

# NIA

## National Integrity Action

**“RESPECT YOUR VOTE: YOUR RIGHT, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY”**

ECJ-NIA TOWN HALL MEETING IN MONTEGO BAY, ST. JAMES

**MAY 28, 2015**

**PRESENTATION BY PROFESSOR TREVOR MUNROE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
NATIONAL INTEGRITY ACTION; HONOURARY VISITING PROFESSOR, SIR  
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Let me first express appreciation on behalf of the NIA for the partnership with the ECJ in presenting this town hall meeting and the series to come. I am particularly happy that the first of the series, **UNDER THE THEME RESPECT YOUR VOTE**, is taking place here in Montego Bay as I have a special attachment to this, Jamaica's second city. This attachment comes from having lived in MoBay for a time as a youth at No. 19 Humber Ave. More so, because MoBay could be said to have laid an important foundation for my subsequent career; it was here that then teacher Howard Cooke accomplished what up until that point had proven impossible, namely, teaching me to understand the mysteries of mathematics-right angle triangles, how to calculate areas and so on. It was therefore him and Montego Bay which made me pass Common Entrance, enter St. George's College and the rest is history. I have been asked to speak with you this evening on the subject "**Money in Politics**".

Money as you know is a necessity in the modern world. Having this meeting required money to rent the hall, print the flyers and, I hope, though I do not see it on the programme, provide refreshments. Neither you nor I can live without money and similarly, there can be no politics without money. To administer elections for example we are told that the Central Westmoreland by-election in December last year cost the ECJ-EOJ thirty (30) million dollars and of course, it would have cost the candidates and political parties a great deal as well.

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But every good thing carried to an extreme becomes a bad thing. When you control the money, that's good, when the money controls you that's bad; when money becomes God and is in control that opens the door to corruption. The Bible in 1 Timothy, Chapter 6, Verse 10 put it this way: *'For the love money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows'*. Just look at what is happening with the top people at FIFA – taking positions not to serve football but to enrich themselves and to serve money and now they are facing many 'sorrows'. So it is with money in politics. When you allow money to become the God in politics, your vote counts for little or nothing, in effect you disrespect your vote.

You ask the question: Why should you respect your vote anyway? Let me tell you why. Our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents had no vote. Prior to 1944 only those Jamaicans with big money or big property had the vote. To be concrete, 19 out of 20 Jamaicans 80 years ago had no vote. Those with money and property along with the colonial governor controlled government and therefore, they got the benefit. So that they and their children enjoyed good education, good healthcare and the best things of life. In fact at that time, prior to us getting the vote, the health services was such that 100 out of every 1000 babies died in infancy; 97 out of every 100 Jamaicans had no place in secondary schools; there was no university; Champs was for boys only and only 7 elite schools took part.

Since we got the vote in 1944, 1 out of every 2 Jamaicans could go to the polls. As a result benefits could now come to the majority. Today infant mortality is down to 17 out of every one thousand, 91 out every 100 Jamaican teenagers can find a place in secondary schools; 1 out of every 4 are attending tertiary institutions; some right here in Montego Bay. And from 7 schools in Champs in 1935, last year there were 111 boys' teams and 114 girls' teams at Champs.

Without the vote none of this would have happened. For this reason you must respect your vote even though there is a long way to go in progress for the majority. Respecting your vote and using it responsibly is one way to get further progress.

