

# Speech given by the Honourable Perry G. Christie on the occasion of the signing of the Majority Rule and Heroes Day Acts

Friday October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at 11:00a.m.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Permit me at once to express my thanks to their Excellencies for extending the hospitality of Government House for this important occasion; an occasion that summonses us here as witnesses to the signing into law of two historic pieces of legislation.

Firstly, His Excellency the Governor-General will in just a few moments from now sign into law the Majority Rule (Public Holiday) Act 2013 which will make January 10th an annual public holiday in The Bahamas, commencing with January 10th of next year.

Secondly, His Excellency will also sign into law this morning the much heralded National Heroes Act 2007. This legislation will formally establish "National Heroes Day". Indeed as from this coming Monday, and thereafter on the second Monday in October of each year, we will celebrate "National Heroes Day" as a public holiday in The Bahamas. In addition, this same Act will also establish the formal machinery for the selection and recognition of our National Heroes.

So, these are the two historic pieces of legislation that will become full-fledged legal realities in just a few minutes.

Your Excellencies :

With your permission, I would like to speak briefly to each of the two Acts that will be brought into force today.

I begin with:

## THE ACT TO MAKE MAJORITY RULE DAY A PUBLIC HOLIDAY.

The attainment of Majority Rule on January 10th, 1967 stands with the Emancipation from Slavery in 1834 and the attainment of Independence in 1973 as one of the three most consequential events in the whole of Bahamian history.

Historians may continue to argue among themselves as to how these three seminal events should be ranked in order of importance but as for myself I share the view that has long been espoused by many of our nation's leaders, chief among them, His Excellency, the Governor-General, who, for many years past, has been saying publicly that when one objectively traces the evolution of human society in our country, there has never been a more consequential, a more fundamental, or a more transformative change than the attainment of Majority Rule.

January 10th, 1967 brought about a profoundly important liberation-experience in the life and history of our beloved country. In an almost literal sense, it marks the transition from the old Bahamas to a New Bahamas, replacing minority government with majority rule. However, at a much deeper psychological level, January 10th, 1967 brought about something much more transformative than a change in the political regime.

In addressing this aspect of the matter, I can do no better than to repeat what I said about it on Wednesday past in the House of Assembly:

"Majority Rule was a singular moment of liberation for all of us. It liberated black Bahamians from a system of political oppression and economic and social deprivation. It opened up instead a new door

of opportunity and equality for all. But it was a liberating experience for white Bahamians too because it freed them from a morally corrupt ideology based on race and privilege. By holding out the promise of a truly democratic society that was colour-blind and dedicated to the principle of equality, our white brothers and sisters were liberated from a psychologically debilitating and morally unsustainable construct”.

So, January 10th, 1967 was and shall forever remain one of the truly transformative events not only in Bahamian history but in the development of the psyche of the Bahamian people as well.

It is important for us to remember, however, that January 10th 1967 was not an end nor even a beginning. Rather, it was a step, albeit a major step, in a journey that began centuries ago when some anonymous slave struck the first blow for freedom in our land.....a journey that continued with slaves like Poor Black Kate in Crooked Island and slaves like Pompey in Exuma and slaves like the man known only as Black Dick in Cat Island who in the early 1830's, against the most overwhelming odds, struck his blow for freedom and paid for it with his death on the gallows.

It is a journey that continued with men like Stephen Dillet, Thomas Minns and John P. Deane who struck their own blows when in 1834, after years of agitation and struggle, they won election to the House of Assembly – the very first men of colour to do so.

The journey continued with men like James Carmichael Smith, originally from Port Howe, Cat Island, who in the 1880's struck his blow for a better Bahamas by leading the protest for a more just and equitable society for all Bahamians. He paid for it dearly and ended up spending the rest of his life in exile in Sierra Leone.

The journey continued in the 20th century with men like W.P. Adderley, Etienne Dupuch, T.A. Toote, Leon Walton Young, C.R. Walker, Milo Boughton Butler, and others who, each in their own way, struck major blows for a better Bahamas.

The journey continued with Randol Fawkes, Clifford Darling and Clarence Bain; and with H.M. Taylor, Cyril Stevenson and William Cartwright, and, most importantly of all, with Lynden Pindling, and that mighty band who joined him in forging from their collective struggles a new Bahamian, upward-striving, forward-looking and free.

Indeed, Your Excellencies, this may be an appropriate juncture for us to remember the standard-bearers of the Progressive Liberal Party in that great and historic election of January 10th, 1967, for it was from this group that the first majority rule government emerged. And let us be clear, this is not party politics I'm taking now. This is history!

