

December 14th 2018

The 23rd Convention of the Unity Labour Party

Introduction

A convention is one of those specialised meetings that political parties engage in, sometimes annually, or every two years or so. It's the highest decision making mechanism of a political party, and is often reserved for key decisions, like the election of top party officials, and the adoption of critical party decisions and strategies.

A similar situation applies to the Unity Labour Party, as the members and officers of the ULP gathered at the Bethel High School last Sunday, for its 23rd political convention. ULP conventions attract large numbers, and this one was no exception, as can be seen on Facebook. The event attracted over two thousand persons, but what is surprising is the amount of young people who were in attendance.

The presence of so many young people augurs well for the future of the ULP, and its fate in the next general elections. It is also a good factor for the continuation of the philosophy of the ULP administration, for "people centered development". Finally, it is an acknowledgement that the young people in the country are in tune with the developmental narrative of the ULP, hence their support. This is bad news for the opposition New Democratic Party, as the young people continue to ignore their message.

Solidarity

There was a great deal of solidarity and camaraderie at the ULP convention, as members and supporters conversed about this and that, all related to the future development of the party. All this is the start of the process of preparing the party for five in a row.

As an event, a convention defines the preparation of any political party for further work in any society, whether it's a general election or the process of refreshing and re-vitalizing the base of the party. Observers will watch conventions closely, since this will give them clues as to what's happening within that organization.

Observers will look to see how the members of the party respond to the message from the political leader. They will look at the size of the audience, the composition of the audience to see the number of young people attending, the

number of new members who are present, as well as any defections or attractions.

They will test the harmony of the event, to determine if the party is together in unity and love. They will try to spot any disaffection, any conflicts, and any diversion from the central theme of the party. To them, a convention is like a man or woman conducting their annual health check up. Some of these observers will be those who have not yet determine who they will support in the next general election, and so a successful convention will help them make that decision.

Overall there was a spirit of love and solidarity as ULP members and supporters bonded together at the 23rd convention. NDP spies could pick up nothing but positive vibes, and this must be a worrying sign for the NDP. There was no indication that the ULP was disintegrating, that the leadership was losing its focus, and that the messages were getting old and dreary and out of touch with reality.

Instead the discussion focused on the international airport and its continued importance to the socio-economic development of the State. The discussion focused on the education revolution, the debate on the medicinal cannabis industry, the new investments in the tourism sector, and the strength of the party for the upcoming elections, in two years time.

The Political Leader's address

The Political Leader of the ULP, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, spoke to his membership in an address lasting just about two hours, none of it boring, all of it interesting and relevant and evoking loud responses from the audience. He outlined some of the achievements of the ULP administration and commented on the success of the people centered strategy, that has brought a high level of development to the country.

He poured scorn on the NDP's so-called visit to the People's Republic of China and asked several pertinent questions, particularly in relation to the purpose of the trip, its cost, and who financed it. He spent some time on the robust parliamentary agenda of the ULP, outlining several Bills which will be placed on the Order Paper for the attention of the members of the House of Assembly.

Naturally, when it came to the closed business session, and the election of the leaders of the party, there was a consensus that Dr. Gonsalves should remain as the leader of the ULP, and so he was elected unopposed. So too was the deputy leader, Sir Louis Straker, the party's chairman Edwin Snagg, and the deputy chairman, Rochelle Forde Duncan. That put to rest all the speculation about leadership, although the issue of transition is still on the table for discussion by the ULP.

Conclusion

A hugely successful convention does not automatically lead to success at a general election, although it is an indication of the standing of your political party. From here on, the ULP and its strategists will begin looking at different aspects of the campaign, including public relations, fund raising, house to house visits and so forth. There is more work to be done in relation to the youth vote. The ULP candidates will continue to reach out to these voters so that they could better understand the work of the ULP.

The ULP administration has a very impressive record in terms of what it has accomplished in the seventeen years in office. It is this record that has served the party well at the polls in 2005, 2010, and 2015, and will serve the party well in 2020.

On the other hand, the opposition NDP lurches from one bungle to the next, making mistakes left, right, and center, and doing very little or nothing to engage in any debate on matters related to national development.