur to tell the country what it is costing Barbadian taxpayers to keep that property shut up, or better still, shut down in the manner it has been, ever since April 28<sup>th</sup>. Today is four months almost to the day since that facility was last used and we still do not know who owns it, how much it cost and how much more tax-payer dollars it will take to make it functional.**

**What we do know is that the figure is so astronomical that the NCF had to scrap plans to host Crop Over events there.**

**All of the great brains and economic gurus are in this government but no one has to date come up with an idea of how we can put that facility to use for the benefit of Barbadians and to recoup some of the more than \$400 million spent on creating it.**

**The Democratic Labour Party has discussed this issue at length and knows clearly how it would go about transforming**

**the features and designation of this facility from white elephant to cash cow.**

**I say to the Prime Minister today if you want to know what to do with Kensington...if you want to see how that facility can work for the benefit of Barbadians...call the elections!**

**The Prime Minister, more than anyone else in this country, knows the intellectual and visionary talent of the Democratic Labour Party. It is he who constantly poaches this organization for new talent. He knows we have the capacity within this organization to make Kensington a milk cow for Barbados.**

**If they had ideas they would have advanced them already. If they had a plan for Kensington they would have articulated it already.**

**On the issue of Kensington Oval alone, I am asking Barbadians to embrace the Democratic Labour Party and give us the opportunity to rescue this entity.**

**Cost overruns are the order of the day for this administration. This is the strangest of situations. They hand pick the consultants for each of these projects. The**

**Consultants are theirs. The engineers are theirs. The architects are theirs.**

**The tendering process is controlled by them. The quantities are assessed and altered by them. They are the ones who come up with the outlandish quotes in the first place and yet, on every capital project in the last 10 years, they have trumped up a whopping 40 per cent or higher cost overrun.**

**How in heaven's name can you set out to build a prison for one price, increase that cost by some 125 per cent and then on the back of that say that the currency tabulation was wrong and that you must now multiply everything by two? How in heaven's name could that be done?**

**In any other country, a few persons, not just the Minister, would be sitting on a bench awaiting trial.**

**And the cost overruns don't stop there...**

**I can think of Grantley Adams International Airport...a facility that functions satisfactorily only when there is no rain and the temperature is beyond 82 degrees Fahrenheit.**

**This project went over budget by some \$70 million and no one in the Government has found it fitting, up to this moment, to give an explanation.**

**But, while ordinary Barbadians are being asked to repay that loan, persons not so ordinary are given all the concessions to operate thriving businesses at the facility.**

**Then there are the road projects; the cost of which we do not know. We no longer hear of competitive bids and tenders. In this country today we just see heavy equipment move in and people start to build roads. No one knows the cost of the ABC expansion. No one knows the cost of the flyovers. No one knows the cost to the taxpayers of all the street widening and roundabout expansions. What we do know is that some road builders in Barbados are saying they never had it so good!**

**What we do know is that somebody is benefiting from the millions and millions of dollars in heavy-duty vehicles and equipment that are being purchased by various government ministries through a lone supplier. All I would say on that score for now is that I hope these people are keeping records.**

**I hope that when the time comes they will have all the documentation necessary to prove that Barbados got good value for money; because the whole issue of procurement will be the focus of an independent enquiry, whenever the Democratic Labour Party is elected.**

**I estimated some months ago that it must be in excess of \$750 million that has gone abegging through cost overruns. To this date, none of the three Ministers of Finance in this Government has refuted that charge.**

**I want you, Ladies and Gentlemen, to stop for a moment and consider what could have been done with that \$750 million, which I assure you has not washed into the sea or been donated to the International Red Cross.**

**Contractors got plenty of it; suppliers got some of it and you would not be wrong if you guessed that leading Barbados Labour Party operatives got a significant slice of it as well.**

**The next general elections in Barbados will be the first elections in the history of Barbados in which the finger of corruption can reasonably and correctly be pointed at senior members of an incumbent administration.**

**The Prime Minister makes it a point to say to the nation at every turn how I made my money as a lawyer and the clients for whom I work.**

