

Independence and the National Question

By

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2008 represents the 30th Anniversary of Dominica's Independence from Britain. Many of us who championed the independence struggle can only grimace when we consider the mistakes made by our leaders and people over the years in failing to seize the opportunities presented to champion the national interest and control of the means of production for the benefit of the vast majority of Dominica's people. The deterioration of any adherence to nationalist principles in philosophy and practice – by the government and governed - gives pause to the committed and confounds the best intentions of those who remain true to the cause. Today, we see scant commitment to indigenous control of our affairs; beyond feting and slogans which pretend to favor same. Recent events have compelled this reflection on our history as a people and, in particular, the role of the Dominica Labour Party which ushered in the era independence and considered itself the guardian of the national interest.

Today many people take for granted our right to vote; laws which protect women; equal rights for descendants of Africans or our Carib people; ownership of land or a home; respect for our creole culture; respect for our African heritage; our flag; our national anthem; our national independence, and the fact that Dominicans can sit in parliament and make decisions about local matters. It was not always so. It is only within the last half a century, 1951 to be exact, that Dominicans got the right to vote. That new policy was called universal adult suffrage. Prior, the right to vote was restricted to the propertied classes; overwhelmingly the descendants of those who had conquered the island, seized the land from the Caribs and then compelled captured Africans to work for free over a term of some 300 years. In the early to mid 19th Century, there were a few of our common people --Robert Douglas and J.B. Charles among them--who had accumulated property by dint of wise investment effort and thrift; but they were a minority. Others who had gained stature through education, such as distinguished local

attorney Cecile Rawle whose bust sits atop a plinth at the top of Federation Drive, became notable leaders in the early fight for self government.

Dominica's first Chief Minister, Franklin Baron, presided over an administration which brought some progress in the manner that local representation should: there was the completion of the Imperial Road linking Marigot to Roseau in 1956; the start of the Melville Hall Airport project in 1958 and the new Dominica Grammar School building was conceived in 1960—among other projects. However, the island's first political party, the Dominica Labour Party (DLP) formed by E.C. Loblack and Phyllis Shand Allfrey in 1956, arose because they felt that enough was not being done to serve the majority population. That majority population was overwhelmingly peasant and working class; still restricted in ownership of land, access to proper health care, and education. Further, because slavery had limited the ability of the descendants of poor Dominicans to acquire land, there was little trans-generational transfer of wealth. That meant if their parents were squatters, and labourers, so too were their children. Many Dominicans, groaning under the weight of that oppressive colonial system were forced to flee to other countries, to escape perpetual poverty: Curacao, Aruba, Cuba, U.S. Virgin Islands, Britain or the U.S.A. being among some of their destinations. Of those who remained, some decided to fight for change, and found a place in the Dominica Labour Party.

Some of the founders of the DLP had been members of Dominica's first trade union, The Dominica Trade Union (DTU) which was formed in 1945. Having such a base, they believed in the working people having a living wage; and peasants being able to own the land upon which they worked. Most importantly the party believed in self government for Dominica; i.e. independence. In 1961 Edward Oliver LeBlanc led the DLP to a sweeping victory over the Dominica United Party (DUPP) led by Baron. LeBlanc's administration laid the basis for many of the progressive changes we see today: new high schools such as the Portsmouth Secondary School; the Clifton Dupigny Technical College—now the site of the Dominica State College; feeder roads connecting mostly all villages; better primary schools; more high school scholarships and a new Dominica Grammar School and Technical Wing; social security; our own National Commercial & Development Bank; the new Ministry building; the Deep Water Harbour project; and the many housing schemes which came later. An exponent of literacy he promoted legislation which in the words of former Commissioner of Police, O.N. Phillip "... LeBlanc made it mandatory for children to attend

primary school.” A truancy officer by the name of “Frank” scoured Roseau streets during the 1960s and early 1970s and would take into custody any child found out on the streets during school hours. In 1967, LeBlanc led the island to Associated Statehood with Britain. That meant that for the first time, Dominicans had control of local government, while Britain maintained control of defence and foreign affairs. A firm regionalist, LeBlanc hosted the hugely successful Expo 1969 Trade Fair at which each of the Windward Islands (Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Dominica) displayed their agricultural and industrial products at the Botanic Gardens; Grenada’s exhibit – a 30 foot tall Nutmeg House with winding staircases and infused with the fragrance of that spice – was the most memorable display. LeBlanc an avid exponent of Dominica’s history and creole culture, also commissioned three magazines from 1965 to 1970 called *Dies Dominica*, and another work on the island’s past called *Aspects of Dominican History*. During the period of LeBlanc’s rule – and for some time thereafter - every National Day would conclude with a culture concert day at a huge circular stage erected on the cricket field at the Botanic Gardens. On stage men would recite poetry in the French creole language and women would whirl around in the colorful national costume of the Wob Dwiyet to . accompaniment of accordions, tambourines, shak-shak, lapeau cabwit (goat skin) drums and bamboo horns.

In 1974 Premier LeBlanc departed and made way for Patrick John. Premier John won a big victory over the the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP) in the elections of 1975; Labour gained 16 out of 21 seats in that election. The DFP, led by Eugenia Charles, failed to gain much traction. The DFP was weak in the countryside and most Dominicans considered it to be the party of Roseau merchants and big land owners. John promoted the “Buy Local” campaign, introduced new housing schemes at Bath Estate and River Estate and inaugurated the Canefield Airport and new Treasury Computer Center and National Commercial & Development Bank building. In 1978, Premier Patrick John would lead the island to independence.

Throughout its early history, therefore, the DLP had focused on Dominicans being masters of their own destiny: the essence of the NATIONAL QUESTION. That meant promoting a policy of indigenous control of the means of production. Such a policy has made for the progress of many countries in the post colonial era; Malaysia, Singapore, Venezuela, India, Cuba are all countries where control of local resources by local people, have ensured that the wealth produced does the greatest good

for the greatest number. In each of those countries, the governments built alliances to broaden the national consensus and promoted self reliance; even while courting foreign private investment. While favoring investment, they always ensured that the state or locals had a major role to play. By favoring the growth of a local business and ownership class, they have spurred local enterprise, science and compatible technology, and so built up the self confidence of their people. Today Singapore has some of the largest foreign exchange reserves; Cuba is a medical and education power which has shared its bounty with us; and India is a science power which has enhanced its food security through a “Green Revolution.” The Venezuelan government has- for years -used its oil wealth to fund indigenous industry; even more so now under President Chavez. Prime Minister Skerrit follows in that path, where he has reached out to sectors in opposition to the DLP, promoted the Dominica State College, and made land available to the landless. However, his actions have not been consistent and there have been mounting complaints and concerns with regard to ethics in office and adherence to the founding principles which gave birth to the Labour Party. These concerns, over years, have been shared internally with the Prime Minister and his cabinet by many who wish success for the party and country; two elements which are inextricably linked, as their can no success for the Labour Party if the country and/or its noble principles are in ruin. It cannot be restated enough that the legendary leaders of the party, such as Phyllis Shand Allfrey, E.C. Loblack, E.O. Leblanc, H.L. Christian, and others were above reproach in their personal conduct and their adherence to the philosophy of Dominican nationalism and social justice.

