

August 13th 2021

COMRADE RALPH AND THE COURAGE TO DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Introduction

One of the hallmarks of any parliamentary democracy is the debate that occurs in the House of Assembly between the representatives of the people duly elected in democratically conducted elections. The legislative process is designed to ensure that in our case, elected representatives are able to scrutinise bills before they are passed into law. The robust debates that occur during meetings of the Parliament are fundamental to the maintenance of a vibrant democracy and should be protected at all times. Prior to the Unity Labour Party government, the meetings of the House were held almost in secrecy with no broadcasts of the people's business allowed. So guarded were the proceedings that former speaker of the House of Parliament, Nolwyn Mc Dowald threatened journalist Glen Jackson with possible arrest and had him removed from the Parliament building, when he attempted to record one such meeting. Once elected to office, the ULP that campaigned on a platform of openness and transparency in government, immediately moved to have the meetings broadcast live on radio for the benefit of citizens. Democracy is much more than a fancy word to use in dishonest discourse to ignite emotions and tighten tensions. It involves processes and practices that deepen people participation. Expanding the legislative agenda, and increasing access to debates and making them public, are some of the ways the ULP administration lead, by Comrade Ralph has worked to deepen democracy since coming into office.

August 6, 2021: An Attack on Democracy

The events of August 6, 2021, dubbed "bloody Thursday", have been well-ventilated in the media and have received widespread

condemnation locally, regionally and internationally. Opposition NDP supporters, under instructions by their leadership, did their best to create an atmosphere of chaos, confusion and fear through their use of aggression and violence. This angry mob of political activists, parading as freedom fighters used the pretext of the opposition to the amendments to the Public Health Act, to disrupt the free flow of traffic, block roads and light fires in the vicinity of the Parliament building. This illegal gathering encouraged and applauded by the Leader of the Opposition, soon forgot the pretext under which they were gathered and began expressing their true purpose: their desire to get rid of a democratically elected ULP government. The opposition NDP has refused to accept the results of any of the General Elections it has lost since 2001, threatening to use any means necessary to curtail the life of the elected ULP administration, often-times calling its supporters out to protest. This latest protest action was the most obvious expression of their desperation for power, having failed to unseat the ULP, and dissatisfied with their minority status in the parliament.

What was on display on “bloody Thursday” was the boiling over of their desperation with their frustration leading the NDP vice president to signal to its supporters that their illegal gathering was about to become violent with the blessing of the party’s leadership. Comrade Ralph has always been a champion of democracy from his early days as a university student, and his activism spans over 50 years. This champion who believes in peaceful protest understands that even in the face of protest, which is also a hallmark of democracy, the business of parliament must go on, it must not be prevented. It is quite the antithesis, that while on his way to the meeting of the House of Assembly, Comrade Ralph was attacked by the angry mob of NDP protestors, who tried to prevent him from entering the institution of democratic practice. Their attempts to prevent the convoy to pass, were not allowed to halt the movement of this champion of democracy to the parliament. His decision to walk prompted a protestor to commit an egregious act, that in any other country may well be considered an act of domestic terrorism against the comrade leader, spilling his blood as he is struck on his head by a rock.

The attack on that day was directed not just at Comrade Ralph, nor the constituents of North Central Windward he represents. It was not on the Unity Labour Party. It was on the very democracy that the Comrade has spent his life fighting for and protecting. The Comrade's blood was shed as he stood courageously in the face of the most vicious attack on our democracy, organised by others who should be protecting it. The Comrade displayed the courage of leaders before him who stood bravely in the face of hate, anger and even violence and showed to the world that he would not cower to mob rule, that has no place in our democratic civilisation.

Conclusion

Leadership demands courage under fire, and our Prime Minister and beloved comrade has shown that he would stand tall and courageous in defence of our country and its democracy. While the NDP tries unsuccessfully to wash its hands, dusting metaphorically as it will, its fingerprints from the events of August 6, 2021, Vincentians understand its role in what occurred and will continue to place the responsibility where it belongs. The opposition NDP's inability to condemn the actions, compounded by their defiance to allowing the events being mentioned in Parliament, with the Member for East Kingstown, referring to it callously as a "side-show", shows not only their inhumanity and lack of decency, but also their complicity. They are to be held responsible. Comrade Ralph and the entire leadership of the ULP have and continue to call for calm heads and the reduction of the tensions, and specifically reiterating that there must be no retaliation that can continue this violence. We are a peaceful people and even though we disagree, we can do so non-violently. On Monday August 9, 2021, as we welcomed home the Comrade, as he smiled and waved to the crowds, we are reminded by his mantra "you could lick me up, knock me down, ah get up back, I'm a hard man fo dead". We stand with you Comrade and your work to defend our democracy.