

What kind of mirror image do you have of yourself?

Text of address by Errol Barrow, Political Leader of Democratic Labour Party, to a political rally 13 May 1986, at which the Democratic Labour Party's 27 candidates for the general elections of 28 May, 1986 were introduced.

What I wish to speak to you about very briefly here this evening is about you. About yourself.

I want to know what kind of mirror image do you have of yourself? That is what I am concerned about. What kind of mirror image do you have of yourself? Do you really like yourselves? Because you can never really like anybody unless you first like yourself. There are too many people in Barbados who despise themselves and their dislike of themselves reflects itself in their dislike of other people... people who live next door to them, members of their family, husbands, and wives, and the ox and the ass and the stranger within the gates.

I would like to say that in 1951, 1956, 1961 the Conservatives used to do a few favours for people.

A planter would send a man who had a little influence, let us say in Ellerton Village in St. George, send him down to Plantations Limited or Manning and Company and get some lumber to repair the old house, or if he had a cheap canvasser you would send him to Detco Motors and let him trust a new car. And those people would be motivated into giving their support to the Conservative candidate because of the favours which used to be given out to them.

But it really did not matter because the people who accepted that kind of help thought that they would be beholden to the rich people of this island, because the rich people were in a position to do personal favours for them. But what the rich people in Barbados did not realise is that they did not have money to do favours for everybody who had the right to vote after universal adult suffrage.

That was all right when you had 250 people voting in St. Thomas, and probably 178 voting in St. Andrew, and probably 311 voters in St. Lucy, but when you have 38,000 voting alone in St. Michael – voting for two candidates, not even John D. Rockefeller himself would be able to do enough favours for 38,000 people to persuade them to go and cast their votes and exercise their suffrage against the Labour Party's interest, in favour of that wealthy person.

Which group is wealthiest in Barbados then? Who has the most money to spend? There has never been anybody in the history of Barbados with six million dollars at his disposal. The Tom Adams government had \$600 million in each and every year at its disposal to bribe you with your own money, and then spit in your face.

So the Conservatives can now save their money. They are not going to France and Italy anymore because of terrorism, but they are going to Tampa, Florida, Vancouver, British Columbia and California, because they have people now who will spend the workers' money to bribe the workers and they could save their money and thus go off and live like true politicians, while they use your money against you.

Now what has bothered me in this society is that every time after elections, people expect certain things to take place. And although the law says that he that giveth is as much guilty of bribery and corruption under the Corrupt Practices Act as he that receiveth, we know that even on polling day, people were given envelopes with \$100 bills in them.

Philip Greaves and Asquith Phillips and I sat down trying to get people to bring affidavits, so that we could lock up some of them. Our own people, registered Democratic Labour Party people, said they were not prepared to go into court and swear.

So what kind of mirror image would you have of yourself? If there are corrupt ministers in Barbados tonight, you have made them corrupt.

I am not trying to make any excuses for you, but I realise what has happened in this society. You have people who are living on the brink of, and at, subsistence level. I look around and see people who have not done an honest day's work in their whole lives driving around in MP cars, having an ostentatious standard of living, unlike my poor families in St. John, who the Welfare Officer gives \$50 to feed a family of ten for a whole week.

What kind of mirror image can you have of yourself?

Let me tell you what I mean by 'image you have of yourself'. You so much despair of this society that you queue up at Trident House (United States Consulate) day after day. Those of you who have read Julius Caesar would know the passage that say: 'You have sat the live long day with patient expectation to see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.' And you have stood the live long day with great patient expectation for the man to tell you down there that you can't get the visa to get on the 400 to New York next week.

Your greatest ambition is to try to prove to the people of the United States Consulate that you are only going up to visit your family, when you know very well that when you get up there, you los' 'way. And you are surprised when the people at the United States Embassy tell you that you do not have a strong reason to return to Barbados. And you are the only person dishonest enough with yourself to realise that you do not have a strong to return to Barbados, because Barbados has nothing to offer you. You are not being honest with yourself, but you tell the man down there, 'Oh yes, I'm returning.'

