

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Randol Fawkes Labor Day Awards and Recognition Ceremony

### Sir Randol Fawkes Award for Courage

Awarded to Obie Ferguson Jr.

June 4, 2014 at Super Clubs Breezes Ballroom

Speech by David Fawkes:

Protocol already established.

My Brothers and sisters, fellow trade unionists , good evening. I can think of no other trade union leader more deserving of the first Sir Randol Fawkes award for Courage than Obie Ferguson.

You may ask, what are the characteristics of a courageous fighter for the rights of the worker; for human rights; the rights of the poor and the rights of the disenfranchised? And you may also ask why is the term “courage” featured so prominently in the naming of this award.

The Sir Randol Fawkes award intentionally uses the term “courage” because the recipient must be fearless; the recipient’s contributions must be sacrificial; he or she must have dedicated their life's work to the concerns of the working class which include better wages, better benefits, dignity, and respect.

The awardees contribution must be done out of genuine passion, especially for less fortunate.

Finally, the work of the recipient must also be done without the expectation of financial reward.

Our leader, Obie Ferguson, displays these characteristics.

While some maybe unsympathetic or even hostile to the plight of the worker, Obie does not let their opinions faze him. You see, those forces, and there are such forces within our Bahamas, who attempt to disrupt the ability of workers to freely associate and collectively bargain will be found wanting and on the wrong side of history, once it is all said and done.

Over the years, Obie has fought for the rights of workers all the way up to the Privy Council; he has battled in the highest offices of government; he has agitated at the door steps of employers and recently he has even had had to threaten the powers that be with a general strike. Just to push the government to do that which they had already promised.

Obie has lambasted the growing cancer of outsourcing to contractors hell bent on compensating workers with a fixed and unjust contract price devoid of benefits. Outsourcing removes the ability of the worker to move from poverty into the lower

middle class. With this state of play Obie, we need not wonder why there is so much unrest in our country today.

Obie, even greater challenges lie in front of the workers as the government is now saying that, it must enter into broad based discussions with all stakeholders as it relates to pension sustainability. Let's hope these "discussions" go better than the VAT and gambling discourse.

My, my...is there no rest or peace for the worker? For even in retirement pensioners will need to organize into a bargaining units or watch their pensions dissipate through inflation, VAT, fiscal irresponsibility or just plain government running out of money.

But Obie, be of good cheer, for we, your friends, are appreciative of your struggle on our behalf. Thanks to you, the workers of this country are better off, have higher wages, better benefits and have someone to stand up for them when the going gets tough.

Obie, I recall the plight of Sir Randol who, as a young attorney in the early 1950s fought so vigorously for the rights of the workers that he was disbarred and had to leave the country at the age of 30 when all branches of the colonial system conspired against. Sir Randol was the son of a simple construction worker and

did not have an opportunity to go off to college or law school. No different than the workers we see on the backs of trucks today.

Now get this, Sir Randol said in his time of despair, even his own priest would not pray with him.

But Obie, imagine where we would be today if our fore fathers like Sir Lynden, Sir Milo, Dame Doris Johnson and our own Labor Living Legend Sam Stubbs did not agitate for change against all structures of power and might. Our national heroes are all men and women of courage.

Be of good courage, Obie knowing that our forefathers are watching over you; be of good courage Obie as we the workers stand with you; be of good courage Obie as our God is protecting you.

In closing, I quote from the words of Sir Randol inscribed on the award “Almighty and Everlasting God, inspire me as I relate what uncommon courage was exhibited by common men and women in the founding of our new Commonwealth of the Bahamas”.

It is with great joy and happiness that I present to you Obie Ferguson, the second Sir Randol Fawkes Award for Courage.