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FOR THE YOUTH: MEMORY AND THE FUTURE

THE ISSUE

In March 2001 when the ULP was first elected to government, a first-time 18-year-old voter then is now 41 years old. He or she would have known how things were bad in 2001 for young people, the poor, the working folks, and the disadvantaged. He or she now knows the immense progress our country has made under the ULP government.

The first-time, 18-year-old voter in the next elections due in December 2025 would have been born in 2007; it is unlikely that he or she paid any serious attention to politics or government before he or she was 10 years old in 2017. Thus, he or she is unlikely to know anything about the NDP's poor governance between 1984 and 2001 or the excellent years of ULP governance from 2001 to 2017; thereafter, this young voter knows from personal knowledge the tremendous advancement for SVG shaped or caused by the policies of the ULP government.

CLEANING UP NDP MESS

The ULP's twin-task on attaining office was to clean-up the mess left by the NDP government and to implement appropriate policies to develop SVG in every material particular. Indeed, some of the NDP mess is still being cleaned up; the mess was piled high and was deeply rooted in many respects.

The mess left by the NDP government included:

- (i) General poverty of 37 percent of the population; indigence/ "dirt poor" poverty of 26 percent of population; undernourishment at 22 percent of the population.
- (ii) Mass unemployment: Only 30,000 active registrants at NIS out of a labour force of 55,000.
- (iii) Annual per capita income (Gross Domestic Product) at under EC \$8,000 per year.

- (iv) Only 4 of every 10 persons who were 12 years of age were in secondary schools; only 4 primary school teachers in the entire educational system had university degrees; only a handful of students were at university; only 500 students or so, in total, were in the four divisions of the SVG Community College; the Public Library was placed in a small cubby hole in Middle Street consequent upon the disrepair of the Carnegie Building. Education was going nowhere.
- (v) Terrible health system: Only 70 percent of households had pipe-borne in their homes; garbage collection and disposal were limited only to Kingstown and its immediate environs; there were unhealthy garbage dumps in full view and foul smell at Arnos Vale, Bequia, and Union Island; there were no polyclinics and no Modern Medical Diagnostic Centre; hospital services were run-down; there were no MRI or CT-Scan facilities; there was an antiquated x-ray facility at Kingstown only.
- (vi) Poor housing. NDP government did not build one housing unit for the poor or marginalised in nearly 17 years in office; the Housing and Development Corporation was a mere collector of old debts.
- (vii) Disaster preparedness was basically non-existent. There was no NEMO.
- (viii) Sporting and cultural facilities were run-down or non-existent. Victoria Park was a dilapidated dump; Peace Mo was ramshackle and unusable; no developed facility at Arnos Vale; limited sporting facilities and playing fields nationwide.
- (ix) Parliament met with infrequency; the Office of the Director of Audit was a veritable dump; only a few construction firms won public works' contracts; the laws on the Director of Audit, Financial Administration, and Public Procurement were underdeveloped and anachronistic; public accountability through the relevant institutions was sadly lacking; the Office of the DPP was inadequately housed and poorly staffed; the Attorney General or Solicitor General acted as DPP for inordinate lengths of time.
- (x) The entire Windward Highway, the entire Vigie Highway, and the Leeward Highway from Hospital Road to Layou were in near-total disrepair; so, too, were most of the secondary roads and feeder roads; bridges all over SVG were falling apart.

- (xi) Official corruption, money-laundering and drug trafficking were widespread; so much so that the British government refused the NDP government debt relief under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative because of the extent of drug trafficking, official corruption, poverty, and uncontrollable money-laundering.
- (xii) The National Commercial Bank (fore-runner to BOSVG) was in disastrous straits: The Bank was severely under-capitalised; its bad loans were over 20 percent of its total loan portfolio; it received a bad “qualified report” from the independent auditors for the years 1998, 1999, 2000; its asset base was small and heavily compromised; it was used as a veritable piggy bank by “NDP high-ups”; and the Ottley Hall Marina -Union Island Projects’ loans and security offended every basic banking precept and put the Bank in jeopardy of collapse; and workers at the Bank had no pension plan, as existed in all other commercial banks in SVG.
- (xiii) The Ottley Hall project was a disaster and indebted the country in the sum of over EC \$180 million for an asset — at arm’s length transaction — was valued at EC \$13.5 million.
- (xiv) State-owned entities such as the National Lottery, VINLEC, the Marketing Board Supermarket, Input Warehouse, Public Works, Public Health, Botanic Gardens were all performing badly.
- (xv) Public buildings (schools, police stations, clinics, etc.) were in a condition of deplorable disrepair.
- (xvi) Workers were disadvantaged in every material particular — wages, severance payments, etc.
- (xvii) No international airport, no Rabacca Bridge.
- (xviii) Selling of passports and citizenship.