**I want him now to tell the nation how he amassed his fortunes on a lowly Prime Ministerial salary.**

**We all knew he was stone broke in 1994. He said he could not make ends meet and was leaving politics. Today, analysts place him in the top ten in Barbados!**

**I want him to explain how his ministers made their fortunes on ministerial salaries lower than those of middle level wage earners in the private sector.**

**Owen Arthur is constantly pointing fingers at persons in this party. I want Owen Arthur to subject himself and his ministers to an independent financial audit. I challenge them today to declare their assets of 1994 and their assets of 2007 and let the public determine if what they smell in Barbados today is fish offal from the Bridgetown Market.**

**Notwithstanding glaring evidence of the foregoing, some people in this country say to me – *“don’t just tell us about them...tell us what you guys are going to do about it’.***

**Well, my answer to that is simple!**

**Any minister in a Democratic Labour Party administration who oversees a project costing taxpayers nearly three times the budgeted estimate will be fired from the cabinet and will not run again as a candidate of the Democratic Labour Party!**

**We shall review the system of awarding contracts on mega projects to ensure built-in safeguards against taxpayers having to foot the bill for incompetence, inefficiency and downright thieving.**

**We shall return accountability and transparency to the procurement of products and services and shall ensure that the tendering process on mega projects in particular, is structured and transparent.**

**Simply put...a Democratic Labour Party Government under my watch will not chalk up \$750 million in cost overruns. That \$750 million will be put towards the erection of houses, the upgrade of hospital services and the creation of high paying, sustainable jobs for Barbadians.**

**I have successfully run a law practice for more than 21 years in this country. I have always worked for myself and I employ three associates and a staff of about 15. My salary as**

**opposition leader has always been substantially used to run this party in opposition.**

**I am not in politics for personal gain. But this is not only about me. I have with me a team of individuals all of whom I believe to be persons of integrity and ability. They span a range of business and professional activities. Many have given outstanding public service. They can stand on their own two feet.**

**I am confident that they will join with me in a new era of public accountability and will sign on before the election result to a code of conduct for persons holding public office including a declaration of assets, support for new integrity and public accountability laws, the strengthening of the Public Accounts Committee and an overhaul of the public tendering system.**

**I go further. The House of Assembly itself – which is open to public scrutiny and whose debates are broadcast – must consider and debate all major ministerial decisions arising out of appeals relating to town and country planning applications that affect large tracts of land, policy directions to Statutory Boards by Ministers and certain appointments made to posts that carry significant constitutional significance.**

## **2) The much vaunted Social Partnership**

**The next development I want to bring to your attention is the Social Partnership, which has brought Barbados some kudos internationally. It is true that this arrangement has brought the country relative industrial peace. But what it has also done is to stifle the voice of the worker and to deny them the right to demand and fight for increases in income to keep abreast of the rising cost of living.**

**My friends, I ask you: In whose interest is the Social Partnership working?**

**A Democratic Labour Party administration will review this structure. Let no one misinterpret our position!**

**It is not that we are anti-business. To the contrary, we believe that fulfilled workers are an asset to industry and enterprise and that is why we will pursue a regime of greater equity, where the interest of workers is factored in and catered for in the structuring and administration of any such partnership.**

**Thinking Barbadians know that the trade union movement in Barbados would be more respected, would be consulted**

**more, and generally, would fare better under a Democratic Labour Party administration.**

### **(3) The Unregulated Growth of Big Business**

**The economic development of Barbados during the past decade has been credited to the dynamic growth of big business. What in fact has happened is that big business has taken advantage of a friendly, laissez-faire government and created powerful cartels, if not monopolies to pursue their own interests.**

**This development has succeeded in neutralizing the efforts of the working classes and the consumers of Barbados to improve their conditions of work and their standard of living. The result has been the rapidly escalating cost of living and the failure of the average Barbadian to make ends meet.**

**For me it is heart-rending to see people who need special diets and the parents of children who need a balanced diet taking fruits and vegetables out of their shopping baskets when they reach the check-out points in supermarkets.**

**It's no wonder that lifestyle diseases are now rampant and that there is an increasing amount of evidence emerging to**

**suggest that our hyperactive children are suffering from a fruit deficiency.**

**The best way to deal with cartels and monopolies is to break them up. They simply do not operate in the interest of the consumer.**

