

An Alternative Energy Policy and Related Development Issues

by
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Much recrimination and unnecessarily harsh words have attended the issue of an oil refinery on Dominica of late. In many instances, the discourse have been flavored by divisive partisanship without any care for the fact that only respectful and amicable partnership can allow us to escape the clutches of backwardness . There are Dominicans who are working hard and who have not fallen asleep or remain unmindful of our duties. For a start, it would be good for those who care beyond words to join some institution involved in the development process and not simply be critical. And Chavez is not the problem, or the enemy, where his government can be persuaded to invest in our green energy initiatives on Dominica (i.e. wind, geothermal, solar). Nor is attacking government the answer as so many often do. We do need to work in partnership with the duly elected government, where they are serious and ethical - even where we did not vote for that government or party. Let us not allow ourselves to be used by the historical enemies of those in the developing world who seek to ensure that our people are the primary beneficiaries of our resources. Colonialism is not a figment of the imagination and we cannot perpetuate that mind set.

We have proposed an alternative energy policy based on geothermal energy to the government. Visit at www.renewableenergy21.com, http://www.zeroenergy.com/developers/p_alwen.html and www.natureislander.com to see what we are trying to do. We have done renewable energy projects on Dominica by introducing wind turbines, solar cookers, and solar technology. On an organized basis we started with the Dominica Sustainable Energy Corporation (DSEC) in 2001 and have continued along that track with different organizations and sectors at home and abroad.

We Need A Dominica Geothermal Energy Company Now!

We need a Government led Dominica Geothermal Energy Company (DGEC) now, and we urge the Government of Dominica to pass the requisite enabling legislation to secure that resource for the benefit of the Dominican nation. Such would show a serious commitment to national development and put those on idle hall estate to work. We wish that more Dominicans teamed up for renewable energy and acted with integrity when doing so. Attacking each other and taking to the airwaves is no solution to a people in dire need of economic development. Last year I made that call on Matt Peltier's show, as we were engaged in preserving good relations with Venezuela, so as to nudge them towards supporting a green alternative. I lamented the fact that Chavez was

being attacked, as opposed to approaching his government in a respectful manner and securing the best deal for Dominica in any such relationship. Some from my own historical brotherhood took every opportunity to twist my words in that vein. Clean Energy Corporation, a local firm affiliated to the Renewable Energy Alliance, have proposed an alternative energy policy to the government for a long time. We have spent much time and effort doing projects from 2001 to move that agenda forward. To that end we have affiliated with the local environment coordinating unit, the local Global Environment Fund, the Dominica Academy of Arts & Sciences, local builders, local farmers, local hoteliers, and local agriculturists to favor a Dominica-centered approach. Mr. Adenauer Douglas has been a leader in that pursuit. The government gave us the original wind turbine license in 2001 and for that we are ever grateful. The turbine, part of DSEC's first project "Energy Emancipation" was installed in Delices at the farm of former Minister of Agriculture Etienne during the second Diaspora in the Development Symposium held in Roseau with Min. Austrie and PM Pierre Charles' support. See: http://www.renewableenergy21.com/projects_operation_energy_emancipation.htm. Again, we need a DGEC and we do not need anyone to advise us against this worthy proposition.

Our effort is not personal, but national and all encompassing in scope. We ask Government embrace that partnership which includes a Dominica centered solution. Where Government were to form a Dominica Geothermal Energy Company (DGEC)- just as it did with the AID Bank or Social Security Administration, we would support it and either merge or dissolve our organization and invest in the DGEC. A DGEC would ensure the responsible use of our national resource for future generations, no matter what party is in power. Such a nationalist driven development policy is in the noble tradition of Cecile Rawle, JB Charles, Frank Baron, E.C. Loblack, Phyliss Shand Allfrey, E.O. LeBlanc, Eugenia Charles (who rebuilt and bought Domlec) Rosie Douglas, Eddie "Izzar" Toulon and Pierre Charles. So we cannot make a mistake on the energy question and give in to fly by night pirates who are now circling above Dominica bearing gifts. From Sunday Island, Shangri La, Valhalla, to Don Pierson and his famous Freeport Authority, we have sought a quick fix to our development woes by giving others the role of developing our country. It has never worked and never will. We must do it, in respectful partnership with others who can assist, using our own native intelligence, integrity an essential unity of purpose. But, in our country, we must lead; same as Chinese do in China, Venezuelans are trying to do in Venezuela - and as Americans have done in the US

Venezuela, Cuba and The Four Imperatives.