But there is now a major danger, a major danger facing your vote here in Jamaica and in almost every single country around the world. The danger is this, the power of big money is coming back; **it is threatening not to serve but to buy out politics and to return the lion's share of benefits and of opportunities, just as it used to be before, to the minority who have the money, who have the connections and who can get things done for themselves.** Without proper controls, without appropriate law and strict regulations, you have heard it said and it is true **"he who pays the piper calls the tune"**. So we in Jamaica like others around the world, if we truly respect our vote, must make sure that we pass and enforce laws to control money politics, and not allow money to control us, our parties and our politics. From experience here at home and elsewhere abroad I suggest that there are at least 6 important measures to ensure that it is your vote and not money that controls the politics:

- **Enforce the law against vote buying and vote selling.** Times are hard and there is much temptation but you tell me how can taking a \$5000 really help you, your children or the community? You get a food for two or three days, after that no opportunity for the other 362. Worse the one with more money buys your vote and that may not be the one to give you more opportunity. In any event each of you who buy or sell a vote can be fined a maximum of \$80,000 or three months in prison. Especially after the complaints in the Central Westmoreland by-election and the admission "that party supporters may have been involved in vote buying" (**Gleaner December 5, 2014**), the police must enforce the law and all of us who respect the vote must help them to do so.
- **Register political parties.** The ECJ recommended this and last year October and December respectively, the House of Representatives and the Senate approved this amendment to the law. One of the things that this now means is that parties have to

submit audited accounts showing the source of funds to the ECJ and if they want public money, they have to submit those accounts to party members as well.

- **Limit the amount of money that can come to a party or a candidate from any single source.** If you don't have any limits as now then big money can in effect buy a candidate or buy a party and ensure that the candidate or the party looks out for the big money man and not respect your vote. The ECJ has made this recommendation; the Parliament has approved it but still no law has been passed to legislate this provision. This needs to be urgently done.
- **Ban certain contributions to candidates and to political parties.** Ban **anonymous** contributions since you don't know who the money is coming from; ban contributions from **illegal entities** like OLINT or CASHPLUS. Prior to the 2007 elections, court documents from the Turks and Caicos Islands, that OLINT, while legal at the time but having been issued a "cease and desist order" by the Financial Services Commission, nevertheless gave US\$2M to the PNP and US\$5M to the JLP. David Smith was subsequently convicted for money laundering and financial crimes but was never charged much less tried in Jamaica. Ban **foreign government money** because this could give a foreign government more influence over our government than we who vote them in.
- **Disclose who is giving big money to the parties.** This allows you and I, as well as the ECJ, to judge whether big money is seeking big favours from the government or the party at your expense and my expense. This disclosure is what happens in most mature democracies. In England where they had an election earlier this month, every voter could know who was giving big money to conservative party or to the labour party prior to the elections. There, election regulations require that every quarter in each year, this information is published on their Election Commission website. In the US they have similar regulations; in the last election, the citizen, and even you and I, could know who gave big money to Obama and who gave big money to Romney. We should have similar law here in Jamaica. Otherwise what happened in the last election will happen again. The two major parties central

headquarters reported that they spent between them one billion Jamaican dollars. Yet neither before the elections nor now, almost 4 years after do we know where this money came from and whether those who gave it have gotten special favours at the expense of the majority of voters. To their credit 6 private sector companies responded to NIA's representations by publishing how much they gave to each party. This wasn't required by law but they did it nevertheless. Clearly they have nothing to hide. The law should require every big company to do the same; why keep your donation secret if there is nothing to hide? Again the ECJ has made recommendations along these lines. The Parliament has approved the recommendations. A Bill has been drafted. But this process is taking too long; the Campaign Finance law requiring some disclosure needs to be passed quickly. Otherwise we are going to have another election without us knowing who is paying the piper and therefore, being able to call the tune.

- **Provide some public funding to balance money from private sources.** This amendment to the law has now been passed and brings Jamaica into line with a majority of democracies who recognize that the public, through their taxes because most don't have money in their pockets, should contribute to parties, so long as they live up to certain requirements; otherwise big money - commercial or criminal - will monopolise contributions and influence policy to serve their private needs and not the public interest.; to perpetuate policies that benefit them and deprive the majority of opportunity.

**And so we conclude money in politics is necessary but without control and regulation big money can buy out politics. With controls and regulations such as proposed by the ECJ and NIA, we can ensure that you respect your vote; that politics respects your vote and that he who pays the piper is less able to call the tune.**