**We shall support the development of small businesses through our procurement policies. Government is the largest consumer of products and services in the country and we believe that a clear and unambiguous message can and will be sent if we set aside a portion of Government's procurement portfolio for new and appropriately sized business ventures and initiatives.**

**Additionally, we will assist in the creation of new enterprises through training, direct subsidies and through support of Credit Unions, which give small businesspersons easier access to capital for investment.**

**The Democratic Labour Party is committed to fostering a culture of enterprise in Barbados. Currently only about 10% of the population become business entrepreneurs. Our target is to double (to 20%) the number of Barbadians who choose to run small businesses, by 2015.**

**This is in keeping with the process of globalization whereby small jurisdictions will have to find small niches in the global economy in order to survive. Basically our people will have to become more enterprising if they want to prosper.**

#### **(4) The Unrestricted Sale of Land on the Open Market**

**My friends, Barbados is a small country with a limited supply of land. In recent years the increasing demand for land by those wanting to start families and by both local and expatriate speculators has pushed the price of land beyond the means of most Barbadians.**

**You just have to read the Sunday papers to see what prices little house spots are fetching.**

**And yet certain developers seem to have a knack for acquiring land, getting change of use from agriculture, and getting planning permission to build houses and condominiums all over Barbados.**

**A few days ago I had an opportunity to take a visiting friend on a tour of the island. I will never forget what I saw on a journey from Port St. Charles, through Royal Westmoreland, up Apes Hill, across by Hillaby, Dunscombe and Vaocluse and down to Lears and Lower Estate.**

**Huge swathes of prime land that used to grow crops are now being converted to gated communities and golf courses. Needless for me to say, the prices of these houses are beyond the reach of the average Barbadian.**

**The escalating price of land has had a knock-on effect on the price of houses. In between the developments are a few token low-cost houses in which you can't even swing a mongoose. And yet these boxes are fetching over \$100,000.00.**

**My friends, our hills and fields are being sold to the highest bidders and being transformed beyond recognition.**

**As we have said on many occasions before, land ownership is too important to the Barbadian identity to be left totally to market forces. The time has come for Government to intervene to ensure that every Barbadian gets an opportunity to own a piece of the rock.**

**I believe that this can best be achieved through effective zoning. I believe that the East Coast should be zoned for private residences and *"inland tourism"* controlled by locals; and most central parishes zoned for farming. Many areas should be zoned for sale only to Barbadians.**

**With respect to housing, I believe that every Barbadian needs a roof over their head and that government should facilitate them to achieve this goal.**

**As I said in the budget debate, the Democratic Labour Party is philosophically committed to ensuring that every Barbadian resident has access to comfortable shelter. Housing is crucial to family life: and family life is essential for raising children to become good citizens.**

**Today I reiterate our plan for housing and land:**

- **In the first 100 days of a new DLP administration we shall remove VAT from building materials on houses valued up to \$400,000.**
- **Provide 500 lots of land in five (5) months at \$5 per sq foot for first time homeowners. (squatters)**
- **Provide 2,500 house spots for sale to low and middle income wage earners in the first term of a DLP government.**
- **Commit to building 2,000 housing solutions in the first term of a DLP government. These will include rental units, terrace units and starter homes.**
- **Commit to building and maintaining a pool of rent-to-purchase units for low-income earners, pensioners, and**

**the disabled who may not qualify for mortgages and loans.**

- **Commit to building the concept of Housing Communities, for low-income earners in which all the amenities — commercial and recreational are provided. e.g. day nursery, laundry, mini-mart.**
- **Promote the concept of starter home projects and partner with private sector companies (through tax incentives) in promoting the concept of “build and live”, long a tradition in Barbados.**
- **Explore the concept of reverse mortgages with the financial institutions and give incentives where necessary, to provide for the dignified existence of our elderly in their golden years.**
- **Provide a waiver of taxes on purchase of property by first time homeowners.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, as we did with the \$15,000 tax break in 1986 I am saying today that the foregoing forms a cornerstone of our social and economic development policy for Barbados and will be carried out, without fail, by a Democratic Labour Party administration!**

