

Feb 9th 2018

The Opposition disappoints again

Introduction

So, the debate on the 2018 budget is over, and the country never got a chance to hear the views of the opposition New Democratic Party, who failed to offer any serious contribution to the debate on the budget. When the House of Assembly resumed on Tuesday February 6th, 2018, at 9am, the Opposition found itself absent from the chambers of this hallowed house. So Vincentian taxpayers, the people who are responsible for the salaries of the opposition, were short-changed once again, and Friday and company will again collect their salaries at the end of the month, for work that they have not done.

This is absolutely amazing, in a modern-day democracy like the State of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is even more amazing, that a political party that complains that it was cheated out of an opportunity to debate a vote of no confidence, did not avail themselves of the chance to debate the same issues which were contained in the motion of no confidence.

But then again we know that these are not serious people. These are people who are hungry for power, who have an unquenchable thirst for power, to the extent that they are ready to destroy some of our important institutions in the State. We have witnessed how their supporters disrespected the office of the Governor General, when he arrived for the opening of the Parliament. We witness their attitude to the playing of the national anthem, a most disrespectful and reprehensible action on the part of the NDP supporters. Where is the leadership? Where is the respect for Her Majesty's representative, and where is their respect for that important symbol of our nationhood, the national anthem?

Their thirst for power has led them to disrespect the office of the Supervisor of Elections, simply because the people ignored them in 2015, and asked the ULP and Comrade Ralph, to run the affairs of the ship of State called St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for the next five years. They fail to understand a clear mathematical concept, that eight is more than seven.

The 2018 Budget

The 2018 budget, in the form of the 2018 Appropriation Bill has been approved by the House of Assembly, without any input whatsoever, from the nine members of the opposition. The ULP administration, through the Minister of Finance, Camillo Gonsalves, has presented a bundle of plans and strategies to provide for the socio economic development of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 2018 and beyond. This is a budget of love and caring, a budget that shows how the ULP administration is concerned about the welfare of Vincentians. Over the next few weeks, the ULP column will address some of the fiscal measures contained in the 2018 budget. But let's look at three of the fiscal measures outlined by the Finance Minister.

The Finance Minister outlined that there will be a reduction in the standard rate of company tax from 32.5 percent to 30 percent. Personal income tax will also move from 32.5 percent to 30 percent. Then there will be a positive movement in the standard deduction for income tax from EC\$18,000 to EC\$20,000. All this means that workers in the State will take home more money from their pay packet. Business too will have more disposable income.

It should be noted that when the ULP arrived in office in March 2001, the threshold for the deduction of personal income was EC\$12,000. The lowering of the tax rate and the increase in the tax threshold will cost the government approximately EC\$12 million in revenue. This development is even better than a salary increase, and will be much appreciated by all. In fact this measure is a sign of the commitment of the ULP administration to provide an economic stimulus, so as to improve in a tangible way, the condition of the Vincentian worker.

Opportunities

This is the 17th consecutive budget of the ULP administration. It is crafted under the mantra "Continuity and Change: Job Creation, Resilience, Sustainable Development and New Opportunities in a Rapidly Changing Global Environment". Clearly, even in the headwinds of global change and uncertainty, this budget represents tremendous cause for optimism, progress in further developing and deepening people-centered policies, along with genuine opportunities for innovation and growth.

Because we have had things fairly easy over the last seventeen years, many Vincentians think that running government is a piece of cake. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many of our neighbours have been forced to slash public sector workers, and social safety nets, but our country lost no jobs. Salaries arrived like clockwork, including those of the opposition, even when our neighbours were struggling to pay their workers.

When countries were forced to trade and sell their citizenship, our government, led by Comrade Ralph, resisted this, and by the sweat of our collective brow, we continued to eat our bread. Indeed, we must be thankful for the leadership provided by Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, who, as the country's longest serving Minister of Finance, successfully navigated the country, through some difficult economic conditions and natural disasters.

Conclusion

Despite all the talk by the naysayers, the Vincentian economy continues to frustrate those who feel that it has collapsed. Many of the NDP supporters and leaders talk down the economy, every day, even while they enjoy the successes which come from the hard work of the ULP administration. History will judge them harshly.