

Post-Election Speech to the Nation

By The Right Honourable Vere C. Bird, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

On behalf of the Labour Party and myself I express great gratitude for the support you gave us at the polls.

The result of the General Election is a clear demonstration of the confidence which the people have in the Antigua Labour Party. It is also a rejection of the opposition groups and all their scandalous allegations. It is a re-affirmation that the people want the stability which they have always enjoyed under a Labour Government.

Like you, I hope that those who sought to create discord and confusion in our society, now understand that this country has turned its back on those undesirable and unrewarding conditions. We want a country committed to democracy. We want a country constructed on a foundation of nationalism, we do not want communist adventurism. We are not prepared to encourage anyone who seeks to change our way of life or alter the things we believe in.

The Labour Party has been given an overwhelming mandate: It is message to all, politician and non-politician, priest and layman, businessman and workers, that the country is firmly putting past differences behind it and looking forward to steady development and progress without a repetition of the constant mischief we are accustomed to observe.

The Labour accepts the people's mandate and pledges to meet its obligations and honour the trust which has been given to it. We should recall that for 20 years up to 1971, this administration alone runs the affairs of state and the country prospered. Our people were united, not divided; our country was whole, not fragmented, we were one social community, not several selfish entities.

It is to such unity we must now look forward; it is for such community we must now work; it is one country, whole and inseparable, we must now build.

As we set ourselves to the task of bringing greater economic prosperity to our country, each of us must be mindful of our individual role. It is a role on which we must each concentrate our efforts. None of us should be deflected by minor jealousies or petty concerns. For a house divided against itself cannot stand and shall surely fall.

Let us, at this time, resolve to work together harmoniously for our own good and for the good of all. We have a unique opportunity to build a strong society on the great unity of purpose shown in the General Election. This large majority, given to the Labour Party indicates that the

people are fully supportive of the government. Let us now go forward together so that we can strengthen this unity and ensure that the country never returns to the dark days of division.

Over the next five years, my government intends to build on the foundations we have so carefully laid. Our principle task will be the creation of full employment - the provision of a job for every able-bodied person. Already the projects are at hand to create the jobs we need.

During this week, two contractors were signed with, a local contractor.

Cage Enterprises, to build a 360 condominium complex at Runaway Bay, and to expand Antigua Village. The first project at Runaway Bay, formerly Ackerman's and now to be called King's View Club, starts construction immediately and will cost one hundred and fifty million dollars! It will employ over 1,000 persons. The Second project is the construction of another 26 units at Antigua Village. Recently the government sold the Mamora Bay and the new owners are shortly beginning the construction of a huge complex. The new operation will be opened on December 21, 1984 with a staff of 300. The complex will include moorings for up to 150 yachts, a nine-hole golf course, a gymnasium and tennis courts. Recently in London the owners held a reception to launch the Antigua St James Club. The reception was attended by many dignitaries including his Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent.

In addition to these projects, the Jolly Beach Hotel is building 1,000; condominiums, creating another 2,000 jobs. Local investors are also doing their share with the Blue Heron expanding, condominiums being built a-La'barry's have already brought some units on stream at Runaway Bay, construction of the Hodges Bay Club continues and more are under construction and more planned.

This is a demonstration of genuine faith and real confidence in our country's economic prosperity under the Antigua Labour Party.

Apart from the tourist industry, 10 new factories are also about to begin operations. These include an apparel factory which is being financed by two local businessmen, La'barry and Jardin, with outside investors, a new electronics company with investors from Hong-Kong; a chain-link factory at Coolidge, and manufacturing of toilet and bath fittings which is being financed by Dews.

These factories alone will provide another 1,200 jobs.

I mentioned the tangible manner in which we will provide jobs so as to emphasise that my government intends to create full employment; we propose to give a job to every able-bodied person. It is on the basis of such full employment that our programme of social stability and economic prosperity shall flow.

It should be noted that with respect to agriculture, we have been assured by the experts from Jamaica that the sugar factory is fully viable.

Recently imported mechanical loaders are now fully operational and this has eased the work in the field. An opportunity now exists for farmers to improve their earnings by planting cane for the factory.

I know that the conditions of drought which we have been experiencing has caused discomfort to many.. I deeply regret the ill-advised action of the George Walter administration which, so callously, shut down the desalting plant that the Labour Government left operating, for that plant would have provided water during this drought and our people would have been spared much discomfort. However, we have many friends who have come to our assistance, Canada, the European communities, France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. In addition, the government of Dominica and Martinique have also offered fresh water. We have to be grateful to our friends, but we also have to be thankful that our country has an administration which is committed to democracy. For without such an administration, I know not what assistance we would have received.

In any event, your government will install a new desalting plant; for our people must not suffer like this again and I am sure that after this we will keep troublesome hands from getting near.

I want you to know that while water is of immediate concern, roads are your government's second priority. The European Economic Community is providing ten million dollars this year for some road construction, but I intend that this government shall scour the world for the funds to establish good roads in every nook and cranny of our country.

We are fortunate that the Labour Government has persons with experience and ability to negotiate in the international community. My Government has had the privilege of supervising this country's development; we had the task of rebuilding it after the dark years of 1971 to 1976; we are honoured to have the opportunity to advance its progress.

I want to give my solemn pledge that we shall be a government that works hard and works in the interest of the people.

Fellow citizens, the future offers much but it is up to us to ensure that we benefit from its opportunities. Our country will only be built by hard work and dedication; our nation will only prosper by the sum of our individual efforts. I call on you to join me in creating a future of plenty for our children by building on the stable foundations of the present. We have it in us to mould a strong nation and a viable country. Let us set ourselves to the task before us.

Reproduced from: The Workers Voice, 16 May 1984