**(5) Increasing Expenditure on Education Without the Requisite Benefits**

**There is no better example of the lack of focus of this Barbados Labour Party administration than the goal-less state of our education sector. Under this government, our once vaunted education system continues to churn out large numbers of half-educated school leavers, 40% of whom will end up unemployed, and about 10% unemployable. You just have to drive around the other Barbados, which is not owned by land developers to see the products of our education system wasting away on the blocks.**

**A few years ago this government introduced Edutech as the means through which our young people would be equipped with the technological skills to catch up with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It was sold to us as the first stage of training an army of workers for the Informatics industry in Barbados.**

**So far we have spent over \$425 million on Edutech and I am yet to see what benefits this programme has brought to Barbados.**

**There has also been much talk about the new University College of Barbados. We have been looking forward to the establishment of this institution to target the 80% of Barbadian young people who are not endowed with academic skills, but who are richly blessed with other valuable talents.**

**We were excited by the prospects of a tertiary level institution that would incorporate the Community College, and especially its Hospitality Institute, the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, the Teacher's Training College, the School of Nursing as well as an Agricultural College and an Information Technology Unit. After all the hype this project seems to have been aborted.**

**Is it because it promised to provide essential and relevant education and training for ordinary Barbadians?**

**The educational revolution started and developed by previous Democratic Labour Party administrations needs to be completed. This party always intended monitoring developments in education and correcting emerging deficiencies.**

**There was never a plan to leave education to fend for itself! The Democratic Labour Party would never have placed education in the hands of the likes of Reginald Farley or Anthony Wood.**

**There is no doubt whatsoever that for many of our children education has failed to take them to the Promised Land. Only**

**those with linguistic and academic skills have realized their potential at school.**

**Your new DLP Government will go back to the drawing board and revise the Secondary school curriculum to meet the needs of modern Barbadian children. It is anticipated that new subjects like Family Life Education, Life Skills, Information Technology, Art, Music, Drama and Sport will feature more prominently in the curriculum.**

**Provision will also be made for young people to go on to tertiary education to continue to study these subjects at an advanced level.**

**Above all, a problem solving approach and a pursuit of excellence in one's chosen discipline will be infused into our education system.**

**One of the areas that will receive particular attention from a Democratic Labour Party administration is pre-school. One only has to visit existing state-run day nurseries across Barbados to see the level of neglect and lack of focus that exists.**

**I have long advocated a regime in which we carry these nurseries and pre-schools closer to primary schools and**

**work sites. I am determined, for example, that new, state of the art pre-school learning centres will be established in close proximity to existing industrial complexes such as Wildey, Newton, Grazettes, Six Roads and the like. The benefits of this are immense and I shall detail this proposal in the weeks ahead.**

**Once again, what is lacking in Barbados today is vision and will. We are saddled with a Government that has been in there too long and which is not motivated by the concerns and aspirations of the broad mass of people. Their every working hour is spent seeing after themselves and responding to the needs of their financiers.**

**Money, in this regard, is not the problem. A fraction of the \$750 million in cost overruns removed from the pockets of party hacks and advisors will underwrite a national pre-school programme.**

**There will not be the need to ask the taxpayers of this country for one additional cent to do anything that I am setting out in our programme, which will be unveiled gradually over the next few weeks. Simply put – we will spend what is there wisely and ensure that we frame and preside over a caring and honest government.**

## **(6) Deteriorating Standards of Health Care**

**It is an open secret that our health care facilities, especially the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, are in chaos. I am not only speaking about the deterioration of the physical plant, nor the systems failure. These could easily be rectified by a government that is committed to providing decent health services to the average Barbadian. What I am most concerned about is the poor service that is meted out by some caregivers.**

**Today in Barbados, it would appear that the disrespect, if not the contempt for the masses, that has been cultivated at the top of our society is seeping down to every institution in Barbados.**

**We empathize with the National Union of Public Workers and the membership of the Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners. We agree that something needs to be done and done quickly at the premier health institution in the country.**

**The Democratic Labour Party has been raising the warning flag for sometime now, but the Prime Minister is totally indifferent to the cries of the ordinary man and woman. It**

