

PLP Annual Delegates Conference

Premier's Address

St. Paul's Centennial Hall

October 28, 2019

To the delegates of the 2019 conference, to my Progressive Labour Party parliamentary colleagues, to the Progressive Labour Party Executive, to the Progressive Labour Party Central Committee representatives, to the Progressive Labour Party Standing Committee Chairs, to the Progressive Labour Party Branch Executives, to the Progressive Labour Party members, to the Progressive members of the public who have decided to join us this evening in person, and to the Progressive members who are joining us virtually via the Bernews live stream, I say, "Good Evening" – and dare I also say, "Fasten your seat belts!" Family, my task tonight is simple: to remind you where we came from, to update you on where we are, and to enlist Bermudians in this Party's renewed mission to fight the status quo.

Members, in the midst of one of the world's most turbulent decades, the 1960s, a few men of vision set about changing a centuries-old status quo on easily the most conservative island in the region. We cannot know precisely what was in the minds of Richardson, Allen, DeJean, Wilson, Cann and Smith, but here, in the shadow of the house in which they worshipped, we stand having exceeded their wildest dreams. We are the torchbearers of a great legacy of strength and determination. It is on their shoulders that we stand and through their selfless desire for change that we form the Government of a Bermuda that must again meet the fierce need to abandon the status quo.

Where we have come from

We were elected on the promise of change and on a platform which some termed the most progressive agenda in the history of party politics in Bermuda. The people responded to the call for change and sent us to the House of Assembly, first with 24 seats and that later became 25.

In the 27 months since the election, many lessons have been learned and we have grown a lifetime in the school of governing. Faced with an onslaught of economic issues, we enjoyed no real honeymoon period.

Look at the hand we were dealt:

- No buses to get our children to school;
- No plan for trash trucks to keep our island clean;
- A one-shot wonder of a boat race;
- A secretly dying hotel project guaranteed by your tax dollars; and
- An airport deal sewn up tighter than Bob Richards'... I need to remember where I am, so I won't say it, but you get my drift!

Let me be clear, these were not mistakes made by the former government; these were deliberate acts. They governed in this way by design, not by happenstance. This is who they are.

With your support, we have changed the course they set and have restored some faith in the relationship between the government and the people:

- We made the achievement of higher education a reality through our College Promise Programme: over 500 students, young and not so young, have embarked on new educational opportunities thanks to your PLP Government;

- Young people whose lives were changed in an instant because of a mistake will no longer be chewed up and spat out by the system, because of the decriminalisation of cannabis possession;
- Seniors who had worked all their lives under a system of inherent inequality were told “money doesn’t grow on trees” but now see a pension increase guaranteed every year; and
- Government workers, so often made the scapegoat for everything bad in Bermuda, were given the raise they had earned.

And here’s what tears the One Bermuda Alliance apart: all of that has been done yet your Government still delivered the first balanced budget Bermuda has had in 17 years.

Tonight I see it as my responsibility to sound a new call. The duty I have to my children, your children and your grandchildren is to eliminate the politics of “fear of change” and the unconscious defence of the status quo. As the leader of this great Progressive Labour Party, it is my humble task to articulate a progressive vision for the future.

In simple terms: we cannot solve today’s problems with yesterday’s thinking or by devoting all our efforts to reincarnating the 1980s and ’90s. We need to let those decades go. Think about it: if retail stores in cities with millions of people are going out of business every day, is the answer to Bermuda’s retail challenges really as simple as “we need more people”? Of course not. Let the ’80s and ’90s go; those rules just don’t apply anymore.

Family, the world has changed, and we need to decide whether we want to be the masters of our destiny, or find ourselves lost for another decade, which will lead us to losing the government again.

We must commit to systemic change

Two years ago, I asked for your vote. One year ago, I asked for your continued patience and confidence. Tonight, I'm asking you to open your eyes and recognise that there is a segment of Bermuda that is just fine for things to remain exactly AS IS.

