



2024 PLP Annual General Conference

October 23, 2024

Premier and Leader E. David Burt JP, MP

Remarks for Conference Opening

PLP Family!

Thank you so much to Layla for that incredible introduction.

Thank you to our incredible performers this evening, Kingdom Mimes, Blues Beat Band, Septimus and to our MC, Mr Nandanja Bailey. Thank you to Rev VanLowe Smith for covering this Conference in prayer. Thank you to our inspirational speakers, the Hon. Tinee Furbert, Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors and to my pastor Reverend Tweed for his powerful and passionate message.

To our delegates, party executive members, parliamentarians, members, union leaders, supporters, and everyone watching online, Good Evening.

Our theme this year, *The Power of One*, is a reminder to all that each voice, each action, has the power to spark the change we need. When one person stands up, even in the toughest moments, they can move mountains.

Now, we all know that it's easy to feel like your voice doesn't matter and that, by yourself you can't make a difference. But history teaches and tells us otherwise.

Real change doesn't always start in the halls of Parliament or boardrooms. It begins with an idea—an idea carried forward by people who believe in something bigger than themselves.

We, the PLP, are a product of such courage, rooted in the belief that fairness, equality and justice are worth fighting for.

Think back to the Progressive Group in 1959 meeting in secret. Organising the theatre boycott that ended segregation in our theatres and began the long march towards a fairer Bermuda for all of us.

One small group with one huge mission changed the course of history. It's their courage and belief in justice that we carry forward today.

Like the Progressive Group, our founders were defiant. They met in secret in that garage in Pembroke back in 1963 to build a movement for fairness, justice, and equality for the working class. Their vision, courage, and determination laid the foundation for the movement we serve and carry forward today.

This movement, this Bermuda Progressive Labour Party, is bigger than any one of us. It's bigger than me, and it's bigger than any individual — this movement is about building a fairer Bermuda for all of us.

The need for individuals to unite to fight for fairness, justice and equality didn't begin in 1963 or even in 1959.

No family, it started even further back when the Sea Venture crashed on our shores in 1609, and a system was set in place. A system of colonialism that divided power and wealth among a few while the many laboured for their benefit. That is the system we are still largely living with today - a legacy of colonialism that still concentrated power and privilege in the hands of a few. And family, do you know how they maintain that power? Through division!

They know that when we, the people, the workers and the middle class, are divided, they win.

They cling desperately to their power and laugh when they see us fighting with each other instead of fighting them to change the system they maintain.

The Labour movement and our unions say it best: “United, We Stand, and... Divided, We Fall.”

Now, I know that some of you may be feeling disappointed that we haven't moved faster in correcting the historic wrongs of the system we inherited. But family, remember — colonialism had centuries to entrench this system. It's not going to be undone in just a few short years. It takes time, but we are making steady progress. Every step we take is a step towards the fairer, more just Bermuda we all believe in.

And as we look forward to the next election, it is about one thing: who will build a Bermuda that works for all of us and not just those who have always had it all?

It will be a choice between fairness or taking Bermuda backwards to the old ways of protecting privilege and inequality.

Whatever they call themselves - today or tomorrow - we know what they stand for and who they truly represent.

But guess what family...

We have never had to change our name, rebrand, or relaunch, and we have never given up... Why? because the PLP has always been about fairness.

Our founders had a vision of a Bermuda where opportunity was available to every Bermudian and not just a select few.

Like them, we believe that every Bermudian deserves dignity, a fair chance, and the opportunity to thrive right here, right now, in our own country.

We will continue to work and fight for progress because that's what the PLP stands for.

And Family, when you're on the doorstep or in the community, and someone asks you, "What has the PLP done?" I want you to tell them that the Progressive Labour Party Government has made Bermuda fairer for all of us.

When they ask, "*how?*".....Remind them that we increased pensions six times to keep up with rising inflation so that our seniors can live out their golden years with dignity and security.

Also remind them that when our opponents were last in power, they increased pensions **once** in their entire term. And they did it on the eve of an election after telling seniors for years, "Money doesn't grow on trees."

