



CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE

GASTON STREET LANGE PARK CHAGUANAS

**ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE WINSTON DOOKERAN
MP FOR ST AUGUSTINE
POLITICAL LEADER, CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE
AT A REGIONAL MEETING IN BALMAIN, COUVA
20 MARCH 2007**

Thank you very much Roy for that wonderful introduction.

My friends of Balmain, I must first of all pay tribute to Mr Soogrim Lutchmedial, for not only helping us introduce a new concept in politics, but also for reminding us that the real strength of our society lies in the work and effort of our community leaders like him.

I want to tell him here tonight, that for too long in our country, we have been using our national awards not to acknowledge those who work and labour to build our communities and villages, but to honour many whose names appear on the newspapers.

I assure him that when we are given the opportunity to change the social order, as dear Sharon (Gopaul McNicol) pointed out, one of the first things that we must do is to redefine what is good leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

We shall not be tempted to look for that through the newspapers, because you might have heard what the newspapers are doing right now. We shall look to the communities themselves and we shall look at those who work to build Trinidad and Tobago.

Our job is not to blame others for what they have not done or to complain to anyone for what we should do. We have only one job and that is to build our nation.

I also welcome sincerely the contribution made by Sharon Gopaul McNicol here tonight. And as the chairman said, I mentioned to her after, that she has now introduced a new dimension to the politics of our country – The Politics of Logic – that is to say we must think logically about what we are doing and the purpose of politics.

So gone are the days when we shall accept the politics of corruption as part of our culture. Gone are the days when we must accept the politics of racial division as part of our culture. Gone are the days when we must accept the politics of betrayal by public officials as part of the culture. Gone are those days forever, now that the Congress of the People is here to usher in the politics of logic, the politics of values and the politics of solutions.

I hope that one day we shall be able to refer to this meeting as the beginning of the new School of Politics. It would have taken place here at the home of Soogrim Lutchmedial and I will remember that if we get the chance and we come here one day to open a new facility, we shall be able to refer to this meeting as the Lutchmedial School of Politics.

For this is what our people need now. This is what our society needs – to be able to understand what our politics is all about.

We know that politics is about opportunities, it is about creating a different future, it is about providing for the senior citizens and it is about providing for our children.

We have been talking about our plans for all these things. On this platform, we have been talking about providing support to our senior citizens. We have been talking about how we can create a situation in which we will prevent our senior citizens from having to go through harassment to receive some paltry pension.

We have said we will create a universal pension which you shall be entitled to as a matter of right.

But then someone asked me, well what about all those people who have to process this, what will happen to their jobs?

Simple, I will take all the public servants who have to spend all these hours in trying to fight you to get your pension – sometimes they say you can't get it because you have a bicycle – I will take them and put them in the Agricultural Development Bank to make agriculture a profitable business in Trinidad and Tobago.

And then some people asked me 'well what about the rich people, will you give them pensions too? Will you use the State funds for them?'

I said – good question! My answer to that is I will set up a fund and ask all the rich people to put their pensions in that fund and redistribute it to underprivileged children of our country.

So what shall I be doing with this little proposal? I will be providing protection and security to the senior citizens. We will be taking those public servants who make little contribution by pushing paper and make them work in making agriculture successful.

As for the children of the society, we will ask all the rich people to stand up and be counted and start helping the poor of the country. Because we cannot have a society in which the rich is getting richer and the poor getting poorer. We've got to stop that and the only way to stop that is to have the power to make the changes.

And that is only one proposal. From time to time, you will hear of the many more proposals.

I feel so confident because every time I come to a meeting of the Congress of the People, there is always a new group of people!

I have not seen this happen in any political organisations in the country for a long time.

When we went to Diego Martin, we had young men and women standing up and holding their own among 2000 odd people and inspiring them! Young people! Never had we seen such an array of individuals with so many ideas and so much commitment and loyalty to our country.

Then we went to Trincity and all we introduced was less than half of the women in the party. They stood up on Sunday at our rally and held their own as they spoke about holding our nation together with the ideas they put forward.

So there is no shortage of ideas. There is no shortage of direction. There is no shortage of commitment!

What you have in this country is a shortage of people in politics with the purpose of serving the people of the country. They serve themselves and want to stay in office forever and it is time we put a stop to that!

We want to say from today onwards that that day is over! Politics is about serving the people of our country and that shall be our first priority.

My friends, I just want to make two other points to you...

For the last week or two, we have been seeing in our country, a spectacle in our Judicial and Legal system. Even today, we had another incident. The entire Judicial and Legal system has been under great stress.

That stress is the result of those who are in high office, those who were there to protect the rule of law were failing in their duty. The first responsibility of a Prime Minister is to honour the rule of law.

You know, in 1990, when we had the violent attack on Parliament, my good friend Joe Toney was there and is known for what he said, there were a lot of people who came to me with different views.

I was then the Acting Prime Minister and they told me to do 'this and that', the nation was in chaos, take action!

People told me to kill this one and kill that one and all kinds of things. People were getting hysterical! They were panicking!

Some of our leaders went home and said 'wake me up when it's over'.

