

Elements of the Leadership Challenge in Dominica - A perspective

by

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Let me begin by thanking the UWI School of Continuing Studies for this opportunity to contribute to the continuation of the long tradition of discussion and debate on issues that are relevant to Dominica and to the region. One recalls the work of Cecil Rawle in the 1920s directed at raising the level of interest in the region in the federation and independence issue. One recalls as well the stimulating debates around the independence issue with participation by key elements of society including the church and in particular by the Diocesan Pastoral Centre. One recalls as well the vibrant debates stimulated by the Movement for a New Dominica on social change. Finally, mention must be made of the on-going debate around the design and possibilities of the Integrated Development Plan consultation process. These are but a few examples of a tradition that must not simply be encouraged, but must be seen as an integral aspect of the Dominican character.

I should state from the outset that though the issues treated can be construed as political in the sense that they involve choice regarding policy positions and the allocation of resources; they are not political in the sense of supporting one or the other party. In fact, I am of the view (and I will return to this issue a bit later) that our preoccupation with the latter, diverts intellectual energy and breeds disrespect since our political preference and prejudices usually prevent us from really listening to the views of others.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this discussion is about leadership and leadership challenges in Dominica. It is only peripherally an evaluation of leadership in our island. I repeat, I am not about to evaluate the track record of the leadership of this or that party or this or the other period. Of course, I am not that naïve to assure that one will not be inclined to see in some of the statements that I will make some measure of evaluation. I am simply stating that this is not the prime purpose of the exercise.

What then is the prime purpose? Simply put, my objective is to encourage non-traditional thinking regarding the challenges that we face as a nation. I am of the view that an examination of what could be referred to as the current Dominican crisis suggests the need for visioning, thinking and action that can only be realized through leadership. It is a personal perspective. I invite you, not only to give it some consideration but to become fully engaged with the debate.

Of course I use the term crisis with a certain degree of hesitancy. There are no riots in the streets; I have not seen or heard of anyone building bomb shelters or handing out gas masks. Our rivers are still flowing, our forests are still verdant and the air is still the

freshest anywhere. To some extent, one can and probably should speak of a mini-crisis when referring to the traffic situation in Roseau. The streets of the capital are crammed full with vehicles making it necessary to spend as much as twenty minutes searching for a place to park. True, many of these vehicles are reconditioned rather than new and they certainly do not attract the level of profits or taxation as would be the case for new vehicles.

Of course there is a definite link between the country's productive capacity and the decision to buy new or used vehicles or any other goods and services for that matter. Here, the evidence of crisis seems more pronounced.

Over the last five years, there seems to have been an overall decline in the country's earnings from the banana industry, consequent on the dismantling of the protective cover for the fruit, leading to weak prices on the international market, declining farmer interest and hence decreasing productivity and export levels. (Chronicle October 2002) The decline in the pivotal banana industry has not been offset by growth in other agricultural produce. The state and its agricultural organs have not been entirely negligent in this matter. There is evidence of attempts at diversification. At one stage the assistance of the then British Development Division was recruited for a programme for planting new varieties of mangoes and other tree crops. We dabbled in ginger; in passion fruit. Didn't we at one stage try winter vegetables? What we may not have done is scan the trends in the international commodity markets to look for windows of opportunity for agricultural produce - premium Arabica Coffee for example - always a favourite, particularly with the Japanese. Viet Nam has done that and is now a major player on the international market for coffee. But let me not get distracted from this comment on so called crises in our country.

There certainly is a crisis in Agriculture. We seem unable to define agriculture in terms other than bananas. Additionally, we seem reluctant to accommodate our culture to the reality of the market. Markets fluctuate. Demand rises and falls. Scientists in the developed world will not stop the search for synthetics in an effort to decrease dependence on imports. We were supposed to learn that lesson in the 1920s with the demise of the lime industry. The crisis resides, not so much in the fluctuation of the market - or with the erosion of previously protected markets. The crisis appears to be largely home grown with the lack of capacity to predict and to respond appropriately to turbulent times and changing conditions. It is important that these perspectives be explored dispassionately. If I am right as to the locus of the true crisis in our agriculture, then the prescriptions cannot simply be applied to the banana industry but to the range of interventions in market scanning, marketing, negotiating, farmer education, and new scientifically based cultural practices. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, must constitute a major challenge for Leadership. As we will see later, the capacity to urge followers to abandon the old and search for the new is a key element of leadership challenge faced by this country.

