

Utter folly!

COMISSIONG RUBBISHES TALK OF HIM ACTING IN CAHOOTS WITH THE BLP TO STALL HYATT

by Colville Mounsey

Attorney-at-law and social activist David Comissiong today suggested that like the state of the island's foreign reserves, Prime Minister Freundel Stuart has sunk to a worrying new low.

Comissiong was responding to charges levelled by Stuart against him in relation to the stalled Hyatt Centric Resort project.

Speaking at a recent town hall meeting in New York, the Prime Minister sought to suggest that the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) was behind the ongoing legal manoeuvres by Comissiong to seeks to frustrate every attempt by his Government to get the stalled multi-million dollar hotel development up and running.

In fact, Stuart went as far as to point out that Opposition Leader Mia Mottley and Comissiong were first cousins, while cautioning that "I have an implicit faith in the triumph of truth over lies, right over wrong, and of good over bad".

However, in a swift response to a front-page story carried by **Barbados TODAY** last night detailing the Prime Minister's position on the issue, Comissiong dismissed Stuart's statement as absolute "folly" and "foolishness".

He also took exception to Stuart's insinuation that he was busy doing Mottley's political bidding, explaining that even though he and Mottley were indeed related, he had



Social activist David Comissiong (right) has dismissed Prime Minister Freundel Stuart's statement as absolute 'folly' and 'foolishness' after Stuart suggested that the Mia Mottley-led BLP was behind his legal challenge to Hyatt.

enjoyed a much closer relationship with Stuart than with her over the years.

"It is just foolishness and it is sad coming from a man who went to university with me and who was at law school with me. We were called to the Bar together, the same morning, just the two of us, and he is a person with whom I have enjoyed a close professional rapport for many years.

"In fact over the entire period of my career as a lawyer. I would say that during that period of time I would have had a closer rapport and relations with Mr Stuart, who I consider to be a friend, than Miss Mottley, who is a relation of mine.

"So it is really sad that Stuart would sink to that level," Comissiong stressed.

Approval of the Hyatt project is being seen here as critical to the country's economic turnaround plan, with the Stuart administration currently banking on the proceeds from the construction of the \$200 million luxury hotel to help shore up the country's dwindling foreign reserves, which, as of the end of December last year, stood at a 22-year low of \$410 million,

or 6.6 weeks of import cover, well below the recommended 12 weeks.

However, with Comissiong currently contesting the Hyatt development on national and environmental grounds, there is still no clear indication as to when the project will actually get going, which is why Stuart has seen the need to question Comissiong's motives.

But in defence of his support of the controversial project, the Prime Minister pointed out that in 2006, the previous BLP-led administration had given permission to an investment company to build a ten-storey hotel on the same Bay Street site.

While noting that permission was given by the Prime Minister's Office, Stuart also pointed out that there was no compromise on the height of the proposed hotel. He also suggested that had the developers not had a change of heart, that construction would have been allowed to go ahead without any objections.

"There were no objections in 2006, but [now] all of a sudden you began to get objections coming from all over the place,"

the Prime Minister told those attending the New York meeting after High Court judge Madame Justice Dr Sonia Richards threw out his application last December in which he had asked the court to rule that Comissiong had no legal ground on which to challenge his decision to let Hyatt go ahead.

However, Comissiong today produced a 2012 press release which he had issued as president of the now defunct People's Empowerment Party in which he had made it clear that he knew what the plans were to develop Browne's Beach and that his party would oppose those plans.

"At that time to the best of my knowledge Mottley was not even the leader of the Barbados Labour Party. Owen Arthur was the leader of the Barbados Labour Party at time. So the whole thing is just ludicrous," Comissiong said, while maintaining that he has not received any help from Mottley in his legal challenge to the Hyatt development.

"Basically the Hyatt case which is the most onerous when it comes to workload, I have had to do that case virtually all alone. I have not had any help, be it research or otherwise. As a matter of fact the only moral support I have had from any legal person is from Bobby Clarke.

"All of the research work, all of the casework has been a lonely task by me. So how wonderful it would have been if I had some help from some legal luminaries from whatever political party, but that simply was not the case.

"So this has been a David Comissiong effort coming out of deep personal conviction on my part and nothing to do with Miss Mottley," Comissiong stressed.

Following last December's court ruling, the way is now clear for him to legally take forward his objection to the decision by the Prime Minister, in his capacity as Minister responsible for Town Planning, to approve construction of the controversial luxury hotel. colvillemounsey@barbadosoday.bb

BHTA calls for stronger management of the south coast sewage mess

The Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA) has issued a strong warning that if the ongoing sewage crisis affecting the south coast is not quickly remedied it could prove disastrous for the island's bread and butter tourism industry.

As such, BHTA Chief Executive Officer Rudy Grant is calling for "a senior Government official to take the lead in terms of the day-to-day management of this crisis".

For more than a year the sewerage system along the south coast, the island's major tourist belt, has been spilling effluent.

Despite several assurances from the Barbados Water Authority (BWA) that the problem was either being addressed or was close to being resolved, the situation has been gradually deteriorating to the point where it is now eating away at the road infrastructure, especially in the Hastings, Christ Church area.

While several businesses, including a number of food establishments have chosen to remain open in the sewage-plagued area, the Chicken Barn in Worthing, Christ Church has closed after losing the battle against the effluent water that has inundated its compound. "The BHTA is extremely concerned about

the ongoing challenges with the South Coast Sewerage Plant and particularly the negative impact on many of our hotel and restaurant members. This specifically relates to those located between the stretch from Lanterns Mall, Hastings to Worthing, all of whom are at their wits end about the increased overflows from manholes in those areas," said Grant in a statement this afternoon.

He did not say how many affected BHTA members there were or if any of them were considering closing operations until the problem was rectified.

However, he said the BHTA believed the situation had deteriorated to the point where it was "imperative for Government to view this as a national crisis as it is affecting residents, schools, businesses and visitors to the island".

"In this context, we also believe the time has come for a senior Government official to take the lead in terms of the day-to-day management of this crisis. It is also important for the BHTA to be in a position to be able to respond to the concerns being expressed almost on a daily basis by our trade partners," Grant said, without specifying which official should be put in charge.

"The BHTA fears that if these challenges are not remedied soon, the end result could prove disastrous for the future of the industry, as well as Barbados as an attractive and desired destination," he warned.

And even though the BHTA remains in "frequent" dialogue with the BWA on what is going to rectify the situation, Grant said "it would appear that there are a number of additional factors and challenges that are inhibiting them from successfully implementing identified solutions".

He therefore pledged to continue to work with the relevant authorities in order to find appropriate solutions.

Authorities are yet to entertain the idea of having businesses in the affected areas closed until there was a solution, with Minister of Health John Boyce insisting last year that there had been no health issues as a result of the recurring sewage spills.

However, the Ministry of Education has closed the St Lawrence Primary School "as a precautionary measure", in light of the problem, which is also occurring on the school's premises.

This is not the first time the BHTA has



Rudy Grant

called on authorities to urgently address the problem.

On the eve of the busy winter tourism season last December, Grant had described the situation as "unacceptable" and "untenable", while warning that the current image of the south coast was not the one that Barbados would wish to present at this time.

The situation has also resulted in the island's main source markets – the UK, US and Canada – issuing travel advisories to their residents, urging them to be cautious when visiting the area, with the US going as far as to warn its staff here that the tap water in the area is not safe, despite repeated assurances from health officials to the contrary. (MM)