A Brief Post Independence History of Dominica

In early 1978 Patrick John dismissed two dynamic ministers Mike Douglas and Ferdinand Parillon, claiming they were communists and part of a plot to unseat him. Earlier, Douglas, alongside his brother Rosie Douglas who led the Popular Independence Committees (PIC) had been one of the most vocal advocates of political independence. In that period Patrick John had energized some young people, especially in Grandbay, Portsmouth and sections of Roseau by his support for self reliance, a buy local campaign and socialism. However, in the immediate pre-independence months he had moved away from those positions and had become distant. He was increasingly cut-off from any serious connection to the masses and had surrounded himself with a small clique of advisors; inattentive to the

dissatisfaction building against his authoritarian manner. John was also cut from his organizational roots in the trade Waterfront and Allied Workers Union (WAWU) of which he was once part. Under leaders such as Louis Benoit (aka Zaboca) of WAWU and Charles Savarin of the Civil Service Association (CSA) organized labour now openly sympathized with the DFP. The revived Dominica Farmers Union (DFU) was led by Ted Honeychurch, Athie Martin and Alvin Armantrading; all persons who were considered anti-government in posture. The Dominica Federation of Students (DFS) led by Angus Aulard, Romus Lamothe, Agnes Esprit, Steve John Debbie Douglas, alongside its President Gabriel Christian and others who had supported the independence drive of Prime Minister John became increasingly critical of government policy. On January 29, 1979 the DFS organized a demonstration of high school students around Roseau in solidarity with the DFU and farmers who were calling for prompt government action to arrest the spread of the leaf spot disease which was crippling the banana industry. The demonstration ended with a huge rally on the Goodwill savannah and was a harbinger of things to come. For a Labour Party which was born of the labour movement, and which once had the overwhelming support of farmers, to have lost such support was indicative of the growing chasm between government and the governed.

In February 1979, the BBC News program *Panorama* sent a TV crew to interview Prime Minister John and investigate reports of his involvement with a South African backed bank in London. His answers were unconvincing and suspicions deepened. Local news reports became more critical; the opposition among young people, farmers and business owners began coalescing.

In 1979 Prime Minister John offered the north of the island for a Dominica Free Port Authority owned by Texan business man Don Pierson which would limit the island's control of its most fertile lands. Don Pierson had been a business associate of Haitian dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier. He was also linked to the Zapata Oil Company, which had been implicated in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Pierson's Dominica Free Port lease would be for 99 years at a paltry sum of \$99 a year. The Free Port authority, with its own laws and immigration procedures, was seen as undermining the sovereignty of the new nation-state. Such actions by John were a deviation from the heritage and philosophy of the Labour Party, and angered students, farmers and workers who formerly supported the Labour Party. Rallies organized by

the PIC, DFS, DFP, WAWU, CSA and a new grouping led by Mike Douglas called the Dominica Democratic Alliance (DDA) were held around the country to oppose the Free Port deal. On March 2, 1979, Don Pierson was invited to a meeting with student leaders of the DFS at the Dominica Grammar School. During that meeting he was unable to answer questions as to who would account for income from the Free Port Authority. He arrogantly refused to provide the students with copies of the contract and Pierson was rebuked for concealing important information which affected the national interest. He hurriedly left the meeting after being booed.

John's promotion of such policies as the Free Port was considered a sell-out of the national interest. When John sought to pass legislation to muzzle the media and curtail trade union activism, Dominicans protested. In one such notable protest on May 29, 1979, the Dominica Defense Force (DDF) opened fire on stone throwing crowds outside parliament; fifteen were seriously wounded and Philip Timothy was killed. The son of Labour Party stalwarts (at the time his father was a gardener for Premier John) Timothy was martyred for the cause of Dominica's young democracy and must never be forgotten.

Incensed, civil servants, workers and students closed schools, government offices and businesses. A call for a Premier John to resign resounded across the land; with disenchanted Labourites in the lead. Rosie Douglas called for a Committee of National Salvation grouping all opposition forces, after promoting the founding of the Dominica Liberation Movement on the evening of May 30, 1979. It must be noted that during the unrest in following May 29, 1979, many innocent Labourites had their homes attacked and businesses looted in Roseau by angry opposition crowds. The country had been divided into competing zones of control. The airport and the entire of north of the island, and Grandbay in the south and areas of the southeast, were solidly in the control of the left-leaning DLM; the DFP was strongest in Roseau and its adjoining suburbs with sometimes armed groups patrolling their areas as Prime Minister Patrick John was said to be planning to bring in mercenaries to assist him. The beleaguered John, who had retreated to the Prime Minister's residence at More Bruce, came on radio and stated: "Citizens of Dominica! I shall never surrender! I shall not resign!"

Alarmed by a situation which seemed to be spiraling out of control, the DLM in turn organized its own revolutionary committees on June 16, 1979

to buttress its control of the countryside. Both the DDF and Royal Dominica Police Force were mostly barracks-bound and unable to maintain law and order. In an alarming escalation of the violence, the House of Assembly was consumed by flames on the evening of June 17, 1979. That night Roseau crowds attacked the homes and businesses of Labourites and sympathizers. Even members and supporters of the DLM were threatened and roughed up by DFP partisans, as they were seen as intent on making a revolution as had occurred on Grenada on March 13, 1979.

