

August 10th 2018

Reflections on the 180th anniversary of the abolition of slavery

Introduction

On Wednesday August 1st 2018, our country celebrated the 180th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. On that day, the country was involved in an event to recognize the National Hero, paramount Chief Joseph Chatoyer naming the Rabacca park after him. That event featured a national address by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, who held the audience spellbound, with a mini dissertation on the history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines during the post slavery period.

It was clear from the information provided, and based on the reaction from the large audience, that there is a virtual gap in the historical knowledge of most Vincentians. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why there is a rather lukewarm response to activities, which are organised to mark Emancipation Day in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The general feeling is that as Vincentians, we need to start reflecting deeper on our historical past, particularly that period around emancipation. This is a critical period during which our people, coming out of slavery, began to be assimilated into the Vincentian society, amidst the presence of the colonial masters.

The Reflection

The reflection process must take into account the salient facts around our history, from as far back as the Carib Wars and the struggles of the paramount Carib Chief, Joseph Chatoyer. Chatoyer gave his life in a valiant attempt to protect his homeland and his people. Our reflection must also consider the circumstances under which our forefathers struggled to make ends meet, following emancipation, and the period of apprenticeship which ended in 1838.

We must understand that the history of this period is very relevant to our country's present and future development. We would do well to remember the words of Edmund Burke, (1729 to 1797), that "those who don't know history are destined to repeat it".

So for example those who forget the struggles of the Caribs, to repel the British and protect their homeland, will fail to appreciate the work of the ULP administration, in the wake of the work by SCL and Henley and Partners, to impose a new regime on our country, which will include the sale of passports. Further, that is why certain people were critical of the decision of the government to name a part of the leeward highway, in honor of the great South African leader, Nelson

Mandela. Their lack of understanding of our history, has created this poor awareness of the importance of certain historical facts.

As a people we have to learn from our history to make ourselves better. Our forefathers toiled hard, under the whip of the colonial masters, to create wealth for countries like the United Kingdom. There is no whip these days, but this does not mean that we should not work hard, or even harder, because we are developing ourselves, creating a future for our children, and charting a better course for our country.

Then there is the reparation drive. If we are not in tune with our history, if we are not aware, and cannot reflect positively about past, we cannot understand the reasons for reparation. And if we cannot understand it then we are less likely to support it, and the reparation movement will lose the drive and stimulus that it currently exhibits. Thankfully, this has not happened, because most people in the Caribbean and wider afield, are aware of what reparation is all about.

But most importantly, we have to have memory. While we do not want to live in the past, we must harness the events of our history, to build a better world for ourselves and our civilisation, despite all the challenges. So we must combine faith and reason, to marry divine inspiration and the creative imagination of our people, so as to work harder and smarter. And we must be in solidarity with each other, and be linked with our friends and allies, in the pursuit of our future development.

Conclusion

As a political party, the ULP administration has always accepted and understood that given the small size of our country, the scarcity of material resources and the existing external challenges, are serious factors to be considered in the management of our economy. The ULP administration has articulated a compelling narrative for a home grown development. This narrative has been backed up by deeds, which have resulted in benefits for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

It is this progressive record that has stymied the Opposition NDP, into a feeling of learned helplessness, a feeling from which they are unable to escape. The ULP is well placed and fairly well equipped, better by far than any other political party in the State, to continue to lead the charge for further progress, always in communion with the people.

As a country, we have our own identity. We are not better than anyone, and no one is better than us. We will continue to push always, the boundaries of our country's possibilities, reducing limitations as far as is practicable, as we strive to provide more developmental benefits for all Vincentians.