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Ralph Gonsalves-A Leader for These Times

Introduction

This article was first published in August of 2020, during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, discussing the decisions taken by Prime Minister Gonsalves and the ULP administration. Today, as we confront the challenges brought on by the eruption of the La Soufriere volcano, the substance of the article is absolutely relevant. This week, with some changes to the original article, the general substance remain extremely timely.

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 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.

He Knows the Times and What SVG Should do

The most recent situation regarding the eruption of La Soufriere has shown in unambiguous terms the ability of comrade Ralph to do what is necessary considering the specifics of the times. Lets look at some of these:

- 1.Preparing the country for emergency evacuation; from the onset of the eruptions, starting with the effusive stage, Comrade Ralph was constantly engaged in the monitoring of the volcano through constant communication with the team from the University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre (UWISRC). Almost immediately following the start of the eruption, arrangements were made by Comrade Ralph, to have Professor Richard Robertson and a team on island to facilitate a closer monitoring of the volcanic activities. Based of the information provided by the experts, the National Emergency Council, chaired by Prime Minister Gonsalves was activated to begin preparation for a possible explosive eruption of La Soufriere. It was this preparation that allowed for the orderly evacuation of residents from the red and orange zones,

that occurred without injury of death to anyone, and with residents being placed in various shelters across the nation.

2. Mobilising local and external resources; the wisdom of preparation can not be overstated, and this includes implementing proactive policies such as the contingency fund, established by the introduction of levy on hotel rooms. This and other measures by the government were heavily criticised by the opposition as “wickedness”, “murderation” as they opposed them in debates in parliament. The contingency fund as well as monies from the Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown (Cat DDO) presented an immediate pool of funds that the government can tap into in the initial stages of the eruption. This was critical to the initial response to the eruption of La Soufriere as it was the source of funds was used to address the more immediate and pressing needs of the evacuees. While many nations and agencies pledged support in cash and other forms of assistance, the contingency fund and the funds available through the CatDDO was readily available be used immediately while we waited for the pledges to materialise.
3. Offering hope with constant updates; Since the explosive eruption, comrade Ralph has been on radio no less than 5 times every week, either in studio or by telephone, updating the nation on the status of volcanic activity as well as the government’s response. 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 professionals from the UWISRC. 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 experience and wisdom of the Comrade who has lead this country since 2001, is showing now more than ever as we navigate one of the most challenging periods in our nation”s history. 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, and being proved to be correct in the stances and decisions made, 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”?