

THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

THE ISSUE

In every nation-state, political leadership is of the highest importance to its functioning now and in the future. In vulnerable, small-island developing states buffeted by enormous external challenges, amidst a limitation of resources for development, quality political leadership is at a premium. In developed countries, possessed of abundant resources and well-established enduring systems of governance, errors of commission and omission by their political leaders are usually swiftly corrected or their impacts markedly lessened; their margins of error are comparatively large. However, in small-island developing countries, the margins for errors by a head of State or government are quite small. Thus, the choice of a Prime Minister in a small-island developing state like SVG is of the utmost importance.

In SVG, the nature and character of its political economy, its possibilities and limitations, its strengths and weaknesses, and the constitutional and political pre-eminence of the Prime Minister compel the electorate to be mature and wise in making the choice as to the occupant of the premier political office in the land. To be sure, the political leader has to function within, and be supported by, an array of constitutional and political institutions, staffed by competent, committed persons; and the leader of the country is constrained in his/her actions by a bundle of formal and informal mechanisms of a constitutional, political, social, and economic nature, and the overall limitations of the country itself. But, given all the extant and prospective circumstances, in the matter of governance of the country, its two wings of government and politics, the political leader is first among equals, and perhaps more.

THE CHOICE BEFORE US

Within the next few months, certainly before the end of February 2026, the people of SVG have central questions of paramount importance to answer:

- (i) Do we replace the tried and tested, battle-hardened visionary, transformative leader of acknowledged high quality and energy, Ralph Gonsalves, who has led SVG, by way of the Unity Labour Party, to extraordinary progress over the last 24 years of exceptional external challenges?

- (ii) Does the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) possess any leader, including the current Leader of the Opposition, Lorraine Friday, who can do better than Comrade Ralph, in the even more demanding circumstances ahead of us?
- (iii) Have Friday, St. Clair Leacock, Daniel Cummings, and the other front-line NDP leaders not been abysmally poor in their efforts in their current leadership roles and thus are disqualified in their quest for promotion?

It is well-established that the committed political partisans in the ULP and NDP vote party first. But the partisan base alone can never assure electoral victory. The wider electorate looks towards leadership first; then the team on offer generally; and thereafter, the person who is standing in the particular constituency.

Rightly, political leadership is of the highest importance!

ENERGY AND WILL, VISION AND SKILL

In considering political leadership, wise and reasonable persons who constitute the vast majority of the electorate do NOT pay much attention to background noise or side-shows; they stick to the lyrics and melody of the song itself; they hold steadfast to the main event.

In their focus on political leadership, people, wisely and reasonably, emphasise in their first order of consideration, the matters of energy and will, vision and skill. People discount immediately aspirants for leadership who are lazy, slow, temporising, indecisive, weak, fake, shifty, inexperienced, unsure of themselves, imitative, make-belief, uncommitted to uplifting the country, uninspiring, and underwhelming in his/her presence. On the other hand, people embrace leaders who are full of energy, activist, decisive, firm, strong, commanding, experienced, inspiring, sure of himself/herself, genuine, committed and responsive to people, and exuding of love.

People gather mightily around a leader who has a well-articulated people-centred vision, an accordingly-connected philosophy of advanced social democracy, and a bundle of consequentially-related policies and programmes for the upliftment of the people and the country, rooted in the further advancement of our Caribbean civilisation and its magnificent Vincentian component. An aspirant for political leadership who has no vision or only an inchoate and distorted vision, no credible policies and programmes, will never command the support of the people, save and except those who are tribally connected to a party.

A quality accomplished political leader must possess abundant, optimal many-sided skills for the tasks-at-hand born out of innate qualities; education and

training; appropriate socialization; wide ranging experiences in life, living, and work; quality performances in preparatory leadership roles; and a quality record as a leader currently.

THE “X” FACTOR IN LEADERSHIP

Energy and will, vision and skill, must be accompanied by the “X” factor to produce a rounded, high-quality leader. What is the “X” factor? Although a great leader must possess the quality of inspiring or putting into followers the need to perform good, quality, and noble deeds, it is far more important, and more difficult, for the leader to draw out of the people goodness, high quality, and nobility which the people may not as yet know that they possess. This “drawing out” taps into “a genius of the people” which contains, among things, “hidden rationalities” (resources and abilities) which have too long been submerged, unutilised, or ill-utilised. All of tis make-up the “X” factor.

It is evident to all that Comrade Ralph possesses this “X” factor as has been demonstrated, over and over again, in his mobilisation of the “hidden rationalities” resident in the genius of the people. This is evident of the successes, for example, in the education revolution, the housing revolution, the cultural revolution, and the advances of our people as entrepreneurs, and professionals, and skilled workers in all walks of life and production.

POLITICAL STABILITY

A quality leader engenders political stability, which connects intimately with economic and social stability. In 27 years as political leader of the ULP and 24 years as Prime Minister, Comrade Ralph has ensured political stability and collective responsibility. There has been little or no disruptive dissonance in either the ULP or the government under Comrade Ralph’s watch. The evidence abounds.

Indeed, in no country in CARICOM has there been as much political stability in party and governance as in the Unity Labour Party, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. For example, our Prime Minister has never had to dismiss any member of his Cabinet in 24 years; and no member of his Cabinet has ever resigned. This is an extraordinary accomplishment in political leadership, not merely political management. An entire book can be written on this.

At the same time, we have witnessed transitions of personnel in the party and the government. And all such changes have been effected seamlessly; and all the persons involved have remained true to, and supportive of, the party and government. This, too, is extraordinary over a period of 24 years! Meanwhile, there is confusion and divisiveness in the NDP under Friday’s weak leadership. This is a recipe for disaster in government.

THE LESSONS OF PAUL

The lessons of Paul, servant of the Lord, called to be an apostle, in his evangelism and in his organisation of the community of Christians are meaningful in their appropriate application to political leadership.

In his various “Letters”, Paul emphasised the following matters of relevance, among others: Unity of doctrine; Unity of organisation; solidarity in love and comradeship; tapping of requisite resources for practical work; and unity around the leadership. The lessons herein are of critical importance for the ULP and the government of SVG.

In one material particular, attention should be drawn. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, his “dearly beloved son” and devoted colleague, the great apostle delivered of himself his famous last words while awaiting impending execution in a Roman prison. In 2 Timothy (Chapter 4, versus 3-4) Paul advises: *“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrines; instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables.”*

There are persons in the NDP or attracted to the NDP, to suit their own desires, not those of our country; these are persons with itching ears, to hear only what they want to hear; they turn their ears from the truth and turn to fables and follies. The ULP, the government, and the bulk of the people must resist these persons of “itching ears”, untruth, and fables. And our resistance must be successful for the good of SVG. In this endeavor the leadership of Comrade Ralph is vital.

The choice in the next general election is clear: Re-elect the ULP and the Comrade as Prime Minister for the sixth consecutive term.

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