CLEANING UP THE MESS AND ADVANCING

In every single area of governance, the ULP had to clean up the mess which the NDP left and put in place actively a range of progressive policies to advance SVG

markedly. The evidence of all this is before our very eyes. Under the ULP government, SVG has been transformed for the better, by far.

The ULP government did the following, among other things:

- (i) Built the international airport at Argyle and the Jet Airport in Canouan; built the bridge over Rabacca Dry River;
- (ii) Carried out a massively impressive Education Revolution;
- (iii) Carried out the Housing and Health Revolutions — built houses galore; built 3 polyclinics; rehabilitated dozens of clinics and rural hospitals; rehabilitated the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital; built the Modern Medical and Diagnostic Centre; about to start construction of Acute Care Hospital at Arnos Vale;
- (iv) Upgraded, massively, the Arnos Vale Sporting Complex; built dozens of sporting facilities including major playing fields across SVG;
- (v) Reconstructed/built the Windward Highway (from Kingstown to Fancy) the South Leeward Highway, the Vigie Highway, dozens of bridges, repaired hundreds of miles of secondary roads;
- (vi) Increased minimum wages four times; strengthened severance pay law; paid thousands of workers severance pay which was denied them by the NDP; reclassified for the better the public sector employers;
- (vii) Increased annual average income per head of population to EC \$25,000, and cut income taxes at the same time;
- (viii) Rehabilitated Peace Memorial Hall, Victoria Park, Tourism Sites, Botanic Gardens, and built 15 Learning Resource Centres, National Library, Archives and Documentation Centre;
- (ix) Set up NEMO and built NEMO's Headquarters; built sea and river defences across SVG, as never before;
- (x) Reduced poverty and indigence markedly;
- (xi) Increased jobs and strengthened the NIS (In 2023, active registrants at NIS numbered over 43,000 — 13,000 more than in 2001;

- (xii) Strengthened the NCB and transformed it into the BOSVG — now the biggest bank by far, in SVG;
- (xiii) Stopped the selling of our passports and citizenships;
- (xiv) Strengthened public accountability; upgraded Office of Director of Audit; bolstered the Office of DPP; fortified the Tenders Board, passed vital legislation to reform the Office of the Director of Audit, Public Procurement, Financial Administration and the Criminal Law; crusaded against official corruption and money laundering; reformed regulation of offshore financial services; established several statutory bodies or public corporations to better deliver important service to the public;
- (xv) Transferred the National Lottery from a “mickey mouse” operation to the best run, most successful Lottery in the OECS;
- (xvi) Championed Youth, Sports, and Culture: Established YES, SET, ON-SITE, and PRYME programmes, and Creative Industries; made Carnival bigger and better;
- (xvii) Reformed and upgraded the Police Force, Strengthened Coast Guard, Built numerous Police Stations;
- (xviii) Obtained debt relief of EC \$180 million on the Ottley Hall Project and purchased it for US \$6 million; obtained debt relief from Britain under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative, and substantial debt relief of nearly EC \$200 million from Petro Caribe;
- (xix) Instituted Petro Caribe arrangement from Venezuela which benefitted SVG massively;
- (xx) Facilitated the making of the average Vincentian more than twice better-off materially than in 2001 with higher wages/salaries; lower taxes; more and better houses, better education and training; low-to-moderate inflation; better and more easily available health and wellness facilities; nearly 100 percent of households with quality pipe-borne water and reliable electricity services; more cars, SUVs, and modern domestic appliances, better and more telecoms services; etc;
- (xxi) Advanced mature regionalism in all aspects;

(xxii) Delivered principled foreign policy with immense benefits for SVG, the region, and the world.

(xxiii) Made the economy grow hugely from a nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2000 of under \$800 million to \$2.87 billion in 2023.

PAY ATTENTION

We urge young people to have the memory, to know the present, and help us, in solidarity, to shape the future in peace, security, prosperity, justice, sustainable development for all. Gather the information and interrogate it for its truth or falsity; arrive at knowledge, historically and comparatively; develop a full understanding; apply your heart to wisdom in making decisions; and act, in solidarity, with these decisions.

