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"The Spurs that patient merit from the Unworthy Take"

If there were to be a Royal Commission of Inquiry into Medical Benefits, Outlet would have a hey-day. Outlet would probably double sales.

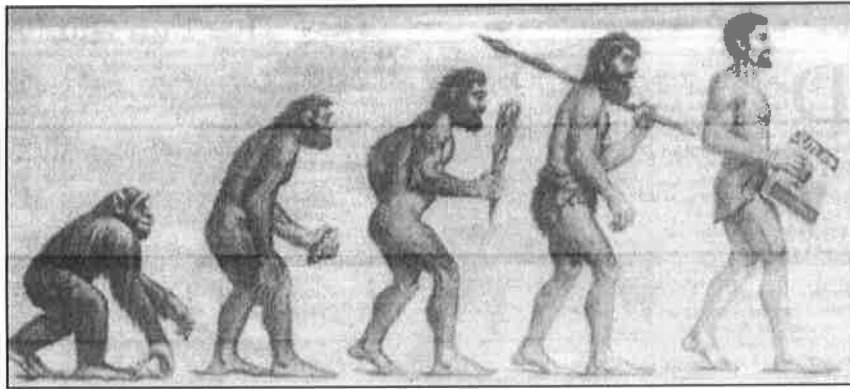
No one has more incriminating evidence on the Medical Benefits scandal. If truth be told, and the querulous and self-serving elite always find it hard to tell the truth, it is Outlet and Outlet alone which has revealed anything about Medical Benefits. No other medium, or none of the media, released a single thing about Medical Benefits. Some now are claiming the key role. We are at a stage in Antigua & Barbuda in which those who genuinely struggle for social justice are condemned to rancid abuse and acid baths, and malice deep and abiding transforms others into monsters. The former are the victims, the latter are the executioners.

That is why I began with the quotation from Shakespeare which is the headline of this piece. Namely, how those of patient merit, and high quality investigative reporting like Outlet on Medical Benefits are being assaulted by the unworthy. Some have even made the most specious charges on Radio and Print. They charged that Tim Hector is being paid \$14,000 a month by the Lester Bird government simply because Hector said, after the Allan Joseph forensic audit he would not call for a further inquiry.

Those who were now saying that Outlet's editor was being paid never stopped to ask who paid Outlet's editor when Outlet revealed that arms were being sent to racist South Africa from Antigua, with the consent of the V.C. Bird government who told the nation "We would do it again." Easily the most outrageous statement in the modern history of Antigua and Barbuda.

Space Research Corporation sued Outlet. Outlet had to fork out lawyer fees. So too did the Sovereign Order of New Aragon. Again Outlet had to find lawyer fees. Vesco sued Outlet. Everytime Outlet has made revelations showing misbehaviour in public office we have always been sued. Everytime. Down to Medical Benefits just now concluded we were sued by the government. The case ended at the OECS Supreme Court. Outlet bore the legal costs. Apparently no one noticed. But the specious are now saying that Outlet, which embarrassed the Lester Bird government with the Medical Benefits scandal, is in the pay of the government it exposed! How absurd! Naturally the foolish repeat foolishness, always ignoring even common sense.

And why is this being said. Because Outlet Editor Tim is emphatic, that any further inquiry, beyond the Allan Joseph inquiry is an absolute waste of money, time and the nation's resources. Worse it is an insult, a sign of self-contempt for our own professionals.



I want to make it clear, When Mr Allan Joseph CPA was appointed solely by the Lester Bird government, without consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, Baldwin Spencer, I was dissatisfied and said so. When the terms of reference for the Allan Joseph Forensic Inquiry was seen to have input from Minister Percival and Dr Prince Ramsay's in my view limiting the scope of the Allan Joseph Inquiry, Outlet was livid and said so. Yet we never repudiated the Allan Joseph forensic Inquiry. We criticised, criticised harshly, but we never rejected the Allan Joseph inquiry. Why?

Because we were certain that the time had come when we had to respect our **own** professionals, like Allan Joseph. All other inquiries involved mainly non-nationals. For example, De La Bastide Inquiry, Justice Nedd Investigation, Blom Cooper Inquiry. The time had come to accept and respect our own Professionals even if we felt they were partial to the current political directorate. Our professionals would have to compromise their own professional integrity, by themselves before Outlet rejected them. If we did not place faith in our own professionals to be as good as their internationally accepted qualifications determined, then we would have little faith in ourselves. We would always be looking outside of ourselves for inquiries, for truth, for justice.

So Outlet, with reservations, went along with the Allan Joseph Forensic Inquiry.

I will say now, for I have read the Allan Joseph Report and its recommendations, it is by far and away one of the most important documents produced in this country.