**baffles the mind how and why Jerome Walcott has not yet been fired as Minister of Health!**

**He has been as ineffective in health as Dale Marshall has been as Attorney General. Yet, the Prime Minister has foisted them upon the innocent and undeserving people of Barbados. He has retained them in key ministries, much to the destruction of the two sectors involved.**

**Health care in Barbados has moved nowhere since Branford Taitt walked down the steps of the Ministry of Health. Successive ministers in this administration have huffed and they have puffed but all that has come tumbling down is the standard of care meted out to patients.**

**One of the biggest challenges facing Barbadians is the development of healthy lifestyles. Not only will this require a massive investment in plant and management systems but also in changing the attitude of Health providers to patients. We believe that there is no point in building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century facility with 19<sup>th</sup> Century attitudes. To rectify this situation the new DLP government will introduce a Patients' Charter to defend the human rights of patients.**

**Friends, we do not need any Einstein to right the wrongs in health. What is needed is concern, care, competence and commitment.**

**There are health practitioners in Barbados who can competently administer the health services of Barbados. There are public officers in Barbados who can implement appropriate policies to overcome the challenges in health. What is abysmally lacking in Barbados today is political will and foresight. This failing is the trademark of a tired government.**

**When you have reports of the Board of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital not meeting for three months and neither the Minister nor the Prime Minister is alarmed, you know that most, if not all, is lost.**

**When you have medical practitioners taking a stand in the interest of patient care and saying that the systems you have put in place are dysfunctional and a Government doesn't care to even meet with them, you know that Government has lost its way and ought to be replaced.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, I say today that on the issue of health alone there is need for a change of administration in Barbados.**

**It is amazing how some persons would seek to prop up an administration that does not care two hoots about whether they live or die.**

**I ask the questions today: how many innocent and unsuspecting Barbadians must suffer unnecessarily before the voters of this country take a stand? How many needless amputations and mis-diagnoses are required before we raise our voices in disgust? How many more must die before we recognize that Jerome Walcott does not know what he is doing and ought to be replaced?**

**Today I ask the Prime Minister of this country to tell us what else he is waiting for before firing Jerome Walcott? Before firing Dale Marshall? Before firing Anthony Wood? Before firing Reginald Farley? Before firing Barney Lynch? Before doing the country the biggest favor of all and firing himself as Prime Minister and Minister of Finance? How much longer must we wait??**

**(7) Worsening Traffic Congestion despite Increasing Expenditure on Roads**

**The last development I want to bring to your attention is the worsening traffic congestion on our roads. Even though it is good to have new roads, this will not solve the problem.**

**Building expensive traffic fly-overs may benefit some people, but this project, which also is likely to experience huge cost over-runs, will not solve the problem either.**

**Barbadians have been complaining for years that traffic jams are becoming unbearable. Parents taking their children to school have been lamenting the hours spent in traffic jams and the time needed to recover from the stress when they finally get to work.**

**I believe that a simple solution to the problem is to decentralize the provision of services. A concomitant of this is the decentralization of government to constituencies.**

**I can see a constellation of towns across the country that are the seats of Constituency Councils, each of which would be chaired by the Parliamentary Representative.**

**Each Constituency Council would have at its disposal a substantial budget that would enable it to deal with local problems at the level at which they emerge. Provision would be made for both the Parliamentary Representative and the**

**Local Councillors to show their accountability to the people of Barbados on a regular basis.**

**This arrangement would take the pressure off Bridgetown and ensure a more even development across the country.**

**My friends, additional to all that I have said above is the daily expression of indifference, arrogance and contempt for the sensibilities and sensitivities of Barbadians. Ministers of Government have become not only callous but also offensive in their pronouncements and handling of situations.**

**When, for example, an Attorney General suggest that he owes no one an explanation for failing to specify the currency in which a project is to be billed; when a Minister of Energy is going to commit to hundreds of millions of dollars in oil exploration ventures with Trinidad when to date a fisheries agreement cannot be signed; and worst of all when a Minister of Tourism tells you that Cricket World Cup was Barbados' finest hour, when everyone else is holding their heads and hands in shame and disdain, you know that that government has lost its way.**

