

October 25th 2019

The Use of Our Instruments of Sovereignty and Independence in Building a Strong, Vibrant Nation

Introduction

The celebration of our country's anniversary of political independence is something that's generally marked with heightened expressions of patriotism and emboldened signs of national pride. This year as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines celebrates its 40th anniversary of independence, there are clear signs of both expressions and a general positive mood among Vincentians. This year, the government led by Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves, launched our national celebration in an innovative and visionary concept of "The Renewal at 40", a concept that urges Vincentians to be reflective and take a fresh guard for the years ahead. But as we look to the future with a renewed sense of determination, let us examine how this government was able to use our country's instruments of sovereignty and independence to improve the livelihoods of our people and the overall growth and development of our nation.

When the Unity Labour Party administration took office in March of 2001, our country had just celebrated its 21st anniversary of independence. Today as we celebrate 40 years, we recognise that this ULP government has led the celebration of our country's independence for 19 consecutive celebrations, almost half of our total years of independence. This is not a feat that we take lightly, as firstly we recognise the faith placed in us by this noble Vincentian society for allowing us the opportunity to govern for such a long time, and secondly, we also reflect with a sense of gratitude and humility on the historic significance of such an accomplishment.

A New Understanding of Sovereignty and Independence

Since staining our independence on October 27, 2019, our country has had at its disposal, instruments of our sovereignty and

independence, that allow us to determine for ourselves, the policies both foreign and domestic that best suits our interests. While previous administrations spoke of this independence in its usual context, it is the Unity Labour Party, that has in very definitive ways, acknowledged that these two instruments are as much resources to be used for the benefit of national development as are our other resources, though very limited. In fact, this government saw as our three major resources; our people, our sovereignty and our independence. It was the acknowledgement of this that saw the ULP administration assigning top priority to our education revolution and the crafting of a pragmatic and proactive foreign policy.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has always practiced international relations as an independent nation, albeit in a manner that tied our proverbial sails to the “masters of the North Atlantic”. As a young nation, one that was finding its way in the global arena, becoming a member of international organisations and agencies and establishing diplomatic relations with new countries, our country seemed always mindful not to go out of our metaphorical crease unless first getting the “nod of approval” from the traditional allies we had come to revere. It's no surprise that as Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Arnhim Eustace responding to a particular policy decision by our ULP government, asked the question “what would America say”? This type of timid and subservient use of our instruments of sovereignty and independence, waiting on permission or approval from allies regarded to be too powerful and mighty to contradict, did very little to advance the development of our nation. It was only after seeing firsthand the work of the ULP as practiced in our foreign policy, that we finally understood that even though we are small and developing, our nobility as a people, with the capabilities needed to chart our own destiny, was best articulated in the phrase “while we are no better than anyone, no one is better than us”.

Practical Results for All to See

Having acknowledged that our country's sovereignty and independence must be regarded as resources to be used to attain national development, the government's foreign policy was determined to expand our diplomatic relationships by deepening our

existing relations while establishing new ones. Prime Minister Dr Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves articulated clearly that while we cherish our traditional allies, we must as a practical exercise expand beyond those by forging new relationships with countries outside of the traditional groupings. This strategy and its subsequent success was inadvertently lauded by Hon Arhnim Eustace when in answering the question “*How would the NDP finance the international airport project at Argyle if they were to take over and Venezuela, Cuba and some of the other non-traditional were to pull out*”? His response rings as fresh and as true today as the day it was spoken, “*It would be dead, the project would be dead, traditional partners like the EU and others are not going to finance that project*”.

The unvarnished truth is this: while Saint Vincent and the Grenadines doesn't proceed with our foreign policy in a transactional manner, we understand that the tools of our sovereignty and independence must confront the external environment in a manner that addresses the interests of our people. How have we done this? One just needs to examine the major and some smaller project initiatives that exists and their source of funding: the Argyle International Airport, constructed with assistance from the Republic of China (Taiwan), Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, Georgia, and a host of other non-traditional as well traditional allies; the bridge over the Rabacca River; the Bailey Bridges built after the destruction caused by the 2013 floods; Petro Caribe; the Learning Resource Centres; and most recently, the geothermal project, plus many others not mentioned here. All of these and so many more projects may not have gotten life, had it not been for the expansion of our diplomatic relations, based on our sensible use of our instruments of sovereignty and independence.

We can Celebrate

As we celebrate 40 years of political independence and take a fresh guard through our Renewal at 40, we can truly celebrate our nation's independence as we proudly reflect on the way our visionary government has used our tools of sovereignty and independence to develop our country and raising the standards of living for all. Vincentians, at home or abroad, can see the results and can stand

with renewed pride when we sing our national anthem, or look at our flag, both symbols of our independence.

The Unity Labour Party congratulates the citizens of our blessed country on its 40th Anniversary of Independence and looks forward to your continued support as we forge ahead with growth and development through the pragmatic and consistent use of our tools of sovereignty and independence.