

Sir Randol - voice of the people

THE DEATH of Sir Randol Fawkes brought forth a torrent of praise for a man whose individuality cost him dear in a life dedicated to fighting the workers' cause.

His single parliamentary seat, along with that of the late Speaker Sir Alvin Braynen, tilted the balance of power in the PLP's favour in 1967, establishing majority rule for the first time.

But unlike some others in that first Pindling Cabinet (the then Mr Fawkes was made Minister of Labour), he did not prosper from politics and spent many of his later years in an unseemly battle for a government pension.

Sir Randol's problem, in political terms, was that he was not a team player. He preferred to run his own show and did so effectively - so effectively that he is now considered the "father" of the Bahamas labour movement, an enduring inspiration for contemporary trade union leaders.

But his refusal to toe the party line meant that, once the PLP boosted their parliamentary majority, he was jettisoned from government forever. For the rest of his political life, he was parliament's loose cannon, an unpredictable force whose oratorical powers were considerable.

Like his namesake, Guy Fawkes, the gunpowder plotter who was hung, drawn and quartered for his role in trying to blow up the king, Sir Randol was forever trying to light squibs under the establishment.

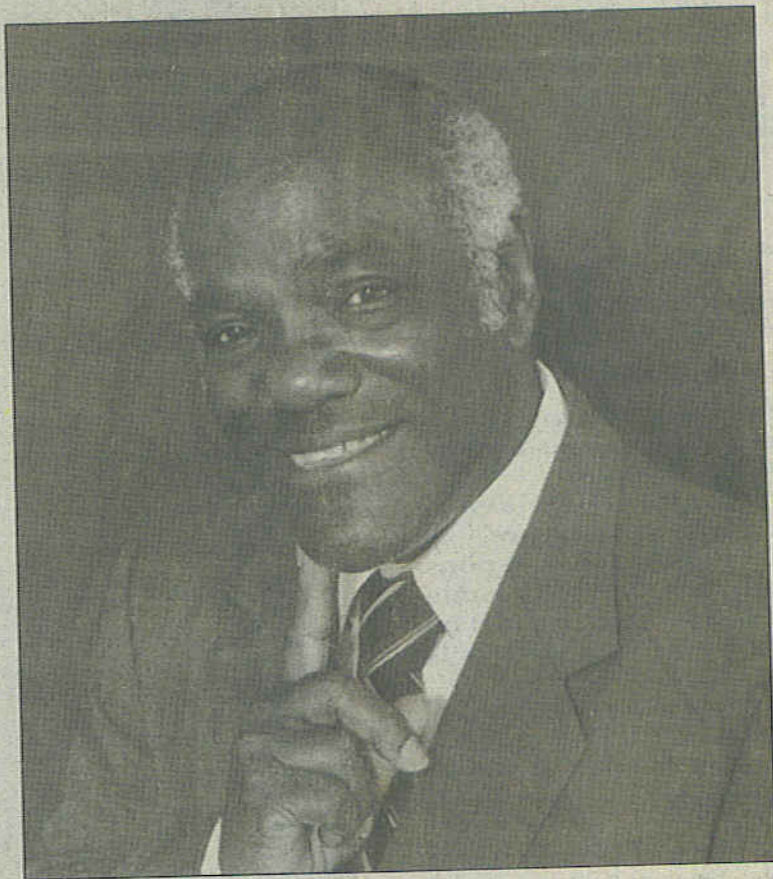
A good example was his "no confidence" resolution against Sir Lynden Pindling, when he lit the fuse and - to use the parlance of pyrotechnics - "retired immediately", leaving his parliamentary colleagues to pick up the bits.

It was utterly typical of this mischievous maverick that he should set in train a potentially explosive motion and then not hang around to see what happened.

In the event, it failed to topple Pindling, but it rattled the foundations of the Prime Minister's power base and left his "Moses" image looking somewhat tarnished.

Sir Randol's famous battlecry was "Righteousness exalteth the nation" and he was fond of referring to himself as "brother of the working man." At a time when an entrenched white oligarchy held the reins of power, Sir Randol was prepared to stand up fearlessly and challenge the status quo. For that, all those who remember will acknowledge his role in modern Bahamian politics.

Every political system needs its Sir Randol Fawkes. Guy Fawkes, say some British cynics, was the only man who entered parliament with good intentions. Sir Randol did, too, though he stopped short of lighting gunpowder under the House of Assembly. But he must have been sorely tempted when he was trying to get Senators and MPs to give him the pension most observers thought he richly



SIR RANDOL FAWKES, one of the great characters of Bahamian politics, will always be remembered fondly by the working people of our country because of his tireless efforts on their behalf during the years before the PLP came to power in 1967. Affable, warm-hearted and good-humoured, Sir Randol was admired as a man who stood his ground against ferocious odds and sacrificed financial gain for political principles. He was pivotal in securing majority rule and served as Minister of Labour in the first Pindling government. In later years, he had to fight for the pension he felt he deserved.

deserved. Eventually, he won his pension, but it was only a fraction of those granted to less principled political practitioners whose names will not live on in the same way.

Sir Randol was, both personally and politically, a bit of an enigma, but there was unquestionably a cheerful, affable and warm-hearted side to his nature which even his political enemies found endearing.

In parliament, he relished the role of maverick MP, ignoring procedural niceties and frequently finding himself being berated from the Speaker's chair. But he was unquestionably one of the great political characters of our time and his piping voice - invariably saying things his fellow MPs shied away from - will always be remembered fondly by those whose cause he represented so gallantly.