

# SIR RANDOL FAWKES. Marching to the beat of his own drum

**I**N one of those strange quirks of fate, two of the most commanding figures in Bahamian history were snuffed out within two months of each other in the milestone year 2000.

Sir Randol Fawkes, acknowledged father of the labour movement, maverick parliamentarian and tireless campaigner for the underdog, died in June - just two months before Sir Lynden Pindling succumbed to prostate cancer.

Though united in a common cause - to lift the black Bahamian masses to power in their own land - these two men rarely saw eye to eye. Headstrong, intransigent and fiercely individualistic, they pursued their objectives in different ways, embracing only fleetingly during the crucial days following the 1967 general election when Fawkes held the balance of power in his palm.

Fawkes, the sole Labour representative in the House of Assembly, was offered the earth by the UBP if he would support them in their hour of need. Miami Herald columnist Jim Bishop suggested at the time that the lawyer-

politician could have become a seriously rich man overnight had he bowed to the entreaties of the Bay Street Boys.

But, for a figure whose entire life had been dedicated to helping the working man, there was really only one course to take, and that was to allow Bahamians to enjoy their date with destiny. His historic decision was rewarded

While many members of the original PLP government went on to prosper from the 1967 triumph, Fawkes most certainly didn't. Pindling became rich, Fawkes remained a man of modest means. Pindling's long term as prime minister brought him a handsome pension, while Fawkes was left to fight an unseemly battle in advanced age for a

table, and in the last few years of his life he was seen as a quixotic figure of high ideals who lost out in the rough-and-tumble lottery of political life.

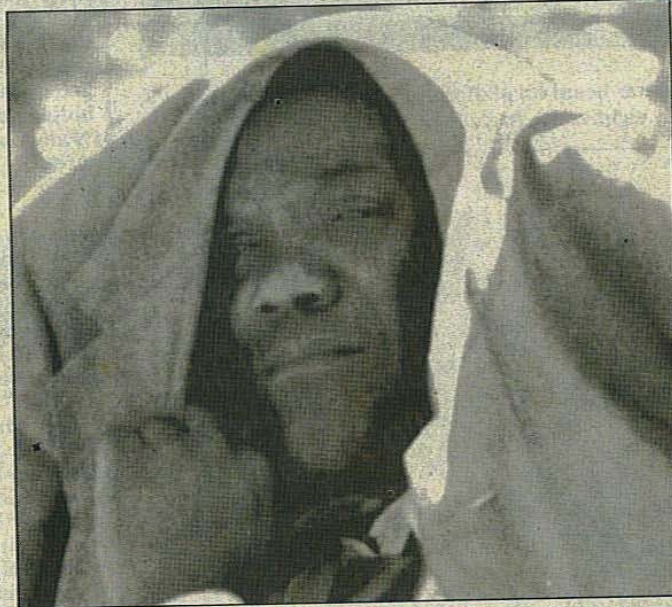
Sir Randol had for years been living testimony to an unchallengeable truth - that the man who marches to the sound of his own drum will ultimately be marginalised in politics,

where tailwagging mediocrities often prosper by nodding their heads and saying "Yes" at regular intervals, beneficiaries of self-serving networks and groupings.

Fawkes was the least malleable of men. The word "Yes" was alien to him, unless in response to a poor man's request for help. Though he promoted trade unions, which thrive on collective strength, he was essentially a singular man who followed no-one's agenda but his own. It was both his strength and his weakness.

One sensed that Sir Randol was happiest when challenging the status quo and breaking the rules. In the House of Assembly he challenged the Speaker's

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**SIR RANDOL: sheltering from the sun**

with a ministerial post, but only for as long as it took the PLP to strengthen their majority in an election the following year. Then Fawkes was again consigned to the political sidelines, a position he occupied for the rest of his life.

meagre annuity from government funds.

Principles, they say, are priceless - but they can be costly, too, as Fawkes discovered only too well. He was made a knight bachelor in reward for his tireless work for labour, but that didn't put bread on the



# Mischievous, noisy, irritating, uncontrollable and likeable

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authority more than once, and savoured the subsequent banishment with a broad smile as he left the Chamber suspended between two burly cops, his briefcase in his lap, ballpoints tumbling from his top pocket.

He was mischievous, noisy, irritating, uncontrollable and, with his jutting jaw and impish grin, a very likeable figure in the eyes of those who didn't have to suffer his wrath.

During his brief reign as Minister of Labour and Commerce, Fawkes continued to fly his political colours under his campaign slogan "Righteousness Exalteth The Nation", declaring himself in his election posters to be "Incorruptible, Honest and Competent."

His greatest claims to fame were that he founded the free trade union movement in the Bahamas, helped set up The People's Penny Savings Bank, and wrote books on government and labour which are still read with interest today.

But there was another side to Sir Randol that was rarely mentioned in the many newspaper articles written about him over the years - his great musical gift, especially in playing the harmonica, an instrument he loved and used to produce sublime melodies.

Long-time friend Walter Jacob recalled a few days after Sir Randol's death the musical sessions they enjoyed together, when the labour stalwart always insisted on playing a cadenza of falling leaves during their rendition of Autumn Leaves.

"Sadly, the harmonica and that unique version of Autumn Leaves are now silent forever," wrote Mr Jacob, "But not quite. For it will be my honour and privilege whenever I play Autumn Leaves to dedicate it to Sir Randol Fawkes; and I shall always end with a cadenza of a flurry of notes in honour of that great man."