

Independent thought or political football?

THE EDITOR: What is taking place at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine? Firstly, it was Shabaka Kambon, director of the Cross Rhodes Freedom Project, who was refused entry to a panel discussion and now Kirke Waithe of Fixin'T&T is removed from an Institute of Gender and Development Studies panel.

Young black intellectuals behind the 1970 Black Power movement rose from the bowels of **UWI**, St Augustine. Indeed, Caribbean independent thinkers Lloyd Best, Norman Girvan, and Dennis Pantin, just to name a few, must be rolling in their graves, since the St Augustine campus, once the bastion of free speech, is currently seeing that freedom threatened.

Was Kambon singled out for his recent call for the removal of the name Milner Hall at St Augustine? He provided a historical account of Frederick Milner, a colonialist and highlighted many of his racist deeds. This led to an outcry by some, particularly those who were residents of Mil-



ner Hall while on campus. In the end it was announced that there will be name change.

Last week I read where Waithe was removed from the panel discussion. I wondered whether this was related to Waithe's recent calls for the removal of Rolph Balgobin regarding the imbroglio at Angostura.

In 2017 are there attempts by **UWI** to stymie independent thought? Politics have long tainted the institution, but such overt actions are of concern as the institution is treading down a dangerous path. Where is the space and forum for youths' opinions and views if not at St Augustine?

I have long said people talk

about involving civil society in the decision making of this country and when they do get involved they are either marginalised or ostracised.

Waithe represents civil society, which has been lacking in this country for decades. His comments regarding the sexual harassment accusations at Angostura is similar to discussions ongoing in homes, maxi-taxis, squares, parks and corner bars across the country.

Yes politicians and others in authority, we have opinions and voices. In our polarising climate, let freedom of speech reign, not be stymied.

To those in authority at **UWI**, please reassure young people that there is a space for independent thinkers. The box of "regurgitators" and "certification" outlet at **UWI** are overflowing. End this charade and downward spiral of our once great learning institution and let it revert to its original mooring of Caribbean freethinkers.

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