

RECLAIMING OUR HISTORY

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

[The following are excerpts from the Feature Address by our Prime Minister, Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves, entitled “Unity In Celebrating Our Heroes: Past, Present, and Future” delivered on the occasion of the Second Anniversary of the Declaration of National Heroes Day — October 19th — in Grenada on October 19, 2024.]

RECLAIMING OUR HISTORY

The establishment of an Order of National Heroes is part of the quest to reclaim our history. Colonialism sought to erase the truth of the history of our peoples; the colonial state, their schools, their text books, their pulpits, their propaganda machine were all directed to the subtle, and not-so-subtle, colonizing of our minds. This was so in the Caribbean, in India, Africa, and elsewhere. The Kenyan writer of the creative imagination, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, is correct:

“The might of the sword and the bullet was followed by the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom.” [Decolonising the Mind.]

Modern imperialism of North America and Europe is more insidious in their attempts in our Caribbean to debase our history. Imperialism’s quest is not so much to erase our history, but to mutilate it into nothingness, and to replace it with their imperial version derived from a globalised perspective in which imperialism’s views are dominant and hegemonic.

Imperialism, and hegemons of all stripes, know very well that the empires of the mind are less onerous to maintain, but more difficult to dislodge or vanquish. Daily their battles are fought in schools, and an entire apparatus of misinformation, disinformation, inclusive of ideology of the market place, in quest of a continued overrule by monopoly capitalism. In every material particular, imperialism seeks to define our world for us through the prism of its alien eyes.

One of the best expositions of the process of reclaiming our history has been offered by the iconic Vincentian poet “Shake” Keane, in a poem “Private Prayer” written in April 1973 for the revolutionary titan of our Caribbean, Walter Rodney on the occasion of the publication of Walter’s hugely influential book, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Let us quote “Private Prayer” in full:

*“To understand
How the whole thing run
I have to ask my daughter and son.
“To understand the form
Of compromise I am
I must in my own voice ask
How the whole thing run.
“To ask
Why I don’t dream
In the same language I live in
I must rise up
Among the syllables of my parents
In the land which I am
And form
A whole daughter and a whole son
Out of the compromise
Which I am.
“To understand history
I have to come home.”*

We in our Caribbean have been compromised by the fever of our history. Out of our compromises we are in quest to form or build “a whole daughter and a whole son”. In so doing, we must ask the question in our own voice, and in our own land make our future whole. Understanding how to go about all this, we have to turn to our history, our parents, and for the future, to our children. In the process we have to come home to ourselves “to understand how the whole thing run.”

THE ECONOMIC BASE AND MRE TO MAKE US WHOLE

The economic base to form or build “a whole daughter and a whole son” out of the compromises of history which, in part, made us, requires us to effect a paradigm shift to the construction of a modern, competitive, many-sided, post-colonial economy which is at once national, regional, and global.

However, by itself, the building of such a post-colonial economy, though necessary, is insufficient to make us “whole”. It demands further something fundamentally existential, and in our pursuits beyond Hurricane Beryl, it demands, too, a process of, and arrival at, the embrace of fresh hope, in faith and love, in the further ennoblement of our Caribbean civilisation, and its respective national components.

Through the travails of history and the process of civilisation, within our especial Caribbean seascape and landscape, our Caribbean civilisation has emerged and coalesced as a metaphoric symphony: We are the songs of the indigenous people (Callinago, Garifuna, Amerindian); we are the rhythm of Africa; we are the melody

of Europe; the chords of Asia; and the home-grown lyrics of the Caribbean. Like all symphonies, dissonances do occur, but we have evolved formal institutions and informal mechanisms or unwritten codes to resolve or mute these dissonances.

Our Caribbean civilisation has arrived at a mature realisation that although we are not better than anyone else, nobody is better than us. Our ownership or permanent sense of belonging to our seascape and landscape grounds us with an enduring solidarity amidst uplifting values. In us resides a “genius of the people”, that submerged, imprecise, and invisible side that cements, uplifts, and even defines us; oft-times it erupts in an undefined or ill-defined sense of celebration that we are “Second to None”.

This “genius of our people” has to be marshalled in the honouring of our National Heroes, and also in rebuilding stronger and better consequent upon the ravages of Hurricane Beryl. All hands are required on deck. It is not an easy road; two roads diverge in the woods, and we take the one less travelled by, and that makes the difference.

Our people in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada, are suffering because of Beryl and an insufficient helpful response from the developed world, the major historic and contemporary emitters of greenhouse gases which generate consequential global warming, producing dangerous hurricanes like Beryl.

In this massive struggle ahead we must have faith, that enduring Pauline virtue expressed as the substance of that which is hoped for, the evidence of things which we have not yet seen. This faith must be accompanied by works; otherwise, it is dead. For these works to be done optimally, national unity and social solidarity are absolute requisites.

I have no doubt about the success in our days, months, and years ahead:

*“Morning by morning new mercies I see
All that I have needed thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.”*

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