

Hurting progress

PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS NOT LOOKING TO HELP ENTREPRENEURS

Public sector bureaucracy, not politicians, is one of the biggest stumbling blocks hurting Barbadian entrepreneurs and business people.

Chairman of Williams Industries Limited, Ralph "Bizzy" Williams, complained today about the attitude of public

sector workers he said were impeding progress, including Barbados' push towards becoming a green economy.

"I get the impression that we elected a government to run Barbados, but the bureaucrats in the government service have not understood that yet. They are making up their mind what is going to happen and what is not going to happen. The politicians may agree to get something done but the bureaucrats don't do it," he stated.

"In general the public service appears to act more as a body of controls, who are there to stop entrepreneurs rather than facilitate them. My experience is that they look for ways that they can interpret the rules to enable a refusal rather than the other way around.

"There seems to be no understanding of, or care



Ralph "Bizzy" Williams

about, the cost of delays in approvals to businesses," he said during an address at a Barbados National Bank Commercial Customer Breakfast Seminar.

The businessman said he had experienced the frustrations of trying to get things done but facing hurdles from bureaucrats, including his efforts to get permission to build a 275 megawatt wind turbine, long before the Barbados Light & Power Company got permission to do so.

The difficulties had prompted him to turn to solar energy, he said, which was not as cost effective as wind energy.

"I asked the gentleman in the Ministry of Energy to come and talk with me. I said 'Look, I only want to put it up for a year, if you don't want it after the year I will have to take it down. It is entirely my responsibility, I would lose the money,'" he noted.

"When I submitted that application the Light & Power had not received anything and they wanted to pay nothing but peanuts for the power so it doesn't make sense; you had to use it yourself.

"It's changed now but then they have limited it to 50 kilowatts so it is not viable to put up a 50 kilowatt turbine on the east coast and then maintain it down there, it just don't make sense."

Williams also said the company now faced another challenge in getting permission to also "put up a megawatt turbine down at the garbage processing plant [at Vaucluse, St. Thomas] so we will hopefully not need any power and can generate our own power."

"But the gentleman told me 'Look, if you put up a thing at the garbage plant ... are the people below here going to get a flicker in their tv? — every reason in the world not to go ahead. But Barbados needs energy and we need it urgently; we are in a bubble,'" he noted.

"Wind will give you a much better return on your money, but you can't get permission to do it so we have decided to do solar ... and we have the biggest installation by a factor of five in Barbados.

"It took me 10 weeks to get the inspectors to come to give a certificate so I could connect it to the Light & Power to get my money. Meanwhile, I had already sold \$6,000 in electricity. Had I waiting on them I would have lost \$6,000. I am not telling you to break the law," he added.

The entrepreneur said this was taking place at a time when "the Prime Minister has pronounced that he wants 30 per cent, I think, of Barbados' grid produced from renewal sources by 2020".

"But we can't get permission. The politicians ... say 'I love it, it's a great project', but when you get back the results from the Town Planning office they say no," Williams noted. (SC)

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