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## **Leadership Matters**

### **Introduction**

We come back to the issue of leadership, and the important question of whether or not leadership matters, in a small resource limited country like St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Some persons within the opposition New Democratic Party don't seem to understand the importance of this concept when they offer their leader, Godwin Friday, as a possible Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Nothing could be more idiotic, as we shall prove in the column.

We accept that as a country, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has to be managed and administrated. Some organisation has to take on the task of pulling together all the aspects that go into the administration mix, which will bring benefits for the people of this country. Vincentians have determined that the organisation that should be responsible for the administration of the country, is the Unity Labour Party.

They did so in 2001, 2005, 2010 and 2015. They did so based on the plans and strategies put forward by the ULP, along with the philosophy of the party, and the leadership identified to drive this administrative process. By electing the ULP administration for "four in a row", the voters were saying that they did not agree with, or support the plans and programmes of the NDP, and further, they didn't think that the leadership being put forward, in that case, Arnhim Eustace, had the qualities to take the country forward.

### **The Leadership of Ralph Gonsalves**

The concept of leadership is described loosely as the ability of an individual to motivate a group of people towards achieving a common goal. In this case the group of people could be described as Vincentians, and the common goal is the socio-economic development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And so leadership is an important function of the administration and management process of the state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Ralph Everard Gonsalves has had a unique upbringing, which has prepared him in advance for his role as the leader of this country. He comes from the rural area of Colonarie, from the country folk with a strong emphasis on love and support and care for each other. He understands poverty and adversity, and the importance of

strong family ties. In other words, he has a clear understanding of the fabric which keeps the Vincentian society together.

His leadership skills were further honed when he attended the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, and the key role he played in the Walter Rodney Affair, as is documented in a number of places. He has had his leadership skills tested in the Movement for National Unity (MNU), and the early days of the merger with the Unity Labour Party. He has lectured here and there both in the region and abroad, on matters related to economics and governance. Finally, he is sought after by all and sundry when it comes to the choice of a guest speaker at auspicious events.

The other pretenders to the throne, Arnhim Eustace and Godwin Friday, do not have the background characteristics of Ralph Gonsalves, when it comes to leadership. Eustace has been rejected by the voters of the country, as not having the prerequisites for leadership. Friday, who has taken his place, is a virtual unknown, trying to get his feet wet, and is totally unfamiliar with the workings of the Vincentian society. Friday does not even know some of the villages in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and in some cases, has never visited these places.

### **Leadership Demonstrated**

It is the political leader who begins the process of economic development of a country. That process begins within the party itself, then transcends the political process to the national agenda. So the political leader initiates the process which produces the ideas, strategies and programmes, provides the motivation, guidance and confidence, and then builds the working environment for the implementation of these plans.

The construction of the international airport at Argyle is a case in point. No former leader, not Joshua, not Cato, not Mitchell and certainly not Eustace, had no idea what they were about, when the idea of an international airport was discussed. It was Ralph Gonsalves who gave the issue clear thought, produced the outline and the approach, and provided the leadership to accomplish this task. At the beginning the issue of finance was identified as being most critical for the project.

It took the genius of Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves to design the concept of the "Coalition of the Willing", a gathering of friendly countries committed to providing financial and technical assistance for the construction of the airport. But Dr. Gonsalves had already demonstrated his leadership skills, particularly in the design and rollout of the Education Revolution, and the construction of the bridge over the Rabacca river.

## **Conclusion**

In a few days the rank and file of the Unity Labour Party will gather at the Campden Park Secondary School for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Convention of the Party. The party leader, Ralph Gonsalves who had announced that it was time for a transition, is not likely to get his wish, as the rank and file has already indicated that they want the Comrade to remain as the political leader, and take the party into the next general elections.

This is a clear indication of the value that the ULP membership places on the leadership qualities of Comrade Ralph. Fortunately, many Vincentians are of that opinion, including some members of the opposition New Democratic Party.

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