After years of banging our heads against the wall and trying slowly but surely to make unjust systems work for our people, systemic change means tearing down processes and institutions that rely on **our** marginalisation to succeed.

Systemic change instils the most fear in those who have the most to lose. Here's a hint: you know when you're about to break down an unjust stronghold by seeing who's objecting, how loud the objections are, and the words they use against the change.

So when this Government moved towards fairer health-care costs and developing a health insurance package that has better benefits for hard-working men and women and their families, look who led the charge against it: insurance companies, demanding that we leave their profits alone so they might continue to print money with the mandatory premiums the law has steered in their direction for 50 years. And out came the "C" word: consultation... Now hear this: Minister Wilson and her team met with insurance companies at every step of the way, but now, magically, those meetings never happened. So when you hear "no consultation", that actually means "you don't have our permission".

It cannot be right that there are 5000 uninsured or underinsured Bermudians and that 91% of them are black. That is wrong, that is unjust, but that is the system we have in Bermuda. So when we are attacked for fighting for a better and fairer system for the people in this country, I wear that as a badge of honour, because in the Bermuda that I lead, we must have fairness. We cannot

have persons who do not have access to health care or systems that leave so many Bermudians without adequate health coverage.

This Government will consult, we will work with the doctors and medical practitioners, but when we decide on a course of action, we will not seek the permission of those who do not share our goals for a fairer and better Bermuda. We were elected to govern and, more than that, we were elected to transform Bermuda. That cannot be achieved, to quote Colonel Burch, by *“tiptoeing through the oleanders”*.

The health insurance sector is not the only sector that needs systemic change; many would argue that our banks do as well. I will speak more about banking later, but firstly I need to speak about a systemic injustice that we will resolve shortly.

Too many Bermudians have been losing their homes due to foreclosure. A few months ago, my heart broke when MP Michael Scott told me about a client of his, a 72-year-old member of this party, who was made homeless when her home was foreclosed. Yes, family, you heard me correctly: a 72-year-old woman was made homeless in our country of Bermuda. It is very concerning to me that this is happening with impunity as properties are taken, sold at less than market value, and then resold to others, while Bermudians are left holding the bill.

We have already started the work to address this injustice and your Government will put in place rules that will require alternative actions if a foreclosure will make homeowners homeless. Additionally, we will require all foreclosures to be reviewed by a government body, to ensure that the banks are acting in a fair and just manner. We have to have a compassionate society that ensures banks are being fair when they foreclose on homes and are not

just taking advantage of Bermudians, and we will legislate this because we have the responsibility to do so. Bermuda must be better and fairer. This is a step that will help achieve that aim, and I hope that each and every person inside this room will support us in that objective.

Immigration

Family, allow me some time to speak about the challenging issue of immigration reform. Former Minister Wayne Perinchief described immigration as “the third rail of Bermudian politics”. Others have called immigration a necessary evil. Still others have called it the only thing that will save us. The truth, as usual, is somewhere in the middle.

Immigration is difficult in Bermuda because it was used by the UBP, and then by its wayward stepchild, the OBA, as a way to divide this country. The plain truth is that generations of Bermudians simply do not trust anything to do with immigration, and they have good reason not to. Bermudians have trained expats for jobs they themselves were denied; Bermudians have seen status handed out like candy, provided you supported the right party or joined the right clubs, and Bermudians have comforted their crying children whose university degrees were rendered worthless in their country by unfair hiring practices.

So yes, we need more job creators in Bermuda. Yes, we need more people living and working in Bermuda. Yes, we have an ageing population and a declining birth rate. Yes, we need to grow the young and healthy working population in this country... All of that is true, but what we cannot do is sell out Bermuda, to the exclusion of our people, in the name of demographic or even economic expediency.

The history of immigration policy in this country proves and teaches us that Bermudians need to be protected. So to all those people who benefitted from

that history and are openly calling for the return of those supposed “good old days”, comprehensive immigration reform is coming, but make no mistake, it will NOT be “your father’s” immigration policy all over again.

