

**The Honourable Gaston Browne,  
Leader of the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party  
responds to the UPP Manifesto  
for  
the March 21<sup>st</sup> 2018 General Elections**

The UPP has finally launched its manifesto a mere 6 days before the general election.

With all the time, they took to present it, the nation had a right to expect a comprehensive document that lays-out a well thought-out and fully costed plan for our country's economic growth and social advancement.

Instead what they delivered is not hope, but disappointment.

The UPP manifesto can best be described as extensive plagiarism, worthless promises, and guaranteed folly.

The UPP has simply stolen policy positions that have been stated in the ABLP manifesto or that the ABLP government has already implemented.

Apart from outlandish and unrealistic promises, there are no new ideas in the UPP manifesto, and no concrete projects to provide jobs.

Instead of offering hope as they claim, they are proposing calamity.

As examples, they say that they will reduce energy prices within two weeks, including the cost of gasoline, diesel and the fuel variation charge.

The technical officers of APUA, the West Indies Oil Company and the Ministry of Finance have already firmly stated that this would be economic suicide, leading to considerable hardship for every single person in our country.

If the pie-in-the-sky promise to reduce the fuel variation charge by 25% were to be executed, there would be an immediate loss in revenue to APUA of \$37.5 million per annum.

This would have disastrous effects.

APUA would not be able to keep the staff it has; many persons would have to be dismissed.

The remaining staff at APUA would not be paid on a timely basis.

And, critical maintenance of electricity feeders would be adversely affected from the drop in revenues, resulting in black-outs across the country.

Both businesses and homes would suffer, and the economy would decline.

With respect to the cost of gasoline, it should be noted that in Antigua and Barbuda, we are already one of the cheapest countries in the Caribbean.

In St Maarten, the price is \$24.87; in Barbados, it is \$20.22; in Grenada, it is \$15.28; in Montserrat, it is \$15.06; in Anguilla, it is \$14.64 and in St Lucia it is \$12.75.

In Antigua and Barbuda, we sell a gallon of gasoline at \$12.50.

No country in the Caribbean is selling gasoline at \$10 a gallon; no country could possibly afford it.

Implementing the UPP promise of dropping the price to \$10 per gallon would lose the Treasury \$47 million immediately, or \$151 million over three years.

The UPP does not say how this money will be replaced.

The UPP manifesto also carelessly pledges to drop vehicle license fees by 50%.

This would cause the Transport Board to lose \$9.5 million immediately and every year thereafter,

triggering the dismissal of half the staff;

eliminating any chance of a pay increase;

jettisoning the purchase of additional school buses for children; and

discarding any possibility of maintaining and upgrading the present system of licenses that are needed when our people travel abroad.

No explanation is given anywhere in the manifesto as to how the UPP plans to pay for these promises, or how they plan to replace the lost revenues.

That is why the promises are deceitful, dishonest and devious.

They are purely and simply election gimmicks.

They plainly cannot be executed.

The UPP would do what they did in 2004 and that is to renege on their promises.

Remember they reneged on not reintroducing personal income tax;

They reneged on not introducing ABST.

But, even if the UPP did execute their irresponsible promises, they would pitch our country back into the hands of the IMF;

This time with dire austerity measures, including dismissing public servants, cutting back on health and education services, and ending social programmes for the poor, the elderly and the disabled.

The closest that the UPP has come to any explanation of how they would pay for their extravagant promises is to say that they would lower corporate taxation to 12.5% to attract business whose taxes would make-up the shortfall.

But, simple arithmetic exposes the fallacy in their false proposition.

First, a drop to 12.5% in corporate tax would immediately cause an even further drop in revenues.

Second, even if there were a rush to our shores to take advantage of a 12.5% corporate tax, it would take years before enough companies could be attracted to make up a shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars in any one year.

By then, the country would be reeling from blackouts, water shortages, inability to pay workers, and little capacity to maintain our ports and airport infrastructure.

No company would come here to locate or invest.

A corporate tax rate as low as 12.5% might benefit countries, such as Ireland, which has many other streams of revenue, including banking, personal income tax, agriculture, and manufacturing as well as tourism and cultural exports.

But, it would hardly help Antigua and Barbuda whose main income is based on tourism where most of the hotels already pay little or no corporate tax.

That is why the ABLP, in our Manifesto, set the corporate tax rate at 20% - one percent less than the US.

At that figure, we calculated that we would keep our corporate tax rate competitive in the global community, while still earning much-needed revenue for the nation.

So, there are no revenue streams in the manifesto and no explanation of how the UPP will finance their reckless promises and rash pledges.

It is all an Alice in Wonderland fairy-tale; and it is an insult to the intelligence of the electorate of our country.

There is nothing in their social programme that the ABLP has not already done and surpassed.

The suggestion of establishing polyclinics was stolen out of the ABLP manifesto which details the 6 new polyclinics that we will construct and provides the location of them and how their costs will be met.

In technology, the UPP manifesto jumps on the wagon of super-fast Broadband that we set out in the ABLP manifesto.

We stated clearly how it will be done, how soon, how it will be financed, and the opportunities it will create.

The UPP manifesto promise is imprecise, confused and provides no information whatsoever on how it would be funded.