Some of us who fancy ourselves supporters of the cause, have found it convenient to fall in lock step with the dominant world media and attack Chavez on a myriad of issues. Chavez is not the cause of our backwardness. Indeed, but for his country's assistance to Dominica and the Caribbean under Petro

Caribe, our countries would have collapsed. Dominicans, who now own 22,000 cars in a 70,000 person country would not have been able to subsist on oil at \$90 plus dollars a barrel. Even so, Chavez's government is moving toward green energy. His government has changed all the light bulbs on highway pylons in Caracas to solar power and is now building a green city outside Caracas. He knows, as Bernard Hurtault of the DAAS once said, that oil is a sunset industry. Therefore he is feverishly building a green future for that country, using the oil bounty. However, if you seek to engage investment from someone you cannot, at the same time, pillory him and make him an enemy. So let us be mindful that diplomacy has its place when dealing with Chavez and others. Let us not prey on peoples ignorance and emotions where they do not know the US has 9 Venezuelan owned refineries and 4500 CITGO (Venezuela's US based oil subsidiary) dealerships. We must steer clear of being pawns in any anti-Venezuela campaign. Let us those who desire better for us, assist investment in our "green" Alternative Energy Policy with their time, and/or financial resources.

Beyond Chavez, China or Cuba, we must do four things in Dominica: Build Teams, Educate Ourselves, Work Hard, and be Thrifty. These are the four imperatives for Dominicans without which development will not take place, no matter which government we have in power. We all know the old adage: United we stand; divided we fall. Do we, however, behave in a manner consistent with such knowledge? Absent that, no party or foreign country can save us. We will keep recycling failure; one election after another. Concrete alternatives based on building team work for sustainable development is what will carry us forward. That, for instance, was the rationale behind the Dominica Academy of Arts & Sciences: build local competence in arts and sciences and put such competence at the service of national development. Raglan Riviere, Clayton Shillingford and many others in that charge, have worked tirelessly to that end. And we shall continue to do so. Alas, our governments and too many of our people remain content to sit around and talk about the problems as opposed to building teams to effect meaningful change. Many will not even pay dues to their own organizations. That malaise is not restricted to the DAAS; ask DAIC and DHTA about that history. The effort to build meaningful links with the Diaspora, beyond barrel sending and showing off the accoutrements of success, have been met with mockery in some segments of the public sphere and a lackadaisical response from elements in government. Ask the Israelis, Chinese and Indians how their Diaspora communities have helped their respective homelands. Dr. Thomson Fontaine's excellent paper on Diasporans in the development process speaks volumes. We need statesmen and women who will look o the needs of the next generation, not simply do what is expedient to win the next election. So let us communicate openly and speak truth to each other, without hate, imputing improper motives, tinged with arrogance, or vanity.

A Development Philosophy:

Do we have a guiding development philosophy? We partook of the Integrated Development Plan; what happened to that? What of the Diaspora Policy Paper we were asked to do and did. The worthy Dominicans who spent their time doing it feel let down and disrespected. Who can blame them? We lurch from one place to the next, while the country idles and languishes. What is our development master plan? No one can accuse us of not trying. We do our best and when we do so, our best motives are held suspect by the purveyors of doom and gloom.

Again, we seem to delight in missing the boat when it comes to empowering our own and too often lack the grace to reach out to each other - despite political differences - to secure the common good of our commonwealth of Dominica. Do we even truly appreciate what Commonwealth stands for? The term "Commonwealth of Dominica" was chosen because of the socialist philosophy which inspired those engaged in Dominica's freedom struggle. Now, because they believe themselves successful, some are ashamed of ever being socialist or leftist. They seek to rewrite history and negate the role of their own people. Narrow cliques and choosing fly by night operators who disgrace our intelligence as a people, can never suffice to build the dream of a developed and prosperous Dominica. Socialism, therefore was our guiding philosophy in the 1970s: we wanted a social democratic state, with social justice for all, and local control of our natural resources uppermost in our minds. We were the ones who struggled alongside the Labour government of the day for independence under the leadership of Rosie Douglas and the Popular Independence Committees. Today is not yesterday, however. Now, our philosophy must embrace our Christian faith and the spirit of free enterprise and could not be a recipe imported from any other country; no matter that they are allies. Yes, Dominica is unique. We would have to do that which works in the context of our history, our electoral standards, our democracy and rule of law. Indeed, such a philosophy has made most of Europe prosperous. Consider Denmark and Sweden? Why not us? Today, people pay scant attention to that history; immersed as they are in soap operas and idle talk shows. Where there exist no guiding equity seeking nationalist philosophy for victory of any nation-state, it's every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Nigeria's fate is worthy of consideration here; despite all its oil wealth it wallows in a sea of corruption, waste and villainy. We, those who remain, committed to country over self, believe in the common wealth and equality of opportunity for all Dominicans. We believe in bringing all Dominicans together for productive endeavor. That is what guides the DGEC proposal; even where we must - of necessity - seek private investment and the foreign competence we lack.

