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How the Covid-19 Pandemic Stumped the Opposition NDP

Introduction

St. Vincent and the Grenadines recorded its first case of the corona virus on March 11th 2020. On the same day, the World Health Organisation declared that the Covid-19 as it is called, is a pandemic. Since then, the world has been thrown into a state of panic with severe global socio-economic disruption, the likes of which has never been seen before.

International countries have adopted their own approach to this crisis, with some countries following the World Health Organisation, while others have adopted a home-grown approach, following the science, and taking into consideration the existing health, social, and economic conditions.

As of April 27th 2020, some 2.98 million cases of Covid-19 was recorded. The WHO says that some 207,000 persons have died, with 875,000 recovering from the virus. As of April 26th 2020, St. Vincent and the Grenadines was reporting fifteen Covid-19 cases, with eight persons who had recovered, and no related deaths. Health officials here had conducted 116 tests, and 77 persons were in quarantine.

The government of Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves has adopted a novel approach to the pandemic, option to keep certain borders open, but ramping up the health services to provide for early detection, management, quarantine and isolation. So despite all the talk of a lock down, and the closing of borders, the government has managed the situation in a commendable way.

How Covid-19 stumped the opposition NDP

The political activists in the NDP recognize that Covid-19 may represent an opportunity for the opposition, to score cheap political points, particularly with the expectation of general elections towards the end of the year. And so, through the use of social media, particularly Face book and Instagram, and through their main radio programme, New Times, the NDP has started a campaign of mis-information, lies and half-truths.

The central purpose of all this, is to create fear and hysteria in the country, and to oppose and denigrate the efforts of the ULP administration in the fight against Covid-19. So early in their campaign, St. Clair Leacock and Margaret London could be heard on Nice Radio, talking about some sort of estimates that the Covid-19

virus will kill some two thousand Vincentians. Where this information came from is anybody's guess.

Then it seems as though the NDP went crazy. So there was a period of misinformation and conspiracy theories about Covid-19 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and then the presentation of false news, all aimed at creating confusion in the minds of Vincentians. For example, on March 18th, 2020, Daniel Cummings, the Member of Parliament for West Kingstown and Chairman of the NDP, was heard on radio advocating the use of seawater, as a cure for Covid-19. Such statements could only be described as incredibly foolish.

Closing Borders

Then there is the amazing about turn by the NDP on the matter of closing the borders of the country. On March 21st 2020, the leader of the NDP, Dr. Godwin Friday, wrote to Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, demanding among other things, that the ULP administration close all borders and lock down the country. A number of NDP supporters and members supported Friday, and pushed this line on radio and Face book.

By April 7th, 2020, the NDP made a 360 degree about turn. A Vincentian on a cruise ship posted on FaceBook that they will no longer support the NDP, because they wanted a lockdown of the country, thus preventing the sailors from coming home. This simple post on FaceBook drove the NDP crazy. Godwin Friday, the "lock down kid", changed his tune and began advocating for the return of the sailors.

In fact this maneuver caught some of his supporters by surprise. Even as he continued to advocate for the return of the sailors, and those Vincentians on oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico, some prominent members, like Kay Bacchus Baptiste and Nigel Stephenson, continued their call for a lock down of the country.

And furthermore, the NDP went on to muddy the discussion over the return of the sailors on cruise ships, with MP's like Nigel Stephenson stating that the ULP administration is using the sailors as a bargaining chip. This of course is utter foolishness and should be condemned by all and sundry.

The NDP is so desperate to obtain political mileage from the Covid-19 situation that they find themselves involved in matters that they know nothing about. They have become critical of the hard working professionals in the Ministry of Health, even to the point of making personal attacks on certain officials. They find themselves involve in the exchanges between the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Prime Minister of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique, without an understanding of the core issues.

Conclusion

It would profit the NDP greatly, if they could find a way to study and understand the approach of the ULP administration to the Covid-19 crisis. They should try to understand the four dimensions of health, economic, social and security, and see how these affect St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

They have failed to do this, and so they are not in a position to make any professional statements that could be helpful in the fight against Covid-19. It is the ULP administration, led by Prime Minister Dr. the Hon. Ralph E Gonsalves, ably supported by the hard working health professionals, who is leading the charge against this pandemic. Equally, they should try to understand the stimulus and socio-economic recovery package that the government has presented, to survive and expand, once the pandemic is over.

By and large the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, have shown great understanding and support for the approach of the ULP, and have praised Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves for the leadership that he has shown in this crisis.

Throughout this crisis, he has remained calm, resolute and focused, in providing leadership, without succumbing to panic, hysteria and futile histrionics.