

**DANGEROUS BERYL ATTACKS SVG —
DEVASTATES UNION AND MAYREAU, HAVOC ON CANOUAN**

by

Unity Labour Party

EXTREME PAIN AND SUFFERING

On Monday July 1, 2024, the dangerous Hurricane Beryl with an intensity of 150 miles per hour, bore down on SVG causing severe damage, mayhem, devastation, extreme pain and suffering. In the process, Beryl devastated Union Island, Mayreau, Palm Island, and Petit St. Vincent; wreaked havoc on Canouan; damaged Mustique; and wrecked large parts of St. Vincent.

In Union Island and Mayreau, the entire populations, more or less, are homeless: On Union, almost 100 percent of the homes are severely damaged or completely destroyed; on Mayreau, 95 percent; they are Beryl's Armageddon in SVG. The resort islands of Palm Island and Petit St. Vincent have had to be evacuated. The villages in Canouan sustained immense damage, and even destruction, to housing and public buildings, preliminarily assessed at 90 percent; the world-class marina and associated facilities in the south of Canouan have been severely compromised. Cursory evidence suggests that in Bequia over 20 percent of the houses have been badly damaged, much of it irreparably so. A local committee on ground puts the housing damage/loss at closer to 50 percent.

On St. Vincent, hundreds of houses have been ravaged; dozens blown away; roofs torn apart on scores of them; and many others damaged significantly; no indicative assessment is yet at hand. At present count (early Wednesday morning, July 3rd), close to thirty

government buildings (mainly educational institutions) have had their roofs ripped apart or otherwise gravely compromised. Agriculture, especially plantains, bananas, fruit trees, forest trees, and vegetables, has been shattered; hardship has been visited upon the farmers. The Botanic Gardens are a jumbled mess.

Across SVG, the raging seas pummeled the coastline causing further erosion and land degradation. Since 1946, the period which covers the lifetime of our Prime Minister, there has been sea erosion of the land on parts of the east-north-east, the Atlantic side, of St. Vincent amounting to some 70 yards — over three cricket pitches in length; elsewhere, including the western or Caribbean side, substantial land erosion has occurred. Beryl has made it much worse.

Dangerous Beryl has occasioned, too, the downing of telecommunications, electricity, and water supply. In large swathes of SVG, especially the Southern Grenadines, modern life and living have disappeared; it is a time of darkness, an absence of connectivity, and water insufficiencies.

Everywhere across SVG, the faces of men, women, and children are strained and anxious; extreme pain and suffering have descended upon us, and for the families of the three who have died, there is immense grief. There has been a terrible setback for our country, our nation, our people — individually and collectively. On the night of Tuesday July 2nd, over 1,500 persons were in shelters; many left on Monday evening, July 1st, but others joined from Union Island.

Yet, there is hope, faith, love, solidarity, and a settled sense that we will build back better and stronger in quest of a resilient sustainable development. It demands, too, a patience and a calm.

TURNING THE TERRIBLE SETBACK INTO A GLORIOUS ADVANCE

Undoubtedly, there has been a terrible setback for our country. We shall turn this setback into a glorious advance. We must do so together. Properly led, our people in communion and solidarity with each other, working hard and smart in accord with an inclusive practical plan for recovery and reconstruction, with the support of our region and the international community, will lift our SVG out of the descent into which Beryl has plunged us. The vision of the metaphoric shining city on the hill is ours to embrace and pursue. We will bounce back and lift SVG higher than before!

At times of extreme challenges and difficulties, it is right and proper that our people go back to a core of fundamentals, resident in the Vincentian sense, sensibility, and beliefs. We reaffirm that our nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man and woman. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah taught us well:

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” [KJV: Isaiah, Chapter 41, verse 10].

To be sure, in the depths of despond, faith oft-times gives way to hopelessness and helplessness in the breast of the individual. But through solidarity and a spirit of community, this individual relapse into faithlessness, cynicism, and individual selfishness can be overcome. Again, the fundamentals of our civilisation must be noises in our blood, echoes in our bones:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.” [KJV: Hebrews, Chapter 11, verse 1].