We fought the OBA’s ‘pathways to status’ not because we did not believe in comprehensive immigration reform, but because we did not believe in immigration reforms that harken back to the failed policies of the past, which marginalise Bermudians. We have the power to shape the future and to make sure that immigration reform works for our children and our children's children, just like in other countries. And if done properly, it can help to lower the cost of living in Bermuda, which is something I’m sure that all of us will welcome!

My mother and father taught me, and I am now teaching my own children, that when you do something wrong or when you offend someone, you must apologise. A large part of what makes our immigration debate so toxic is that neither the old UBP, or its new creation the OBA, have ever apologised for what their immigration policies did to this country. The unjustly applied discretionary grant of status, the grant of the vote to people who had been here for ten minutes, the deliberate recruitment of certain demographic groups to the exclusion of others....not one word of atonement or recognition of just what they did to create the divided society we have today. They did this, and to now pretend like nothing happened and to just shout for a new policy like the old policy is disrespectful. Humble yourselves, publicly accept what you did, show some remorse and then maybe this country has a hope of healing the divide. Family, even the Anglican Church eventually apologised for its role in slavery.....

[Battle against the status quo](#)

The Progressive Labour Party was born from the will to fight the social and economic inequalities that divided Bermuda, keeping a segment of Bermuda

behind: the majority black segment. Progressive policies were needed to fight a legacy of oppression, segregation and inequality.

The progressive stances were required then and are equally required now.

However, it seems we as a party are unconsciously becoming the guardians of the status quo – a status quo that fails to serve the best interests of people, leaving many in undesirable socio-economic positions. Look at the furore that was set off by skipping the throne speech for just one year. It is as though any suggestion of change in Bermuda meets a hostile reaction, no matter how small the change, or whether the change may be good for us.

To progress, change is required. Change is required to break down systemic barriers that have hindered the advancement of all in Bermuda. We require a change in mind-set, a change in the way we view our economic system. We must create a new normal that will use the force of government to heal the ills that plague our society.

At times, I feel we are struck with amnesia; we forget who the real enemy are and too often focus on disruptive internal cannibalism. While we bicker and fuss, the real enemy maintains control of the wealth and our economy, and their political puppets plot our collective demise. We must never lose sight of who the real enemy are. A united front under a common vision is ultimately what is required. Nothing else will deliver for our people.

In 2017, in our final budget reply in opposition, we said that the PLP was not running to be the best manager of the status quo, as the status quo has largely failed us.

The reality is that in the two years since we have been in government, although we have accomplishments that we can point to, our people are becoming impatient with our pace of change, and are questioning whether or not we have the courage to break the cycle, to take on the status quo. They are wondering if

we are willing to back up our tough talk with action. They are wondering if we really feel the plight of the working class in Bermuda, who, given how much they earn, should now be solidly middle class, but are still struggling to make ends meet. Crushed by the costs of housing and mortgages, challenged by food prices, and facing high electricity bills, they wonder if we really understand what is happening in Bermuda.

The fact is that yes, we do. We are still connected to the community we hear and feel your cries for help.

However, it is clear to me that the challenge is not rooted directly in the Government's management of the economy, as some would have you believe. Why not? Because the structure of our economy is not set up to reduce costs or make life easy for the working class. It's not who is managing the system, it is the system itself!

The fundamental basis of our economic system is broken. Although the forces behind the status quo may be less well off than they once were, they are still well off, while the vast majority struggle. Duty changes for food, energy-efficient light bulbs, and mortgage duty elimination are mere tinkering around the edges, when – as our dear departed colleague, the late Walton Brown, stated – direct action is needed.

So this Government will take direct action in tackling these forces, by using recently changed laws that allow the Government to start corporations through the BEDC that will keep our local companies honest, while providing relief to many in this country. Not only will we start these companies, but all of you will have the option to become shareholders, so you can enjoy the collective benefit. What does this mean? Does this mean that the Government is going to get into the business of providing food? Not entirely, but this does mean that a

government-backed company must challenge the high prices of food on our island.