If I had to answer that question now I would be in trouble, because under this dispensation for the past ten years, I never had a strong reason to come back here.

But I want to tell you this, that I believe I am as much Barbadian as they are and I do not like my country being run down the way it has been run down since 1976, and that is the reason why I return.

When I went to Mexico, I had to make a decision, and I returned; I went to the Pacific and I had to make a decision and I returned. I had a strong reason. My reason is that I did not want to see my country go down the drain but you who are not in politics, don't have a strong reason. Tell me one good strong reason you have to return to Barbados.

Your mirror image of yourself is that your ambition in life is to try and get away from this country. And we could call ourselves an independent nation? When all we want to do is go and scrub somebody's floors and run somebody's elevator or work in somebody's store or drive somebody's taxi in a country where you catching your royal when the winter sets in?

What kind of mirror image do you have of yourself? Let me tell you what kind of mirror image I have of you, or what the Democratic Labour Party has of you. The Democratic Labour Party has an image that the people of Barbados would be able to run their own affairs, to pay for the cost of running their own country, to have an education system which is as good as what can be attained in any industrialised country, anywhere in the world.

It is only now that you are reading that in the state of Texas, the government of that state has asked to make the teachers pass an examination – you know what kind of examination? To see if they can read and write!

The gentleman of the Texas teachers' union came on the news and he said that he was proud of the result because only eight per cent of the teachers couldn't read and write!

If (President Ronald) Reagan had to take the test, I wonder if he would pass. But this is the man that you all say in the newspapers, how great he is for bombing the people in Libya and killing little children. I am no (Libyan leader Mu'ammarr) Qathafi supporter. I don't know Qathafi and I never had any desire to go to Libya. But this ia the man that you all go up at the airport and put down a red carpet for, and he is the President of a country in which in one of the more advanced and biggest states eight per cent of the teachers cannot read and write, and he feels that they are better than we. And you feel that we should run up there and bow.

What kind of mirror image do you have of yourself? Why don't you sit down there and start trying to put people on the moon, too? Instead of using \$100 million to develop the potential of the young scientists that we have, and the young doctors that we have, we spend it putting up an expression of a monumental edifice behind the Cathedral and call it a Central Bank Building, because we think that people develop by ostentation, by showing off, and not by developing people.

But when a government steals from people in the way of consumption taxes and takes that money and spends it on their own high lifestyles, and unnecessary buildings, then that government not only has contempt for you, but what is most unfortunate, you have contempt for yourself, because you allow them to do it.

And you get the Prime Minister of the country saying that his ambition is to have the same kind of lifestyle as the people in the United States enjoy. I wonder what kind of lifestyle he is enjoying now? And then his successor goes outside of Barbados and says we are drifting away in Barbados from the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy, and we are easing into a presidential system; that we want a presidential system, so that, like Reagan, they can go and bomb. They can go and bomb the mental people in the hospital in Grenada and the little children in Benghazi, in Tripoli? Is that what we want a presidential system for?

We don't have a Presidential system yet. But you have people who are employed and paid with your taxes who could buy a boat and give it to an Englishman to smuggle arms into Barbados. I can give you the name and the place and everything you want.

We don't have a presidential system, but you can have people removing money from a Canadian Imperial Bank account and people who are in charge of institutions in this island, and in transferring it to the Barbados National Bank without the authority of the people from whose account the money was being withdrawn. I know it is so, because I told (Prime Minister Bernard) St. John who said it was and that man has not been locked up yet.

I told him then that you should never appoint a person to a responsible statutory corporation in this island who is accustomed to forging people's signatures. And then he went outside and came back and never said a word. And you allow that to go on in Barbados.

And there are people in high places in this island who conspired to allow that to happen, because the gentleman was fined \$1,000 for so doing, and not by the law courts, but by a private group of people who got together and said, 'You committed forgery; we are going to fine you \$1,000.' So you circumvent the Director of Public Prosecution, and you hold your own dumb-head court martial and then you present him with a big bowl and congratulate him on his achievements.

