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## NJAC Viewpoint

### Corruption Too Common

Since the National Joint Action Committee was formed in 1969, our party has condemned corruption in all its forms. As far as we are concerned nothing affects a nation's morality as much as corruption especially when it exists at the top levels of politics in the society.

NJAC is very aware of the often repeated statement that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is very applicable in our society as corruption has seeped into all levels of the nation.

What is disheartening is how easily we have accommodated ourselves to corruption. It seems as though people are not affected by its danger as we would have thought.

We are reminded of the politician who once declared, "*All ah we tief!*". Little, in fact nothing was done, either by his party or the other political parties to condemn his statement. Far more to put it into its correct perspective.

NJAC is concerned about Truth. "*Truth must be a corner stone of the Political System*" is one of principles affirmed in our ideological statement, "**The People's Declaration of Policy for the Development of a New Trinidad & Tobago**" written in 1981.

We further stated that "*An environment of truth is vital to the functioning of a new political system. Actions that breach the trust between people and the leadership lead to a loss of confidence not only in the leaders, but the people lose faith in themselves...*"

This is why; NJAC is saddened by the fact that a leading political figure, a former Prime Minister, and the Chairman of his party, Mr. Basdeo Panday, has been convicted by the courts, for transgressing laws which were designed to prevent corruption in public affairs.

We do not wish to be misunderstood. NJAC will not condone what has been proven to be wrong. If the law of the land says that all a public official's assets should be declared to the Integrity Commission. Then so be it. All who fall under the purview of that law must obey its tenets.

But there is something about this conviction which worries us. We sense an element associated with it that we believe, no society can afford. We were never comfortable with the manner in which Mr. Panday was arrested, virtually in the company of a foreign delegation. We found this to be an embarrassment to the protocol of the nation.

We did not get the sense during the trial that this nation was really dealing with a former Prime Minister, a leading Trade Unionist, an established Attorney at Law and a man who had served his constituents and Trinidad & Tobago for more than forty years.

We repeat that what had to be done was done. Yet the verdict seems unduly harsh. Why should the verdict be given with "hard labour"? Are we forgetting that we are dealing with a man in his seventies? What assurance is there that Mr. Panday will live through this?

Furthermore, NJAC has not yet seen any evidence that any one has dared to comment on what effect this verdict may have on his family and his constituents. Have we considered those who may have worshipped him as their communal hero over the past forty years? What will happen now to the old women who have to shed their tears for him?

Have we not considered the consequences of the sense of shame that must now be enveloping his followers?

As we also wrote in **“The People’s Declaration of Policy for the Development of a New Trinidad & Tobago”** ... *“the moral responsibility of the legal system to the society as a whole must be recognized. Moral in the sense that official institutions do not act in a way to corrode the values of the society by moving against an individual with an ethic of revenge”*

NJAC says, let the judgment reflect the gravity of the act, but let not there be a sense of rejoicing, nor gloating. In fact, it is not just Mr. Panday, but it may be that the country has failed itself.