**When a Prime Minister and Minister of Finance could sit down with a handful of other Caribbean leaders and effectively sell out the regional airline to Texas interests,**

**resulting in total calamity in regional aviation, you know that that Prime Minister has lost his way.**

**Can you imagine that if for whatever reason you needed to travel outside of Barbados today to any Caribbean island, you cannot secure a confirmed booking on LIAT for at least two weeks?**

**Do you know furthermore that notwithstanding the downsizing of Air Jamaica and the scaling back of Bee Wee to a shadow of its former self that American Airlines is set to cut the number of seats from the U.S. Mainland to Barbados?**

**These things are never talked about by Ministers of this Government because they do not believe that the public has a right to know.**

**These are not money-making ventures so no one in the policy making arm of this government is interested in reducing the price of air travel and access to aircraft seats.**

**Can you imagine that to fly from here to Trinidad, which is 40 minutes away, it is now costing in excess of \$750 on a good day and up to \$1,000 if you book late?**

**Do you know that American Airlines is putting on small planes from next month, thus reducing the number of seats and indirectly jacking up prices for those who absolutely must travel? Do you understand what that means for you as customers?**

**Do you realize that you are being forced to shop here in Barbados and pay whatever the friends of the Barbados Labour Party determine that you must pay for products and services?**

**Do you understand that life in Barbados cannot and will not get better under Owen Arthur as Prime Minister?**

**Friends, I believe that these developments, taken together, are part of a conspiracy to deny citizens of Barbados their human and constitutional rights. We have seen the systematic erosion of the rights of Barbadians and in their place has been erected an edifice of patronage within which our political leaders and their lieutenants do favours for citizens of Barbados. The price of these favours is calculated in terms of both money and votes.**

**I believe that this policy of making people increasingly dependent on government is bad for democracy and bad for Barbados. This rot must stop because it erodes our pride**

**and industry and goes against the grain of the self-reliant Barbadian.**

**Indeed I see resilience and self-reliance as the cornerstones of our vision for Barbados. For us the role of government is to create the conditions for the empowerment of our people and to inspire them to contribute to the emergence of an authentic Caribbean civilization.**

**As I have said on many occasions, I have a vision of Barbados as an independent, egalitarian, moral society in which every citizen has the opportunity to realize his/her potential and to live productive, secure, happy and fulfilling lives.**

**I believe that we can make Barbados a country that is hungry for higher forms of success through the forging of economic, social and political policies that drive innovation, facilitate mass participation and create and distribute its wealth in the most equitable ways possible.**

**I see a 21st Century Barbados that leads this region in every aspect of national endeavour. That revolutionizes the delivery of primary health care by not only increasing the number of trained medical personnel per 1000 head of**

**population, but is predicated on respectfully offering the latest treatment options to our population.**

**I believe that we can create a Barbados in which we have a better co-ordinated system of delivering public social goods. Not one with more agencies but one in which the current set are made accountable to the public they serve. I see a transformed and empowered social sector in Barbados that seeks efficiency in expending public resources but never loses sight of the reason for their existence – to attend to the needs for their clients.**

**I have a vision of Barbados in which the lands of this country are reserved for Barbadians first and foremost. I still see a place for foreign investment; and surely a new DLP administration will aggressively seek to attract investment to Barbados, but it will not be at the expense of the birthright of our people. Under a DLP administration Barbados will not be for sale to the highest bidder.**

**I want to help give birth to a Barbados that lives up to its responsibility to provide affordable housing for the poor and unique housing solutions for its middle class citizens. A new DLP administration will introduce radical new initiatives to make this a reality.**

**I believe that we need a Barbados that can truly secure its borders with an appropriate national security and border management policy highlighted by realistic immigration policy that maintains our regional commitments but protects the integrity of our social systems.**

**I want to see Barbados become a regional leader in breaking new ground in the use and development of information technologies. That pushes new vistas of industrial enterprise where creative ideas can be brought to life by a government that is willing to invest heavily in research and development of innovative pursuits and a private sector eager to invest in making those ideas a reality.**

