

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE WINSTON DOOKERAN
MP FOR ST AUGUSTINE
POLITICAL LEADER, CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE
AT A PUBLIC MEETING IN CANAAN, SOUTH TRINIDAD
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Thank you very much Roy.

It was not very long ago, at this very school, in this very room, that the birth of a new movement was signaled that sooner rather than later, expressed itself on 10 September 2006.

It was here that you gave us a mandate to take charge of Trinidad and Tobago.

Less than four months later, we have been able to not only very systematically put in place what is the new movement of this century in Trinidad and Tobago, but also the beginning of a new era in the politics of our country.

I am sure that as you have heard those who spoke tonight, you will see that what is most striking about this platform of the Congress of the People is that everyone who speaks on this platform is speaking from the heart with honesty and love for Trinidad and Tobago.

Today we are attracting hundreds and hundreds of people throughout our country because for the first time the politics of Trinidad and Tobago will be based on the politics of sincerity and hope. That is what we are about.

In order to take on that challenge, we have to face up to those who have benefited from the politics of yesterday. Those who have benefited from yesterday's politics are today our political opponents.

The politics of yesterday is the politics that has us today where we are and the politics of the future is where we belong in the Congress of the People.

It is the politics of yesterday that allowed criminal elements to take part in the politics of our country with deals and so on. It is the source of the problems of which Captain Griffith spoke when he gave you some idea of the solutions.

It is the politics of yesterday that allowed the events of 1990 to remain untold and create a sense of permissiveness in this country that has led today to the complete breakdown of values. Deputy Leader Rawatee spoke of this in her very telling exposé here today on the education system.

It is the politics of yesterday that has brought us to the brink of a near collapse in our energy and economy of which Deputy Leader, Carolyn spoke.

It is the politics of yesterday where there was no hope that led Carol Cuffy Dowlat to speak of the politics of the new hope.

It is the politics of yesterday that would not allow Ashaki to be on a platform, a young woman. It is the politics of today that is bringing her forward.

I say that because I want you to understand that we are at the beginning of a new era in the political life of our country. In the same way that in 1956 this country began the process towards independence, we have now had 45 years of that...

And I want to tell you under the banner of the party that you have created and given birth to, on the 50th anniversary of the independence of Trinidad and Tobago, we shall be celebrating a new politics in our country.

That is why today is important as we return to Canaan to start the next leg, the leg that will take us into the solutions to our country's problems. We know that the mandate is in our hands. We know that the people of this country are relieved that there is a possibility that is emerging.

And we know that we shall succeed if only because the political logic of a society like ours will tell you that no one else can succeed to rescue Trinidad and Tobago from where it is, other than the Congress of the People.

No society remains hopeless forever.

No society remains complaining forever.

No society remains blaming everyone else forever.

No society remains apathetic forever.

No society remains in a state of paralysis in Governance forever.

Any society faced with those conditions will, as the Vedas say, arise and awake and create a new order for Trinidad and Tobago and that is what we are about.

That is why it is important for all of us to understand what is taking place. If we do not capture this historic moment in which we are, we may think that this is politics as usual.

It is no wonder that our opponents of today are coming from the old politics of yesterday. It is the politics that may have served us well in the past, but it must now go to sleep in our country!

That is why we can boast of having new energy, new faces, new ideas and this is only the beginning. Throughout this country, on all our platforms, we can mount similar platforms like this anywhere in our country, at any time! Different faces, different energy and new people!

Today, no political party on the political scene can do that anymore. Why? Because we have come here to provide you with hope and a better future.

Some people have been talking about how we will deal with the crime situation, law and order. I heard Gary say here tonight that the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the PNM challenged this country to suggest any other alternative than the one they are employing in law and order.

God help us if that is all they can offer!

God help us that if after \$10 billion of expenditure, and a multitude of promises and plans, we are faced and gripped in this state of gridlock.

