

Statement by People's Campaign and Bermuda Trade Union Congress

We have gathered here today to respond to the statement made by Minister Fahy yesterday which set out the Government's position in respect to PRC holders. On July 11th the People's Campaign issued a press statement that set out the position of the People's Campaign in respect to this issue. We had hoped that in the spirit of transparency, inclusiveness that an honest public conversation between all of the stakeholders would have been welcomed by the and in fact led by the government so that a just and fair resolution of this issue could be reached. To our great disappointment no such conversation was forthcoming, and it appears that the government engaged in a deliberate policy of silence, and avoidance, and indeed waited until the House of Assembly was in recess to even make a public announcement on this issue. It seems to be a government strategy to listen, placate and then ignore the concerns of the people and proceed along an undisclosed preordained path when it comes to policy.

Let us begin by removing all of the erroneous and distracting charges coming from some quarters regarding Xenophobia. It is our position that PRC holders who have and continue to contribute to Bermuda should be provided with a fair and reasonable opportunity to pursue status if they so desire. The fear and scaremongering of some people who have attempted to generate hysteria around PRC holders stealing jobs and opportunities from Bermudians we likewise reject in the strongest terms.

What we find to be equally disingenuous at best at blatantly dishonest on the part of the government at worst is the fact that it seems that while the government not only acknowledges but agrees that the "loophole" or as the Chief Justice referred to it, the "sleeping provision," provides a back door that violates the intent of the legislation which was never intended to provide a path to status they are willing to not only allow it to stand, but allow it to be used.

The honorable thing to do, instead of engaging in the politics of avoidance, or the politics of blame, the PLP did it so why should we change it, would have been to close the "loophole" legislatively, and then engage in a more reasoned and well thought out policy that would provide PRC holders who seek status with a path and an opportunity to attain it. When any government concedes that there is a flaw in policy, but chooses instead of correcting it, to appear to use it as a political device it destroys and erodes public confidence in the honesty and integrity of the government.

The existing policy is fraught with its own limitations and problems. So, for instance if a PRC holder has been in Bermuda since Aug 2nd 1989 then based upon the loophole they would not be eligible for status. For a government driven by compassion and fairness to allow such an arbitrary distinction which in effect discriminates and disqualifies persons who have shown an equal level of commitment, and have contributed as much to Bermuda as those who were in Bermuda up to Aug 1st 1989 is an egregious offense. Similarly, if a PRC holder wishes to pursue status and has been in Bermuda for a sustained period of time why should the spouse of such persons not be included in their application for status rather than having to wait ten years following the granting of status to their spouse. These and other complications that create

unfairness and discrimination and hardship could have been remedied if the government were serious about being fair and compassionate and would take the time to develop a good policy.

It is not too late to correct this matter and so we are calling upon the government to;

1. Immediately suspend the granting of status based upon this legislative loophole.
2. to work on and be prepared to present a revised policy that would provide a reasonable and fair path to status for PRC holders.

In conclusion, it is even more alarming that Minister Fahy on behalf of the government has claimed that their decision was in part based upon a poll that they conducted with a sample size of 404 Bermuda residents of which 57% (230 people) of those polled allegedly supported the granting of Bermuda status to PRC holders. If persons were polled on whether they agree with granting status that is one question but if they were aware that the granting of Status was based upon a unintended loophole in legislation would they have responded the same way. Or if they were asked if the government should close the loophole what do you think the answer would be.

This represents an alarming trend that escalates the already growing lack of confidence in the way this government conducts the business of the people. We are calling upon ALL Bermudians and people of goodwill to join us in expressing our call for the government to reconsider their position on this matter and to conduct the business of government with the integrity and honesty that the people expect from those elected to serve them.

We are asking ALL Supporters of the People's Campaign, all Union members, and all people of goodwill to join us tomorrow at Victoria Park at 12 noon and we will make our way to the Cabinet Office building and let our voices be heard.