

May 8th 2020

Bringing home our Cruise ship workers: Leadership at work

Introduction

The discussion over the plans to repatriate Vincentian workers employed with international cruise lines appears to have lost its fervor, in the face of the facts on exhibit, particularly the information coming out of Florida. And it is clear that individuals in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, particularly those associated with the opposition New Democratic Party, were at the forefront, in terms of the hysteria created over this issue.

It is clear to all and sundry that the opposition New Democratic Party, wanted to capture as much election capital from the Coronavirus pandemic, and the issue of the repatriation of the Vincentian cruise ship workers was fair game for them. But they, as usual, failed to reckon with the outstanding leadership of the ULP administration, led by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves.

The ULP has never wavered in its resolve to bring home the cruise ship workers. As Prime Minister Gonsalves has said, they are Vincentian citizens, and citizenship must count for something.

NDP twisting their tongue

The entire saga shows how the NDP has been “bold faced” in their approach to bringing our sailors home. For example we must remember that in late march, when the House of Assembly met to elect a new speaker, in the person of Carlos James, the leader of the Opposition Dr. Godwin Friday, sought permission to raise what he described as “an important matter affecting the lives of all Vincentians”.

At that time Friday, in his usual cunning way, called on the government to shut down the country, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. His sycophants on radio echoed his call, stating that the ULP administration should close our borders, and lock down the country, advocating the use of “draconian measures” in the process.

But that is not all. In his so-called address to the nation on April 1st, 2020 Friday maintained his position that the government should lock down the country and close our borders. In essence he and his supporters were calling on the government to prevent anyone from coming to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We have to admire his consistency, because supposedly, there was something he was seeing differently as compared to the ULP administration.

But the middle of April 2020, Friday found himself with a serious problem on his hands. Several cruise ship sailors posted on Face book, that they were going to change their political support, because the NDP didn't want them to come home. They felt that the NDP's call to lock down the country would lead to them being in exile, and unable to come home. They were in support of the ULP, who was keeping the country open, so that they could come home to their families.

It is out of that situation that Godwin Friday found himself having to eat humble pie. He was forced to make a 180 degree turn around, and to change his mind about locking down the country. So that he was forced now to try and champion the cause of the cruise ship workers, because he was afraid that he would lose political support.

In fact, his party was split along this issue, with the MP for South Leeward Nigel Stevenson, and Senator Kay Bacchus Baptiste, refusing to support him, maintaining their position on closing down the country and locking our borders.

The ULP approach

Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves has clearly stated that his administration will support the cruise ship workers. As he has said, "citizenship must count for something", a clear indication of where his support lies. In fact the government has appointed the CEO of the Port Authority, Bishen John, to drive this process.

John has already been in contact with the Directors and Managers of the cruise lines to outline the procedures for the repatriation, including the requirement for quarantine, as stipulated by the Ministry of Health. Arrangements for hotel accommodation have already been put in place, and hotel operators here are indeed happy to receive this business, at this particular time.

There are those Vincentians, particularly supporters of the New Democratic Party, who are bent on creating hysteria over this issue, but they will fail. The workers on the cruise ships are our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, and as a country, we must find ways to look out for them. Most of all, they are our citizens and this must count for something.

And so Bishen John has reported that the first group of Vincentian cruise ship workers, about twenty five of them, from the Disney Cruise Line, will arrive here on May 20th 2020, on board the ship, the Disney Fantasy. Disney Cruise lines has agreed to follow all the protocols established by local health officials, including arrangements for quarantine. All this information is contained in a letter sent to Bishen John, from the Executive Director of Marine Operations at Disney Cruise Lines, Russell Daya.

Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves has spent a tremendous amount of time on radio, providing information on this issue and he will continue to update the nation, as information comes to hand.

Conclusion

It is perhaps important to quote from the Minister of Health, Luke Browne, on the issue of Covid-19: *“The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines would do everything in its power to protect the lives and health of Vincentians. We will make use of all available resources. Everyone has a role to play. We will beat this Coronavirus pandemic together. Our faith will see us through. This could be our finest hour as a nation”*.