

The Three Commonsense Rs of Jamaica's Revival

Over these last few years, there have been newspaper editorials and columns calling, challenging, chiding and cajoling the Jamaican government, whether it was the PNP-led version or this current version led by the JLP, to do the little things to make Jamaica a better place. There have been announcements made, a number of times with great fanfare, that government is going to embark on doing these things but, as has been too often the case, these announcements ring very, very hollow. So, I'll contribute my two cents' worth and make some suggestions as to what can be done to help turn things around and help make government work better.

What I refer to as the three 'Rs' - **Reform, Restructure and Reduce** - is what the administration must do in order to make government work better for the governed. I intend to address them in reverse order.

Reduce. At present the public sector workforce totals over 100,000 and yet the government is no better at providing the services and resources to improve the quality of life for a good portion of the populace. The solution? Reduce the number of employees. Forget about plans to increase the number of electoral districts from the present 60 to 65. Instead, reduce the number to, say, 41. The result? Bigger, electoral districts with a more diverse electorate and, likely, less garrisonisation.

Another solution: do away with Parish Councils and have county councils instead. Each county council would have 25 members maximum and they would be responsible for most of the major functions within their purview. They would submit budgets to the Finance Ministry for its approval and would be expected to operate within those budgetary confines. End result? A reduction in the number of local government representatives by almost 69 per cent (from 240 parish councilors to 75 county council reps).

Another solution: reduce the number of government ministries from the present 18 to 12, a one-third reduction. It's high time for administrations to stop creating ministries just so long-time party hacks/supporters can have a 'meaningful' job. You do this by combining ministries and eliminating others.

Another solution: merge the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) and the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) into one crime-fighting organization. I know this has been suggested in the past and been shot down for no justifiable reason. The army is a luxury Jamaica simply cannot afford. Anyone in their right mind who believes that an army of 4,000 could really protect Jamaica from a determined external aggressor is seriously deluded. A merger with the JCF would address staffing issues and would allow more resources to be focused on crime-fighting.

Restructure. Reading about how the Jamaican government operates and how things get done, one can certainly understand the frustrations that folks feel when they have to deal with it. One idea: streamline the courts. Do away with the Gun Court, RM Courts and Home Circuit Courts. Instead you'd have Civil Courts, Criminal Courts, Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals as the highest court in the land. Besides having judges hear the cases in these various courts, JPs could be allowed to adjudicate some Civil Court cases up to a certain monetary value and their decisions would be final. Yes, the JPs would have to take a course in Basic Law. All criminal offenses, violent and white collar, would be tried in their namesake court. Cases involving constitutional matters and government corruption would be tried in the Supreme Court with any (un)favorable decisions being appealed to the Court of Appeals, who would have the final say on all appeals it deems worthy to be heard. The justices on the Court of Appeals should be appointed for life so as to remove the doubt of partisanship and partiality. They would be removed for abusing/violating their powers or leave via retirement.

Do the same with the various ministries and other government agencies in order to reduce the layers and to cut the red tape. This should not be seen as something to be done for those foreign investors in Jamaica but for local investors who want to do their part to help foster Jamaica's growth and development.

Reform. Over these number of years now, there have been several scandals and questionable activities by folks in government and they have been allowed to stay on the job. This has to end, period. It makes a mockery of the anti-corruption laws that are in place and have been implemented to address aberrant behaviour by elected representatives. It is no longer enough that every time some government minister is involved in a scandal that a board/commission of inquiry is convened to see what went wrong and issue a

report on its findings and recommendations to prevent a repeat of said scandal.

It should be that if a government minister is involved in a scandal, he/she should recuse him/herself from Parliament until such time as it can be determined if something criminal was done or otherwise. This would mean having an independent prosecutor's office to investigate these matters, issue a report and recommend a course of action. If law enforcement needs to get involved then so be it. The last thing Jamaica needs is the hypocrite that is a government minister calling out folks on their questionable behaviour while they condone said behaviour within their midst.

Another issue to be addressed is the dual-citizenship flap which reared its ugly head within these last few weeks. If one has a Jamaican passport, they should be allowed to work for the government. If they have dual citizenship they should not be allowed to be PM, Foreign Affairs minister, Finance Minister and Justice/Security minister. Otherwise, they should be able to be any other minister or work in any other ministry. At a time when Jamaica can use all the expertise it can to better society, it's ridiculous for folks to be questioning each other's allegiance. Clearly, if you're living in Jamaica and putting yourself up as an elected representative it's because you do give a damn about Jamaica. It's rather hypocritical for Jamaican government folks to go abroad and appeal to the Diaspora for its money, investment and expertise but then turn around and say to them that if you're living in the US and want to serve as an MP, you can't. Last I recall, the US was once a British colony only that in 1776 it chose not to recognize the head of the British monarchy as head of state.

There's something very wrong when if Robert Mugabe could leave Zimbabwe, move to Ja., reside there for six months and then be possibly elected to Parliament but someone who has US citizenship (and have not renounced their Jamaican citizenship) and moved back to Jamaica for over a year is told they are not eligible to be elected to Parliament. Bottom line: address the shortcomings in the constitution to make it more relevant to today's world (aka constitutional reform).

Other suggestions/ideas such as government divesting itself of commercial and money-losing enterprises, utilizing its own real estate for its ministries and agencies and becoming more wired all fall in one or more of the aforementioned categories. By doing all these things, the government could actually end up finding the money to do other things that could put more people to work and, in the process, help to address some social and financial issues. A win-win situation all around, if you ask me.