

When Leaders Become Criminals

The scandalous physical attack (a crime under Vanuatu's Penal Code) on the Daily Post publisher instigated by the Minister of Public Works, Harry lauko laris, the latest in a line of reported unwise or allegedly corrupt actions by the Minister, is definitive proof that lauko is totally unfit to hold any public office, let alone a leadership position.

It is clear from the "Letters to the Editor" that the conduct of this Minister, whose daily life is paid for from public funds, is a shameful embarrassment to the people of this country. As a minister of State, Mr. lauko represents the whole country not just his own small group of voters.

If the Kilman government wants to retain any serious credibility, swift and decisive sanctions will need to be taken against Minister lauko.

Instead of the political maturity that we should have the right to expect from our Government Ministers 30 years after Independence, we are instead witnessing the sickening display of a gang of undisciplined brutes, reportedly urged on by a State Minister who swore the following oath:

I Harry lauko laris, having been elected a member of Parliament do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Republic of Vanuatu, will uphold the Constitution and the law, and will conscientiously and impartially discharge the responsibilities to the people of the Republic of Vanuatu upon which I am about to enter. [So help me God]"

MP lauko is in his position to serve the public, not help himself to whatever he wants, either for himself or for his political cronies, and certainly not to assault people who are doing their normal job of reporting local politics.

Have any of the serious allegations raised in the media against Minister lauko been shown to be wrong? Minister lauko has the same recourse to the Letters to the Editor page, or to make his own Media Release, or in extreme cases to the defamation laws just like any other citizen if he believes he is being unfairly represented.

Ironically, it is not the media's portrayal of Minister Lauko that is diminishing his reputation – it is, especially after this latest incident, his own behavior.

In the private sector Lauko would have been sacked immediately for such outrageous and embarrassing conduct, and would likely find it very difficult to be hired again in any position of authority or decision-making, especially concerning money or other assets.

However, the volatile and unstable nature of Vanuatu politics will make it difficult for the Prime Minister to do what should be done without question. Instead, if the past political maneuverings are any guide, embarrassing and incapable Ministers like Lauko will most likely find a way to survive, will somehow concoct some back room deal to stay alive politically.

If Minister Lauko objected to anything he read in the Daily Post, why did he not simply contact the publisher himself and make an appointment to go to see him in the normal way any other person would do, instead of arriving unannounced with a gang of hoodlums?

A leader is a man who shows good standing, substance and leadership qualities not someone who stoops so low to act outside the law in an act of violence and cowardly behavior.

The last thing Vanuatu needs 30 years after Independence, when other political leaders are talking about “maturity”, is an undisciplined thug turning the clock back to earlier times by leading a gang of “bully boys” into a newspaper publisher's office, where reportedly attempts were made to strangle and beat him.

If Harry Lauko has any plans to continue in politics he had better get used to media comment and media criticism. And certainly if he plans to continue to respond to any unwelcome criticism by violent criminal attacks then he had better brace himself for the barrage of criticism that will most certainly follow. This act of criminal thuggery against the Daily Post publisher is a dark stain that will not easily leave Lauko's personal or political reputation.

Not only are Minister Iauko's actions a blatant breach of the Leadership Code, which should disqualify him from Parliament, they are serious criminal offences under the Vanuatu Penal Code.

Is Minister Iauko so deluded that he believes people will sit meekly and quietly as they read more and more reports of how he has engineered schemes designed to permit him and his political cronies to plunder public funds or public assets (land deals, compensation payments of huge amounts of monies, etc..).

Mr Iauko wants to be thought of as a "big man". He claims to be the real leader of the Vanuaku Party. He has apparently made it clear he intends to be Prime Minister. In fact Iauko's petulant tantrum **is the action of someone angry** angry at being repeatedly exposed in the media for his allegedly unscrupulous and corrupt actions, tired of reading the letters to the editor outlining how the ordinary public are sick and tired of his reckless, greedy and self-serving actions.

This weak and entirely disproportionate action by the Minister of Public Works should be utterly condemned. Condemned by the Government. Condemned by the Opposition.

What developed country would for one moment tolerate such criminal behavior in one of its cabinet Ministers? Why then should any developing country be asked to tolerate such shameful conduct? Someone who behaves like this can never be taken seriously.

Leadership is not only about respecting the law; it is about setting an example worthy of following.

Transparency Vanuatu condemns the actions of the Minister of Public Works, Harry Iauko Iaris, for his central part in the criminal assault on the Daily Post Newspaper.

Transparency Vanuatu calls on the Prime Minister to sanction Iauko without delay, and calls on the Police to ensure that the publisher's criminal charge against Minister Iauko does not join the many other complaints that have simply been swept under the carpet like the assaults

of Mark Neil Jones by Christopher Emelle family and Jackson Noal, the latter now being a senior executive in the Police.

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