Saddened by the actions of a government which had lost its way Labour ministers such as Oliver J. Seraphine (OJ), H.L Christian, Eustace Francis and others resigned and formed a coalition government in alliance with the DFP and the DLM of Mike Douglas, Rosie Douglas, Para Riviere, Bernard Wiltshire, Lloyd Pascal, Athie Martin, Pierre Charles, Ron Green and other leftist leaders. DFP allies such as human rights activist and lawyer Brian Alleyne and former senior civil servant Charles Maynard were given ministries in the interim government. Mike Douglas served as minister of finance and Athie Martin served as agriculture minister. The interim government which replaced Prime Minister John was the first such coalition in Dominica's history. The government had been crafted by the Committee of National Salvation, and was an example of civic leadership at its best, where it sought a peaceful resolution of a political conflict which threatened more street protests. Led by Seraphine, that interim government brought the island back from the brink of civil war. The interim government was dominated by Labour Party sympathizers and so the DFP soon withdrew its support as a prelude to the 1980 election. Rosie Douglas and Athie Martin were to be later expelled from the interim government when OJ Seraphine sought to assure the US government that his was not a leftist regime.

On August 29, 1979 Hurricane David struck Dominica a devastating blow. The first rescuers aboard the Royal Navy's *HMS Fife* found almost total devastation from winds which topped 200 mph; luckily, only 67 Dominicans perished. Massive aid was garnered from the UK, USA, Venezuela and France. Other Caribbean islands also chipped in, with Jamaica sending its coast guard to assist. Helicopters scoured the island from each of these nations, rescuing stranded Dominicans from hillsides and dropping food supplies. The sound of falling boxes of emergency supplies - "brogodow!" - was later used to describe all such relief items. As in, "I had some brogodow for breakfast this morning." Or, "He is wearing brogodow."

Rosie Douglas and Bernard Wiltshire – with assistance from Grenada’s revolutionary leader Maurice Bishop - traveled to Cuba and lobbied its government for help. Maurice Bishop travelled to Dominica, along with Cuba’s economic minister Hector Rodriguez Llompart, for emergency assistance talks with OJ Seraphine and the interim government. Cuba offered a 500 bed hospital and 100 scholarships which the US pressured Dominica not to accept; instead only 11 scholarships and \$100,000 was accepted from Cuba. However, Cuban president Fidel Castro persuaded the Non-Aligned Movement nations, meeting in Havana in September of that year, to render assistance to Dominica. From his appeal, \$13,000,000 USD was raised to include \$1,000,000 from Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, \$10,000 from Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and \$1,000,000 from Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. The hurricane assistance was to trickle into the island over the years and includes the Venezuelan funded Simon Bolivar Housing Scheme at Stock Farm.

In the July 20, 1980 election the DFP emerged the victor. It was the first time that a helicopter and a Goodyear blimp were used in a Dominican election. The blimp (emblazoned with the words: VOTE DEM LAB) was owned by OJ Seraphine’s Democratic Labour Party and was towed by a trawler leased to the PIC by Guyana’s Forbes Burnham. OJ Seraphine also moved from one pre-election rally to another aboard the Dem Lab leased helicopter. Afraid of further revolutions, such as had occurred in Grenada and Nicaragua in 1979, Bob Woodward – the reporter who broke the Watergate Scandal – reported that the CIA gave \$100,000 to the DFP, along with other material support. OJ Seraphine’s Dem Lab hastily distributed plastic cowboy hats and relief supplies such as galvanize to shore up its support, but it was to no avail. The DFP responded with a huge motorcade which roved the island called “The Freedom Train.” In a marked indicator of the role of Cold War politics of the time, the conservative DFP partisans wore t-shirts with the slogan: No Russia! No Cuba! No Labour! The DLM tried to rouse the population with well scripted and educational talks, to include land reform, the development of light industry, equal rights for women and Caribs support for African liberation, and good relations with Cuba and the Non-Aligned Movement. Its campaign was, however, poorly funded and not well organized. Further the population, heavily Christian, was told that if the DLM won it would close churches and distribute the land and possessions of its opponents to the poor and lazy. The DLM was painted as a communistic menace to be feared. Overall, the Dominican populace was tired of instability and the DFP seemed offer security under

the leadership of a solid establishment lawyer, Mary Eugenia Charles. The DLM led by Dr. Bill “Para” Riviere, hitherto untested, made a good showing with about 12 % of the vote. Even then, the DFP eked out only 51% of the vote. The remaining votes were split between Dominica Democratic Labour Party of interim Prime Minister OJ Serpahine and the Dominica Labour Party of a still defiant Patrick John. That defiance would soon show its face in more deadly and menacing ways.

The sign at the DLP headquarters in Roseau states that it is the party of “National Independence & Progress.” However, it must be clearly noted that the DLP did not lose power in 1980 because it had ushered in independence, progress or social justice. It was where it deviated from its core values of independence, progress and social justice that it opened the way for the DFP. While the DFP always had a solid core of partisans in the Roseau area, it had been unable to expand beyond its urban upper class roots for a long time – until the DLP leadership strayed from its philosophical moorings. It must be considered that Dominica boasts a vibrant civic activism that spans almost 200 years; with a press often critical of government misdeeds. Thus, it is clear that there is exists a national consensus which demands that any government which seek to rule our land do so in accord with the principles of competence and integrity. That integrity driven pace was set by early leaders such as Loblack, Allfrey and LeBlanc. When it was lost, the party fell from grace.

The early years of DFP rule saw much political instability. Dominica’s small army, the Dominica Defense Force was disbanded in mid 1981 after its involvement in coup plotting at the instigation Patrick John. That year Patrick John and DDF Captain Malcolm Reid was arrested and jailed, after a tip to government from coup plot participant Algernon Maffie who had been invited to partake of a mercenary invasion of Dominica. Maffie, an ally of Rosie Douglas while in Canada during the black power movement activism of the 1960s-1970s, considered himself a patriot and would not go along with the coup plot. John had sought out Nazis and Ku Klux Klan members for his leadership of the *Operation Red Dog* invasion plot in cahoots with White supremacist Mike Purdue and Wolfgang Droege. Several people lost their lives due to these machinations by John and his allies to include the Police Officer Alexander, DDF Corporal Howell Piper, and DDF Sargeant Major Ashton Benjamin; many other police officers were wounded alongside the former named deceased during the gun battles which erupted

during the December 18, 1981 coup attempt. During the December 18, 1981 coup attempt the DDF soldiers had attacked and partially occupied police headquarters during a night time gun battle and had severely wounded Police Commissioner Oliver N. Phillip who –bravely- had sought to retake the facility. The rebellious soldiers also unsuccessfully assaulted the Stock Farm Prison in an attempt to free Patrick John, Captain Malcolm Reid and former DBS radio personality Dennis Joseph. Commander of the DDF, Major Franklin Newton, was later hung for his role in the affair. In that descent into madness, misdirection and lust for power had reached its apogee.

