

November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019

## The ULP - Celebrating its silver anniversary

### Introduction

On November 17<sup>th</sup> 2019, the members and supporters of the ruling Unity Labour Party, descended on the ET Joshua tarmac in their thousands, to mark the silver anniversary of a party that has been a force for good in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Indeed the over 20,000 persons who attended the event on Sunday, sent shock waves through the rank and file of the opposition NDP. It was a signal that the ULP was still as strong as it was in 2015, and getting stronger, with overwhelming support from the young people. It was a sign too, that the ULP was well placed for the next general election in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Further too, it was a sign that the continuous nasty, dirty, campaign that the NDP is engaged in, is not having any effect on the ULP.

Above all, this strong show of support is a demonstration that the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines recognize, understand and support the policies and programmes of the ULP, particularly over the last eighteen years. It is indeed the greatest period of socio economic development in the history of our beloved country.

### The beginning

The genesis of the formation of the Unity Labour Party could be found in the relationship between the late Sir Vincent Beache and Dr. Ralph Gonsalves. At one time, they were political contenders, but by 1993, they were convinced that there was need for closer cooperation between the Labour Party, and the Movement for National Unity. Both gentlemen recognized the need for a nexus between their respective parties, to address the worsening situation in the country, caused by the poor administration of the NDP.

Just before the 1994 general elections, a “Concerned Citizens Group” facilitated a sort of electoral pact between the Labour Party and the Movement for National Unity, to arrive at a type of accommodation to contest the 1994 general election. Coming out of the meetings between the two political parties and the “Concerned Citizens Group”, was an agreement that Sir Vincent Beache will be the political leader of the Labour –MNU Unity, with Ralph Gonsalves and Stanley John to remain as leaders of the MNU and Labour party respectively.

In the 1994 general elections, the Labour –MNU Unity secured three seats, but with an impressive forty four percent of the votes cast. Sir Vincent Beache, Ralph Gonsalves and Sir Louis Straker, were the successful candidates. This meant that for the first time since 1989, there was an opposition in the House of Assembly.

Following the 1994 elections, the Labour-MNU Unity settled down to create a new political party, the Unity Labour Party, with Sir Vincent Beache being elected as political leader. The ULP was a modern progressive party of advanced social democracy. Its leaders articulated with clarity, its policies, programmes and vision to a wide audience in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and in the Diaspora.

By this time the many failures of the NDP, were being exposed in Parliament by a relentless ULP in opposition. These include the Ottley Hall project, Education, Health and the infrastructure, the Winter Vegetable programme, poverty reduction and poor governance. By this time the NDP machinery was falling apart. Local trade unions became restless and there were a number of strikes and sick outs, both in the state and private sector. The NDP was faltering badly, there was no leadership, and it was time for them to go.

### **Enter 2001**

Following the elections of 1998, and the Grand Beach Accord, 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.

The country's economy was in a tail spin. 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 of the NDP administration.

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 changes 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. The facts are there, and the evidence is before our very eyes.

## **Conclusion**

After 25 years in the business, the ULP is picking up steam and is getting “busy”. The developmental agenda is really taking off, with the tourism sector showing the greatest activity, with the construction of at least four hotels by the State and private sector. There will be a new referral hospital at the site of the ET Joshua airport, and there are plans to expand the port in Kingstown.

All this and more is happening while the country captures the imagination and admiration of the international community, as the smallest state to become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. The outpouring of support at the anniversary rally is a further indication, that the people are happy with the stewardship of the ULP, lead by Comrade Ralph.

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, then it's all good.