

April 5th 2019

18 years of outstanding progress

Introduction

Eighteen (18) years ago the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines made a decision that they have had enough of James Mitchell, Arnhim Eustace and the New Democratic Party. Their beloved country had been dragged through a myriad of poor decisions, all of which created developmental difficulties for the average Vincentian. For example, the decision by the NDP to always have a surplus on the budget, at all cost, affected the ability of the NDP to finance important developmental activities of the government. So while the NDP declared a budgetary surplus, many of our primary school children were subjected to a shift system, where they attended half day school.

By 2001, the country's economy was in a tailspin. Bananas had declined, due to the absence of the preferential system in Europe, and poor planning by the NDP. The state infrastructure was in shambles, with police stations, schools, and health clinics in a state of disrepair. The country was saddled with the unfortunate Ottley Hall Project, through which foreign investors virtually ripped off the country.

To crown it all, trade unions were getting active over the plans by the NDP, to introduce the "Greedy Bills" to give themselves salary increases, while public servants struggled. NDP Parliamentarians and close party supporters were purchasing State lands, particularly in the Grenadines, at knock-down prices. NDP ministers were using State vehicles as if they owned them, and the list goes on. This whole state of affairs was too much for Vincentians, and it had to be corrected, in the face of a new and bold developmental strategy put forward by a new and vibrant Unity Labour Party.

People Centered Development

Over the last 18 years the Unity Labour Party has adopted a "People-Centered Development Policy" which has been extremely successful, and which has created tremendous positive change in the country. Through this policy, the ULP has been able to devise and implement programmes and policies to uplift the quality of life of all Vincentians. Perhaps the most popular of the ULP strategies is the Education Revolution, a programme which has touched the lives of every single Vincentian since it was implemented in 2005.

Under this programme the government has modernised the education system, to provide universal access to primary and secondary schools in the State. Before 2001, less than forty percent of eligible primary school students got an opportunity to further their education at the secondary level.

Now all that has changed, and all students are getting a chance to attend secondary schools, and the ULP administration says “no child will be left behind”, a commitment to ensure that universal access continues. That is not all. The ULP has expanded the opportunities for our Vincentian students, to advance their learning at the tertiary level. The opportunities at the Community College have increased, and many students are making use of the opportunities to go to universities abroad, particularly the University of the West Indies.

There are a number of things that the ULP government has done as part of its people-centred development drive. For example, there is the construction of the bridge over the Rabacca Dry River. For years, the people of North Windward were at the mercies of this river, and no political party did anything about this. It was the ULP administration who devised, designed and built a bridge over the dry river, to ensure that there is easy communication by road, for the people of North Windward.

The truth is that as a country, we have made significant socio-economic and technological progress despite our geographical size, and our scarcity of natural resources. Much development has been accomplished and achieved in the face of unfavourable economic conditions. But much work still remains to be done.

Overall there has been significant developments in Health, Tourism, ICT, and Agriculture. Scholarships abound and our students are pursuing studies as far as Malaysia and Taiwan. In the area of diplomatic relations the ULP administration has developed new international relationships with a number of countries, particularly those in the Far East. This has resulted in benefits for the country particularly in the areas of geothermal energy and infrastructure development.

Salaries have been increased and with the current low to zero inflation rate, many public servants, including teachers, nurses, and police officers, enjoy a comfortable standing of living. The government has made a significant dent in the poverty level, and with the Zero Hunger Trust Fund, this battle will continue.

On to 2020

The future certainly looks bright for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines under the ULP administration. Tremendous work is being done in the energy sector, which will see eighty percent of the country’s energy needs being produced from renewable sources. This will be a great savings for Vinlec, which will be passed on to consumers.

In hotel development there is the government hotel at Mt. Wynne which will begin towards the end of 2019, along with the Holiday Inn Express in the Brighton area. The Buccama hotel should be re-opened this year, and work on the Peters Hope hotel project will be well advanced during this period.

All this is good for the Argyle International Airport. As the airport attract more visitors, the country has to improve its hotel room stock to accommodate more people, particularly those coming out from the United Kingdom market.

There is a busy period ahead for the health sector, as smart hospitals and polyclinics are opened, and the health services are further improved. And then there is the medicinal cannabis industry which is set to take off in the near future.

All this is not good for the opposition New Democratic Party as they contemplate another five years in opposition. But since they have already set a record as being the party to spend the longest in opposition, it's all good.