The DFP went on to rule for fifteen years and brought some stability to the island. The banana industry grew and so did the standard of living; educational opportunities saw some expansion and primary health care got a boost. Prime Minister Charles' most notable foreign affair involvement surrounded her leadership of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean states which, with US forces, intervened in Grenada to restore order on October 25, 1983. On October 19, 1983, Grenada's Prime Minister Maurice Bishop had been killed, along with several cabinet member and civilians, by his former allies at Fort Rupert. That island was placed under a 24 hour curfew by General Hudson Austin and a Revolutionary Military Council. Charles had studied Latin and French in her late teens at the Grenada Convent and, like most Dominicans, considered Grenadians kith and kin. As a leader, Prime Minister Charles was well respected by her regional and international peers and received very favorable international press coverage after her appearance with Ronald Reagan at the White House prior to the intervention. The dispatch of US paratrooper s and battleships to Grenada on October 25, 1983 was a dramatic demonstration of her successful lobbying of the US leadership.

Despite such successes, little was done to alter the mono crop economy which depended on bananas. The banana industry had generally done well, and there was no sense of urgency to massively introduce other income generating crops – though the Taiwanese agriculture mission introduced new pineapple and melon varieties. New tourism marketing initiatives were engaged and two cruise ship berths built at the new Roseau waterfront and Portsmouth. Yet, little development of agro processing took place. A person of some homely charm and personal honesty, Prime Minister Eugenia Charles administration was never wracked by allegations of her ministers profiting from their public office or engaging in secret deals affecting the national interest. Indeed, most of her ministers were viewed favorably, and

seen as generally competent. In one instance, early in her term, she fired Minister of Public Works Henry “Babs” Dyer who was alleged to have used a Public Works truck to do work for his personal benefit. Such a dramatic display of a no-nonsense approach to governance was to endear her to the newly emergent Dominican middle class who expected honesty and competence from their public servants. Ultimately, however, Mrs. Charles was lacking in the visionary and inclusive leadership necessary to mobilize Dominicans to build an even more prosperous society. With her administration caught in the vice of US led Cold War politics, many with opposing political views were victimized and Dominican graduates from Cuban universities were not welcomed into the fold and incorporated into development planning. No concerted effort was made to create a new economic platform for the many secondary school graduates. As a result, an exodus of approximately 10,000 Dominicans left our shores during that period to seek better opportunities overseas.

It was only the selfless work of heroes such as Mike Douglas, Rosie Douglas, Pierre Charles and other worthy strugglers for justice during the period 1980-2000 that any return to power was possible for the Labour Party. Even then it was in alliance with its erstwhile nemesis, the DFP. The DLP policy was one of building alliances amongst Dominica’s opposition DFP and others in 2000 for the common good. They stood against what was perceived as a United Workers Party (UWP) immersed in corrupt dealings with newly minted Chinese merchants and self-dealings by some of its ministers. The UWP had been formed in the 1990s when Labour seemed unable to remove an entrenched DFP regime. It was comprised of well known businessmen such as Julius Timothy, Sheridan Gregoire and Norris Prevost who had – by education and diligence - worked their way up from modest working class origins. Former DLM principal and community development activists Ronald Green joined with the UWP; he brought along with him former DLM sympathizers such as Francisco Esprit and Cuban graduates such as Sobers Esprit and Julian Prevost. Lennox Linton, a radio and television journalist of note was a well regarded ally of the UWP in that period.

By 1995 the UWP had gained enough ground to remove the DFP from office in the elections of that year. The UWP championed universal secondary education, built new roads, and schools. It made history by establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba and sent more students to universities overseas in a four year period than any government prior. However, while it brought an end to the DFP regime and claimed to be a social democratic

party like the DLP, the UWP seemed bereft of any clear guiding philosophy of governance. Soon, charges were made by the opposition that its ministers were engaged in unethical behavior and contracts which favored their political allies at the expense of transparent dealings and good governance. While these allegations were hotly denied by UWP's leader, Prime Minister Edison James, they were enough to cause its defeat in the 2000 national elections.

While Roosevelt "Rosie" Douglas became Prime Minister in 2000, his term was short lived. Considered our Independence Hero, for his role in that movement – and his earlier leadership of the civil rights movement in Canada - he was to fall victim to cabinet infighting and threats to his leadership role by those who criticized him as being a poor manager. While Douglas was not wedded to sitting at his desk, he inspired overseas Dominicans to invest their time and resources in Dominica. In September 2000 Douglas embarked on a trade and investment mission to Europe and the United States. On September 22, 2000 he gave his last major address at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, calling for friendship and understanding with the United States; better education for our people; greater market access for Caribbean products; and assistance to our people in science, technology and agriculture. Upon his return from that trip, he returned to rumors of a plot to remove him from office. On October 1, 2000 he died from a massive heart attack in circumstances deemed suspicious by those closest to him.

Rosie's greatest legacy to Dominica was a sense of patriotic commitment and an energized Diaspora movement more engaged in the development process. As a tribute to his efforts a Roosevelt Douglas Foundation was founded in October 2000. In alliance with the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences, three Diaspora in the Development Process symposiums were held – Brooklyn New York 2001, London, England 2002 and Roseau, Dominica 2002 which promoted unity and development projects for Dominica amongst our island's far flung sons and daughters.

Rosie was succeeded by Pierre "Pierro" Charles of Grandbay who had been a former General Secretary of the National Youth Council and a front line leader in the national liberation struggle. A founding member of the Dominica Cuba Friendship Society he had led Dominica's delegation to the 11th World Festival of Youth and Students in July 1978. He came into leadership at time of economic crisis and stringent IMF conditions related to

its assistance to the island. However, as Prime Minister, Charles successfully steered the island away from looming financial collapse during the period 2000-2003, as banana prices and a scant Inland Revenue constricted government spending. Again, he was to be plagued by cabinet infighting and calls for his resignation by younger members of cabinet who disagreed with his leadership style and policies. In that context his health worsened and he died of a heart attack on January 4, 2004. He was replaced by a young US educated teacher of much charisma, Roosevelt Skerrit. Prime Minister Skerrit quickly established ties with the Peoples Republic of China and got assistance to complete the Windsor Park Stadium which the UWP had left as a few holes in the ground. He fostered close relations to Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and facilitated the building of an oil storage facility at Belfast. He led Dominica into membership of the Venezuelan led Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), via which the island accessed financial assistance to stave of the ill effects of low productivity in the local economy. Cuba provided assistance in refurbishing the nursing school and doctors to staff an intensive care unit at the Princess Margaret Hospital. Skerrit's mobilizing of foreign assistance for Dominica was notable and exceptional in many respects. However, allegations of unethical behavior, lack of accountability and transparency in office were raising concerns in the latter part of his first full term in office. With a tardiness which troubled many, the government only recently provided the resources to inaugurate the Integrity in Public Office (IPO) Act in September 2008; doing so only after much outcry in the media.

