

The Carl Mack Story!

By Rick Wayne

To visit Saint Lucia, these days in particular, and not expect to be drenched in political doo-doo is like going out unprotected in an African monsoon and not expecting to get wet. Dr Carl Mack, executive director of the Mississippi-based National Association of Black Engineers, came here last week at the invitation of Dr Stephen King, in the best interests of Rise St Lucia and the nation's youth.

Also a past leader of the Chicago chapter of the NAACP and a renowned motivational speaker, the impressive basketball-tall Mack did not expect to be turned by local players into a political football.

But that is precisely what happened, with the fall-out all but obliterating his and Dr King's best intentions. And all because of a remark by Mack during his appearance on last Thursday's *TALK* about his meeting with Saint Lucia's prime minister Stephenson King.

Remarkably, most of the callers to the night's show concentrated on Mack's astute observations after less than a week on the island. He was especially optimistic when he talked about the young people he met at St Joseph's Convent and at special get-togethers in Union and elsewhere, all of that arranged by Dr King. He spoke enthusiastically and in great detail about his plan to choose at least a half dozen young Saint Lucians for engineering studies part-sponsored by his alma mater Clarkson University that in May this year awarded Mack an honorary Doctor of Science degree. When I asked who would pay the other half of the chosen students' tuition fees, Mack said he fully intended to raise the money by his next visit, possibly three months from now.

Born in Jackson,

Mississippi, Mack is a graduate and Distinguished Engineering Fellow of Mississippi State University, where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering. In March 2005 Mack was named the fourth executive director of the National Society of Black Engineers, one of the largest student-governed organizations in the United States. It was during a tour of Toronto, similar to that undertaken here last week, that Mack met Saint Lucian Gwyneth Chapman (daughter of Cyril Matthews). By the end of Mack's tour, Ms Chapman had made the arrangements with Dr King that resulted in the famously outspoken American's visit last week.

As I say, during his *TALK* appearance on Thursday Mack spoke with unbridled enthusiasm about his meeting with Saint Lucia's prime minister, describing him as "sensitive, cooperative, concerned about the island's youth" and so on. Alas, he was not as effusive when it came to "some of the prime minister's men." By Mack's measure, they were inattentive and remained silent after he addressed the special gathering in the prime minister's Cabinet room. At one point he described them as "disrespectful," whether of him or the prime minister.

I had barely arrived home following the night's episode of *TALK* when certain political activists started calling to underscore what they described as the prime minister's "inability to control his Cabinet." The issue received a boost when a well-known SLP endorser (he cannot fairly be described as a hack, for the simple reason that he normally addresses political discussions with calculated intelligence!) called Newspress to invite a related comment from the host Timothy Poleon. As is his wont, Tim said: "I did not

watch last evening's *TALK* so I would prefer not to comment on what the night's guest allegedly said." A heated five-minute exchange followed, with both caller and host refusing to give ground. No one planned to congratulate Dr King on his efforts in the best interests of deprived young Saint Lucians. Neither did anyone recall Mack's flattering remarks about the island's locally maligned prime minister.

I have been in touch with overseas representatives of Carl Mack. He offers no apology for his heartfelt comments, whether referring to the prime minister or anyone else. To which I say, right on, brother! Already we've had far too much diplomacy when what was sorely needed was straight talk, without buffers. If during his stay here the visitor encountered behavior that he considered inappropriate for public officials, then why not say so out loud? The people have a right to know how their representatives treat visitors in our name.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that Carl Mack misinterpreted the silence of the wolves in King's Cabinet. In any event, both Mack and the prime minister have confirmed that immediately following "the possible misunderstanding" King apologized to the visitor and proceeded to have a long conversation with him that Mack himself has publicly applauded. So, now, shall we all try to get along and concentrate on the more important youth matters that brought the American to our shores?

I could not resist a smile when it came over HTS on Monday evening that the prime minister had dismissed the obviously well intentioned Carl Mack as "ignorant." As it later turned out, what the prime minister said was "the



Prime Minister Stephenson King (right) and Dr Carl Mack: Evidently, no hard feelings.

gentleman is ignorant of the facts" of our education policies, the money spent on education and so on.

Did someone we know create a media minister?

It may be worth mentioning that during his visit Carl Mack made time to meet with representatives of the business sector, Dame Pearllette Louisy—and the leader

of the opposition Dr. Kenny Anthony!

Finally: When Joe Biden exploded his precedential four-letter word on the world, at the precise moment

that Barack Obama was exulting over the historic passage of his Health Reform Bill, was that proof that the first black President of the United

States cannot control his vice? When Walter Francois famously played fast and loose with the truth, was that proof of Kenny Anthony's inadequacies? Let's

face it, bad manners, for which only the practitioners are responsible... that is, other than the electorate!