From the point of view of language and prose style the Allan Joseph Forensic Audit is banal and pedestrian. But from the point of view of analysis and recommendations the Allan Joseph Report is of a fine order.

Like most West Indian professionals Allan Joseph ducked the political wherever and whenever he could duck it. He only faced it when it was unavoidable. Allan Joseph was certain that he was not coming here to do any forensic audit, in order to take Antigua & Barbuda's corrupt political chestnuts out of the fire. Others in other fora would and could do that. He was out to save and improve Medical Benefits, as a health care scheme, for the people of Antigua and Barbuda. That was Allan Joseph's professional mission. And that he accomplished splendidly.

Now let us examine the Allan Joseph Forensic Audit. First, its purpose:

"The purpose of the Audit is to provide an in-depth evaluation and analysis to Cabinet on the **integrity** and adequacy of the Scheme's internal control and verification procedures and on operational expenditure over the last six (6) years. **This is with a view to dispelling or confirming the presence of irregularities or impropriety in the administration of the Medical Benefits Scheme's funds.**"

This was a long way from the severe limitations, which the past Medical Benefits Board and Percival & Co sought to put on the forensic inquiry. It got to the question of corruption. The Forensic Audit sought "to **dispel** or **confirm** the presence of irregularities or impropriety" in a word, "corruption" with the Medical Benefits Scheme's funds. That is comprehensive enough.

Now, follow closely the opening statement, in my view the definitive statement in the Allan Joseph Forensic Report. It goes like this:

"Our examination of the Internal Controls of the Medical Benefits Scheme revealed that the controls in place are very weak and in many cases **non-existent**." It was designed that way to allow for corruption. The point now is to correct it by modern controls.

The second striking statement in the Allan Joseph Report is this:

"The evidence supporting the purchasing of pharmaceutical products for the Medical Benefits pharmacy and the continuous differences between ending inventory in the Pharmacy and stores as compared to the accounting records, indicate a **high inference of impropriety**."

In other words, or in plain terms, rackets have been run in the procurement of medicines at Medical Benefits by the political directorate of Medical Benefits, the Ministry of Health and several drug suppliers. The rackets here have been long and continuous.

However, from 1989 to 1998 all the records of Medical Benefits were burnt. Sent to Cooks and burnt. Officially, if you please.

Anyone who thinks about that for a moment, must come to the conclusion that the essential records have been destroyed. Therefore to go beyond the Allan Joseph Report, to another Public Inquiry, is to set up a Public Inquiry to return a report, which has to say we could go no further than the Allan Joseph Report, because all the essential documents for the crucial years have been destroyed. This to say the least would be a monumental waste of time. And money. Anyone who urges such upon the people wishes to make a monkey and a mockery of public affairs.

It would be engaging in an exercise, which might bring some public titillation to go over the stories that Allan Joseph went over in detail such as the \$1.4 million worth of goods sold by Ms Cavelle John's Tropical World. The point is the details might provide some public laughter at Ms John's expense, and for public pleasure. But, in the end, Ms John had the **permission of the Board** to sell all these goods to the very Medical Benefits of which she was Superintendent.

The truth is, that what Ms John did, Ministers of Government did. But the records no longer exist. They were burnt, at Cooks Dump, officially and according to law! So go after Ms John the sardine, while the sharks go scot free.

It can be said of Ms Cavelle John that she did allow the record of **all** her \$1.4 million sales to stand at Medical Benefits and be counted. She could very easily have put the record of every transaction in the shredder. Instead they are reproduced fully and totally in the Allan Joseph Report.

But there is something far more important which deserves our attention. It is what Allan Joseph has done to bring **good governance** to Antigua and Barbuda that concerns me. It is of primary importance to us all.

In my view Allan Joseph has made at least two recommendations of the profoundest significance for the

present and future well-being of Antigua and Barbuda.

The first is this:

"A proper system for the processing of applications for medical assistance overseas from the Medical Benefits Scheme should be developed."

Such a system must guarantee Mr Pick-Up-Jimmy equal access to medical assistance abroad as it would permit the Governor-General.

It is to the maximum credit of Allan Joseph that he not only outlined, but created a new system, with a new Medical Referee, which would provide medical assistance overseas to the people of Antigua and Barbuda on an equitable basis, with easy access to all.

In my view the Opposition UPP and NGOs should not be seeking a further inquiry. They should be seeking a new system, to guarantee fairness in awarding medical assistance abroad. People have died for want of this assistance. If the UPP and NGOs help to guarantee this to our people then that would be tantamount to a sea-change. It would end the current system of favouritism, and looseness, and provide equal access to all, on a systematic way.