Let me comment on another indicator of crisis that is commonly referred to on the streets of Roseau - out migration. If the stories are to be believed, many families have left Dominica to reside in other countries within the region or further a-field. Migration, we

need to remind ourselves, is a constant feature of island societies and is particularly common in open societies. But migration is also an international phenomenon that, for a mix of factors, is particularly in vogue at this time. Globalization and the quest for competitive advantage, has forced societies to become more tolerant of the other. A survey, which was undertaken in the UK recently, shocked that nation. It revealed that over 40% of the population would leave the UK if they could. The reality, though, is that the UK is a favourite destination for persons wishing to migrate from their country - whether or not they speak the English Language. Another factor to be taken into consideration is that there is high demand in the developed world for skills - in engineering, computer science, design, and in the service sector. Interestingly, these countries seem less interested in the origins of the skilled people they wish to employ and more in their competence. Leadership is required here, for the pursuit of one of a mix of four options:

- Creating a dynamic society which can satisfy the various needs of all the youth,
- Persuading the Dominican youth that there is life-enriching benefit to be gained by remaining engaged with the island's quest for development, whether they are in or outside Dominica,
- Persuading the developed world that the migration of our youth to their shores, constitute exports for which we should be duly compensated beyond the remittances made to the island.
- Persuading nationals of other countries that Dominica is an attractive destination in this international movement of peoples. If as I think we are suffering from our small population size, then leadership is required for the crafting of a population policy that encourages a new influx of people to our shores.

The indicator of crisis - the proverbial straw that broke the back of the camel - the drying up of national and international sources of deficit funding of the public sector, has been extensively treated in the national and regional press and in the Reports of regional and international agencies - particularly the IMF. A country's invitation to the IMF to assist in reordering its public sector finances is always an indicator of crisis. The IMF was in fact set up specifically to deal with such situations, and its prescriptions are generally well known and have been applied in our case. What is less clear is whether the usual punitive mix will be off set by interventions meant to improve the viability of a small island state with a micro population and an even smaller productive base.

Let me wrap up this section by suggesting the need for caution in identifying the locus of the crisis that we face. It may well be that the real crisis resides in our reluctance to change and modernise ... to accept that the 19th and 20th Centuries are no longer with us ... that our viability in this age of globalisation and rabid competition for labour and for markets can only be guaranteed if we effect appropriate change in our social relations in the way we do business (including the conduct of diplomacy) in the way we govern ourselves and in the vision of the future that we sell to our youth our sister islands and to the international community.

Leadership Elements

Let us now focus a bit more on the leadership question. Ladies and gentlemen, the

literature on leadership is quite extensive and there is much that is not relevant to our purposes. Let me begin with the assertion of Kets de Vries that effective leadership is dependent on more than the individual. In his book *The Leadership Mystique*, Kets de Vries contends that "effective leadership strongly depends on a complex pattern of interaction among leader, follower and situation". There is a message here for those who tend to place too much focus on building individual leader capacity without reference to the attitudes and motives of the follower. There is a message here as well for those who seek to apply the same leadership solutions or approaches to a variety of situations. The onus has to be on appropriateness.

To Kets de Vries and other researchers, successful leaders fulfil two key roles: the charismatic role and the instrumental role. The charismatic role "encompasses the way in which leaders envision, empower and energize in order to motivate their followers". These three terms have been highlighted in the original text - and I will be pleased if particular note was taken to them. Leaders need to have "the knack of perceiving salient trends in the environment. They must be able to process many different kinds of information and use their perceptions as a basis for judging the direction in which environmental forces are going". Having settled on a particular course of action, the leader must be able to carry significant others along the chosen path towards the particular goal.

In many cultures, preference is given to the charismatic leader who can identify a cause and sway others to it. However, the instrumental role, which relates to organising of tasks and the controlling and rewarding of those undertaking the task, is deemed equally important. Leadership then is all about formulating a vision for a group, exciting interest and dedication to the vision or cause. It is to quote another author, "getting people to work together to make things happen that might not otherwise occur or prevent things from happening that ordinarily would take place". May I note here, that these things being referred to are not restricted to the political sphere. Leadership must be equally present in the church and civil society in general, in business and in governance.

In the time that is left, I would like to focus on several areas that need to be treated if we are to set ourselves on the road to viability within the context of globalisation. I call them leadership challenges largely because their successful implementation will require a healthy dose of inspired leadership. Focus will be on the following areas:

- Renewal of social relations
- Renovation of political culture
- Modernisation of agriculture and
- Renovation of our regional and international relations.