**I dream of a modern Barbados economy that not only values the contribution of all segments of the society but actually works to ensure that avenues are created for such contributions to be made.**

**I know that under a new DLP administration the unfinished agenda for economic enfranchisement in this country will be a national priority. We cannot continue to believe that this country will make it to the next level when only 10% of our people are seriously engaged in the mainstream of commercial enterprise.**

**I want to see a Barbados economy that is characterized by prudent financial management. Where deficits, if they have to be created, are done to promote social and economic engineering to advance the development of the country and not because of government wastage, squander mania, and poor utilization of government resources.**

**I envision a Barbados economy that is built on a low tax regime and that gives equal access to households and businesses alike for investment in new opportunities created by government and the private sector for the development of this society.**

**I crave for a Barbados in which workers are treated as equal partners in the developmental process. Where they are guaranteed decent and sustainable work and where minimum standards for wages and other conditions of service are the law of the land.**

**I envision a Barbados that treats to the social and economic concerns of its young men, its elderly and women folk in particular. I see a Barbados where key societal institutions in public, private and civil society are empowered to protect traditional family values in this country. A country that does**

**not punish families with high cost of living and high land prices but gives every family in Barbados the chance to make it in this highly competitive global community.**

**I see a Barbados in which the word democracy is given a life beyond the partisan electoral structures. Where people can take a larger responsibility for the management of their own communities and can be empowered with requisite resources from central government to produce real solutions to pressing problems.**

**I believe in the decentralizing of governmental structure that allows for real participatory democracy in Barbados, where public policy is not imposed from on top but results from full involvement of a wider society.**

**I envision not just a new Barbados but a better Barbados. We have been fortunate as a people, but we can do better and I call on the people of Barbados not to accept a status quo of underachievement and lowered expectations.**

**Rather I call on all Barbados to demand the highest standards of performance from their government, their opposition, their private sector, their churches, schools, social clubs and above all from themselves.**

**I call on Barbadian to demand change and make change in this country.**

**Delegates, colleagues, friends, Barbadians..... When I reflect on this vision and the state of affairs in Barbados I cannot help but think of that old joke I heard about Haiti under Francois Duvalier; the self proclaimed President for Life.**

**One day he called his Advisors and Ministers and asked them what was the best solution to the problem of popular unrest in the country? One advisor told him to get a million US dollars, tell the nation that he would be dropping it from a plane at a particular time and whoever found it could keep it. This would make everybody excited, but one person very happy.**

**Succeeding advisors improved on this by suggesting that he split the \$1 million and wrap it into 10 parcels, then 100, then 1000 and finally one million parcels that would make one million people happy.**

**One smart advisor then piped up and told him to go up in the plane, jump out without a parachute and make everybody happy!**

**Certainly we do not want to see our aspiring fourth term leader doing anything silly like that. Instead what we want Owen Arthur to do is to call the elections and let the people decide!**

**This should make all those who feel that working class Barbadians have suffered enough very happy. It would also give us the opportunity to put Barbados back on track in moving towards a more prosperous and equitable society.**

**I assure you today, Brothers and Sisters, that the Democratic Labour Party is ready for these elections. Not in my more than 30-year association, has this party been more prepared well in advance for a general election.**

**I am not saying too much here today because I do not want the Barbados Labour Party to get wind of what is going on.**

**What I would say to you, my dear beloved people, is that if he calls it at midnight tonight, by 6 a.m. our readiness will be manifested in all 30 constituencies across Barbados. We shall execute a four-week campaign the likes of which has never been seen in Barbados before. We shall match them in every department of this campaign. Too much is at stake for us to lag behind.**

**My plea to you today, my dear people, is that you redouble your efforts. Serve notice on your wives and husbands, parents and children that the next few months belong to Barbados in general and the Democratic Labour Party in particular.**

**I want you to go up to your candidate today and recommit yourself to his or her campaign. Tell him or her that you are reporting for duty.**

**That you see and appreciate the big picture.**

**I am saying to Owen Arthur and the Barbados Labour Party today that Barbadians have had enough. The vast majority can take no more! I am saying to Owen Arthur, again, to stop the dilly-dallying and call the elections and let us together put Barbados back on track!!**