I say the reason is that we have allowed politics and criminality to mix. That is the reason. And the Government has admitted it. They said that some of their programmes are in fact fuelling the criminal sector. They claimed this inadvertently, but nonetheless, it is happening.

I want to tell you that the Government you will put in place whenever it is will stand by one principle and one principle strongly on the issue of crime – that we shall not allow criminality to be part of the political process of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have already begun designing the strategies to do that. Captain Griffith gave you an idea and we have an entire crime team looking at crime and have come up with the solutions.

Now I want to raise one or two of the current issues that we are facing today.

I need not remind you of what has happened to the value of life in our country. Faith Williams suffered the fate of negligence. She suffered the fate of incompetence by a public authority and a public institution. She had to pay the price and it is now well known.

If the MP for Chaguanas, Manohar Ramsaran, did not unveil that information in Parliament last week, this country would have remained in the dark about the causes of her death. And the causes lie squarely on the shoulders of the Minister of Health!

He admitted that he must take blame. I said today in a press conference that if he is genuine in that admission of blame, then he should offer his resignation to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We cannot allow our Ministers not to be accountable and face the consequence of their failure. That is why we are in this situation. The Government blames everyone and finds excuses for everything they don't do and our society sits and back and says nothing?

Well I am telling you that for 2007, on this platform and on many other platforms of our party, we shall no longer remain silent. We are here now to make our voices heard as we begin the process of taking back our country and reclaiming this land.

I know that we are not in Government, and therefore we cannot do the things we want to do, but I want you to join with me and the rest of the people in our country to call on the Government to call an early election so that we can make that determination and move on with solutions.

I will tell you later of our readiness to do so, but before I do that, I want to raise two other issues.

Recently in Parliament, we had to make a decision regarding the extension of the Bail Act. For us, it was an important decision because we looked at the principle that we wanted to ensure that the criminal elements do not roam our streets at will. If the Bail Act kept them in prison until the cases were heard, we thought that was one step that was right.

Had we not supported the Bail Act, 19 people would have been immediately released and they would have already been on the streets of this country.

But we insisted to the Government that they must not only deal with the Bail Act, but also with the other legislation they promised the country:

- (i) The Justice Protection Act and the protection of witnesses
- (ii) The DNA Act
- (iii) The Police Reform Acts

How many of you remember not long ago when there was an impasse with the Government and Opposition regarding this legislation? In my very first act when I became the Leader of the United National Congress, I stood up in Parliament and called for deep dialogue between Government and Opposition to solve the problem of crime. Crime was above party matters, it dealt with the lives of people!

What do we have today? Last Friday, we received in Parliament the Equal Opportunities Bill. Not only have we been able to maintain the Bail Act and have a hard position on criminals, but also we now have the legislation coming to us in a fury.

They have now put on the order paper, the Equal Opportunity legislation.

Some people are claiming credit, but I don't care who wants the credit. The fact is that you the people now have in your hands, not only the criminal legislation, but the legislation for equal opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago.

To that end, I wrote to the Prime Minister and indicated to him the stipulations that we imposed in this 90—day plan. What we have realized is that we can no longer trust the Government to do the things they say they would.

Our role now in Parliament is not only to promote your interests and represent you, but to force the Government into action until such time that we can take it ourselves.

In my letter to the Prime Minister, I told him that I am pleased that he has begun to discharge his obligations under the Congress of the People stipulations for supporting the Bail Act extension. I suggested to him that bringing the Equal Opportunities legislation is appropriate and right and now we are concerned about the implementation of the provisions of this legislation.

We believe in the equality of treatment of all our people. We believe in the equal access to State resources by every region in our country.

We believe in equal access for the citizens of our country to find and receive the benefits of the State.

And we are calling for that.

We are calling on the Government to account to Parliament on the impact of the special legislative measures on the incidence of kidnapping, murder and other serious crimes.

We indicated that as Members of Parliament, public safety must never be put in jeopardy. Regrettably, we cannot claim that that is so today.