When they ask how the PLP is making Bermuda's tax system fairer...Remind them that we lowered taxes for 86% of Bermudians, putting more money in the pockets of working and middle-class people. That a worker earning \$48,000 has seen their payroll tax reduced from \$2,280 a year under the OBA to just \$240 today—a 90% reduction under this PLP Government! For some families this has meant \$18,000 less taxes paid to the Government since we've been in office. - Yes - correct \$18,000 less in taxes!

And remind them that we didn't just lower taxes on workers to the lowest levels in history; we also raised taxes on high earners. Why? Because to build a fairer island, they needed to pay a little more, and we know that a fairer Bermuda is one that uplifts every worker and where the wealthy pay their fair share.

When they ask you how we have made Bermuda fairer for families, remind them that we expanded Childcare assistance to families making up to \$130,000 and are giving up to \$900 a month to support our young parents.

When they ask you how we've built a fairer Bermuda for young Bermudians trying to get a start in life, remind them that we created the Mortgage Guarantee Programme, which has helped dozens of Bermudians realise their dream of homeownership with reduced interest rates and down payment costs.

Remind them that we eliminated stamp duty for first-time home buyers, invested \$15 million in affordable housing since 2022, and have completed over 70 units, with more on the way.

When they ask you how we're building a fairer Bermuda for our students, remind them that this PLP government ensured no student was denied access to Bermuda College due to finances. Remind them that this PLP Government doubled the funding for scholarships after the OBA cut them.

Remind them that it was this PLP Government that introduced signature schools, including Bermuda's first trade school in a generation - providing education in skilled trades like construction & carpentry at the Cedarbridge Academy.

Family, we have a good story to tell! We saw this country through the worst pandemic in a century, and now we're building a fairer Bermuda for Bermudians.

But equally as important...Remind persons that our political opponents did not support the steps we've taken towards a fairer Bermuda.

They did not support us raising taxes on high earners while reducing taxes for workers to the lowest level in history. They did not support us when we introduced Bermuda's first tax on dividends and used the additional revenue to invest in our education system and social services.

Why didn't the opposition support us? Because building a fairer Bermuda is not what they stand for - but here is the thing - it's not just the OBA who didn't support it, the FDM said they would reverse those tax cuts for workers - to create a flat tax, where the worker pays the same as the insurance executive. We believe in a different path - and that is why Bermudians must pay attention to what is being proposed by our political opponents - as policies matter!

So, what comes next?

We will continue the work that is our calling, and we will continue to live up to our responsibility to those who came before us and the people we serve today.

We are expanding access to senior daycare services and have funded the construction of a Senior DayCare facility, which will help the *Sandwich Generation* struggle to care for ageing parents while caring for their children.

We are increasing funding for mental health services because we know that Bermudians - especially young people - are struggling in this age of rapid social, economic and technological change.

These initiatives, which came from our Central Committee, ensure that this PLP Government not only delivers on our platform promises but also adapts to ensure that new policies make a meaningful difference in Bermudians' lives.

In keeping with the issues that matter most to the community, I want to reassure everyone tonight that this PLP Government recognises that the cost of living is the number one issue facing Bermudians today. Though we didn't cause the 40-year high global inflation, we understand the pain it causes Bermudians.

Unlike the other political parties, we have committed to reducing or eliminating taxes, like customs duty, with the additional tax revenue from the introduction of Corporate Income Tax.

Taxes like customs duty increase the cost of goods and services in Bermuda, and this PLP Government knows how these costs impact the pockets of hardworking Bermudians and our small businesses.

But even before our corporate income tax regime has been implemented, and after reducing taxes on workers to the lowest levels in history, your PLP remains on track to deliver Bermuda's first budget surplus in over two decades - and they tell us that we don't know how to manage the economy.

Nonsense. Just because we manage the economy differently by reducing taxes for 86% of workers and all local businesses doesn't mean we don't know what we are doing—we're just doing it differently—Bermudians first, workers first, families first, and fairness first!

Why do I say - we do it differently - because this PLP Government knows how to manage the public purse, and reduce our island's debt without cutting childcare & education, without asking public servants to take furlough days, and without cutting scholarships and social services.

With your support, we will continue implementing policies that build a fairer Bermuda. That is why the Progressive Labour Party was founded and that is what we will work every day to deliver.

