

Should gays serve in Parliament?

Former prime minister Bruce Golding's infamous 'Not in my Cabinet' statement to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 2009 when pressed about gays in Jamaican representational politics, ignited fiery discussion on the previously taboo subject which drew widespread reaction.

Golding came out forcefully in the BBC interview, stating that he would not allow known homosexuals to be a part of his Cabinet, a sentiment lauded for the most part in Jamaica, but shredded in parts of Britain and the United States, countries that are tolerant to such sexual conduct.

The thorny, yet delicate issue of showing tolerance to politicians with homosexual or gay tendencies has become more topical in recent years, with claims of irregular conduct among members on both sides of the Jamaican political fence.

Three aspiring parliamentarians in the upcoming general election have said that unless it can be proven that homosexuals were using their behaviour in an offensive way, and their conduct could be proven beyond the shadow of a doubt, it should not prevent them from entering the Jamaican Parliament.

Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) candidate for the redefined St Catherine East Central constituency, Camile Buchanan, along with People's National Party (PNP) representatives, Leonard Green — who will be the face of the party in St Thomas West — and his namesake, Dr Winston Green — the PNP's point man in St Mary South East — agree that homosexuals have the right to choose their sexual paths and should not be persecuted and prevented from serving nationally, as long as they conform to the laws of the land.

"I do believe that it's your personal life," Buchanan told Observer editors and reporters at this paper's Monday Exchange last week.

"However you choose to live, it is entirely up to you. I think if you are representing your party and the country and not representing your sexuality, that is fine with me. It is your personal choice. Who you really choose to sleep with is not my business," said Buchanan, the former chief executive officer of Caymanas Track Limited, who will be challenging the young PNP attorney, Arnaldo Brown.

Petrol station operator, haulage contractor and farmer, Leonard Green, said that he would not aggressively oppose homosexual behaviour, as long as citizens who are so inclined, operated under certain terms.

"My position is simple. Every citizen has privileges under the law. If there is no law preventing this (homosexuality) and if the person is not in breach of any law, then I have no problem at all.

"If however, the laws that exist are against certain behaviour, then I couldn't sanction it at the highest level of the land," said Green, who will go up against the JLP's deputy leader James Robertson, whose United States visitor's visa was cancelled last April for unknown reasons.

Green is firm in his view that punishment should be handed down to offenders if proof is found that Jamaican law has been breached.

"If you find out and know and it is proven that the person is doing this, then there should be action," Green said.

For his part, dental surgeon, Dr Winston Green, said that homosexuals had the right to choose the way they wanted to live, as long as they do not break the law.

"Where do we go from here? Is it that at some time we are going to say no Catholic can be a representative (in Parliament), or no Pentecostal?

"A person's private life - how does that affect his ability to represent? It's not that he is convicted of something and it's against the law. How would you prove that he is operating against the law in private?

"What about the person who uses drugs, smokes ganja for example and you cannot prove it?" Dr Green asked.

The fourth guest at the meeting, the JLP's representative for St Catherine South East, Keith Blake, did not offer a view.