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Uniting the Nation The Concept of Together Now

Introduction

The concept of together now has been with us in a structured way since the ULP came to office in March 2001. In fact, following the victory at the polls at that time, Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves issued the call for together now, while taking the Oath of Office at Victoria Park.

Now, on the eve of the next general elections, the opposition New Democratic Party has started a nasty dirty campaign, claiming among other things, that the ULP has divided the country. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact it is the NDP who has divided the country, through their unrelenting attacks on good citizens who were making their contribution, towards the development of the country.

The fact of the matter is that the ULP has been recognized as a force for good in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The opposition NDP is so infused with negativity, that even their supporters are finding it difficult to identify with that party.

Together Now

The concept of Together Now was easy to understand but difficult to accept. Some ULP supporters felt disappointed that Dr. Gonsalves could open up his arms to accept persons in the NDP, who opposed him bitterly in a general election and elsewhere. Others in the NDP felt that this was a weakness by the ULP, and tried to exploit it. They pretended to accept the concept of Together Now, but at the same time, they engaged in activities to try to derail the ULP from its people-centered developmental approach, so as to gain an advantage for the opposition NDP.

The truth of the matter was that the nation could not continue with the old doctrine of divide and rule, which characterise the rule of the NDP. The country could not move forward to a new era of development, if one half of the country was exposed to the socio-economic policies of the ULP. Development meant all Vincentians, whether or not they supported the ULP. History has shown that this concept of Together Now has been very successful, but Dr. Gonsalves and the ULP, have not been given enough credit for persevering with a strategy, that has brought the country into the 21st century, as a modern-day Caribbean State.

And so, from 2001, the ULP set about correcting many of the problems facing the country. There was the failure of the education system which the ULP corrected by introducing universal access to primary, secondary, post secondary and early childhood education. Teachers were trained, scholarships were provided for all, whether ULP or NDP, and the whole training sector was expanded to include areas such as ICT and human resources development.

The government addressed the social sector, providing a safety net for the poor and the disadvantaged citizens in a number of ways, including by upgrading the National Insurance Services, to meet this need. There has been development in virtually all areas in the society, including agriculture, health and the environment, national security, fisheries, tourism, housing, ICT and housing. All this was done, by including all Vincentians in the development process, ULP or NDP.

The NDP response

So what has been the response of the opposition to the concept of together now? In Parliament, the NDP made it clear that it was not interested in this concept. From time to time, their MP's, especially their political leader at the time Arnhim Eustace, would state that "I not in this together now thing with you".

And there is more. One of their candidates in the 2010 general election, Burton Williams, uttered the infamous "parson say christen your pickney first". This was a clear indication of the road that the NDP intended to take, if they ever saw government in this country. It was going to be NDP first and foremost.

Then we must never forget the strategy of the NDP to adopt what is called the "tough love approach". The NDP wanted their supporters in the Diaspora to cut off financial support to their relatives in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, if they did not support the NDP. In these and other ways, the NDP has indicated that it will be NDP supporters first and foremost who will benefit, if they ever win government in this country.

Although he might not be around, the former leader Arnhim Eustace has already indicated that his party will provide financial support for supporters, Marcus De Freitas and Bigger Biggs Samuel, amounting to a few million dollars. So the evidence is clear, that the NDP will favour their supporters first.

Conclusion

The Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves has always said that he is the prime for all Vincentians, NDP or ULP, and he has demonstrated this in many ways. For example, the ULP has provided millions of dollars to meet the medical costs of Vincentians, and in all cases, it did not matter if the particular Vincentian supported

any political party: as long as the assessment required the intervention of the ULP administration, then whatever assistance is available, is provided.

Similarly, when it comes to the provision of education and training opportunities under the Education Revolution, no partisan gamesmanship is employed.

People will continue to scoff over the concept of Together Now, but those numbers have dwindled appreciatively. Many persons have come to the realisation that our country cannot continue its current development pathway, if one side of the population is developed. We must move forward together as a people.