

Inaugural Address to the National Executive Council of the People's National Party by Peter Bunting, General Secretary – Sunday Jan. 27, 2008.

Comrade Chairman, Comrade Leader, Comrade Officers, Comrade Life Members of the NEC, Comrade Members of the NEC, Comrades All.

I wish to thank you for the confidence which the NEC has placed in me to be the new GS for the Party. Over the last few weeks I have had the privilege of going across the six regions meeting with gatherings of NEC members and having dialogue with them on the platform for my candidacy. This has been a rewarding and fulfilling exercise.

It has allowed me to listen to many NEC members, and particularly the life members, speak of their deep love and profound commitment to the Party, and of their urgent concern for the state of the Party today. It has reminded me of the rich history and tradition of our party as the principal force for progressive change in the contemporary history of Jamaica, leading the successful battles for Universal Adult Suffrage, for Political Independence, for gender equality, for workers' rights, for children's rights, and for re-asserting our unique identity after 400 years of de-culturisation under British rule. However, as our founder Norman Manley said in his last public address to an annual conference of the PNP: "I say that the mission of my generation was to win self-government for Jamaica. To win political power which is the final power for the black masses of my country from which I spring. I am proud to stand here today and say to you who fought that fight with me, say it with gladness and pride, 'Mission accomplished for my generation'.

"And what is the mission of this generation?... It is...reconstructing the social and economic society and life of Jamaica".

This mission is not one which is going to have a definite point of completion but one that is a continuing task; it is one that is subject to what Michael Manley referred to as "the cycle of rising expectations." This was demonstrated in the last elections where many young people who had a good education because of the PNP's policies did not support us, many professionals who had received a university education because of the policies of the PNP did not support us, and many businesspersons whose businesses had prospered like never before under our policies for 18.5 years, did not support us.

There is no point in us cussing them for being ungrateful, for like the business maxim – the customer is always right – I believe we can construct a similar political maxim which says – the voter is always right. And like a business we need to respond to the changing needs of our marketplace, our customer voters, and indeed we must have the capacity to respond to the changing strategies of our competitors. We need to ensure that our Party continues to evolve to remain relevant to the continuing mission of our generation, and indeed generations to come, which is to reconstruct the social and economic society and life of Jamaica.

Recently I read the ANC's Anniversary statement and the similarities with some of the challenges we face was quite striking.

While the ANC's organisational strengths have included an ability to broaden its appeal beyond its traditional support base and adapt to mass work under new conditions, it has acquired a number of "accumulated weaknesses".

As Conference indicated, these weaknesses include:

- an inability to effectively deal with new tendencies arising from being a ruling party, such as social distance, patronage, careerism, corruption and abuse of power;
- ineffective management of the interface between the movement and the state;

- a flawed approach to membership recruitment;
- a decline in ideological debate among cadres; and,
- a lack of institutional resources to give practical effect to the movement's leadership role.

In the run-up to Conference, the process of leadership contestation seriously tested the ANC's unity and cohesion, core values, character, and tried and tested organisational practices.

Part of the programme of renewal should be a mass political education campaign to be undertaken at branch level within six months to report back on the substantive Conference outcomes, and to consolidate common approaches and unity within the movement.

The reason I share this quote with you is to demonstrate that the challenges we face are not unique, and after 18.5 years of being in government, should not even be surprising.

My comrades, I am not going to say that on day one I will have the answers for all the challenges that face our Party, but I am committed to being a critical part of the solution, one which I am confident will emerge through dialogue and consultation with the wider party membership. In my recent consultations with NEC members, one comrade put it this way "Michael Manley didn't die and will the Party to any one person". All comrades, and particularly NEC members, need to take responsibility for the solution which will represent the collective wisdom of the Party, not just any one clique or leadership cadre, and therefore be inherently more effective and unifying. The Appraisal Report is a start, and I add my thanks to the team, but it is just the beginning and there is much more work to be done to operationalise those recommendations which we will accept, either in whole or in a modified form.

Let me close by saying thank you to all those comrades who have worked so hard to make this possible, who have organized and travelled with me to address meetings, and who have made numerous calls. My thanks also to the wider NEC membership who received my candidacy with enthusiasm and who have given their support. I commit that so long as I continue to be blessed with health and strength I will give all my energy, creativity, and expertise to continue the successful mission of our great People's National Party.