

OUT Spoken

Meb Vexed

Letter in response to Mr. Norris Hall's attack on Princess Anne.

Mr. Hall I would like to ask just what acts of compassion or charity you have performed in your life that you have such unforgivable rudeness and temerity to attack a woman who has spent a major part of her life devoted children in poverty and distress throughout the world.

I am sure that you cannot be unaware that Princess Anne is the very active and participatory President of Save the Children Foundation and as such raises a great deal of money for this charity, which has saved the lives and helped thousands and thousands of poor and distressed children in every corner of the globe.

I feel that you should offer the Princess an unqualified apology for what is either your lamentable ignorance or else your

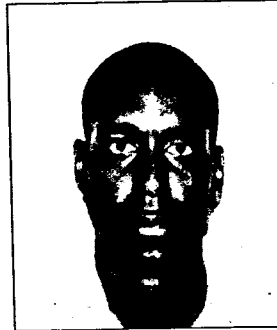
deliberate and tawdry insult - and also for the disgusting racism of your remarks. I would also like to ask you if you are writing as a Belize Government spokesman or a private citizen?

Meb Cutlack.

Editor's note: Late Wednesday afternoon I contacted Mr. Hall to see if he wanted to respond to Mr. Cutlack's heated correspondence. Mr. Hall replied that he didn't feel it was worth the effort to respond to Cutlack's Pro-British harangue, though he did have one question for Mr. Cutlack, "Can you identify one impoverished child on the Southside of Belize City that Her Highness has helped? Or is Belize one corner of the globe Anne forgot the distressed and poor?"

PEOPLE OVER BEASTS PLEASE

By Mark Gabb
Thursday, April 5th the Belize Zoo



celebrated the 18th birthday for the tapir named April. April's birthday party is an annual tradition which goes back years. This year primary school students from four different schools were invited to share in the celebrations at which a gourmet cake was specially made for April. Everyone was invited to sing birthday songs to commemorate the occasion. Television, radio and print media were out in full force. April even has a partner named Scotty who lives in a cage right

next to her. Some hope she will start "dating" and that she will mother a young tapir.

Cute! And good for April that she had the opportunity to experience what some would refer to as a high class, up-scale birthday party and media event. But does the same opportunity exist for our Belizean children? No. There are kids right here in Belize City and the entire country as well for that matter that have never had a birthday party. Or a cake. Or a song. So what are we in essence saying to the children that were in attendance? I, for one think it an insult to the children. This birthday bash certainly reflects a lack of compassion for our impoverished youth and is much too 'First World whimsical' for a country that has much more important concerns at hand. It suggests that beasts are of more importance than our children. Aren't our children entitled to these niceties, too?

From the four schools that were invited to this function, one must realize that there are definitely kids in that group that have never had a birthday party. The attention being shown to this one animal in particular is ludicrous when we look at the conditions in which some children are being forced to survive in.

Children on the south side of Belize for example are living in dire circumstances in some cases. Their families are either poor or unemployed and have no means of providing even the bare necessities for their young ones. These children need a chance to have fun, grow and develop just like some others do. And still here we are spending valuable time and money on a birthday party for a tapir. In the wild, does the Mama tapir have birthday parties for her young ones? Or do tapirs even understand what the hoopla is all about?

Don't get me wrong, I admire this peace-loving, chubby critter related to the rhinoceros. But don't tell me that I should feel happy knowing that some well-intentioned expatriate spent the money to make a special cake for an animal that has absolutely no care in the world about how or what its food looks like. Not to burst bubbles here, but tapirs could care less whether or not children are singing songs to them before they eat. If perchance April ever were let out of her prison, (the zoo), would she carry on the birthday fete in the bush on her own? Hardly! What in fact are we thinking? How can the zoo continue to promote this worthless and wasteful activity while so many of our children continue to go unnoticed, hungry and deprived?

To add insult to injury, people overseas are being indoctrinated by misinformation and distorted stories centered on the scarlet macaw. Again, we understand and are well aware that the scarlet macaw is one of the rarest and most beautiful parrots in Belize. In the world even. Nonetheless, we feel our children are pretty darn rare, beautiful and significant too. I hope I don't ruffle Matola's feathers here, but possibly, just possibly, our children are more precious, more important than her beloved tapir or red plumaged birds. Kids starve and tapirs feast, what's wrong with this scenario? Shouldn't the kids be fed first?

Minister Ralph Fonseca's Speech to BNTU



April 18th, 2001
Excerpts from an address given by Minister Ralph Fonseca to the BNTU on Wednesday, April 18, 2001.

It is a unique privilege and indeed a real honor for me to stand before you today during a time of exciting changes and opportunities - a time when more than ever, by working together, we can harness the wealth of benefits that this modern age is making available to us. The challenges are of course many, but now there are better tools at our disposal to overcome them.

Since achieving much success in getting our economy back on track, we have spent the last year bringing Belize up front on the global agenda whether with bond ratings, multilateral respect, regional leadership or programming for the inevitable challenges and opportunities of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and globalization in general. None of this could have been accomplished without consultations with our people and a clear signal from Belizeans that we were aware that success means sacrifices, and we were tired of hearing excuses, we were ready to work, ready to sacrifice, as long as we are owners of the plan, of the program to succeed.

It is in this spirit of positive thinking and close cooperation that we enter a new era of educational development that holds significant rewards for our present and future generations. Any country that hopes to secure its place in the new world economy and at the same time preserve its uniqueness among nations must be prepared to make education a top priority. In Belize we have made it the number one priority.

At the forefront of this noble task of education are our teachers - men and women dedicated to preparing our youth to become constructive citizens. It is therefore paramount that any design to move forward must have your inputs; and indeed the Government of Belize has invested not only the larger slice of the budget but through consultations with stakeholders, a major part of the process of the development of education in our country.

The National Education Sector Strategy takes an integrated approach to dealing

low net enrollments and transition from primary to secondary. The Toledo district and Southside Belize City are two of those areas that will be targeted to ensure that there is greater Equity across the system.

Sustainability, quality and competitiveness must be the new criteria for all planning and decision-making, or we will go the way of the dinosaurs. We read of paperless government and schools in Singapore and the vigorous debate about vouchers in the U.S. At one time we could read and romanticize. Today we must read and formalize

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with the issues of educational development. What occurs at one level, for example at primary, has effects on all other levels in the system. As such, when addressing the critical issues of ACCESS, EQUITY, QUALITY and EFFICIENCY of the system, all levels of education - primary, secondary, tertiary, and administration, plus vocational - must be considered as components of a larger unit. The people at each level and in each area need to play a more active role to ensure that information flows smoothly and that it is timely and accurate. Thus, a major initiative in the Strategy is decentralization of control, that is, giving more power to the people at the district and school levels over decisions about which they have better information. This is a new way of doing things and with it comes new responsibilities and greater accountability.

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The Government of Belize will be making considerable investments beginning this year that are focused on improving Access and Quality which have a special emphasis on Equity. Certain areas of Belize have very high rates of dropouts and repetition, and

environment to make reaching out for these opportunities possible. Your profession too, which forms the backbone of the system must already realize the importance of calm, reasoned and innovative thinking at

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