So we had a choice. Elections are about choices. The choice now is whether or not we can continue to have a Government in place that is not providing solutions to the problems, but is in fact is itself the problem.

The choice is whether or not you the people of our country will rise to ensure that you put in place people who have the strength, commitment and solutions to solve the problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

That's the choice. We can't talk to the Government about doing things that we can't do in Parliament. We must have a political solution to the issue of law and order in Trinidad and Tobago in the new era ahead of us.

That is why it is important. I always say that politics is not football game, as some would like us to believe.

Politics is a serious matter. It is about your life. It is about our very being and our very future.

I want to raise another issue that I believe in the interest of truth, should be raised. That is the issue of the development of the Agriculture sector and the sugar industry.

At some time, we will talk more about it, but tonight I want to put the record straight.

At one time, I was responsible for determining public policy with respect to the future of the sugar industry. That was in the 1980s for those who would remember.

At that time, I brought together all the experts and stakeholders in the country and developed what I felt would be the salvation for the sugar industry.

In that programme of action, there were many proposals for diversification of the industry - diversification of the agriculture base of the country; diversification of the agro-processing sector or the establishment of one and presented to the then Government and got approval to proceed.

I had lost the report, but a friend of mine from Canada sent me the report. It's called 'The Directional Plan for Caroni (1975) Limited' and it is the blueprint not to close down Caroni, but to open it up.

It was meant to open up the company to new possibilities for the revitalization of the agriculture sector, for a sustainable agro-processing sector.

The details are all here and they were done by all those who had an interest as stakeholders or as experts.

And then my friends, we had to proceed and I went to the World Bank. In those days, I was responsible for mobilizing the financial resources of the country for development. It was not like today, we had to borrow and we had to go to the World Bank and the IMF.

I was able to negotiate in principle a loan of US\$100 million, to be applied to the diversification of Caroni Limited and the agriculture sector of our country.

It was meant to be used for all the purposes required for diversification, for drainage and flood control, for the purposes of access roads, for the purposes of financing plans so that people would have financing capabilities, for the purposes of opening up the agriculture sector.

It was a dynamic plan, and the regrettably, the Government in office at that time fell apart. You will remember that in the politics of that period, the NAR fell apart and some left, or were thrown out (whatever the reasons are, we can debate that).

But I went to the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Trade Union and its leadership at that time when I saw they were now going to oppose the plan.

I said to them that we are in politics for a short period of time, but the people of Caroni would be here for all time. And therefore, please do not oppose what I am doing because it will go beyond my time. It will involve the establishment of an Institute for Technical Training as well.

But it was to no avail, because those who were in the leadership of the sugar union took a very short sighted view of the challenge and because of the political split in the party, they decided that they would stop the plan.

At first, I thought they were simply mouthing their intentions. Lo and behold, the sugar union and the leadership decided to stop the Directional Plan, it was referred to in the press as the Dookeran plan!

They decided to stop it and they took me as Minister of Planning and Mobilisation to court to stop the plan.

In front of me here is the judgment. It's all there.

So when we talk about who is interested in the future of the sugar industry, I want to put the record straight. I will not be involved in the rhetoric, but I am involved in the substance for solving problems.

This was in 1990. The evidence is here, we got it from the Registrar of the Supreme Court a few days ago.

It said they were taking me and the Minister of Finance then, Selby Wilson, to court to stop the plan.

The end result of it was that they were successful although the court subsequently ruled much later that they had no such authority.

But the fact is that by the end of 1990, that ambitious plan which would have protected the future of the children of the sugar industry was stopped by the very union and its leadership that claims the interest of the sugar workers.

AND I SAY THAT HERE WITHOUT FEAR OF CONTRADICTION AT ANY TIME. THOSE ARE THE FACTS!

My friends, it is important for us to acknowledge the fact because we now have a new challenge. We have now to create a new approach to the agriculture sector.

The Government of the day has taken the position to let agriculture die a natural death. The Minister of Agriculture got up and boasted about how fast the sector is dying in Parliament.