How do we Treat Each other or build teams?

The double shock (in 2000 and 2004) of two Prime Ministers fatally stricken by heart attacks in less than five years robbed the Labour government of two selfless and brave leaders. Neither of them, despite their detractors, was ever said to self-seeking or unethical in their governance of the country. Few seemed to reflect on why two leaders could have perished from – hitherto undiagnosed- heart problems in such a short space of time. But even fewer still spent a moment to reflect on how their deaths may well have been a comment on what is wrong with our society. What could have been the behaviors, manner of interpersonal dealings, indiscipline or contempt for the ethos of respect and charity of spirit, which doomed these men? What was the perverse human intervention - if any - or karmic force which intruded or conspired to end the lives of these two legendary leaders so suddenly?

We must be frank in all things, even at the risk of condemnation or scorn. In my view, while we are generally a kind and God fearing people, our standards are slipping. Too many Dominicans today are coarse, rude, dishonest, hateful, lacking in amity, prone to corrosive jealousies, prone to profanity in public and averse to team building. Too few are willing to be respectful to those whom they meet, or complimentary to their colleagues or neighbors. Civic organizations are weak and few see themselves as agents of social change. Instead too many – in particular those in the professional class who should be more civic minded - are comfort seeking, show scant concern for volunteerism, and seem content to occupy the spectators gallery or the critics perch. The ruthless partisan seems to hold sway amongst the chattering classes and the center cannot hold. Do gooders are too few and far between and scoundrels reside in low and high places. With such an ignoble flood how can we better the nation?

Scant regard is paid to any appeal to the better angels of each others' nature. Loyalty to principle is too often a rarity and promises seldom kept. Amidst this all, arrogance abounds, and too few reflect on the fact that good interpersonal relationships provide the key to the development of our country.

Today, the study of human behavioral science is a major enterprise in all advanced societies. That science instructs on how best to cooperate, collaborate and build teams to achieve common objectives: traits which seem lacking in much of our society and government. At this juncture, all Dominicans, in or out of government, must reflect on the elements of team building, competence, loyalty and integrity without which any movement or civilization can long survive.

Spiritual Transformation & the Struggle for Development

Those who formed the DLP, DFP, DLM or UWP must all have been guided by a mental vision prior to taking action to found their parties. It is therefore clear, that the thought precedes the act. However, as a people, we keep being disappointed by politicians and leaders of all stripes when we fail to appreciate that real change and development first begins from the internal; the spirit. Someone who is dedicated to a spiritual path of sharing, love and progress can easily be discerned. One need to look only at what that person focuses on in the material plain. Are they greedy? Do they keep their word? Are they honest with handling money which belongs to others? Do they

abuse their office for personal gain? Are they consistent in the pursuit of the national interest? Do they volunteer to improve the quality of life in their community? Are they willing to share the knowledge with others or mentor our young? Do they strive to educate our people for a better future? Do they fall easily into the embrace of pleasure seeking after wine, women and song? Do they become arrogant once they possess power? Are they charitable in spirit? Do they volunteer their time or resources to noble community development causes? Are they profane or abusive to others? Are they unwilling to apologize when they have wronged someone? Are they ostentatious in dress and other material things?

Key to finding our internal moral compass is what guides our thoughts. Mostly, our thoughts are fed by what we engage via reading, visual stimulation, our environment or other stimuli. If one believes in God, then one accepts that we are channels for a supreme being. Yet, experience teaches us that simply professing a belief in God's goodness is no cure for that which ails us. One must live the word, organize around the word, and preach the word with clarity and integrity; teach the word to transform the society. We must live the gospel of social change in our very lives or we will continue to disappoint ourselves and our people.

Too many leaders prey on the ignorance and weaknesses of our people and make vacuous promises to them or try buying them with things. They deny them any real historical and political education of a kind which empowers them and allow them independence of thought. When last has any leader of our beloved homeland convened an assembly to discuss our constitution; to reaffirm the founding principles of the nation? At this time it bears noting the founding ethos of our nation as engraved in the preamble to the 1978 national independence constitution:

WHEREAS the People of Dominica-

- a. have affirmed that the Commonwealth of Dominica is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions, the dignity of the human person, and the equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed by their Creator;
- b. respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in so distributing the material resources of the community as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means

- of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;
- c. have asserted their belief in a democratic society in which persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in the institutions of the national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for lawfully-constituted authority;
 - d. recognise that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law;
 - e. desire that their Constitution should make provision for ensuring the protection in the Commonwealth of Dominica of fundamental human rights and freedoms;

NOW, THEREFORE, the following provisions shall have effect as the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Dominica:

These words resound: social justice, family, common good, integrity, rule of law, merit, and respect for moral and spiritual values. What becomes of founding principles where we cease to practice them? How can we practice these principles if we do not even know of them? We cannot plant bananas and reap oranges; it is the same with civic responsibility and patriotism. Where it is not consistently taught and practiced – in particular by our leaders – we will have a wayward population. We must introduce a civics curriculum in schools and craft a **National Patriotic Education (NPE)**. The NPE would familiarize students with the constitution, civics and best business practices. So dedicated, we would likely persuade most Dominicans too exert maximum effort for the cause of national progress. Absent such an effort, we will remain mired in backwardness.

The above noted preamble to our constitution must be in every school, every office, every store and every church. It must be framed and hung inside every home, where we are to be a serious people intent on development.

