

THE BARBADOS LABOUR PARTY CALLS FOR MINISTER JONES' REMOVAL FROM THE CABINET OF BARBADOS

The Barbados Labour Party today calls for the resignation of Minister Ronald Jones from the Cabinet of Barbados. Failing this, we call on Prime Minister Stuart to dismiss him.

The citizens of any democratic country must be able to believe, rely and act on the words and public undertakings of a cabinet minister. They must be able to plan their everyday lives and future based on the statements and promises made by any member of the highest executive body in the nation. Events over the last six months have clearly demonstrated that Barbadians, whether students, their parents or the general public, have found it next to impossible to hold sacred the public pronouncements of this Minister as they relate to the funding of University of the West Indies' onerous tuition fees of financially challenged students. Minister Jones has, in our opinion, failed to meet the expected standard of ministerial conduct such that citizens affected can reasonably plan their affairs and future.

Minister Jones will go down in political history as the official who had cabinet responsibility for dismantling one of the fundamental pillars for the socio-economic development of our citizens and nation over the last 50 years. Free tertiary education at the UWI has been the ladder by virtue of which tens of thousands of poor Barbadians, who have traditionally comprised over 80 per cent of the local students attending this institution, have been able to climb their way out of poverty and into better social and financial circumstances.

On 15th April this year, 3 days after Member of Parliament Miss Cynthia Forde and I held a press conference, the Education Minister publicly announced at the 40th annual general conference of the Barbados Union of Teachers that his Ministry will be providing "a substantial number of bursaries so that no eligible Barbadian student will be disadvantaged" from attending UWI.

Nothing further was then heard on the issue of the grant of any bursaries to any UWI student from either Minister Jones or from any high-ranking education official for 3 months. This Minister on 11th July at the plaque ceremony inaugurating the UWI Chinese Confucius Institute then announced that "in the first few years, we will do some 3,000 bursaries to help these UWI students with challenges." He in fact proceeded to inform the public that "this has already been agreed to". These bursaries were to be thereafter launched in two weeks and were to be made available to Cave Hill, Mona and St. Augustine Campus Students. Furthermore, Minister Jones publicly stated that they would

cover about 50 per cent of the successful students' total tuition costs. He additionally was quoted as saying that "Sir Hugh Wooding Barbadian law students would not have to pay tuition fees".

The Ministry of Education finally announced through a GIS release on the evening of 28th July that the bursary application forms would be available from the following day. This was the same date when I publicly expressed concern over this Government's continued broken promises to put adequate arrangements in place for the financing of UWI students' tuition fees and over the fact that there were no bursary application forms in existence and no criteria as to how bursary recipients would be selected.

Hundreds of Barbadians filled out bursary application forms on reliance of the Minister's word that free grants would be given to financially disadvantaged UWI students. Required supporting documents were submitted by these many applicants. Weeks have passed since then and first UWI semester is almost midway in duration.

The public of Barbados has now been told, not by Minister Jones or any high-ranking official of the Ministry of Education, but by a media house that the Ministry of Finance will not be funding any bursaries to any UWI students as promised by Minister Jones or at all. In the meantime, the Education Minister yesterday left Barbados on a ten day first class travel trip to China, presumably partly if not completely funded by the taxpayers of this Country. This when hundreds of the declining numbers of UWI students do not know how they will pay the next due monthly installment on their tuition fees and are now, in the continued absence of the promised bursaries, seriously contemplating their future education.

Furthermore, the Sir Hugh Wooding Law School Barbadian students were told on arrival last month that they will have to pay their own tuition fees, contrary to Minister Jones' public assurances on 11th July.

In any proper functioning Westminster-type democracy, a Prime Minister would not have had to request the resignation of his cabinet minister under these or similar circumstances. The Minister, having announced government policy on an issue so fundamental to his country's human resources development without his cabinet colleagues' approval and now in fact, apparently, with his colleagues' disapproval, would resign forthwith. Minister Jones for the last six months pronounced on a government educational funding policy without the approval of the Minister of Finance.

He has apparently, according to the news report, been "admonished" by Finance Ministry officials for so doing. He ought to be relieved not only of the Education, Human

Resources, Science and Technology portfolio but of any ministerial responsibility whatsoever.

Minister Jones has throughout this whole episode also acted with a degree of arrogance which, in our opinion, has shown utter contempt for the people whom he has been elected to serve. His earlier incendiary statements in Parliament about “cracking some heads” and “shooting some people” have been matched by his more recent statements about “hungry people” running him down asking about the sharp decline in UWI applicants this year whilst the media “beat him to the ground” and people “run him down” about when we can get the bursaries.

Clearly, Mr. Jones is no longer capable of engendering any feelings of hope for their future in the youth of our country. Indeed, his ministerial legacy has been one of despair and frustration among thousands of Barbadians who wish to further their tertiary education. The public can no longer have confidence in this Minister in his public capacity.

Yesterday’s statement by the Acting Education Minister, Senator Harcourt Husbands, did nothing to inspire any one as to when, if at all, bursaries would be granted, under what criteria, to whom they would be awarded and how they would be financed.

The Prime Minister ought to relieve the public of Barbados of the ministerial liability which, in the submission of the BLP, Mr. Jones has become and which the public can no longer afford to carry. The Education Minister himself has been quoted as saying that he is “really tired”. Previous Barbadian Prime Ministers from both political parties have dismissed cabinet ministers for much less.

Edmund G. Hinkson
Shadow Education and Human Resources Minister
And St. James North Member of Parliament

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