I should just interrupt here before I go on to the most revolutionary proposal in the Allan Joseph report, which if applied, could go a long way to change the awful and unaccountable system of governance we have had here for the past 25 years. But before that revolutionary proposal I want those of you who are in favour of a further Public Inquiry to look at this in the Allan Joseph Report. The Report states:

"Over the years, several items and services have been purchased on behalf of the Ministry of Health by the Medical Benefits Scheme. However, there are no procedures in place to verify that these items were actually received by the Ministry of Health and/or its hospitals, clinics and other Medical Facilities."

There is no way to get hard evidence on anyone. One may suspect, but one cannot prove when the hard evidence has been destroyed. Finally Allan Joseph admitted that Medical Benefits was an open sesame, without procedures, in which Ministers, in particular, could claim to purchase things for the hospital; on which they give **kickbacks**; or, the items were not purchased at all, and Medical Benefits money went into the private pockets of big public, elected or unelected officials. Percival may feel peeved that what others got away with, ended up as Percival taking the rap for all. But it had to be brought to an end sometime. Better now than later.

Again Allan Joseph has not only by forensic audit agreed with the charges laid in Outlet, he has recommended a system, which if put in place, will prevent Ministers in the future from being able to use Medical Benefits money, to claim purchases for Holberton, various clinics and various other medical causes, while the money went into their private pocket, or at any rate, did not go to the medical benefit of the nation.

A further inquiry will not uncover, without hard evidence any of the past wrong-doers. Simple. Because the records have been destroyed. However, Allan Joseph has put a system in place to prevent this past corruption with Medical Benefits funds from continuing any time further.

It is the bounden duty of the UPP and every NGO, and every concerned citizen to see that this system, these new controls with further refinements, is put in place at Medical Benefits to protect the Health Care funds of the people, for the people, by the people. (Another inquiry, to say the obvious cannot and

will not do that.)

I come now to the most outstanding proposal to prevent corruption in the Allan Joseph Report. It reads very simply. But it is as simple as it is profound. It is this:

"The Antigua and Barbuda Medical Benefits Board of Control should establish an **Audit Committee from among its members**. This committee should be comprised of three members and be responsible for, among other things

"Inquiring into the effectiveness of the Scheme's management in financial and accounting functions **with particular attention to ensuring that there are no illegal or improper payments.**"

21 years ago **ACLM** put forward this idea of an **Oversight Committee** over all Boards and Ministries, made up entirely of Civil Society, or competent citizens.

It gives me, and I think every ACLM member some satisfaction to see that Allan Joseph CPA, an Antiguan with an impressive accounting record in the First World, has recommended this internal Oversight Committee, whose function is to prevent or report illegal or improper payments. In sum, an anti-corruption committee on every Board.

I want to publicly confess that I thought, in the beginning that Allan Joseph, CPA, being selected by the Lester Bird government was part of a **set-up**, a cook-up, if you will, to exculpate Lester's Ministers of the allegations made with compelling documentary evidence in Outlet, week after week, for an incredible 9 months.

When Mr Allan Joseph secured the services of his brother, Dr Eugene Francis, I was about to scream not just a Lester Bird set up, but nepotism was patent.

Then I reflected that Dr Eugene Francis was a man of extraordinary ability, who, by dint of integrity, had made it in the difficult international world of modern pharmacology. Not only with a doctorate, but who went on to hold important positions, demanding integrity, in top flight pharmacology. I decided to keep my powder dry and hold my fire.

I am pleased I did so. Because Dr Eugene Francis, in supporting his brother's forensic accounting has come up with some brilliant manual and pharmaceutical guides, which can be equalled, but cannot be surpassed. They will do not just Medical Benefits, but the national Healthcare system a world of good. If implemented they would certainly make us a model to all other developing countries, even the Newly Industrialising Tigers. Antigua and Barbuda cannot do better than the Allan Joseph, Dr Eugene Francis report, and in particular their recommendations for control and development of this health care agency.

Those who call for further inquiry have not read the report. And if so, have scant respect for the brilliant work of their own Antiguan and Barbudans, intent on creating systems for good governance in every institution in this country. It is not so much the governors that matter. It is the control that Civil Society, through Oversight Committees, has over its rulers that matters. Therein lies the salvation of Antigua, not in inquiries, but in new institutions where Civil Society controls the political directorate.

It remains only to be said that once again Outlet too has done its job, using documentary evidence to expose the wolves in sheep's clothing. The unworthy again have attacked our patient merit. But Outlet like truth, however lied about, however spat upon, however burnt to the ground for speaking truth to power, will always rise, and rise, and rise. Because, we can bear to hear the truth we have printed or spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools.

The Allan Joseph Report, if implemented, is a powerful blow against corruption. It is therefore the duty of all committed against corruption to see to the creation of these new procedures, manuals, guides and institutions in the Allan Joseph Report. It would be a terrible pity, if it were said that our own came unto their own with their accumulated knowledge of a high order, in accounting and pharmacology and our own received them **not**.