Those of us who are conscious must foster among our people, a command of our history and the struggles of our people to overcome backwardness. So equipped, we ensure our people can make better choices; be more discerning. Absent that, we mislead our people by adorning each other with labels of Labour, Freedom, UWP, without any deep seated appreciation of what such labels mean for our long term development and survival. The survival of our people can proceed where we are of one accord. We must then have a guiding motto. It should be something upon which we can all agree and which has a noble legacy. A good choice for a guiding motto at our 30th

anniversary of independence would be: **“Unity in the cause of merit, national independence and social justice for all.”** Or we can cleave to **Koudmen** (Cooperative or collective effort) as our guiding principle, as it was the method of cooperative effort used by our ancestors to survive the poverty of means and degradation common to slavery and colonial bondage. **Koudmen** was the spirit which was utilized to successfully promote the many cooperative credit unions around Dominica in the 1950s. Maybe a new motto could be: **Koudmen, Justice, and Prosperity.**

Similar national purpose can be found in all cohesive nation-states which have had a semblance of progress: The US and the primacy of its constitution’s preamble that “All men are created equal...”, The ethic of *Italia Irredenta* fostered the unification of modern Italy; the fervent Cuban nationalism of Jose Marti and the cry of *Patria O Muerte* (homeland or death) was key to that island’s independence struggle. India chose as its guiding principle: “a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic with justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all.” Singapore, a nation-state with no natural fresh water courses, less land mass or fertile soil than Dominica, and made up of disparate groupings of Chinese, Indians and Malaysians, seemed at great disadvantage at independence. To guide itself to prosperity its visionary leadership grasped that need for a guiding philosophy thus:

"Reward for Work" and "Work for Reward". Meritocracy is practiced that rewards hard work and talent. People are encouraged to do well and they are rewarded based on their abilities and hard work. For example, students are rewarded for doing well in their studies Meritocracy gives everybody in the society an equal opportunity to achieve their best and be rewarded for their best performance regardless of race, religion and socio-economic background.

I have chosen Singapore as it is smaller than Dominica and has fewer natural resources than we do. However, it has had a visionary leader in former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who favors honesty, hard work and thrift as his guide to good governance. His focus on competence, loyalty and integrity in governance has made his country a world financial power. Considered authoritarian because of his focus on discipline, he has made it mandatory that all government leaders must have first served in the Singapore National Cadet Corps (SNCC). The SNCC motto is “Leaders of

Character for the Future.” Barbados, a neighboring Caribbean island, has what is considered the most competent government system in the region and favors a similar focus on youth leadership via their cadet program. The Barbados Cadet Corps is the best organized in the whole region. Via their cadet corps, they program their students to have a spiritual focus on a “love of country and competence in execution of all tasks” to advance that island state.

Once we have a guiding motto or philosophy, then we must be faithful to it in practice. While we are all free to favor our particular religion, our national philosophy must become our secular faith, of sorts. All the major faiths: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism favor good deeds and charity of spirit. Dominica is a majority Christian nation as far as faith goes. However, that same Christian faith could be claimed by those who practiced slavery, slaughtered the Caribs, and enforced colonialism. So faith itself is no guarantor of societal progress where words are not matched by deeds. Our deeds must be informed by that noble spirit upon which our philosophy of development rests.

There are many countries in the world which are rich in material resources. Yet, their people remain poor because their leadership failed to undergo a spiritual transformation for the betterment of all mankind. Spiritual leadership is the best. Such leadership is found where good words are matched by good deeds. Where our past heroes have retained respect it is due to their selflessness and a widely held belief that they served – not themselves – but the common good. Success for our society therefore will require that we study our history, observe that which represents the best in our past, and strive for the most noble and visionary future.

To do so however, we must trust each other and trust the people. We cannot promote our nation where we routinely distrust each other, run government by secret deals, or favor others over our own. Such distrust of our own is not restricted to politicians or government. Dominican waiters in restaurants are often known to attend to visitors first, before serving their own people. The blinkers of self hate imposed by 300 years of slavery and colonialism still fetters the minds of too many. Indeed the feeling of inferiority and mental captivity bred by slavery and colonialism still saddles too many Dominicans with the shackles of a defeated people. We have not listened well to Bob Marley when he sang out: *Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds*. That mental slavery and

self hate has real societal costs and consequences. It can be seen in the increased crime rate where some shamelessly mimic the thug life and drug use fashionable in other societies, instead of carving our own noble course. It is why we lash out at each other incessantly and disdain our own without knowing why. It is why blind favoritism to outside financial interest continues to undermine our ability to promote productivity in our agriculture and industrial spheres. The same Dominican worker or farmer, who performs lackadaisically at home, works two or three jobs when overseas. That productivity overseas is not simply because of the immigrant ethic which compels performance for survival; rather it is due to an enabling environment where fair reward for work performed is more apt to occur. I am convinced that we also have to teach better work habits and thrift to our people; something now lacking amongst too many young Dominicans caught up in consumerism and the lure of easy money offered by the drug trade. Even the casual use of the word “brother,” “Sister,” “comrade” has oft times lost meaning to the extent that it makes mockery of these terms of endearment – where the behavior shown is to be opposite of their meaning. Dominica is a blessed land with great potential to be an oasis in a world torn by discord, but we must put our house in order; both mentally and on a material plain. We have enormous value to add to the human patrimony, but we must let it shine. So divided, disaffected and confused about our intrinsic value, we continue to diminish our worth and export our people to enrich other lands.

Putting Dominica & Dominicans First

Firstly, I must state that putting Dominica or Dominicans first is not to be xenophobic or anti-foreign investment. That commitment to the nation is evoked because we witness a government which increasingly behaves in a manner at variance with that history of commitment to the national interest. Be it in energy, telecommunications, or commerce, Dominica and Dominicans seem to be consigned to petty spheres of economic influence and are increasingly disinherited from any control of the commanding heights of our economy. While we must work with foreign interest and encourage foreign investment, we must have a plan and it cannot be done capriciously or whimsically. All investment must be part of strategic plan for the development of the homeland. It must always be that we encourage such investment to strengthen the abilities and means of our people, not

weaken or undermine that which we hold dear. To do otherwise would be to merely exchange one colonial master for another.

Most recently, in a dramatic example of such deviance, the current government which purports to be one led by the Labour Party, gave a geothermal energy license to a foreign concern, despite the fact that the local firm Clean Energy Corporation of Dominica and its predecessor, The Dominica Sustainable Energy Corporation (DSEC) had led the development of renewable energy in Dominica. The position of these local entities was for the energy resources to be owned and managed by a Government Linked Company (GLC) as has been done successfully in many newly independent countries such as India, Singapore and Malaysia. No effort has been made to devise a National Renewable Energy Agency to develop the resource for the benefit of our people as has been advised. Not even the government's own energy unit was involved in the licensing process and no local lawyer or government advisor can be found who will publicly state they saw the document or gave it approval, prior to signature. At 30th years of independence – or at any time whatsoever - such misbehavior is totally unacceptable. All contracts for the exploitation of our natural resources should follow this path to ensure transparency and maximum benefit to our people:

- Be reviewed by competent legal counsel and a Contract Review Advisory Committee made up of an economist/accountant (persons with the competence to review the matter for the benefit to the country); a business person (one who can assess its greater benefit to local commerce which benefits our local businesses); and a technical person (one who understands the science underlying the matter at hand).
- Be published in whole (or summary of its pertinent parts) in the national gazette – unless where some extraordinary reason which comports with our democratic tradition, precludes same;
- Include a clause which penalizes (to include a ban on future dealings with Dominica's government) the contracting party for any kick-backs to, or corrupt dealings with, public servants;
- Be inclusive of technology transfer and training of local competence terms so as to enhance our indigenous development process and control of our destiny;
- Be open to public bidding & public disclosure of how the winning bid was chosen;

- Be inclusive of a majority or significant government control, where it is not a Build Own Transfer (BOT) contract for a term certain;
- Be subject to debate in parliament where it concerns major control or use of our airspace, land or territorial waters by a private entity – local or foreign.
- Be compliant with the best environmental practices.

