

THE BAHAMAS FEDERATION OF LABOUR AND BLACK LIVES MATTER - THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS OF THE QUIET REVOLUTION

It was the very year that I was born that the struggle of the black population in The Bahamas to gain equality with their white counterparts gained momentum.

I was only a few months old when my father was suspended from The Bahamas Bar for two years. Stripped of the means to support his family and shunned by some compatriots, my father left for New York and my mother later joined him while my brother and I remained behind with our grandparents, Leonard and Joanna Bethel.

Dad had been warned by many not to take a case against the Government but he heeded not the admonitions as he believed strongly in the innocence of his client. Mom told me that the case was closely watched by the public and the way in which he fought brought him acclaim amongst the common man and before he left for New York they told him that they wanted him to come back and be their representative in the House of Assembly.

When Dad returned from his “voluntary exile”, he came back with further ideas of enlightenment gained from watching the civil rights movement play out in the United States of America and a determined resolve to fight with might and main to get rid of the minority white oligarchy.

With lightening speed, he amassed a vast following among the poor, dispossessed, exploited and often illiterate workers. He loved them and they said that they would follow him until they died. My mother told me that one day when they were walking on Wulff Road, he saw a garbage collector picking up a dead dog with uncovered hands. Without hesitation, he extended his hand and reached for the hand of the sanitation worker and said, “I will put gloves on those hands.”

Sometimes I wonder if I am the only one who thinks about the forgotten members of The Bahamas Federation of Labour. Led by a small band of educated, black professionals, these workers were the ones who marched, held office in the unions, demonstrated and stood up and spoke out when middle class blacks and whites watched silently and oftentimes with condemnation for those who dared to defy the status quo.

Today, in tribute to the memory of the fallen, I share with you a video that shows The Federation marching for equal rights in 1958 and I mention the names of the few that I still remember: L. Garth Wright, Napoleon McPhee, Florina Smith, Marion Stuart, Johnny DeLancy, Rev. Eugene Butler, Joseph Zonicle, Marguerita Wallace, Ariminthea Pratt and Sam Stubbs. Sam was Dad's taxi driver and body guard and the only one that is still alive. May the souls of the departed rest in peace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kd2BPtgXtdM>