What kind of mirror image do you have of yourself if you allow this kind of thing to happen?

What kind of mirror image do you have of yourself when you allow the mothers of this nation to be beasts of burden in the sugarcane fields? In Mexico where people suffer under a lower standard of living than in Barbados, they use donkeys to freight canes out of the fields.

In Antigua, they use a small railway; but here the mothers of the nation with sons at Harrison College, the Alleyne School and daughters at Queen's College, St. Michael and Alexandra – they are used as beasts of burden and there is no shelter in any of those cane fields. I have talked time and time again to the Barbados Workers' Union about this and you allow that to continue. What kind of image do you have of yourself?

I suggested, and I was inspired by the work done by the late Mr. Ernest Bevin, who was (British) Foreign Minister, who went to work at eight – I don't mean 8 o'clock in the morning, I mean eight years of age – and those dock workers in London used to turn up during the winter and summer from 5 o'clock in the morning waiting for a ship, and if a ship didn't come in for three weeks or three months, they wouldn't get any pay. And Ernest Bevin introduced the guaranteed week for dock workers. I set up a commission of enquiry into the sugar industry and made the examination of the guaranteed week for agricultural workers one of the terms of reference of that commission, and the commission reported that nobody gave any evidence before them in support of this recommendation.

What kind of mirror image do the people of the Workers' Union, of whom we have members, have, even of you or themselves? And I had to wait until there was a dispute in the sugar industry and we had television and get on a blackboard and say, well these will be the wages from next week and on Tuesday I went into the House (of Assembly) and introduced the guaranteed wages for agricultural workers.

Why should only one man have a mirror image of you that you do not want to have of yourself? What kind of society are we striving for? There is no point in striving for Utopia, but you do not realise your potential.

You have heard the opportunities which our members have taken to improve themselves by going to certain institutions and so on – not that we believe that people with good education are the only people who can be in politics. The very fact that a man has made the effort and taken the time to improve himself shows that he has the kind of calibre which would make him a useful representative of the people.

I lived in a little country when I was young, the Virgin Islands. It was just bought from Denmark by the United States of America. My father was a Chancellor. I was too young to go when he was transferred. So when I was three months old, I went.

There is no unemployment in that country. They don't manage their affairs as well as we did in the past. They don't receive any big lot of grants and loans and that kind of thing, even from the United States.

They have to bring in workers. They have the largest oil refinery in the western hemisphere run by a man called Hess. But that is a small country. But there is another small country which is run by a friend of mine. That country has 210 square miles; it is 40 square miles bigger than Barbados. If you took the Parish of St. Philip and put it right in the little curve by Bathsheba that would be the size of the country of Singapore of Lee Kwan Yew.

But you know the difference between Barbados and that country? First, Barbados has 250,000 people. You know how many people Singapore has on 40 more square miles? Over two-and-a-half-million, on an island just a little larger than Barbados.

They don't have sugar plantations; they don't have enough land to plant more than a few orchids on. It is one of the orchid centres of the world. They grow orchids in Singapore. They don't have enough land to plant a breadfruit tree in the backyard and nearly every Barbadian, even in the metropolitan area of Bridgetown, have some kind of fruit tree in the backyard.

Sixty per cent of those three million persons have been housed by the government of Singapore. They don't have oil for ministers to steal. They don't have any beaches like we do here. There are people here in this audience, Barbadians who have served in Singapore, who can tell you about Singapore. There is no unemployment in Singapore.

They have developed an education system but they are teaching people things that are relevant to the 21st century. They are not teaching people how to weed by the road. They are in the advance of the information age.

But you know the difference between you and them? They have got a mirror image of themselves. They are not looking to get on any plane to go to San Francisco. Too far away. The government does not encourage them to emigrate unless they are going to develop business for Singapore.

They have a mirror image of themselves. They have self-respect. They have a desire to move their country forward by their own devices. They are not waiting for anybody to come and give them handouts. And there is no unemployment.

Is that the mirror image that you have of yourselves? Anyhow, ladies and gentlemen, I done.