Perhaps the greatest problem faced by our small island nation is that of transforming our people into a community united behind the quest for development and national wellbeing. In Nigeria where I work, three questions constantly arise regarding Dominica: Is it in the United States, it is the Dominican Republic, and what is the size of its population. The first two questions usually get immediate and enthusiastic response. However, I am always reluctant to deal with the last question. Despite my best efforts to

shift our population to "almost 100,000" the situation gets out of hand with every one laughing about a country with less than 100,000 souls. I dare not tell them that the figure is probably closer to 60,000. The point is that Nigeria with its 120 million people, its religious divide, and its numerous ethnic groups each of which is taken very seriously is likely to have a problem transforming its population into a coherent community and nation. We with our miniscule population and a clear absence of ethnic groups and peoples should not have that problem. Leadership from all segments of society is required to challenge the persisting notions of racism that characterize our views of each other. Leadership is required to actively and effectively counter the notion that the most appropriate reaction to someone's success should be scorn, doubt and enmity. Leadership is required to counter the notion that our leadership should originate with this or that group. In essence, Leadership is required to divert our attention from pettiness to full engagement in the development effort.

If our tendency towards petty divisions among ourselves has the effect of diverting our energies from the goal of national development, our current political culture tends to even greater confusion and division. In the first place, we have over the years, instituted a system of government of and for the party instead of government of and for the people. A young man or woman who publicly supports the losing party is condemned to be unemployed until his or her party comes to power. In this situation one is at pains to determine who is leading whom. One hears stories of followers and supporters, making claims to rewards for their support of one or the other party. At times the demand is not only for reward in terms of personal advancement but for the demotion or sacking of someone who supported the losing party. Leaders must learn to empathise, not only with their supporters, but with the needs and aspirations of all Dominicans. Remember we are in competition with other countries for Dominican talent.

This tendency to victimisation and vindictiveness is not the only problem with our current political dispensation. The system tends to confuse the question of representation with the right of leadership. Thus, virtually every successful constituency representative feels that he or she has a right to a ministry whether or not his or her experience and qualifications suggests that he or she should be entrusted with this responsibility.

Of course, I do not have a firm tried and proven alternative to the current system. What is clear is that our political culture must change and change rapidly if we are serious about viability. The truth is that leadership on both sides of our current political divide recognise the need for change. Both sides speak of the need for unity. It is our hope that leadership on both sides will move beyond the talk and diligently pursue the task of ensuring that a new system of governance, one that is appropriate to the times is put in place in our land. Actually, the time seems right for a moratorium on politics as usual. Perhaps consideration should be given to putting the current competitive system on hold for the next 15 years and instituting in its place a government of national unity with shared leadership and regular consultation of the Dominican people both at home and abroad on critical issues of direction and strategy.

The third leadership challenge involves modernisation of our economy and in particular our agricultural sector. Note, Ladies and Gentlemen, I did not say our banana

industry. This is not to suggest that the banana industry is not important. It is just that we cannot continue to pretend that the green is still gold. Leadership, including leadership of the banana industry must recognise the changing environment and seek other opportunities that are presenting themselves. I refer to the continuing attraction of Arabica Coffee that can again be planted on selected mountain slopes; to the almost insatiable demand for fruit and organically grown produce. However, leadership is required to ensure that our industry is supported appropriately by entities whether national or regional which have been mandated to provide such support. Our leaders should determine for instance why CARDI appears ineffective in assisting Dominica with its fruit fly infestation.

Incidentally, due attention must be paid to building and empowering of the private sector to play the pivotal role in production and marketing of our agricultural and other produce. This is not longer the age when government withholds dynamic assistance from the private sector because of concerns that the sector will grow too rich powerful. Another position which has lost favour is that critical private sector investments in Dominica should only be made by Dominicans and or foreign investors. Much more work must be done in encouraging other CARICOM and OECS firms to invest in agriculture and in industry including water - still one of the best prospects for transforming the industrial landscape of this country. Incidentally, I understand that there is a huge unmet demand for bottled water in Martinique and Guadeloupe. We seem to be waiting for one of our sister islands to seize the opportunity. Finally, reference must be made to the need to have Dominica seen as a pioneer in the new information and knowledge based industries. A good example is the exploitation of intellectual property rights in which McCarthy Marie has developed some expertise.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope that I have been able to persuade you that the core challenges facing Dominica are home grown and require action at the national level. There is, however, a regional and international dimension that must be treated at least briefly. We are after all a member of a regional grouping that for years have been pursuing a policy of functional cooperation and economic cooperation within the context of a Caribbean community. Certainly our markets have been thrown open - but have our economies been integrated? If so why were the juicing operations of Barbados's Pine Hill Dairy not located in Dominica where raw materials could be guaranteed? Shouldn't Caribbean community supplies of citrus juices and pineapple juices be purchased from surplus rich countries as Dominica before companies as Pine Hill are allowed to import concentrates from outside the CARICOM region?

