

The Splendid record of the ULP and Comrade Ralph in advancing the cause of Women in SVG - part three

INTRODUCTION

It is to be noted that the salaries of public servants increased on an average in excess of 70 percent since 2001, some 40 percent in excess of price increases and productivity measured in terms of real Gross Domestic Product. Most of these beneficiaries are women since there are far more women in the civil service, teaching, and nursing than men.

Despite these phenomenal achievements, much more still remains to be done for women, and men in SVG! The ULP and the Comrade have the policies and programmes in place; just look at the ULP Manifesto for 2015 and its other public policy documents.

POLITICS AND PARLIAMENT

In terms of active party politics and representation in Parliament, there has been, historically, in SVG, a woeful under-representation of women; but no major party has done better than “Labour” (SVLP/ULP) in this regard: Seven women have been candidates (Girlyn Miguel, René Baptiste, Olivia Bentinck, Celithia Davy, Valcina Ash, Michelle Fife, and Deborah Charles), two of whom have been Ministers of Government as elected representatives.

Girlyn Miguel has served for seventeen years (1998 – 2015) in Parliament and fourteen years as a Minister in three Ministries, rising to the level of Deputy Prime Minister. Although Ivy Joshua of the PPP served more terms as a representative than Girlyn Miguel, the latter has risen higher and served longer in government than any other woman. The other ULP Minister was René Baptiste (2001 – 2010) who was the representative for West Kingstown, the only woman ever to be elected in an urban constituency. Five other women have served as Senators for the ULP, two of them as Parliamentary Secretaries. (By comparison the NDP has had six female candidates for office, three of whom won elections, two for two terms each and one served as a Minister).

Since the ULP was formed in October 1994, as a merger of the St. Vincent Labour Party and the Movement for National Unity, it has never fought a general election (1998, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2015) without at least one female candidate. In 2015, when the ULP fielded a female candidate,

Deborah Charles, against the NDP incumbent, Daniel Cummings, he derisively referred to her as “mere window dressing” and of no merit. Ms. Charles, 48-year old mother of three, is a qualified teacher who served as a teacher for over a quarter of a century and is also the holder of a Bachelor of Laws degree. Cummings referred to her as “a nobody”, “mere window dressing”!

Comrade Ralph and the ULP proposed in the Reform Constitution of 2009 as one of its non-justiciable “Guiding Principles” that political parties offer at least one third of its candidates in elections as women (there must be one-third of men, too). The NDP critiqued that proposal and the entire Reform Constitution, and in fact led the resistance to the proposed constitution of 2009.

So, Marcia Hinds if you want a political party which places women at the centre of its policy discourses, check the ULP. Never mind the propaganda of two or three NDP women. At the NDP women’s gathering, their leader Lorraine Friday, had only one solution to SVG’s problems: Get rid of Ralph and the ULP!

OTHER IMPACTS

The impact of the progressive policies and programmes of the ULP in other areas touches women, too. This is true of the physical infrastructure projects such as the Rabacca Bridge and the Argyle International Airport; the policies on sports and culture; the broad macro-economic policy and the sectoral programmes; the policies on climate change and natural disasters; air and sea transportation; and regional and foreign policy, among others.

It is not an accident that the ULP has been in office longer than any political party in our country’s history; that Comrade Ralph is our longest-serving Prime Minister; that in the 2015 general elections, in going for a fourth consecutive term the ULP won a higher percentage of the popular vote than in 2010; that the ULP wins the majority of both the female and male vote; and that “Labour” is the natural party of governance. Comrade Ralph in the 2015 elections asked the women: “Stand by Me”; they did and they continue to do so. That is a big headache for the NDP, but no importation of one or the other of the Hinds duo from Barbados can help them.

Conclusion

And so we have demonstrated over the last three articles, that the ULP has a splendid record when it comes to women's issues, and the advancement of the cause of women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. No other government, no other political party, and indeed no other political leader, has been active in the pursuit of the betterment of women. People talk, and sometimes talk is cheap, as the spoutings of the NDP clearly indicate.

Of particular note, and of critical importance is the work done by Comrade Ralph and the Unity Labour Party, in keeping the ship of state called St. Vincent and the Grenadines afloat, sailing comfortably through one of the worse economic upheavals in living memory. It is therefore no fluke, that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is one of the very few CARICOM countries, who have not sought the services of the IMF, to bail them out of any economic crisis.