

June 24th 2022

**PUBLIC SERVICE WEEK:
REFLECTING ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR
PUBLIC SERVANTS**

Introduction

Public Service week this year 2022 is being celebrated from Monday June 21 to Friday June 24 under the theme “Charting Our Road To Recovery, Affirming the Sustainable Development Goals”. The Ministry of the Public Service, under the leadership of Minister Frederick Stephenson planned the week of activities that began with a Church Service on Monday June 20th, and included a number of activities throughout the week ending with a Public Service exhibition on Friday 24. The Unity Labour Party joins with this nation’s hard-working public servants in their celebration, and for their efforts in this period of recovery and rebuilding following the eruption of La Soufriere, and the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The task of recovery ahead of us is great, and the government is committed to supporting Vincentians who have suffered from the impacts of the challenges we have faced over the last 2 years. To efficiently implement the programs of the government necessary to assist those citizens in need, the public servants in the relevant ministries have a most important role in the process. As they celebrate during this week, the ULP recognises their contribution across all sectors, and joins in solidarity with them in recognition of their contribution to nation building. It is also because of this recognition, that the ULP remains committed to making sure that the conditions of the service continues to

improve and offer opportunities and benefits to Public Servants. There was a time in the public service when there was nothing worth celebrating, and public servants felt demotivated and demoralised by the poor working conditions, poor salaries and limited opportunities under which they were expected to function. This week, we dedicate this article to the public servants, and reflect on the strides made by in improving the conditions of work, which now makes the public service the first choice for individuals seeking work.

Making the Public Service Better

Many of the public servants today are young professionals who have been employed in the service for less than 15 years. In that group of young public servants are those who chose the service as their first job straight out of school, and have worked their way through various departments and/or positions in the service, and benefitted from personal development opportunities. For many of those young public servants the stark contrast in the condition of service prior to the ULP coming into office and what has happened since may not be so clear or even known, since this is all they know. This version of reality is not only false, it's deceptive since it can lead to a failure on the part of the public servant to appreciate the significant improvements made by this government and the range of benefits that accrue to workers as a result. The pre-ULP era of the public service can be summarised simply by low wages, lack of upward mobility, lack of opportunities for professional and academic development and limited economic power that hampered their ability to own property. Prior to coming into office, the ULP met with the various workers representative organisations and unions and held extensive discussions on the issues affecting workers and came up with policy responses to the many longstanding issues that were ignored by the NDP administration.

Once the ULP won the 2001 elections, it was clear that the new administration had specific plans for the public workers including the public servants to improve the conditions of work. Three significant initiatives by this ULP government changed the Public Service from what it was to what it is today by completely transforming the conditions under which public servants worked that included a number of benefits that made the service extremely attractive.

The first initiative was the 100% mortgage program for public servants, nurses, police officers and teachers throughout the then National Commercial Bank. This allowed public servants, who at the time had severe difficulty obtaining the 10%-20% deposit required by lending institutions to be approved for a mortgage, to now be able to obtain the full cost to build or purchase their first home. This program introduced by the NCB was so successful that the other lending institutions soon followed, and today the program has been expanded that most, if not all, institutions offer 100% mortgages to beyond public officers. The second initiative of the ULP government that significantly improved the public service was the reclassification exercise that was taken to overhaul the structure of the public service. The successful completion of this exercise saw a number of grades being moved upwards which naturally meant better salaries for the grades affected, and also offered better benefits at retirement to public servants as a result. The improved economic situation of public servants complimented the first initiative as now home ownership was much more realistic and many took the opportunity to get their first home as well as other assets such as personal vehicles. In many instances the reclassification exercise was essentially a promotion for many and in that while their position may have remained the same, the individual moved up a grade. Finally, public servants in this country now have access to many opportunities for professional and academic development through increased in-service training and a significant number of scholarships and tuition assistance. Unlike the

days of the NDP when a few scholarships were offered, this current ULP has increased the number of government-to-government scholarships from countries such as Cuba, Taiwan, Russia, and more recent additions such as Wales, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Public servants also benefit from the hundreds of tuition scholarships offered each year by this government, and all of this while benefiting from study leave, earning their partial salary for the duration of their studies.

Indeed, this ULP has improved the public service significantly and this week, the public servants of this country can truly celebrate this week with pride and accomplishment. We in the ULP congratulate the public servants and celebrate this week with them.