Local Initiative and Foreign Investment:

In addition we have this fixation on the foreign investor or ally as key to development, missing the point that it is by our own diligent efforts we shall rise; as with China, Singapore and yes - even Cuba. No amount of Soviet aid could have made the Cubans survive; they had to work hard, and smart and ensure

control of their basic resources. In the recent bulb exchange program, the Cubans had to send people to put in bulbs in Dominica? That is a sordid example of dependency at its worst. No effort was made by the authorities to meaningfully partner with students and others on what was a good opportunity to build true bonds of friendship with that sister people who have given us so much in scholarships and other assistance over 32 years. As a founding member of the Dominica Cuba Friendship Society, I know that is not what we intended when we built that organization in 1976. Our focus was true partnerships aimed at self reliance. Do we truly focus on supporting the local man and local initiatives? The evidence of such focused support is scant. Unfortunately a Dominican trying to invest in Dominica has to jump through hoops like some circus clown. With a few exceptions, every government of Dominica has been guilty of such inattention to the need to develop local enterprise.

A National Energy Commission: Negate the Commissioned Agent

Another failure is to institute a National Energy Commission or a Government Link Company (like the early National Development and Commercial Bank success) in Energy. All major countries which have done renewable energy have done so via indigenous control of the resource. **We are urging the government to do this and so avoid the corruption endemic in some places of having ministers and locals fronting as Commissioned Agents for foreign concerns, where people are paid back-door fees and commissions and sell-out the country.** To grow and succeed we must negate the "commission agent mentality" which has corrupted and ruined the chances for so many in the developing world. Let us not disappoint Dominicans who are committed to working for the country without ever asking for some personal benefit or engage in illegal and immoral greasing of palms. Without such ethics in private sector dealing or public sector honesty, we are finished. The commissioned agent is self-serving and facilitates the continued domination of our island by exploitative foreign interest. We welcome foreign investment, but it must be transparently pursued and of mutual benefit. We lament the lack of economic development not understanding that such will be our eternal fate where the bulk of profits made in Dominica are repatriated as in the colonial era. Dominica now has the opportunity to build the local economy by ensuring that we have a Government linked or owned energy company, in partnership with some private equity and publicly sold shares to Dominicans at home and abroad. In this quest, everything must be transparent, communicated openly and be inclusive of all those committed Dominicans who are willing to try. Via our allies we can obtain scholarships for geology, power plant management and such, so that in three to five years we have a strata of trained locals who can run our very Dominican owned and controlled energy shop. Building local corporate and publicly owned entities takes work. That process takes hard, committed effort, but such is the only way: there is no quick and easy fix to our development puzzle. Anyone who is not prepared to rally Dominicans to the hard work, and diligent preparation necessary for sustainable and equitable development on our island is selling a

pipe dream and misleading the public. There is no development without sacrifice. All parties in Dominica must appreciate that free t-shirts, bountiful liquor, and fete type rallies cannot replace the sober, ethical, collaborative effort which will realize development on Dominica.

Alliance Building Essential to National Development Energy Policy

Every Dominican government within the past 30 years has had the unselfish support of the patriotic Diaspora movement. When the hurricanes have come, or the hospitals have had needs, or the schools and libraries have needed books, we have never engaged in any partisanship. We have been true and committed to serving all Dominicans. That sense of alliance building or community is now lacking in a very fractured overly-politicized landscape on Dominica. **The need for a national energy company presents government and opposition with a unique opportunity to come together and do something that ALL DOMINICANS CAN BENEFIT FROM.** Dominica is in need of a revival of that faith in community and family spirit. We must understand and embrace the need to communicate regularly and build alliances or teams. The Diaspora movement can be of great help in building an indigenous energy policy and even investing in it, as some of us already have. Today, too few political actors are willing to build the non-partisan alliances which are critical to such success. Too few are willing to apologize where they have wronged others, or reach out across the divide.

Aimlessly running around with Labour, Freedom or UWP banners are pointless on our small island, especially on issues such as energy which require a singular national purpose. Building new political parties is not the answer either; instead to embrace inclusion, mutual respect, the national interest and a can do attitude grounded in productivity. Some countries have dozen of parties and they are eating each other; so partisanship - or new parties - cannot save us. We need statesmen and women to take to the fore and secure the national interest. Where we have a locally owned and managed geothermal energy, we will all benefit. Therefore, this cause represents an opportunity for all Dominicans to work together. DGEC, with Dominicans at home and abroad owning shares in it is the way to go. It is by such an approach we can build Dominica into a true nature island; energy independent and prosperous.

Conclusion:

Those of us who played a role in Dominica's independence movement cannot let down the side. An alternative home based alternative energy policy can spur our productivity, make our island more competitive re foreign investment, lead to electric powered vehicles to replace the many second-hand polluting cars on our roads, allow us to do a electric powered light rail around the island, and erect cable cars to span the many valleys. We can become the first Caribbean island to be totally green powered. The opportunities are limitless if only we try. And try we must. We here are dedicated to the struggle for a better Dominica.

We must persevere and press on to victory in this cause of renewable energy as it is Dominica's best hope for forward movement in these times.

Taking a cue from our calypsonians we say: Forward we go, as - divided and on our own - we cannot make it to the promised land.