The summer 2008 contract with West Indies Power did not follow the above principles. These conditions are the norm in developing countries such as Singapore, India and Barbados which have all made great strides by placing the national interest at the forefront. Such an act was a betrayal of the Labour Party's founding philosophy and the national interest. More so, where the geothermal license did not comport with the government's own regulatory scheme devised for such projects. The misnamed West Indies Power company was given hegemony over that geothermal development in the south of the island for a paltry return to our government in royalties. The fact that such an important contract granted to a foreign owned concern hegemony over a portion of the national territory was not made public prior to signing, is a squalid example of poor governance. That the said contract was not reviewed by any state regulatory agency represents a lack of transparency in dealings affecting the national interest. Such behavior by a Labour government represents a retrograde step which undermines confidence in the party and government and betrays its noble heritage of putting the country first at all times. Modern nation-states run on energy. Absent control over the development of our energy resources, progress will remain elusive and Dominica will remain backward. Control over the income generated by our renewable energy resources is what will ensure our independence has real meaning. Once again, a Dominican government has blundered by yielding control of our energy future to domination by outside forces inimical to our best interest.

Absent a focus on "country first" which is inherent to the national question, none of the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICS) in Asia would have prospered. Their governments skillfully wove into the national fabric: self-reliance principles, economic and social justice, ethical leadership, and innovations in management and science. In 1979, the DLP lost power where it forgot the importance of such nationalistic principles. Prior, its policies were unassailable and it racked up many victories. Such victories can continue where we do not lose focus, by failing to put the interest of the people first. Defeat is certain where those principles fall victim to selfish

interest, corrupt dealings, lack of due diligence, attention to detail, incompetence or avarice.

Such delinquent behavior in governance evinces a fundamental lack of self knowledge and self respect. All who consider themselves self respecting Dominicans must do more to appreciate the importance of understanding our history. With such knowledge there can be no self respect; lack of self respect results in poor choices made by the government and the governed.

As civic minded people, we need to know of our heroes and must be proud of them. We, therefore, must study the principles that inspired Loblack, Allfrey, LeBlanc, Eugenia, JB Charles, Rawle, Rosie and Pierro. They were all nationalists, and/or socialists; in that they put love of our island and its people first, and fostered social justice—before all else; certainly, before self. While Eugenia Charles was criticized as a conservative, she was possessed of great dignity and self respect which benefited most Dominicans. In many ways she continued the social programs started by the DLP such as home ownership, cooperatives and education. While her party was considered conservative and assailed by those who favored a socialist path of development, there were never any serious allegations that she used her political office to gain wealth or sold out the natural resources of the country. Neither were there any allegations that she sold off national assets via hidden contracts which she refused to disclose upon being called upon to do so, as is the case with the summer 2008 geothermal fiasco. In that instance a relatively unknown Russian-banker backed firm was given dominion over our geothermal resource in the south of the island in complicity with a so-called Labour government which has lost its way. Negotiated in secret, with no tender or public disclosure, not even the residents of the area were consulted; it was presented as a *fait accompli*.

To Eugenia Charles' credit she gained control of our energy company Domlec, from ruinous foreign control; something we must revisit after it was sold for a pittance in the past. So she too deserves credit for wisdom shown on ownership of our natural resources by Dominicans. Even the United Workers Party did well in reaching out to Cuba and making higher education via such alliances with friendly nations a priority. Wisely, the UWP continued promoting social democracy. Where it erred, and was seen as self dealing and not acting in the national interest it lost respect and soon lost power.

History thus shows that the overwhelming majority of Dominicans will not support any government which appears immersed in self dealing, unethical behavior or betrays the nation. It is wise, where such is learnt and appreciated by all. To that end, pursuit of the national interest requires the DLP – or any government which seeks to rule our affairs - to maintain a deep sense of inclusion of all citizens – at home and abroad - in the development process and the avoidance of corruption and political victimization.

In certain countries today where greed, unethical behaviour in public office, racism, class prejudice and a desire for imperial empire have gained favor, there is a decline in fortune. As of October 21, 2008, the greed exhibited by Wall Street traders and the US corporate elite has led to the virtual collapse of the US economy. It is of interest that those who once showed a blind adherence to capitalist “free market” orthodoxy have now called on the US taxpayer to bail them out from the failure of the rampant speculation on Wall Street which created no value and hurt the US national interest. The state now is asked to intervene with \$700 Billion USD in tax payers money, to inject liquidity into a failed system. Will our government ever be able to rescue our people where the industries in energy, information technology, agriculture, we have urged them to build are in foreign hands and outside our control? How will we, as a nation-state, ever be able to accumulate the capital to propel our economy forward and feed our people? Who will bail us out, where our country’s leaders routinely fail to support initiatives such as Ronald Abraham’s Marpin Telecoms and a Government linked Geothermal Company as proposed by Clean Energy Corporation?

Today we witness the rape of our land for aggregate exports that is dominated by non-Dominican owned companies. Again, our people are paid a pittance and there is scant accountability in the export of such a vital, non renewable, resource. Absent such control of the commanding heights of our economy we can never prosper or chart our own destiny. We will remain captive to others and subject to modern day economic slavery.

Let us observe the mistakes of others and seek to avoid the calamities born of the arrogance of power. Historically, the DLP has been more than about politics for politics sake or holding office. Holding office must always mean adherence to practices which advance social justice and the national interest: the essence of the Labour party’s philosophy.

The struggle for national liberation does not end with attaining office. Indeed for victory to be won, the early founders of the DLP felt that they had to transform society for the better, in all spheres. Hence their promotion of our local art, poetry, prose, music: a new culture of a liberated people. Hence, we saw a new national dress, the shirt jack, creole music, local cuisine and the “buy local” campaign. The DLP founders espoused a value system premised on service to the less privileged, ethical behavior, national and cultural pride and equality of opportunity. Such values are in keeping with the Christian principles favored by most of our people. The DLP, therefore, was born of a desire to maximize freedom for the many, not just a few. Thus it has a rich legacy which we would do well to follow in the years ahead. Absent a core set of guiding principles our victory can be hijacked by opportunists and self-serving persons who adore power and privilege, with scant regard for civic duty or patriotic endeavor.

