

MASSIVE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER IN SVG

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

THE ISSUE

Despite the resource limitations and challenges facing SVG as a small island developing state, the extraordinary progress being made is a marvel to behold. The ULP's compelling developmental narrative, grounded in the quest to build a modern, competitive, many-sided, post-colonial economy, is being made flesh before our very eyes. Never in the history of SVG have so much positive developments been taking place. And the trajectory for further development is becoming more and more evident.

All around us the country is buzzing with developmental excitement. Materially, the people of SVG are far better off than ever before. Many more jobs, much better jobs, much higher salaries and wages are being rolled out. The recovery and reconstruction after Hurricane Beryl is going well, despite some hiccups here and there. In practically every area of socio-economic activity there is immense progress. One disappointing area of real concern continues to be the criminal, violent misconduct of a tiny minority of young males; this is a complex issue of causation, but at its core it involves an active choice made by the criminally-minded.

TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS/PROGRAMMES WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

The huge developmental projects and programmes jump out at any objective observer. Let's list some of the more recent ones: The Sandals Resort built at a cost of EC\$650 million; the Holiday Inn Express and Suites (EC\$60 million); the roll-out of support for agricultural and fisheries (EC\$50 million); the ongoing development of the Sir Vincent Beache Stadium at Diamond (EC \$45 million); the massive upgrade of the Arnos Vale Cricket Facility (EC\$35 million); the massive upgrade of the Arnos Vale Cricket Facility (EC\$35 million); the ongoing construction of the Modern Port Project at Kingstown (EC\$650 million), due to be opened in May 2025; the start-up of the construction of the 135-bed, modern Acute Care Hospital at Arnos Vale (EC \$200 million to construct); the huge expansion of the local tourism plant, including Myah's Suites, the addition of a substantial number of rooms at Hotel Alexandrina, Beachcombers' Hotel, and others, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars; the Rainforest Seafood Plant (EC \$10 million); the road programmes financed respectively by loans from Taiwan (EC \$125 million), Kuwait/OFID (EC \$90 million), CDB (\$50 million); the sea defence projects at Sans Souci (EC \$10 million), at Georgetown/Caratal (EC \$17 million), and ongoing at Sandy Bay (nearly EC \$40 million); the 104 national scholarships, national exhibitions, special awards, and bursaries based upon the 2024 exams (EC \$25 million); the 1,800 tuition scholarships for university (EC \$10 million); more scholarships to Taiwan, Cuba,

and elsewhere; the school rehabilitation programme (EC \$60 million); more international and regional flights at AIA; and post-Beryl Reconstruction.

Across SVG, every village is awash with developmental initiatives, including roads paved or repaired by BRAGSA; houses repaired or built from scratch; building materials distributed; health centres repaired or built afresh; technical institutes built or refurbished; sports facilities built or upgraded; community centres built or repaired; the SET and YES programmes expanded; the PRYME and ON-SITE programmes continue to be rolled out; the ramping up of social protection supports for primary, secondary, and college students from the Ministry of National Mobilisation and the National Lotteries Authority; huge increase in assistance to patients travelling overseas for tertiary health care; the beefed-up roll-out of medical missions from overseas, including the iconic World Pediatric Programme; the delivery of water, electricity, and garbage collection/disposal has improved massively; and the tremendous support accorded sports and culture.

Further, in 2024, the largest evert increase in minimum wages in the history of SVG was put in place. The lowest paid workers across SVG got increases in minimum wages on an average of 50 percent. This has a knock-on effect on wages and salaries across SVG. At the same time there was a reduction in personal income tax and the marginal rate at the top has been reduced; the first \$25,000 annually is exempt from personal income tax. Since 2001, the top marginal rate of tax has been reduced from 40 percent to 28 percent.

Moreover, in SVG today, there is the lowest ever unemployment, lowest ever poverty levels, lowest ever indigence, lowest ever homelessness. There is more work to be done in SVG today than there are able-bodied and willing workers to do the available work. The stark fact is that some able-bodied persons prefer idleness to honest labour; some persons choose not to work; and others seek jobs which are a mismatch with their skills and training. Some persons choose not to look for work; oft-times such persons expect the work to look for them.

THE TRAJECTORY FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

In agriculture, fisheries, tourism, manufacturing, professional/technical services, construction, wholesale and retail trade, banking and insurance, telecoms and electricity, water and sanitation, educational and health services, sports and culture, recreation and entertainment, there are growing prospects for further growth and enhancement. In each of these areas, both the private and public sectors are on a trajectory for a further uplift.

From the standpoint of the ULP government's initiatives, there are immediately several relevant projects/programmes, including those funded by loans respectively from: The Saudi Fund for establishment of cultural and production hubs, health and educational facilities, and for repair/construction of police stations (EC \$160 million); telecommunications through the World Bank-financed Caribbean Digital

Transformation Project (EC \$80 million); CDB-financed Sandy Bay Secondary School at Orange Hill (EC \$18 million); World Bank-financed programmes for agriculture and fisheries (EC \$30 million); World Bank-financed post-Beryl reconstruction (EC \$160 million); the Marriott Hotel at Mt. Wynne of EC \$325 million financed through an overseas private sector entity (EC \$200 million) and government of SVG through Taiwan loan (EC \$135 million); capital investments by VINLEC and CWSA (EC \$120 million in the aggregate); expansions planned by BOSVG; reforms initiated at NIS; further road programmes.

Meanwhile, the ULP government is elaborating the hugely transformational plan to develop, in conjunction with the private sector (local and overseas), the existing Port Kingstown area linked to the rolled-out city at Arnos Vale via a tunnel under Cane Garden point. This is massive.

POST-BERYL RECOVERY/RECONSTRUCTION

At the same time, the post-Beryl recovery/reconstruction continues apace. Over 2,000 of the 4,993 houses to be repaired or rebuilt have either been repaired already or are in the process of being repaired or rebuilt; great progress has been made in this regard on Canouan, Mayreau, Bequia, St. Vincent; Union Island is now being ramped up amidst a real scarcity of skilled labour on Union Island.

Public facilities (schools, airports, police stations, clinics, administrative buildings, community kitchens) in the southern Grenadines and Bequia have all been fully addressed or in the process of rebuilding. VINLEC and CWSA have been, and are, doing great jobs in their respective areas of responsibility. The private telecoms companies are upping their game after a slow, faltering start after Beryl.

Production supports have been rolled out already for banana, plantain, and arrowroot farmers. There is a further roll-out for other farmers and fishers. Income support will be paid in late November or early December 2024, and ongoing, to over 5,000 families. A special Cost of Living Allowance (COLA Special) is being earmarked for 3,000 most vulnerable persons.

The entire Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister, is hard and smart at work on the post-Beryl Recovery/Reconstruction.

LABOUR IS WORKING

Undoubtedly, “Labour is Working: Onwards to a Sixth Term”. This the appropriate theme for the 2024 National Convention of the ULP scheduled for Sunday November 24th at the Bethel High School at Campden Park. This event is likely to be massively attended by the Labour Warriors. The Political Leader has important announcements to make.

This Convention is following upon a rush of activities inside the ULP itself. Last Thursday (November 14th), some 550 delegates attended the meeting of the ULP's National Council at the Russell's Auditorium at Stoney Ground. And on Sunday last (November 17th), the ULP's leadership at the Central Executive level had an all-day retreat at Hotel Alexandrina with one agenda item: "Organising the Party for a Sixth Term". Both the National Council meeting and the retreat were highly successful.

Meanwhile, the government is very busy with its internal preparations for the 2025 Estimates and Budget. Stay tuned. Labour is indeed working, full of energy and will, vision and skill!

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