And to the Bermudians who left our shores for whatever reason, I have a message for you. Please know that we are working every day to build a Bermuda that is prepared for your return—where opportunity & fairness await you here, at home in your own country. That is why we have invested record amounts in affordable housing and will continue to do so!

Now, you know what we've done and what we're doing to build a fairer Bermuda. Let me say a few words about what is happening on the other side. Because, family, we have seen this movie before.

Those of you who are political historians in the audience might remember. But, let me remind everyone for the sake of the younger people in the audience.

The United Bermuda Party ruled Bermuda for decades and represented the establishment - the wealthy elite interests of Bermuda. On November 9, 1998, led by Dame Jennifer Smith - the Progressive Labour Party finally brought an end to UBP rule.

Fast-forward to the aftermath of the 2007 election. The United Bermuda Party—realising that it represented Bermuda's colonial past and had a toxic, unwinnable brand — split into two, with the younger members leaving and forming... now, here is a Bermuda politics trivia question for you... Does anyone remember what the name of the UBP splinter party was?

That's right - The Bermuda Democratic Alliance, aka the BDA and who led the BDA family?

That's right... none other than Craig Cannonier!

A few years before the 2012 general election, the BDA and the UBP contested a by-election in C26, and what happened? These two parties split the opposition vote.

So, the UBP and the BDA realized they had a problem. So, what did they do? they rebranded and came back together as one party with a new logo called the One Bermuda Alliance.

Now, this was not some natural coming together. As many let Bermuda know at the time, it was actually a plan written in an election 2007 post-mortem report about how to regain power. And, yes, that report called for the splitting and re-joining and the use of “black surrogates” to help them win power.

Now, I tell you this story from Bermuda’s recent political past because while history might not repeat itself, history certainly rhymes. Today, we have three peas in the same pod.

We have a One Bermuda Alliance that not only represents the historic elites of Bermuda’s society but also failed Bermudians in government. It was the OBA that gave us the bad airport deal, which cost us tens of millions of dollars during the pandemic and hundreds of millions more in lost revenue that is continuing to flow into the hands of a Canadian corporation.

It was the OBA that put us on the hook for \$200 million for Morgan’s Point. And, it was the OBA that tried to push through Pathways to Status which would have fundamentally redefined what it means to be a Bermudian.

Then, we have the OBA’s junior partners. The Free Democratic Movement (FDM) might look like us, but... family... **take a look under the hood**. What you will find is a group of people with some downright **strange** beliefs. Massive new immigration, reduced public services, reduced taxes for high earners - while workers pay more.

That’s not an ideology that will build a fairer Bermuda for us, that’s an ideology that plays right into the hands of the OBA.

Then, you have the independent Party of Sir John Swan, the longest-serving United Bermuda Party Premier. If you study his history, there is little question what they are about.

Today, it seems we have a new combined opposition that has a pro-wealthy, pro-establishment agenda that includes tax cuts for high earners and cuts to public services & programmes and that will fundamentally change Bermuda by opening the immigration floodgates.

If you want to get a real sense of what could be in store for Bermuda under the Opposition's Chaotic Coalition of Convenience, take a long, hard look at what's happening in the Cayman Islands. They embraced radical immigration policies—just like some in our opposition are proposing—and what's the result? Born Caymanians, the people who called that island home for generations, are now a minority in their own country. Yes, a minority in their own country.

Ten years. That's all it took in Cayman.

Ask yourself: Is the Bermuda that the Oppositions' Chaotic Coalition of Convenience wants, the Bermuda you want?

Our political opponents, with their planned Chaotic Coalition of Convenience, want to distract us with personality politics. They want to talk about anything but the policies that make a difference in people's lives and make our island a fairer place. But we know better.

Our policies benefit the majority, the working people of Bermuda, while their policies increase the economic burden on you - Bermuda Workers - while they work for and on behalf of the privileged few. Remember what the OBA said.

They told Bermuda that they want to tax healthcare - which would increase healthcare costs.

They told Bermuda that they want to reintroduce Travel Authorisation Fees - Can you imagine?

And they remain committed to Pathways to Status - even though they won't say it.

They talk about balance sheets, radical immigration policies, and public service cuts that will harm our communities.

We talk about the Bermudian people and making the changes that will matter to you. We are focused on building a Bermuda with you at the heart of our policies. But that is not a conversation that they wish to have.