Speaking at the low point of the Labour Party after its defeat the 1980 elections, former Attorney General Eustace Hazelwood Francis said, “The DLP was founded upon a fortress of good intentions.” May we never be distracted from a sense of duty to our country’s best hopes. May we always maintain clarity on the national question. May we always strive to live by the lofty intentions of those who gave their best years and lives for the victory of the Labour movement and the rise of the common man and woman of Dominica to a place of dignity and decency. As certain as night follows day, only defeat and ruin can come when one betrays that noble cause evident in the lives of our national heroes.

In 2008, in face of the international economic crisis and an increasingly indiscipline and unjust country, only *a broad democratic front* of patriotic leaders and an informed and energized citizenry imbued with patriotism and civic virtue can stave off disaster. The oft-seen party tribalism born of Labour, Freedom Party and the Workers Party schisms, must cease in view of our absolute need for unanimity on the issue of honesty in public and private dealings. Blind partisanship which favors views such as: “I support my party, right or wrong!” Or, “Leave my Prime Minister alone!” are unacceptable. Such views ill serve our intelligence. They merely serve to cover-up wrongdoing and prevent us from discussion of real issues which affect our lives or the national interest.

The Urgent Need for the Politics of Strategic Convergence

Legendary abolitionist Abraham Lincoln once said: A house divided against itself cannot stand. He was paraphrasing Jesus in the New Testament and he was right. Within two years of his making that statement the US descended into civil war. At year 30 of our independence, we are as divided as we were in 1979. The Labour/Freedom coalition of 2000 is in tatters. The progressives who supported the DLP are now with the UWP or its new-found ally, Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM) of Dr. William Riviere. There is no real inclusion in decision making between the government and the opposition parties which is the hope of all genuine Dominican nationalists and was the desire of Rosie Douglas: a sincere and selfless exponent of alliance building in the national interest.

Yet, we have more in common that unites us in common decency than that which divides us. No reputable party in Dominica is against free education, socialized health care or the rights of persons of African or Carib descent. No reputable party in Dominica stands against land reform or ownership of land by the landless. No reputable party is in favor of a return to the class and color prejudices which imprisoned the hopes of Dominicans in the period prior to universal adult suffrage in 1951. No reputable Dominican party publicly favors the sell-out of the country to foreign interest. No reputable party in Dominica supports a return to the days of colonialism. Granted the foregoing, now is the time to acknowledge the social democratic nature of Dominican society and craft a **strategic convergence among all parties**. We can all agree on making real the principle imbedded in the preamble to Dominica's constitution and the principles of social justice and a government which works in the national interest. Strategic convergence means coming together around a common set of guiding principles to save the nation. Strategic convergence means that we place our time and resources into working together for the common good, not engaged in incessant criticism of each other or disruptive behavior.

Now is the time to bind even closer to our Dominica Diaspora populations worldwide and engage in such worthy initiatives as the Diaspora Bank championed by Dr. Thomson Fontaine and others at the 2001 Development Symposium in Brooklyn, New York. That bank would access the savings of those Dominicans around the globe, manage their savings in a diversified basket of the world's leading currencies and precious metals and give them financial security – while helping them invest in Dominica. There are countries which have been able to harness their strength born of functional

unity as explained above; so too we can. Those common nationalistic principles should include a focus on:

1. Teaching of civics in and out of schools
2. Promotion of volunteerism in the national interest
3. Promotion of integrity driven government and rule of law
4. Promotion of Dominica as a meritocratic state
5. Development of a national patriotic education
6. Development of Dominica's fisheries, agriculture, light industry and merchant marine
7. Promote Dominica as a showplace of renewable energy science
8. Includes members of the opposition in commissions and other meaningful facets of the development process
9. Provide representation in parliament for the Diaspora Dominican communities and a financial system which develops that linkage.
10. Promote an economic system where the state fosters social equity; as in the greatest good for the greatest number
11. Ensure the commanding heights of the economy are owned and managed in the national interest with said income benefitting the majority of our citizens not a narrow elite;
12. Promote a culture of excellence, innovation, disciplined productivity and a love of justice for all; not some.

While that list is not exhaustive it provides a good template upon which we can all agree and from which we can work. We can also dust off the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and the Diaspora Policy Paper (DPP) and formally take guidance from those documents which were prepared at government request and seem to be languishing in some dead zone.

While the coming together of our political leaders is hard to do, we have done it before when faced with crisis. With low production, a floundering banana industry, and high unemployment, we are at a point crisis now; though we have been partly shielded from its bitter bite by Venezuela's generous budgetary support, European Union (EU) assistance and the gifts from foreign allies such as China. But we cannot prosper by aid alone and we must be prepared to quickly build up our agriculture, industry to meet the

challenges of the financial crisis of 2008. Only such a strategic convergence amongst all patriotic forces can save the day.

The party, leader, or leaders, best able to craft such a **united front** will be best suited to protect and promote the national interest. The leadership we need now must be visionary and diligent; calm, yet passionate enough to inspire and unite the nation; firm yet flexible enough to listen to good counsel as need be; willing to be surrounded by wise men and women, and not given to sycophants and party acolytes merely seeking favors who sing empty praises in adoration of the leader. He or she must be inclusive of opponents where they have merit which aids the national interest; that leader must not subject his/her reputation to diminution by the taking of gifts or favors, or abusing the privileges of his/her office. He or she must be consistent in championing the national interest at all times. He or she must be humble, while dignified; they must be able to abandon false pride and arrogance. They must be able to calmly accept criticism and engage in self criticism as appropriate. They must be strong enough to apologize for their mistakes and make good on any wrongs committed against the national interest. Who will that be? The field is always open for wise leaders to step to the fore. Only time will tell. But, absent such a strategic convergence and sure footed leadership, we risk plunging the nation into fratricidal political conflict with the result that Dominica becomes yet another failed state. We cannot, we dare not, tread that ignoble path. In the main, we are a good and decent people and can, and must, do better. Let us therefore bind ourselves together in such a course. So committed, we cannot fail. Without that path of unity of purpose, we cannot win victory for our people. In so doing, we would make our ancestors proud and imbue our 30th Independence anniversary with real meaning.