Let me give you an example of how Bermuda's economy doesn't work for the majority, and why the power of government must be used to reduce prices in our economy. Let me tell you a story, family. It is a story about before the election, when I spoke to the owner of supermarkets in Bermuda. The owner told me that they could reduce the price of food tomorrow by 15%, but it would mean that they would cut out the middleman, and that was not something they were willing to do.

Let me translate that. What the owner really meant was this: "This current setup means that many of us are profiting from it, and I'm not willing to reduce the incomes of some who have profited for decades so that the vast majority of people can benefit."

In other words, family, those who own the supermarkets, the wholesalers, the trucks, and the boats have a vested interest in continuing to make money, even if they have the ability to be more efficient and reduce prices. This is an example of why Bermuda is an imperfect market and why our economy is broken. This is a contributing factor to why prices are so high. In other countries, an entrepreneur will see the 15% that could be saved and will start a new supermarket to take that on. They will be able to raise the money to start a business to provide competition in the market and lower prices for everyone.

We want to empower Bermudian entrepreneurs to start a business and provide competition for the established players, using technology and a more efficient model. Just one problem, right? You will need to go to a bank to get the money, and we know how, in the Bermuda of today, that story will end.

So, you may ask, where will we get the money, Premier? We are barely able to save as it is. We don't have the money to start our own supermarket. Well, yes,

you do. In 1998, one of the last acts of the then-UBP Government was to create mandatory savings plans for all, called the National Pension Scheme. The plan was to boost savings, and provided a government-mandated steady stream of income for the money managers at local pension companies.

Follow me now, family: much of this money – now worth \$3 billion dollars – is invested overseas, creating jobs and economic opportunities for people in other countries and not for all of you. Yes, that’s right, I said the mandatory savings, less the fees that you are paying to Argus, Colonial, and BF&M to manage your money, are being used to create businesses overseas, while you struggle locally. Tonight, I say that it is time to bring that money home. The hopes and dreams of entrepreneurs who wish to compete with the established generational wealth, to make our economy more efficient and to create wealth for them and future generations, can no longer be deferred. In Singapore – a country that many want Bermuda to be like – they allow their citizens to use their mandatory savings to put a down-payment on a new home and invest in the shares of Singaporean companies. I want that for all of the people here, who have toiled hard and who want hope for the future.

I have faith that Bermudians can look at what they have, assess the risks, and decide, if they wish, to make a bet on their future. If they are confident in their plans, they should be given access to a small portion of their forced savings to benefit themselves and their families. If it is good enough for Singaporeans, it is good enough for Bermudians.

Collectively we can unleash the power of cooperative banking and give you, the citizens who have been paying our local financial institutions for years, the power to start your own cooperative financial institutions. What does that mean? You can pool your resources to start your own bank!

So instead of the \$200 million of profit that Butterfield earned last year being exported from Bermuda, those profits can be translated into lower mortgage rates that can be used to reduce your monthly payments and increase your standard of living.

Family, let me tell you what they will say tomorrow... What about the employees of our banks? I know that there are many talented Bermudians in our local financial institutions who have seen their talents ignored, while those who may not be from here, or those who didn't challenge leadership or injustice in the workplace, have been promoted with big bonuses.

Family, let us not be afraid of the future! Let us not doubt ourselves! This is the time; this is the opportunity to practise collective economics and pool your resources. This is the time to use your training and experience and build something that fulfils the vision of your parents, who sacrificed to send you away to school, so that you can work together to help your community.

My predecessor as the leader of this party preached the mantra that we must do for self. Yes, we must. I want us to do for self, but we – the Progressive Labour Party Government – must give our citizens the tools and resources to do for self. What is standing in our way is access to capital, and we will let you bring back your capital to Bermuda, so that it can work for you and we can, collectively, do for self!