My friends, I could not believe this because there is no faith in Government about the future of the agriculture sector.

Many of the elements of the Directional Plan may not be relevant today as they were in the 1980s, time passed. But I want to tell you that we start with the premise that the sector can be made into a profitable sector to support the people.

One of our deputy leaders, Wendy Lee Yuen, is busy at work with the stakeholders and the farmers in Biche and elsewhere. She is working with a very dynamic team of professionals and policy makers to design the very plan for the revival of the agriculture sector in Trinidad and Tobago which you shall give us the authority to implement when you use your finger in the next election.

In the same way, we have solutions in the area of security, we have solutions in the area of agriculture and indeed, in every other area.

Many of our people have now been engaged in working to find those solutions. And I told you once, the Government in power has the money, they have the power, but they do not have the will or the knowledge to run this country anymore.

And when we begin to discuss the important issues of today in detail during the course of 2007, you will understand that they have lost their way in running this country.

That is why the Prime Minister can get up today in a symposium and in identifying the successes of his Government, talk about high growth rates and so on and use that as evidence of success.

You see, the Prime Minister's concept of success is big numbers and tall buildings.

His notion of development is to have the symbols of development, not the substance of development.

That is why today, he can talk about large numbers, but he can't explain the 10% inflation rate that is affecting you. Twenty eight percent of your income has been lost in the last three years.

Their entire notion of development is wrong.

I would just add a few points on that issue, because I noticed they have identified industrialization policy to be the main theme of a convention that is taking place shortly. And I ask myself, what is happening, what is the politics in this?

Then I realized – the Prime Minister intends to wave the banner of all those energy plans he has been talking about, including the aluminium smelter, and say that is development!

But what is development? Development is the capability of the citizens of our country to be able to live their lives being proud, safe and productive. But their notion of development is based on two premises.

It is based on the belief that there will be a continued supply of gas and oil from now until forever.

It is also based on the prices of these commodities will remain high forever.

So if you take away those two premises upon which they have built their industrialization policy, the entire policy will collapse!

But he is going to the country to call all the names of all the projects that are dependent on high prices and long term supplies and he is calling that industrialization.

They will start that debate and I have done before, I do it here again. We in the Congress of the People, and I as the Political Leader, we are prepared to engage the Government on television any time, on their policy for development of Trinidad and Tobago.

The last time the PNM was in office for a prolonged period of time, they left the Treasury empty. They left the country without any growth capability.

It was Selby Wilson as the Minister of Finance and myself as Minister of Planning and Mobilisation, who had to roll up ourselves and get the work done to rescue this country from total collapse in the 1980s.

My friends, the Government only knows how to spend, they do not know how to create wealth. They do not know how to distribute wealth in a manner that could eradicate poverty.

Cycles of underprivileged children are things we have to face up to. This generation and the next generation...there are the same cycles of underprivileged children.

I gave them a simple idea when they were looking at the Heritage Fund. If we are putting aside some of our present resources in the Fund, I said the Fund should not belong to the Government because they can use such Funds to protect themselves in Government.

If we want to create a serious solution to poverty in our country, let us link the Heritage Fund to the underprivileged children in this country and give them an inheritance for the future.

Those are the kinds of policy initiatives in the Congress. But they want to use public funds to buy votes.

But I want to warn them that the people of this country are no longer going to accept that. They never have. While they are concerned about receiving the goodies of today, they are more concerned about ensuring the security of the future.

On economic management, we will talk about those things and others. We have a powerful team.

What I want to tell you today is that not only are we prepared to run the Government, but also, we know it is inevitable that we will have to do so!

We must win the support of all the people of our country!

Some people are coming forward and saying 'let us come back and unite,' but when we were united, they said, 'let us disunite.'

My friends, one of the essential parts of political life in this country, and relationships between political leaders is that it must be based on acceptance and mutual trust.

