

Tivoli bangarang

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It had to come to this.

The show of naked criminal power and defiance; the brazen display of territorial control and dominance; the frightening public demonstration of overlordship of the lives of residents; the virtual "I dare you!" message of the criminal underworld.

For those members of the intelligentsia - including influential voices in the media - who had long been in denial over Tivoli, the moment of truth has come crashing in.

The blocked roads, executed with terrorist precision; the locking down of the Tivoli community and the confiscation of any means of communication with the outside world was just a small indication of the rotting underbelly of garrison politics which has infected our body politic.

And while the innocent people of Tivoli - the vast majority - were held hostage under the gun, we had an asinine statement from the police, which itself acknowledged that people's cellphones were being seized, but which called on the people to give the police a ring if they needed them!

For, you see, **the independent state of Tivoli is sovereign** and sacrosanct, and only on invitation by its 'president' can an outside force go in to give assistance to its people.

It had to come to this. For the country to see what we have been toying with all these years.

For the big business people - the tourism people, the manufacturers, the big people in commerce - to see what their party contributions have propped up.

Bleeding-heart liberals engaging in sophistry about individual rights versus the rights of the state were thrashed by the reality of criminal bravado before their very eyes.

Those stoutly defending the human rights of innocent, decent people of Tivoli - the majority, who cannot drive out or have visitors drive in - have to tell us what of these people's right to free movement and free assembly?

It is the worst of times and the best of times. The last couple of weeks in Jamaica could prove the most pivotal and catalytic in decades

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As a result of a spectacular and superlative display of the power and persistence of the free press, which kept the Christopher 'Dudus' Coke extradition and Manatt, Phelps and Phillips issues on the front-burner, things were brought to a head with that crucial admission of the prime minister in Parliament, which touched off a crescendo of calls for his resignation.

(Govt paid \$400,000 to a 'public relations legal firm in wash DC to lobby the US Govt to cool it on the extradition of Dudus)

By Monday night the prime minister was on his knees to the Jamaican people, pleading for forgiveness and pledging to make atonement.

The cathartic weekend for the prime minister yanked him back to his National Democratic Movement (NDM) platform, a platform from which he had built up so much hope and trust and from whose pedestal he had tumbled so ignominiously.

But on that Monday night he recommitted to us, renewed his vows, as it were, promising never to be unfaithful to us again - if we would just take him back.

He will shed some of his workload, he assured, so that he could focus his time on saving his marriage to us, the Jamaican people.

The pressure which the media kept up on the Government over the extradition issue, which has confounded cynics who felt that this was just "another nine-day wonder", **emboldened civil society groups** and the Opposition People's National Party (PNP) to stoke the fires under the tail of the Golding Government.

The strident, trenchant and belligerent stance of the media, particularly the editorials in this newspaper and the Observer, aided by some biting cartoons, made it impossible for the Government to take a business-as-usual approach.

Trafigura flashback

The final show of media force - which really sealed it - was that much-talked-about 'Trafigura flashback' journalistic feat of the RJR Communications Group.

If you ever needed to be reinforced about the value of having a free, unfettered press, our journalists' exemplary conduct in this extradition/Manatt, Phelps and Phillips issue was enough.

While the issue first came to light through the Opposition PNP, it could not have sustained its force and galvanise the nation's attention without the immeasurably commendable role of the media and later civil society groups.

While the PNP, particularly Peter Phillips, did some excellent work in Parliament and outside - **it was Peter Phillips' questions which led to the prime minister's admission in Parliament** - if the issue were perceived as purely being pushed by a party hungry to taste power again, it would not gain the traction it did.

This issue was a noteworthy example of strategic advocacy by the Opposition, the media and civil society. **The role of civil society groups like Jamaicans for Justice, the Jamaica Council of Churches, the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce, the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ) was crucial.**

Indeed, what the prime minister's backpedalling on this issue has strengthened, in my mind, is the absolute importance of having a strong civil society; a civil society not tainted by partisan politics; a civil society that represents a genuine third way.

A major affliction of the Jamaican society is its political partisanship. Many people find it nigh impossible to view things outside of green and orange. Everything is seen and judged through these lens.

It is the thing I hate most about Jamaica, as I have written before.

It is not just the professional politicians who see politics before principle. That is how many Jamaicans see it, too.

But, happily, increasing numbers of Jamaicans are abandoning the partisanship, which is sinking.

JLP PR man and Education Minister Andrew Holness perceptively spoke on radio last week about "the power of middle Jamaica", as demonstrated in this extradition issue.

He insightfully pointed out, too, that the power of middle Jamaica has reached into the corridors of the PNP, as evidenced by the party leader's brilliantly crafted and politically correct speech to the emergency PNP's National Executive Council meeting at the University of the West Indies last Sunday.

It is the worst of times but the best of times.

Wayne Chen himself said **he had never seen a time in his life when civil society was so united in revulsion over the politics-criminality link, and when it seemed so determined to push the politicians to smash it.**

What has been demonstrated, so forcefully over the last few weeks and days, **has been the power of the people.**

We have seen what can happen when we put country before party. Even media, which were formerly friendly to the JLP, broke ranks on this important issue. It was a proud moment for the press corps in Jamaica, which was totally united on this one.

Continued Pressure

The pressure on the Government by the press and civil society must continue. I have been happy to see groups calling on the prime minister and his Government to give timelines for the achievement of the renewed agenda. I am happy to see the calls for words to be backed up but deeds, for the talk to be accompanied by the walk.

I don't believe Bruce Golding is going to squander this opportunity. He is too wise a politician not to realise that this late in his tenure he has no room for error and that he has already cashed the only cheque he will be given.

Trust is not easily rebuilt - especially when it was so robustly invested. I believe we

will see a reinvigorated, recommitted Bruce Golding.

It should not have taken this crisis for him to focus on the critical agenda issues he outlined on Monday night. But nothing focuses the mind more wonderfully than a crisis. Golding must not waste it.

We must all support the crime bills he will take to Parliament. "Tough and uncompromising measures to deal with the pervasive crime problem and to stamp out corruption will have to be matters of urgency."

We must hold the prime minister to that, while unequivocally supporting his initiatives in that regard. I was happy to hear PSOJ President Joe Matalon give his strong support to the anti-crime bills and other strong measures. The moneyed classes must start using its money power to push the politicians in principled directions. Stop talking about not supporting politicians who support criminals - do it! Stop supporting politicians who give contracts to criminal enterprises. Make all party contributions dependent on the dismantling of garrisons.

The captivity under which our fellow brothers and sisters live in that mother of all garrisons, Tivoli Gardens, as well as in other garrisons, must rouse us to support measures to smash criminals gangs and lock away or extradite criminals and terrorists. No longer must our country's good name be tarnished by narco traffickers and gunrunners.

The kind of fear which has been griping this country; the show of "who run things" by criminal elements must all galvanise us to unite to defeat them.

We must not equivocate or allow politics to divide us on this life-and-death issue. We must do it for our children. Otherwise, history will not absolve us.

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