So family, we cannot let them distract us from our work or distract the voters of Bermuda from what matters most in Government: the policies, not personality politics.

Policy, not personality — reduce taxes and keeps more money in the pockets of working Bermudians while ensuring that those who can afford to pay more pay their fair share.

Policy, not personality— increase seniors' pensions every year in line with inflation.

Policy not personality— expand access to the Child Care Assistance

Policy, not personality—enhance workers' protections and strengthen our trade unions

Do not be misled by the vicious commentary, or latest WhatsApp rumour - meant to divide us. Those are the same people who wish this Progressive Labour Party Government would forget its commitment to building a fairer Bermuda because it would make their lives easier.

We cannot allow them to make the next general election about personalities. It must be about policies. Policies that build a *fairer Bermuda* for all -vs- policies that benefit high earners.

Your PLP Government will continue to deliver policies and legislation that honour our party's core ideals and our commitment to the working people of this country because we know who we are and who we know who we stand with.

We know who we represent. We are a party and a government that shares your struggles, hopes, and dreams for a better and fairer Bermuda. Most importantly, we have a plan to build it (not just a little pamphlet of empty words—like the OBA).

At the end of the day, the next election is about fairness.

It's about forging a fairer future -vs- turning back to the system that dominated Bermuda in the past.

It's about the safety of a government that is making steady progress to build a fairer Bermuda -vs- the risk of a chaotic coalition that does the bidding of the economic haves and have-mores.

Family, I know that the PLP isn't perfect - no political party is or ever will be. But, what we are is a **team** of caring people who are connected to the community. We are a **team** of people who understand that the economic system of Bermuda - built over generations and centuries - is one that benefits the few and not the many. The PLP was born to change that. And- **we are making progress.**

So, today... I am calling on all of us to redouble our efforts. Get out on the doorstep. Work in your communities. Talk to your neighbours. Talk to your family. Talk to your friends and make sure they are registered to vote.

Family, let me tell you this now—this next election will not be another landslide, and yes, we may lose some seats. But, if we are complacent, if we are divided, ... those who oppose our vision of fairness will take advantage.

Despite some missteps, we have proven that government can and should be a force for good in people's lives and one that can fight for fairness in society. And our work is far from finished.

We, the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party, must remain united, and we must show the people of Bermuda that *community* is not just a word—it is our identity, our strength, and, yes, our power.

The PLP remains strong, and the PLP is the party with policies that will achieve the people's needs and aspirations. We are committed to progress, fairness, and equity and to policies that benefit all Bermudians.

And while the road ahead may be challenging, we know that together, we can overcome any obstacle. Our history has shown that when the people of this party come together, there is nothing - nothing - that we cannot achieve.

As I close, joined by **Team PLP** - I ask you to join me in paying tribute to two giants of the Progressive Labour Party, who have contributed to that history and helped to lay the foundation for a brighter future and a fairer Bermuda.

Deputy Leader, the Honorable Walter Roban, has devotedly served the people of Pembroke East for 17 years. His commitment to this party and Bermuda has been unwavering, and on behalf of the PLP family and the people of Bermuda, I thank him for all that he has done and all that he has given.

We also honour the Honorable Lt Col David Burch, who has served this country with passion, integrity, and an unrelenting commitment to improving the lives of Bermudians, and we thank him for the dedication and hard work he has given to this party and our community.

As we pay tribute to them, we also welcome new faces who will help carry the Progressive Labour Party torch into the next election. Talent like Senator Owen Darrell, our candidate to carry on the proud legacy of the PLP in Constituency 15, Mischa Fubler for Constituency 30, Paul Wilmot for Constituency 27, and our new MP for Constituency 36, Rev Dr Emily Gail Dill. They represent the future of the PLP and embody the energy, dedication, and commitment that will help us continue delivering on our progressive agenda and building a fairer Bermuda.

All of us - stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and we are strengthened by the new voices who will help lead us into the future.

Together, this team will continue to build a Bermuda where opportunity is shared, where fairness is felt, and where every Bermudian has the chance to thrive.

Together we will deliver a fairer Bermuda for all of us!

PLP! ALL THE WAY! ALL THE WAY! PLP!