

August 14<sup>th</sup> 2020

## Ralph Gonsalves: A Leader for these Times

### Introduction

Very often, when speaking to the people of this country, Comrade Ralph would refer to the Bible and extract many quotes to strengthen his point or to make it more relatable to those of the Christian faith. Within recent times, our Prime Minister and political leader of the ULP has given us insights on the source of his inspiration, regarding his ability to adapt to the times offering appropriate leadership to the people of our beloved country. We have most recently been introduced to the biblical character, Issachar, the leader of one of the twelve tribes of Israel in a manner that provides us with an indication of the way our Prime Minister intends to ensure that his decision making and policy decisions are what are necessary to maintain the development trajectory that SVG has followed since the election of the ULP to office in 2001. The book of Chronicles says referring to Issachar, *“And the children of Issachar, which were men that had the understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...”*

This repeated reference to the sons of Issachar by our Comrade leader, among other things, lets us know that the leader of our country, is one who ensures he is kept informed, always up-to-date with information locally, regionally and internationally, has his fingers on the pulse of the current and trending issues, and understands the local movements and issues affecting the daily lives of Vincentians. Like Issachar, PM Gonsalves makes it a priority of having a good grasp of what is happening on the ground so that he can formulate policy responses to address the needs of Vincentians. He takes on as a personal and lived responsibility, knowing and understanding the times and the way our country must respond to situations locally, regionally and internationally.

Having just celebrated his 74th birthday, the column this week would examine just a few of the most recent instances where his knowledge of the times, allowed him to respond in the most appropriate manner.

### **He Knows the Times and What SVG Should do**

The most recent situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic has shown in unambiguous terms the ability of Comrade Ralph to do what is necessary considering the specifics of the times. Let's look at some of these:

1. Recognising the 4 dimensions to the Covid-19 pandemic; from the onset, Comrade Ralph was the first and may still remain the only CARICOM leader to recognise and articulate what some in the OECS Secretariat are referring to as the HESS dimensions, meaning Health, Economic, Social and Security dimensions. It was Comrade Ralph's recognition of this, that informed the government's response when there was pressure from the opposition and others to close our borders and shut the country down. His understanding of the situation in SVG caused him to immediately consider the farmers, fisherfolk, vendors, the elderly, those daily paid workers and others who depend on each day's activity for their income. Comrade Ralph recognised the importance of maintaining reasonable levels of economic activity that would not allow the government to collect revenues to carry on the business of the people, but that would also allow those dependent to earn a living.
2. Offering income support to affected workers; with the immediate and significant negative effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, the government of this country lead by Comrade Ralph, was proactive in making plans for the possible fallout. It wasn't long before the hotels started laying off employees because of the lack of business, and that signalled the beginning of workers either being laid off or seeing reduction in their income. There were a number of measures put in place to provide income support for workers including vendors, minibus operators and temporary support for the elderly for up to the end of the year. Since then, things have also been put in place to offer income support to sailors, farmers and early childhood centre operators. The number of persons who have already benefitted is in the thousands and will increase further once the close to 2000 sailors, and approximately 6000 farmers are given their support.
3. Offering hope with constant updates; Since the pandemic, Comrade Ralph has been on radio no less than 3 times every week, either in studio or by telephone, updating the nation on the actions of the government to management of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is significant, as he is showing that he is there with us and he understands that in times of challenges and difficulties, the people need to hear from their leader. It is of great significance that PM Gonsalves'

call to not panic and give way to hysteria, has been widely heeded with the majority of Vincentians following the advice of the health professionals and observing the protocols. His ability to understand our people and offer a message that would appeal to them in a way that would produce the desired outcome, indicates clearly that Dr. Gonsalves is not only in touch with the people, but is one with us.

## **Conclusion**

The celebration of 74 years on this earth is a significant milestone and we are all grateful to God for sparing the life of Comrade Ralph and wish him long life and health. His actions inclusive of the handling of the economy as well as the way this government conducts its foreign policy, being friends of all and staying on principle, always putting the interest of the country first, leaves little doubt that he knows the times and the way SVG should go. And while PM Gonsalves displays the wisdom and intuition present in the sons of Issachar, it could also be asked of him as it was in the case of another biblical character, Esther, “*and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for a time such as this?*”