

April 18th 2019

The State of the Union

Introduction

On Thursday April 4th 2019, at the rally to mark the 18th anniversary of the ULP administration in office, Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves made a profound statement on the country, one that has had a calming effect of Vincentians. He said “for those that are listening overseas, to say to them, that the state of the union, the state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, is sound, and we are developing well. We have a compelling developmental narrative and progress is being made in the interest of the people”.

Indeed this statement sets out the landscape for anyone who would ask the question “what’s happening in St. Vincent and the Grenadines”, in the face of the nasty dirty propaganda being conducted by the opposition New Democratic Party. Prime Minister Gonsalves has made a re-assuring statement that is backed up by an incredible amount of facts, which we as Vincentians, see every day, right before our very eyes.

And so, after eighteen years in office, there are things that the ULP can boast about, which have had a positive effect on Vincentians, even more than the prized project of the international airport at Argyle.

Poverty reduction and Wages

Let us begin with the issue of poverty reduction. In 2001, when the ULP arrived in office, indigence, or dirt poor poverty, stood at an amazing twenty six percent of the population. This meant that more than twenty six thousand persons were living in dirt poor poverty conditions under the NDP and James Mitchell and Arnhim Eustace. Around that time, the NDP boasted of a surplus budget, but our children were on a shift system in the primary schools in the State.

Now today, under the ULP and Comrade Ralph, that figure has moved from twenty six percent, to just three percent, through the programmes and strategies of the ULP administration. In 2001, the level of malnutrition in the country stood at twenty-two percent. Now that figure is five percent, and dropping, thanks to the work of the Zero Hunger Programme.

It is statistics like these which prove that the ULP is doing something good for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Let’s look at another one.

In 2001, the average income per head of population was under eight thousand dollars per year. Today, that figure is twenty two thousand (\$22,000) per year. What is the action that has supported this statistic? Well for one thing the ULP administration has increased the level of the minimum wage three times in eighteen years. The NDP did so once in seventeen years in office.

Here is another one. When the NIS came into being in 1987, the NDP increased the pension rate one time, in a period of fourteen years to 2001. Under the ULP, the pension rate was increased four times in a period of 18 years. What a caring loving government. What a government that pays great attention to the welfare of its people!

And then we must mention the number of salary increases provided to our public servants, teachers, policemen and nurses over the years, including the re-classification process which has increased salaries beyond the expectation of Vincentians. All this has put additional monies in the hands of our workers, and has led to an increase in the standard of living in the country.

Social Programmes

The ULP administration has expanded the level of social programmes which are available for poor and the working class in the country. At the tip of the iceberg is the health sector. In 2001, the NDP spent just 35 million dollars on the health sector. The ULP by comparison spent over 80 million dollars on health in 2018/2019. The services have been increased, with polyclinics at Stubbs, Mesopotamia and Buccament, and a new facility, the Diagnostic Centre in Georgetown. To these services the ULP administration will add the 130-bed acute referral hospital to be constructed at the new city at Arnos Vale.

The other successful social programmes include the Zero Hunger Trust Fund, Lives-to-Live, Home-Help for the Elderly, and the School Feeding Programme. The government has also provided a safety net for the less fortunate in the country, by increasing the payments under the social welfare programme.

We must talk about the magnificent housing programme that the government has implemented over the last 18 years. First there was the One Hundred Percent Mortgage for Public Servants, and then came the low income, middle income, and the no income housing policies which benefited many Vincentians. Then there is the provision of tax concessions to private sector builders of housing estates, and the revamping of the Housing and Land Development Corporation, to better implement the housing policies of the ULP administration.

All this is a demonstration that the ULP is committed to providing access to affordable housing, and building lots, as a basic human right.

Conclusion

The ULP has performed outstandingly since 2001. In fact, St.Vincent and the Grenadines is a far better place to live today, than in 2001. We have made tremendous progress in all developmental indices, despite the challenges that have confronted us, particularly in relation to our size and our limited material resources.

But the leadership of the ULP is strong, resourceful and imaginative, and with the creativity and resilience of our people, the country will continue to thrive, despite the difficult and unfriendly international circumstances.