On youth, the UPP tries to hijack, the Entrepreneurial Development Programme, which the ABLP has already established and capitalised with a million dollars;

We have set-out a clear method for financing the programme on an annual basis, giving young entrepreneurs access to funding and managerial know-how to make them successful businessmen.

The UPP plan is nothing more than naked stealing of an established ABLP programme.

On crime, the UPP has repeated the same tired lyrics of their worn-out song.

While they are talking, the ABLP has been doing and we have laid out clearly the strategies for curbing crime and making our country safe.

The UPP manifesto is also frighteningly lacking on the future development of education.

They have latched on to the University of Antigua as if it is a new idea and not already implemented.

They conveniently ignore the fact that under the ABLP, our country is well on the way to housing the fifth campus of the University of the West Indies.

They also make little mention of scholarships.

In contrast, the ABLP has provided more scholarships for young people in the last 3 years than at any other time in our history, and we have a clear and well-financed plan to do more, year after year.

On land use, the UPP again whistles the tune of “affordable homes through Public/Private Partnerships” that failed in the past, with projects such as the Bau Panel scandal where they gave away our peoples’ land and money and could show nothing in return.

In 10 years, the UPP built 99 houses; in 3 years, the ABLP built 360 houses with a plan over the next five years for hundreds more.

Further, the ABLP identifies the locations for the housing projects and exactly from where the money comes to pay for them.

The UPP manifesto also trumpets “Rent to own” programmes as if it is an innovation.

Yet, the ABLP has had a successful rent-to-own project in place, having taken-over the UPP failed housing projects, resuscitated them and put them into operation.

In agriculture, the UPP again pilfers ABLP declared policies to give farmers long-leases for land,

But they fail to match the ABLP programme of financial investment in pork and poultry farming and in fisheries.

Whereas, the UPP manifesto makes vague and high-sounding promises, the ABLP has set-out a detailed plan for helping farmers and fishermen through providing finance and technical assistance.

Tourism – the key sector of our economy – is the worst part of the UPP manifesto.

It boils down to words without deeds, talk without practical plans, and no indication of how they will create more jobs and put money in the pockets of the people.

In what amounts to a clear misunderstanding of the purposes of Duty-Free zones, the UPP say they will establish such zones at English Harbour, Jolly Harbour, Redcliffe Quay and Barbuda.

The ABLP government has already provided duty-free, tax-free concessions to the Yachts calling here to ensure that we are highly competitive with other countries in the Caribbean.

The people of Antigua and Barbuda would hardly benefit from such zones, for they will have to pay the duties anyway.

Even the tourists would get no greater benefit since they already enjoy duty-free shopping at the Ports on Antigua and would also do so in Barbuda once the Port there is built.

The promises in the UPP manifesto are plenty, but its practical plans are empty.

On investment, while the ABLP has laid-out in detail over \$6 billion in investment over the next four years with every project identified, named and costed, the UPP manifesto does not name one investor and it does not pinpoint one real project.

All it does is make unclear, unreal and undistinguishable promises rooted in hope and ingrained in desperation.

The critical issue of creating jobs is not in any way detailed,

The UPP expects this nation to take their word for it, that like manna from Heaven, jobs will miraculously emerge from their promises.

I had said that if there were any good ideas in the UPP manifesto, my Government would not ignore them.

Another of their promises which has already been done by the ABLP government is the removal of duties from laptop and desktop computers.

The UPP is promising what has already been done.

Finally, I turn to the promise made about public servants.

Again, the UPP insults the intelligence of our electorate.

They make a blanket statement that they will “complete” negotiations for Public Servants payments “within 90 days”.

Note that they did not say that they would “pay public servants within 90 days”; they said they would “complete negotiations”.

Even that statement demonstrates a strong element of deceitfulness, because they alone cannot determine how long a negotiation would take to satisfy the other side.

To say they would “complete negotiations within 90 days” shows absolute contempt for the public servants’ negotiators.

It is also important to bear in mind that the UPP was in office for 10 long years, and not only did they not give a red cent in wage increases, they paid no back pay either.

Now, the UPP would have us believe that, on top of all the money they are foregoing from gasoline, diesel, water, electricity and the fuel variation charge, they will pull money out of nowhere to increase all public servants’ wages and give them back pay.

All of that is nothing more than election gimmickry with no foundation in careful analysis and without hearing the proposals of the public servants.

In contrast, the ABLP acknowledged the importance of rewarding public servants for their patience, tolerance and continued diligence.

We undertook to begin negotiations at which a position would be reached by both sides on the percentage of the increases.

We took no unilateral position.

And, we provided all public servants with a 5% increase as an interim measure and as a show of our good faith.

The UPP promises; the ABLP delivers.

Let us be reminded of Matthew Chapter 7, verse 5:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”.

They have lied to you before, they would do it again.

Thank God, Antigua and Barbuda does not need the UPP to deliver hope.

Thank God, Antigua and Barbuda has recovered in three years under the ABLP administration from a decade of UPP destruction.

Thank God, that the ABLP has an actual, practical and fully-funded plan by which our people can rebuild our country together,

making our economy stronger,

creating thousands of jobs

and making our country better for the good of all.

Thank you, God Bless You and God Bless our beloved Antigua and Barbuda