The other leader said 'that is a family problem'.

Another leader ran to Grenada!

But a lot of people were afraid and I had to adopt a principle. How would we manage this chaotic situation in our country with so much violence in Parliament and looting in the streets? The country had descended into anarchy!

That was only in 1990. I remember that had to hold to one principle alone. When I sat in the Cabinet in those days, I always said: "Regardless of what the consequences were, a Prime Minister and a Cabinet must uphold the rule of law in a country."

And as difficult as that was, I said if you did not do that, you would open the entire country to lasting anarchy, chaos and total confusion

and decay. Because if the Prime Minister and Cabinet do not uphold the law, what will the rest of the country do?

That is what guided us during that time. I know a lot of my friends still think we were wrong, but for the sake of democracy in this country I know in spite of the price we had to pay that it was the right price to pay to defend our democracy.

So today when a Prime Minister is presiding over a spectacle where so many of the main actors are now running for cover...the Attorney General, the Chief Magistrate...it all started with the Prime Minister attempting to introduce what he said were legitimate charges against the Chief Justice.

For two years, this has been going on. What happened in the end was that all the charges collapsed in the courts when the very people who were used to make such charges refused to be man enough to stand in front of the people and say what the charges were.

Then you have today another decision. The freeing of the conviction of the former Prime Minister and the fact that he will now face a retrial is another indication in which the centre is no longer holding.

It is a triumph for the beleaguered justice system that this decision was taken today.

I want to go further. I believe that the time has come for them to reinstate the Chief Justice as a matter of urgency and in the name of the rule of law, since the Chief Justice is under no charges at this point in time.

What kind of country are you living in, when there are no charges...I'm not talking about convictions here...there are no charges against you but you are not allowed to perform your constitutional duty. Isn't that breaking the law?

So my friends, we used to say no one is above the law and everyone is entitled to the protection of the law. We have reached a stage now where the country will have to rise up.

At the top, there is now an absence of the rule of law and the absence of confidence. In a true democracy, the Prime Minister, the Attorney General and the Chief Magistrate, out of honour, should vacate their position.

For there is no doubt today that the country has lost all confidence in the Judicial system.

But they will not do that, so what I am saying is that if they do not wish to act honourably and vacate their offices, then you and I will have to do it for them.

The Appeal Court acknowledged bias. The Attorney General is the legal advisor to the Cabinet. The Prime Minister is the protector of the law.

Our society today is now without confidence in the top leadership of our country. That is why we are here and that is why the Congress of the People is now engaged in a movement among the people. This movement is to make people realize that this country must be rescued quickly.

The best way to do that is to unify the entire country to get back into Government.

We are now going throughout the country – In Trinidad and in Tobago – saying clearly, 'let us not unify ourselves to remain in Opposition, but unify the country to get into Government'.

All it takes in 1.3 million people is to get a Government with a generosity of vision to treat everyone equally in our nation.

We lost a very distinguished scholar and academic yesterday in Lloyd Best. He was someone I knew very well for the last 30 years.

When I myself joined the University of the West Indies, he was my friend and colleague and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a man whose voice remained a voice of sanity in the midst of political turbulence in our land.

One of his greatest contributions he made to Trinidad and Tobago in that he knew that to build a building you must have the foundation correct.

Every time he spoke, he spoke about getting the foundations of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean societies correct.

The reason he never rose to high political office is because sometimes people don't worry about the foundations, they only worry about the fruits of the labour. He never allowed himself to be tempted with the fruits, he was committed to the labour.

If you remember, he spoke so often about how we could change the political structure of our country to make sure that everyone becomes part of the nation.

Tonight I pay tribute to him – to a man who understood that true and genuine development comes out of good foundations. The easy road is not always the best road. The road that might tempt you might be the road to hell.

But if your foundations are solid, you can walk the streets with pride and the knowledge that nothing can break you.

Your job now is not only to listen, but to become active partners now. Here in Balmain, you have a special responsibility. Whatever the performance of your past and present Members of Parliament is really of no significance today.

What is of significance is the performance of your next Member of Parliament you will choose at the next election.

And as we said before, our job is not merely to win the next election, it is to win the next generation.

But those who have office and power are not just going to give it up. They are going to put all the obstacles in our way. They are going to use State money. They are going to provide attacks.

I want to ask you here today to stand up and pledge that we will defend our dear sister, Sharon Gopaul McNicol, for her bravery and courage in the stand she has taken in the interest of our country.

You must expect that they will try to belittle her character. We know they will not succeed, but we have to be able to resolve to protect her involvement.

And on Sunday, another very eminent citizen who has the tremendous respect of the world of education and who has produced students of the highest caliber in Presentation College San Fernando, joined our platform.

Brother Michael Samuel decided to stand up and to show this country that men of stature are willing now to join with the Congress of the People.

People see there is only one way to go.

You know my friends some are still saying that the Congress of the People and the UNC must unite to beat the PNM!

I want to tell them that it is the UNC and the PNM who will have to unite to beat the Congress of the People!

We are going to take our country back!

I thank you.