Why is it that Dominican bottled water is hardly found on supermarket shelves in Antigua? Why is it that the OECS has not yet developed an integrated tourism marketing strategy, allowing visitors to enjoy the fine beaches in Antigua and Anguilla as well as the delights of Dominica's natural - not artificial ecotourism?

Through these questions, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am raising the possibility that our current economic crisis may in part be attributable to the tardiness on the part of regional institutions and leaders to ensure fuller integration of Dominica into the regional economy. Again, the window of opportunity is still open. We are thankful for the

leadership that has resulted in demonstrations of generosity on the part of our sister regional states in our present crisis. Let us not forget, however, that cash cannot be the limit of the assistance provided by our sister islands. Even more important is a higher level of market access, technical assistance and investment that is likely to result in our fuller integration into the regional economy. I am therefore looking forward to news of a meeting between Pine Hill of Barbados and Bello of Dominica facilitated by the Ministry of Agriculture and aimed at improving collaboration around the utilisation of Dominican surplus fruit juices.

Before his untimely death, Ladies and Gentlemen, former Prime Minister Douglas, having assessed the environment within which the quest for national development was to be pursued, decided on something he called a new initiative... - entry of Dominica into the European Union. New ideas usually frighten rather than excite. Interestingly, they frighten and intimidate even those they are meant to benefit. I am on shaky ground here, but I wish to suggest nonetheless, that Douglas's leadership in this area will in time be vindicated. It is not that he had the details right. Certainly, I have not seen a document where the new initiative was clearly articulated. In this one can accuse him of not demonstrating several of the attributes of effective leadership - of failure to communicate and win over his people before going regional with his ideas.

What then should we consider the legacy of Douglas in this matter? I would suggest that we give consideration to the following propositions:

- That we ignore the international dimension of the struggle for national viability at our peril.
- That even as we continue to work at strengthening with our CARICOM brothers we must also seek to extend historic and cultural ties with Martinique and Guadeloupe to areas of trade and joint investments. Incidentally, I read with much concern the challenges facing the Dominica's innovative Creole Festival. I hope that when we contemplating new areas of investment we
- That we should strengthen our trade and international relations functions with one or two lawyers and charge them with developing expertise regarding the treaties and protocols that govern international and trading relations. The EU is already the biggest donor club in the world. With the recent invitation of some 10 countries to join the club, it is likely to become even more influential in the near future.

Much of what I have proposed above implies continued and increased attention to a key cross cutting area: education. Here I am referring to education in all its guises and levels. That knowledge must be the key resource that drives our quest for viability applies to Dominica as well other members of the international community. In fact it appears to be even more relevant to countries as Dominica which can boast only of its riches in its people wherever they are.

Incidentally, the recent UNESCO report on Education for All lists Dominica as one of the countries at risk of not meeting to goal of education for all by 2015. One hopes that this is viewed as a call to action and that due attention will be paid to adult education and literacy so that we can, in quick time, be graduated from this category.

I am pleased to note that attention continues to be paid to higher education even as we work to consolidate achievements at the basic level. The decision to reinvigorate the national tertiary institution with new resources and new leadership is commendable. Opportunities for continuing education must be available for all who desire to continue learning. We cannot, however, afford to lose the battle at the base. Over the years, we have had a strong tradition with pre-school education. I hope that by now pre-schools can be found in all towns and villages of the country and that the quality of instruction and care delivered at these establishments is similar whether they serve urban and rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the education imperative also extends to Leadership. Gone are the days when it was thought that leadership qualities were simply innate and could not be learned. Researchers have in fact identified the core set of competencies that relate to leadership. These include:

- Getting and Giving Information
- Understanding the Needs and Characteristics of the Group
- Knowing and using the resources of the Group
- Controlling group performance
- Counselling
- Setting the Example
- Problem solving
- Evaluation and
- Sharing Leadership

We are warned though, that the simple learning of the above competencies does not necessarily make a leader. The leadership competencies must be internalised and must be seen to influence behaviour and values.

Great leaders, ladies and gentlemen are remembered for doing things differently for changing things and disturbing the status quo. I have argued that the true Dominican crisis resides in our preference for conservatism over change. It is as if we are worried that changing outmoded practices will change the landscape of this country we love. It will not change the landscape. It will certainly improve the quality of life of those people who choose to live here. Change is therefore to be the focus of the leadership challenge for Dominica.

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