This isn't an anti-business speech. As an entrepreneur, I don't have anything against private enterprise. However, it is important to accept that if Bermuda's economy does not become more fair, we will all continue to suffer.

If we can make our local economy more efficient, while keeping companies honest that are profiting off the backs of hard-working Bermudians, we will have lower prices in the country. And that means that we'll be able to save more,

spend more, grow this economy, create jobs, and ensure that the future of this country is prosperous.

So tomorrow, when you hear the headlines of “Burt attacks business”, when you read those blogs with their vitriolic language saying that Burt doesn't understand the way the economy works, when you hear all of the things that will be hurled towards your leader after tonight’s speech, remember one thing and one thing only: there is nothing that David Burt can say or do that will satisfy our detractors – unless it keeps the status quo in place.

However, I was not elected to serve their interests. If there is one regret that I have over the last two years, it is possibly being too deferential to the interests that will never support this party’s aims and objectives. Yes, we will govern for all, but not all need our help!

So when they go back to their talking points, and call me a radical, remind them that we've done it their way for 50 years and it has not worked for the people of Bermuda, and enough is enough: now it is time to change course.

It is not radical to expect lower prices in the country so that individuals do not have to work two jobs just to tread water.

It is not radical to expect that families can live a decent life and save for their future.

It is not radical that people be allowed voluntarily use their savings to invest so that they can build a home or invest in a business for the future.

It is not radical to take examples from other countries of programmes that have worked to grow their economy and build a strong middle class of property and business owners. The only people who deserve the title of “radical” are those who do not want this to happen, who are scared that the collective ambitions of the have-nots are about to be unleashed.

Where do we go from here?

In our 2017 Election Platform, we told our fellow Bermudians: *“In order to deliver the social framework... [required]... the PLP will take actions to balance our budget, increase employment, educate our citizens, heal our social fabric, rebuild our infrastructure, make government more responsive and reduce our structural inequality.”*

THAT was our promise then. THAT has been our daily work for these past 27 months, and THAT is where we go from here. THAT is who we are; THAT is what we are about.

By any measure, we are on the right track; we have made significant progress and we have not lost the energy or the will to keep pressing forward with that mission. That is a mission that has not changed and will not change, no matter if someone reads it on the Cabinet Office lawn or if I say it in Centennial Hall. THAT is what we are about and the people of Bermuda know it!

Some of you are here to find out what the government has in store for the next year. On November 15th in the House of Assembly I will be making a statement to outline the pledges of which we have completed from last year’s Throne speech and the items which will be added to the government's agenda. Out of the 52 commitments made last year, 19 have been completed and 33 are in progress with some coming to the House of Assembly this month.

However, it would not be right for me to invite you here, and not give you a little preview of what’s in store. Every year, the Progressive Labour Party Caucus holds a retreat where members of caucus can suggest items to be added to the Government’s Agenda. In true democratic fashion, those items are discussed and then voted on by the Caucus.

46 issues were put the Progressive Labour Party caucus and I'm going to share 5 of the highlights of items which made the top 20, which will be part of the agenda as we move forward into 2020.

- The Government to work with our Labour Unions to create the Union Deposit Company, a cooperative company, that will provide expanded access to lower mortgage rates for their members.
- We will commence the implementation of our platform promise to provide an unemployment insurance scheme in Bermuda.
- To build a more inclusive Bermuda, we will complete the long overdue National Disabilities and Accessibility Plan
- To support our educators, we will repurpose a school building to be used for alternative education.
- And finally we will build on the medicinal cannabis regime which is scheduled to come to the House of Assembly next month, by implementing a regulated cannabis market in Bermuda which would create jobs and increase tax revenue.