Fresh hope at this time of respair, not despair and despondency, must be our watchwords. And as our revered elders have commended to us: Faith without works is dead; faith is made manifest in our works. Accompanying our faith and our fresh hope is the greatest of all, LOVE: Without love, we are nothing, but sounding brass and clanging cymbals. Love is an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken. Tempestuous Beryl must never shake our love and caring for each other; indeed, the tempest of Beryl ought to draw out of us even more love than before.

In all this, quality leadership is vital. Our leadership must not pay any serious attention to the howling noise of the metaphoric leaves of despair and discord; it must answer the genuine cries and queries of the roots, our people, in their faith, hope, love.

The leadership is enjoined not only to inspire the people to achieve optimal, desired outcomes, but very importantly to draw out of the people their goodness, high quality, and nobility; and oft-times to draw out of them the goodness, high quality, and nobility which the people may not as yet know that they possess. In this profound leadership connection with the people, the optimal desired outcomes are likely to be achieved.

Above all, the leadership must accept and follow the divine injunction relayed to us by the Old Testament prophet, Micah, in answer to the query: *“What does the Lord require of us?”* The answer is clear: *“To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.”*

THE PLAN

The government is in the process of elaborating, and executing a plan of immediate humanitarian relief, and is shaping a recovery and reconstruction plan. Within this overall plan, the special case of the Southern Grenadines and the particularized circumstances of each of the islands of Union, Mayreau, Canouan, Palm, and Petit St. Vincent are to be specially addressed. The various ministries,

departments, and state agencies are actively engaged in these endeavours. Ongoing consultations with all stakeholders and the affected people are vital. So, too, our engagements with regional governments, CARICOM, OECS, ALBA, CDB, regional agencies such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Regional Security System (RSS), international agencies (United Nations' entities, the European Union, non-governmental groupings, and so forth), and governments internationally.

Already, our government has been actively engaged with the regional and international community for support, in respect of relief, recovery, and reconstruction.

An assessment of the damage and loss wrought by Hurricane Beryl is in its earliest stages.

Immediately, the government has to draw down on the Contingency Fund which it established a few years ago with a one percentage point contribution from the VAT. We drew down on it during COVID, the Volcanic Eruptions, and Hurricane Elsa of July 2021. This Fund currently stands at some EC \$70 million, but this is no where near sufficient even for humanitarian relief required, much less for recovery and reconstruction.

Secondly, internally, the government has to repurpose some funds allocated elsewhere in the 2024 Budget to contribute to the relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts. But, again, these funds will be hugely insufficient for the tasks at hand.

On the basis of experience, including during the emergencies of COVID and the volcanic eruptions, very little resources are going to be provided by overseas agencies, institutions, and governments as grants. To be sure, there will be some grants for relief, but they will not get us very far, given the magnitude of the relief efforts required.

Again, on the basis of experience locally and regionally, there is unlikely to be much grant resources for recovery and reconstruction. And since, SVG does not have the requisite resources itself for recovery and reconstruction, we will have to borrow, more than likely on concessional terms. But loans on concessional terms take a long time to materialise on the ground because of the bureaucratic procedures and hurdles of the regional and international financial institutions such as the Caribbean Development Bank and the World Bank. These institutions are not fit-for-purpose to respond rapidly to recovery and reconstruction consequent upon natural disasters.

As always, our leadership has to find creative ways and creative avenues with some friendly governments to make some headway. But it all demands a patience and a calm.

So, we come back to the beginning. Together, we in SVG must act fully in solidarity and very productively to rebuild better, stronger, more resilient, sustainably. This is the lesson!

SUMMATION

SVG is in a very difficult and challenging phase because of Beryl. We must do nothing to make our situation worse by behaviours and approaches inimical to our relief efforts, recovery, and reconstruction. This critically includes an avoidance of criminally violent misconduct and anti-social behaviour.

Instead, we must all put our shoulders to the wheels of relief, recovery, and reconstruction. Our government intends to lead the way in turning a terrible setback into a glorious advance. The challenges are huge, and the material resources are slender. We ourselves, in our behaviour and output, must make the difference for the better!

Relief, Recovery, and Reconstruction as a consequence of Beryl will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The approximate number is yet

to be assessed, but it will be huge absolutely and as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product, and as a percentage of government revenues.

The Americans have a saying which is apt: *“How do you eat an eight-hundred pound gorilla, one bite at a time?”*

Metaphorically, we have to do so with urgency!