If that is not part of the arrangement, then it will not be credible and it will not be able to bring the confidence of the people. Trust is important! And the people of this country will only support something where there is trust and credibility.

So to those who are singing that song, they have already missed the boat. We are moving on!

If I have a choice between the unity of Opposition forces and the unity of the country itself, I shall opt to unite the country because is the best safeguard to forming the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

And that is another cardinal principle of our position. We are not here to divide the country and reap the rewards of such division, political or otherwise. We are here to unite the country and to come forward to the people as a whole with the development that is theirs and belongs to them.

I want to add that in this party, the Congress of the People, is a party that believes in the unity of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will bring people together.

We operate with open minds. We operate with open doors. We operate with a new style of open politics in Trinidad and Tobago.

That is why I end by saying this is a historical time, a period which is important for all the country.

If we remain silent and do not exercise the right and power to alter the political future of this country, our nation and our people will suffer.

The choice therefore is a very clear one. It is a choice between the old politics and the new energy in politics today.

I want to assure you here today that we shall continue. We shall continue this road in 2007. This is a year for all of us.

The year 2007 is when we will have to mobilize throughout this country and we are doing it, but it's up to you.

Are you ready to change the Government of this country? Tell me, loud and clear. (*massive response*).

The time is now or forever let us hold our piece.

This is not ordinary politics, this is a country in decay and decadence through bad governance and no possibility of solving our day to day problems. My friends, this is a time for us as citizens of our country, whether we are in Tobago or in the east-west corridor, whether we live in Caroni or in San Fernando...this is a small nation of 1.3 million people. It is not rocket science to run this country.

And we can bring together what has to be brought together to solve the problems on your behalf.

Many of you here today, I know, can play an important role. So I want to use this opportunity as we begin our campaign for 2007 to say that this will turn out to be an historic place in the new movement of Trinidad and Tobago.

This will turn out to be an historic moment as we begin the campaign in search of that new political solution.

I have always said that the reason for coming into politics was because politics has gone wrong in Trinidad and Tobago. It is our duty to make it right!

So don't be sidetracked about the little you hear from different platforms. I don't even bother with them, because I know that those voices are just voices in the wilderness.

At this stage, we have a lot of work to do. We cannot assume that the people will work together for political change, we have to work to make it happen.

That is why I would pay tribute tonight to a man who has been doing that and continues to do that and is already organizing a nationwide programme to make it happen, Sadiq Baksh.

Selfless, patriotic and committed to the future of Trinidad and Tobago, there could hardly be anyone like Sadiq Baksh. He has told me that based on the organisation we have now put on the ground, we in the Congress of the People have quietly put together a structure, a policy, a constitution and an operation.

While others were talking and trying to blame and while the others were just complaining, we were building and working and we continue.

So on 18 March 2007, we shall be calling on the people of this country to make a stand and to come together to stand up. Not to stand up for Tobago or Trinidad, not to stand up for the Hindus or the Muslims or the Christians, not to stand up for the people in Port of Spain or San Fernando and Siparia.

We are calling on the people on 18 March to stand against the politics that have imprisoned us and kept us where we are and has no where to go...into a politics of a new freedom for our people and to stand up for Trinidad and Tobago!

My friends, I ask you to join with us on that day and before. Join with us in your numbers and encourage others to join, because this is a moment we cannot allow to escape. It is a moment that will change the course of our political history.

It is similar to the moment in 1990 when I stood up in Parliament with my colleagues with the onslaught on our democracy. I felt the society could have gone in any direction.

Similarly today, this society could go in any direction if you the people, if we the citizens of our country, do not rise and say that we want a new course, we want a new direction, we want a new dawn, we want a new opportunity, we want a new future. Are you ready my friends for that?

LET US MOVE FORWARD AND I WANT YOU TO COME OUT IN YOUR THOUSANDS TO MAKE THAT STATEMENT FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND MAKE A REALITY THAT NEW FUTURE WE ARE ALL SEARCHING FOR

