

August 9th 2019

A Titan has Passed

Introduction

Vincentians from all walks of life awoke on Monday August 5th 2019 to the news that one of the country's longest serving politicians, Sir Vincent Beache, had passed on to the great beyond, just one week short of his 88th birthday. Within the ULP family, Sir Vincent will be greatly missed. He was a person who provided great leadership at a time when the NDP was on a rampage to destroy this country. Together with Ralph Gonsalves, he worked assiduously, to prepare the ULP first elections, and then for governance in this country.

His will be mourned by Vincentians on both sides of the party political spectrum, more by ULP supporters who revered him. But there were persons within the NDP camp who respected and loved him too. This was the measure of the man, who carried no malice towards any, but instead looked for the interest of all Vincentians, even those who bore ill-will against him. The truth of the matter is that he dedicated his life towards the development of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Early days in politics

Sir Vincent's political career got going in earnest in 1972, when he contested the constituency of North Central Windward, on the ticket of the St. Vincent Labour party. But his preparation for this process started a long time before, through a life of community service, attention to detail, and a love for the common man. He was not successful in his first outing at the polls, but this was a learning lesson for him. And he really learnt from this defeat.

In 1974, Sir Vincent captured the seat of North Central Windward for the first time, and went on to retain the seat in 1979 and 1984. Readers will remember the election agreement between the Labour Party and the MNU for the 1994 general election. As part of that agreement, Sir Vincent agreed not to contest the North Central Windward constituency, and to move south to contest the South Windward seat. This was indeed a daring move and it showed some of his political genius.

It meant that there was a two-way fight in North Central Windward and Dr. Ralph Gonsalves captured that seat. At the same time, the political prowess of Sir Vincent Beache was more than good enough for the NDP's Alfred Bynoe in South Windward. He went on to retain that seat in 1998 and then in 2001, retiring from the political scene in 2005.

As it turns out, Sir Vincent Beache established two sets of political families in the State, first his supporters in North Central Windward, who still loved him even as they gave their support to Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, and then his supporters in South Windward who became his second political family in 1994. But Sir Vincent loved the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, even those who hated him. Many stories have been told of persons who did not like him for one reason or the other, but who visited him for assistance, and was accommodated.

Here was a young man from South Rivers, who grew into an influential politician, a man who loved people, especially the poor and the working class. His handiwork is still seen across a wide range of the Vincentian landscape, and here and there, people still remember the work of Sir Vincent Beache, a true Vincentian patriot.

His Legacy

Sir Vincent Beache left a rich legacy which most Vincentians will treasure. Perhaps the most legacy that he left, is the role he played in the formation of the Unity Labour Party, and its ascent to governance in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In 1994, a group of nationals called the “Concerned Citizens” felt that there was a need for cooperation between the Labour Party and the Movement for National Unity, to combat the NDP in the general election slated for February 1994.

Both political leaders, Vincent Beache and Ralph Gonsalves agreed to this strategy, and won three seats in the general election. Sir Vincent then became the Leader of the Opposition, and following a series of meetings and discussions, guided the process which created the founding of the Unity Labour Party. Sir Vincent Beache was the first leader of the ULP.

Following the elections in 1998, in what most people felt was his greatest political move, Sir Vincent Beache gave up the leadership of the ULP, and supported a younger and more vibrant politician, in Ralph Gonsalves. The rest is history. With the support of Vincent Beache, Gonsalves led the ULP to victory over the NDP, by a margin of 12 to 3. Thereafter Sir Vincent Beache played a critical role in the first ULP administration, particularly when it came to matters of national security and the public service.

Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves will attest to the important advice tendered by Sir Vincent during his tenure as a government minister, and then as a consultant to the ULP administration.

Conclusion

Sometime this month, Vincentians will gather to say farewell to this magnificent son of the soil, who made such an outstanding contribution to the development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The list is long, but we cannot forget the Mt.

Bentinck Sugar Factory, the Diamond Dairy Enterprise, the drive in at Diamond, the construction of the Argyle International Airport, and the modern prison at Belle Isle, as projects that he touched.

Here was a man who set out to make a difference in the lives of Vincentians, to ensure that they received the best that life had to offer. We will never forget him, and we will protect his legacy.

Sleep on in peace Sir Vincent!