

A FIRE IN THE BELLY

By Norris Hall

Some recent developments are contributing to a raising desire from within to return and rekindle

the burning fire of nationalism and to re-visit the anti-colonial movement here, of the fifties and sixties.

We see, for example, that almost pauperized individuals could come to this country with questionable professional skills and amass so much land, and even try to influence the naive, at the expense of poor land-starved Belizeans. And their only claim to fame is because of their past affiliation with certain corrupt politicians. We see them defy the laws of this country, support illegal activities and arrogantly breach our national park management regulations to serve their own self interest and other little "white" sins. And then with the face of a bio-degrading onion, try to sanctimoniously preach to us on a weekly basis. This is a topic that requires some investigative journalism.

Allow me to applaud the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, for his bold move to confiscate 1,480 farm, mostly owned by whites, and to return them to their rightful owners. While I cannot agree with most of Mugabe's politics, this move has been to reverse some of the sins of the exploitative colonial past. Of course this only my view and maybe, I am wrong. But I must add that there are many people worldwide who are speaking in whispered voices in support of Mugabe's land acquisition policy.

The burning and growing desire to rekindle this rationalistic fire in the belly is manifesting itself across this nation on a daily basis. But our friends from abroad should understand that while they are welcomed as partners in our development, any attempt at neo-colonialism or long range attempts to meddle in what we intelligently consider to be sustainable development, will certainly not be tolerated.

The recent past President of the Belize Audubon Society, Jose "Pepe" Garcia, in his address to the annual general meeting of the Belize Audubon Society, which was held a few weeks ago, put it quite succinctly. He said that "we must not allow ourselves to be unduly influenced by interest from abroad and at home that do not have this country at heart". "Pepe" added that as responsible environmentalists, we must be able to identify other agendas that may sometime be cloaked as environmental concerns, to the possible detriment of our people's interest."

There are two things that come to mind: land speculation, and no, space will not permit us to elaborate on that as yet, and a recent international forest corruption report, which implicates the former government of this country and its Minister of Natural Resources. The illegal Malaysian logging in the southern region of Belize were however supported by some members of BACONGO The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) did everything it could to suppress this report which has now surfaced in a diluted form.

The past President of the Belize

Audubon Society boasted as perhaps being the only true broad-based membership driven non-government organization. However, I question the wisdom of members of the Board of Directors who want to disqualify Village Council Leaders from holding office on the BAS Board.

This is "elitist". By suggesting that village leaders are politically manipulated is short-sighted at best. I urge some reflection in view of the support of a vibrant rural community which has been Audubon's closest allies and who lead the charge against the illegal logging in the Toledo District

and strong resistance from communities in the Crooked Tree lagoons area, who retaliated against a "gringo" who had recommended that Audubon should prohibit fishing and hunting in this area where these activities were the traditional means of livelihood for these surrounding communities.

I agree with the rest of Audubon's new Code of Conduct, but shutting out the limited leadership in these rural communities from the Audubon Executive is not kosher.

The desire for the rekindling of a nationalists zeal and fire was also brought to the fore by Housing and Planning Officer, Carolyn Trench-Sandiford when she addressed the graduation class of the Belize Technical College last Sunday. In a highly popular address, evidenced by audience response, Ms. Sandiford declared that while, with the attainment of independence "we have freed ourselves from the shackles of our colonial master and were about to charter our own course of development", but it "did not stop the conceptualism of a colonial mentality strategy towards our

country with the intent of keeping us submissive..."and a change from "the colonizer to the re-colonizer".

She made reference to international organizations which try to "force us to adopt strict environmental standards which in their countries they cannot even enforce".

As the Housing and Planning Officer, continued her address to the BTC graduating class, she received a standing ovation when she declared:

"It is the rich countries who have brought this environmental dilemma. They have for centuries destroyed their environments in the process of industrialization, and now as a result, sustain a high and comfortable standard of living for their people. But we must not go through this process. You see, we must stop eating gibnuts and armadillos, and create parks and reserves for their people, as tourists to come in and enjoy, and import the food stuff they make. So while the animals and fishes and every other creature in this country become assured of longevity, many people are impacted negatively because of these policies."

Ms. Trench-Sandiford affirmed that "nothing is wrong with sustainable development and environmental concerns. But it must begin with the recognition that the diversity of cultures which nourish human creativity is as precious as an inheritance of the diversity of animal and plant life. It is the repository of collective wisdom from which springs the capacity of individuals and societies to survive adversity and renew the commitment to future generation."

Are you feeling that fire in the belly? Let it burn! burn! burn!