I begin this roll call of honour with those who have since gone on to glory, and I call them in no particular order, including those candidates who stood but lost in January '67:

Milo Butler Senior

Milo Butler Junior

Curtis McMillan

Cecil Wallace-Whitfield

Jeffrey Thompson

Jimmy Shepherd

Clifford Darling

Anthony Roberts

Uriah McPhee

Lionel Davis

Carlton Francis

Clarence Bain

Scherlin Bootle

C.B. Archer

George Thompson

Preston Albury

Henry Bowen

Livingston Coakley

Raleigh Butler

Joseph Ford and

Lynden Pindling

And I would like to add to that roll call the names:

Randol Fawkes and

A.R. Braynen

They were not candidates for the PLP but without their support, as Canon Sebastien Campbell reminded us all on radio yesterday, Majority Rule would not have become a reality in 1967.

Please let rise now to observe a moment's silence in memory of all these brave men I have just named who fought the good fight on the frontlines of the 1967 struggle for freedom but who have gone on now to their final rest.

....Thank you.

And the roll call now of the living; the men who stood as standard-bearers in 1967 and who happily are still with us, and again I include those candidates who stood but lost:

Eldwood Donaldson

Arthur Foulkes

Edmund Moxey

Arlington Butler

Arthur D. Hanna

Loftus Roker

Warren Levarity

Maurice Moore

George A. Smith

Please let us have a great, big round of applause for these outstanding soldiers of the Peaceful Revolution who are still with us.

Your Excellencies :

Behind the frontline soldiers whose names I have just called there was, of course, a vast army of men and women who had the backs of those in front. Let us never forget them or the sacrifices they made, these brave warriors for freedom. They are the unsung heroes of the Revolution. They risked everything and in most cases asked for nothing in their quest to for freedom and social justice in our land. To all them, and to each of them, I offer the thanks of a nation that must forever be in their debt. Thank you!

Your Excellencies :

I turn now to say a few words about:

#### THE NATIONAL HEROES ACT

This has been long in coming! But as Shakespeare reminds us "All's well that ends well".

And so it really is cause for celebration that at long last National Heroes Day will this Monday become an annual legal public holiday in The Bahamas, replacing what we used to variously call "Columbus Day" and "Discovery Day".

Equally important, the National Heroes Act will also establish the framework for the orderly, rational and systematic selection of our National Heroes.

At this point I would like to pay special tribute to the men and women who comprised the Heroes Committee, for without their persistence over the course of some 20 years this legislation would not have become a reality. They never gave up the fight. They always pressed on. And today this victory is theirs. I congratulate them. I salute them.

I commend and thank them all, most especially, Reverend Canon Sebastien Campbell, who has been a model of persistent and vigorous and yet always respectful agitation all these many years. He is deserving of our highest praise for all his efforts. On behalf of the entire nation, I thank you, Canon Campbell!

Please also join me in giving thanks to the other members of the Heroes Committee for their outstanding work in helping to make this National Heroes Act the reality it will become today :

Reverend C. B. Moss

The Hon. Fred Mitchell

Loretta Butler-Turner

The late Franklyn Butler Sr.

Vanda Moss

Freddie Munnings Jr.

Terrence Bethel and

Keod Smith

A great, big round of applause for the entire Heroes Committee!

As I said in the House of Assembly on Wednesday the Order of National Hero will be at the apex of the now emerging indigenous honours system of The Bahamas.

This particular honour will be reserved for “the greatest of the great”, be they living or dead. Indeed this honour is really only intended to be conferred on those citizens of The Bahamas who have so fundamentally influenced the course of Bahamian history or who have given such truly extraordinary service to the nation that they deserve to be elevated to the status of “National Hero of The Bahamas”, a status that will carry with it the right to be known and addressed as “Right Excellent”.

Appointments to the Order of National Hero will be made by His Excellency the Governor-General , who will serve as Chancellor of the Order, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and after consideration of the report of the Advisory Committee. This Advisory Committee I expect to be in a position to name very shortly.

As I advised the House of Assembly on Wednesday, I also expect to be in a position very shortly to speak more generally to the re-vamping of our system of national honours.

There are a great many persons in our society who may not be worthy of elevation to the highest rank of honour – the Order of National Hero – but who nonetheless are deserving of state recognition in one of the various classes or orders of state honours.

I expect this new national honours system to become a reality in the near term as well.

But for today the focus is properly placed on the two pieces of legislation that have drawn us to Government House this morning.

Thank you once again, Your Excellencies, for your gracious hospitality, and may I say to each of you present here today, and throughout the nation, even if I am a few days early : Happy National Heroes Day!

## **Communication**

**By**

**The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister & Member For Centreville**

**To The Honourable House Of Assembly**

**October 9th, 2013**

**Mr. Speaker:**

It gives me great pleasure to inform this honourable House that on Friday of this week two important pieces of legislation will be brought into force by His Excellency the Governor-General during a public ceremony at Government House.