Conclusion

In last year's Budget Statement, I said: *"I am mindful of the fact that among those listening are a single parent worried about next month's nursery fees; a husband and wife whose joint incomes still leave them short at the end of every month; a university student who has doubts about Bermuda welcoming her once she has her degree; and a senior citizen whose diminishing savings may soon result in problems with paying health insurance."*

Those concerns are still real, but so is our commitment to change that reality for our people. We have not forgotten one person or family left behind by the previous Government's policies. We have brought relief to those parents and

families; students are taking advantage of our College Promise to further their education and seniors can rest assured that we will always take care of them. We are diversifying our economy and making it more fair, so that our people can break free from the traditional economic constraints that too often characterise Bermuda.

We have not been perfect. We haven't always got everything right. And I am sure we may get some things wrong in the future. But our mission is unchanged. We are clear on what we have been elected to do, and with your support, with your strength, with your commitment, we will finish this race strong.

I am confident in Bermuda's future because I have seen first-hand how this team of ministers, MPs, senators and executives have put public service first. I have witnessed the open and frank debate on the future of this country as we make decisions, and have never doubted that Bermuda's best interest was on the lips of every person. I know the unwavering commitment they each bring to this work, and so I can tell you, confidently, that Bermuda will succeed.

Before I close, let me talk about a phrase we hear a lot "Friends & Family". Let me give you some examples of Friends & Family.

It is a young Bermudian, name Chae Brangman, who is here tonight. I met Chae a few years back when he was playing for Devonshire Cougars. I ran into him a few months back following his return home with his university degree in business. When we spoke he was losing hope as he was working as a kitchen porter and was looking to leave Bermuda. Today Chae is now working as a trainee in international business after a business that is expanding in Bermuda, created two trainee positions. So when you hear them talk about friends and family I want you to think about my friend Chae Brangman. Or Dajon Richardson who is also here tonight, who recently graduated and approached me at cup match looking for a job in investments. He had studied hard and already earned some

investment certifications and now he is with Chae working in international business.

When you hear the PLP is looking out for friends and family, I want you to think about Rachel Burrows a working mother who has sacrificed to provide for her children who has had the opportunity to go back to school and earn her bachelor's degree via the Mount Saint Vincent University from the Bermuda College due to our College promise program.

When they throw around Friends and Family, I want you to consider the members of our football team, some of whom are here tonight. Our National Men's Captain, Dante Leverock was granted a graduate scholarship to continue to advance his master's degree program, so that he will continue to excel off the field as well as on the field. I want you to think about LeJuan Simmons who I consider my family, who this government will support via the department of workforce development to become the first Bermudian certified sprinkler installer.

Family these stories are important because you will not read them in the Royal Gazette, but they are a testament to the ethos of this government to make sure that we look out for those who need someone to look out for them. Those are my friends, those are your family!

I want all of you to know that the Progressive Labor Party is here for you. As the first person in my family to go to university, I know how important it is to help those that need a hand up, and the members of this party will not rest until every Bermudian is given a fair chance in their own country.

This work isn't about me... It isn't about any of the bold and courageous men and women who are serving the PLP and Bermuda on the front line, determined to end the unjust status quo... We are just the latest soldiers in the battle for

freedom, justice and equality that many before us fought and sacrificed themselves for. This work is about all of us!

It is about standing up for the basic principle that Bermudians must come first in their own country. It's about tearing down an unjust present, in the name of building a better future for our children. It is a simple argument: maintaining the status quo or living up to our name as the Progressive Labour Party.

So, family, in closing, what do I need from you? I want you to leave here unafraid of challenging the status quo. No longer can we afford to allow one segment of our society to prosper, while the other is left with struggle, frustration and lack of hope!

I want you to leave here saying: "I am going to be a part of the change this country needs." I want you to leave here saying: "I am going to stand up and fight for my children and my children's children, because Bermuda is a place for my family and we have to make it fair and just."

Family, I'm asking you to join me in this mission. I'm asking you to take to the streets, take to social media, take to the airwaves and declare that you are ready to join the fight against the status quo. I'm asking for you to join the Progressive Labour Party and fight for this country's future.

Thank you for coming. Thank you for your attention. May God continue bless the Progressive Labour Party, and may God continue to bless Bermuda.