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Courageous ULP

Introduction

There is one thing you can say about the ULP administration, and that is, the party is not afraid to attempt to cross the virtual “development chasm”, and to take huge, bold steps in doing so. The NDP, in its seventeen years in office, never displayed any inclination to attempt to cross the development chasm, limiting itself to some small projects here and there. Indeed, perhaps the largest project attempted by the NDP in its seventeen years in office, was the construction of the J.F Mitchell airport in Bequia, a project lacking in scope and purpose, and no significant contribution to the country’s GDP.

Not so the ULP. Many of the critical projects implemented by the ULP showed deep thinking and consultation, and a focus on development. The ULP, under the leadership of Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, was never afraid to tackle the hard issues, and the evidence is there to show.

No political party in the history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has provided the impetus for socio-economic development, in the manner that the ULP has done. In the circumstances, observers have been moved to call the leadership of the ULP, bold and pragmatic. Perhaps the time has come to take a brief look at some of these projects and programmes which have defined the ULP, and its bold approach to the socio-economic development of the country.

The Bold Projects

Perhaps the project which is the hallmark of the bold, aggressive approach of the ULP administration, is the construction of the international airport at Argyle. Politicians from the 1970’s to the 1990’s era, have been talking about an international airport for SVG, but no one had the boldness to undertake such a project. In fact some persons described Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves as being “crazy”, and even recommended that he should be referred to a psychiatrist. Well the rest is history. The airport was completed and is operational with astounding success.

Then there is the education revolution. When the ULP proposed the policy of universal access for secondary education in 2005, the NDP said that this could only be accomplished by 2025, twenty years down the road. Not so the ULP. A series of bold initiatives were implemented, and our eleven year old children were heading to secondary schools to continue their education. Under the NDP, only thirty four percent of them got an opportunity to go to a secondary school.

We come now to the bridge over the Rabacca river. For years, the people above the dry river, the residents of Sandy Bay, Owia, Fancy, Point, Orange Hill and Overland, lived in fear of the dry river. Many stories have been told about persons who were washed away while trying to cross this river. The ULP designed a bridge, and then sought the funding to have it constructed. Now the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines travel back and forth, between North Windward, and the rest of the country, with relative ease.

There are two more initiatives. The re-classification exercise for the civil service, is an exercise that many Caribbean governments are afraid to carry out. The ULP completed this exercise with little or no fuss. Then there was the constitutional reform process, which the NDP supported, and then had a change of heart. In fact the NDP fought against the referendum, tooth and nail, and so the 2009 constitution failed. Now Vincentians are regretting that whole scenario in a number of ways.

Other Projects

There are two other bold strategies which we must mention, and one was implemented in the early days of the ULP administration. This was the one hundred percent mortgage programme which was implemented by the then National Commercial Bank. At that time, the opposition New Democratic Party said that the ULP wanted to bankrupt the NCB, and that the programme would fail, because the public servants would default on the loans.

As the NDP found out to their detriment, the programme was extremely successful, to the point that other financial institutions in the State, including credit unions, decided to follow the example of the National Commercial Bank. The public servants duly repaid their mortgages, justifying the confidence that the ULP had placed in them.

All these strategies and projects show that the ULP is a bold and pragmatic party. So that when Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves announced that the government was going to pursue a policy leading to the development of a medicinal cannabis industry, everyone knew that this was another of the bold and courageous initiatives of the ULP.

Conclusion

The ULP has demonstrated over the last seventeen years that strategic thinking and actions are its hallmarks. Major leaps are required within a small resource-challenged economy and society like St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for the actualization of genuine, sustainable development. Timidity, learned helplessness, pessimism, and a lack of faith in our people, as demonstrated by the opposition NDP, lead to hopelessness and non-achievement.

The ULP offers boldness, courage, optimism, faith, hope, love and the grace of right reason, which will lead to progress and a better life for all Vincentians.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year!