Firstly, the Majority Rule (Public Holiday) Act 2013 will be brought into effect on Friday. This Act will make January 10th in every year a public holiday in The Bahamas, commencing with January 10th, 2014.

In this connection, Mr. Speaker, I would wish to recall what I said on an earlier occasion when speaking to the singular historical importance of January 10th. And this is what I had to say:

“There is no event in the whole of Bahamian history that can be objectively credited with greater importance than the attainment of Majority Rule on January 10th, 1967. Indeed, neither the achievement of Independence in 1973 nor the abolition of slavery in 1834 has a greater claim.

“That is certainly my view. And I know that it’s a view that is shared by many of our nation’s foremost leaders, chief among them, our Governor-General, Sir Arthur Foulkes, who, for many years past, has been saying publicly that when one objectively traces the evolution of human society in our country, there has never been a more consequential, a more fundamental, or a more transformative change

than the attainment of Majority Rule. “

I then went on, Mr. Speaker, to say this:

“Majority Rule was indeed a singular moment of liberation for all of us. It liberated black Bahamians from a system of political oppression and economic and social deprivation. It opened up instead a new door of opportunity and equality for all. But it was a liberating experience for white Bahamians too because it freed them from a morally corrupt ideology based on race and privilege. By holding out the promise of a truly democratic society that was colour-blind and dedicated to the principle of equality, our white brothers and sisters were liberated from a psychologically debilitating and morally unsustainable construct”.

I then made the point, Mr. Speaker - as indeed I do again today – that January 10th does not belong just to black Bahamians, nor just to PLPs, but to all Bahamians; that it deserves to be elevated above the political fray, above the divisions in our society, so that we can all come together :

“each year.... in the context of a national holiday, to give thanksgiving for the heroic struggles of those fearless men and women who from one generation to the next carried, and then handed off, the baton of freedom until the relay was won on that glorious night forty six years ago.”

I am therefore so very happy, Mr. Speaker, to be able to stand before you and before the people of our country to let it be known that come January 10th of next year, and for every year thereafter in perpetuity, January 10th will be a public holiday in The Bahamas; a public holiday to recognize and reflect upon the greatest, most defining moment in all of Bahamian history: the attainment of Majority Rule on January 10th, 1967.

Mr. Speaker:

Secondly, the Governor-General will also bring into force on Friday The National Heroes Act 2007. Thus when we celebrate National Heroes Day, formerly known as Discovery Day, on Monday of next week, we will be doing so for the very first time under the legal umbrella of an Act that statutorily creates “National Heroes Day” and declares it to be a national holiday to be observed on the second Monday in the month of October of each year.

This Act also creates the formal machinery for the selection and recognition of our National Heroes.

This, of course, is the group of persons, be they living or dead, for whom the nation’s highest honours will be reserved.

By nature, this group, this “Order of National Heroes”, will be exceedingly small – the rarest of the rare, the greatest of the great. And it must remain so if the term “National Hero” is to retain its legitimacy.

This status is really only intended to be conferred on those citizens of The Bahamas who have fundamentally influenced the course of Bahamian history or who have given service to The Bahamas by outstanding leadership, extraordinary achievement or heroic sacrifice of a truly transformative kind.

An announcement will be made shortly as to the persons who will comprise the Advisory Committee under the Act. These are the persons who will be charged with the task of identifying and investigating citizens, be they living or dead, who should be recommended for conferment of the honour of “National Hero of The Bahamas”, a status that will carry with it the right to be known and addressed as “Right Excellent”.

The Advisory Committee will consist of Seven (7) persons, including 2 members of each House of Parliament. It would certainly be my wish, Mr. Speaker, that there be one nominee from the Government and one nominee from the Opposition in each of the House of Assembly and the Senate. This will ensure optimal balance and parity. We really do need to take partisanship and political prejudice out of the selection of our national heroes. To do otherwise would be to debase the whole process and to detract from the sense of national unity and patriotism that should always be exclusively in view when we approach a matter such as this.

Appointments to the Order of National Hero will be made by His Excellency the Governor-General , who will serve as Chancellor of the Order, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and after consideration of the report of the Advisory Committee.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I expect to be in a position very shortly to speak more generally to the re-vamping of our system of national honours.

There are a great many persons in our society who may not be worthy of elevation to the highest rank of honour – the Order of National Hero – but who nonetheless are deserving of state recognition in one of the various classes or orders of state honours that will be the subject of special legislation for this purpose.

I expect that to become a legislative reality in short order as well. In the meantime, however, the focus should be properly placed on the two pieces of legislation that are the subject of this communication today.