

# OPPOSITION POLITICS IN DOMINICA: HOW LABOUR CAME TO POWER

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Most analyses of Caribbean politics tend to focus on the political faction which happens to be in control of the state, while little attention is paid to the official political opposition. And if by some stroke of luck that opposition happens to displace an incumbent regime, the pundits are often at a loss to explain the peculiar circumstances which informed that situation.

The aim of this paper is to explain how the nature of the Commonwealth Caribbean state structure has influenced the formation, character and the behavioral patterns of the loyal Dominican opposition. The Dominican political structure, like the others in the Caribbean, demands the existence of a credible, informed and independent, if not vibrant opposition party. To be sure, some may argue that the state bequeathed to the region "is [mainly] a special institution, organized [as] a public power ... to impose sanctions [with the use] of an army, militia, police, etc. which are separated from the general population."<sup>1</sup> Therefore an opposition is superfluous. Winning factions so thoroughly dominate state and society, the opposition is reduced to reacting to government initiatives rather than advancing its own agenda for public consideration. A curious political legacy and government's intimidating relationship to business may further explain the futility of the opposition.

## THE POLITICAL LEGACY

That Caribbean political system, which surely could be included in Samuel P. Huntington's *Third Wave* schema,<sup>2</sup> has emerged in the region. Others are so impressed with this prototype that they have described it as a system which approximates first world politics operating within third world economic settings. This suggests that Caribbean systems are so democratic, even they failed to produce developed capitalist markets, prerequisites for the realization of liberal democracies, that they are models for third world political development.<sup>3</sup>

But the Caribbean inherited a political system which can best be described as an "elected dictatorship" or an electoral democracy. It is supposed to be pluralist; power is dispersed, and there is widespread accountability to the electorate. Instead, a system has emerged where the opposition has been eclipsed and marginalized. The opposition is not really a *de facto* counterweight to the governing faction, even though it is an integral part of the legislative structure; the unit created to monitor the executive.

However, the general legislative branch does not always influence governance. Policy is often decided before it reaches the legislative arena, and in many instances, non-elected administrative personnel have more impact on policy than the elected cabinet.<sup>4</sup>

At the terminal stage of colonialism, power and the authority to make decisions were not passed on to sub-committees in an emerging elected legislature (opposition included). This could have more easily operationalized that desired pluralism, the *sine qua non* of that democratic process. There were no independent state agencies, public enterprises and the like. Public interest groups were virtually absent. Think tanks neither existed nor did they evolve to initiate and sustain the debate about the nature of that state Caribbeans were about to construct.<sup>5</sup>

The independence plan for the separate islands was not that significantly different from the colonial one. The older civil servants, the erstwhile nemeses of the emerging charismatic leaders remained intensely loyal to the departing colonial authorities. Many quickly retired at independence and left.

Their replacements were very energetic and enthusiastic about the newly won status of the region but they owed their positions and careers to the emerging nationalists. These newer civil servants gained much influence over state institutions and were more highly regarded than many members of the elected legislature. G.E. Mills writes that because of the critical roles that these played and their own vested interest in preserving their jobs and influence, they could not be described as neutral actors working to uphold the principles of good government. They had to be blatantly partisan to ensure the retention of their jobs.<sup>6</sup>

As the Caribbean variant of democracy evolved, both sitting governments and loyal opposition essentially agreed to the principle that "the group which first passes the post" will have exclusive right to not only run the state but also to partially own that state for a specific period of time. Government and opposition agreed that all power will be vested in the winning team. And more succinctly, power would rest in the charismatic leader or in "revolutionary" power elites, as Paul Singh calls them, because they "believed that when they acquired power, they need not recognize any limits because power has essentially devolved into the hands of the people and as the people's representatives, they are omnipotent."<sup>7</sup> The elites are the people and the states all wrapped into one.

Predictably, partisanship became the norm as segmented interests coalesced around narrowly defined agendas. The emerging cleavages failed to include the spirit of a solidifying pluralism which demanded constructive, intensive search for power to make decisions for the commonweal.

This permanent contentious situation was perceived to be healthy because it enhanced the availability of alternative choices from which the polity could choose. But it is a known fact that cleavages make for a working pluralist democratic system only when coalitions are temporary. Only when individuals hold membership in multiple and even potentially mutually exclusive groupings that democracy can be truly nuanced. It is always the possibility for creative conflict which informs the need for negotiations which ultimately strengthens the democratic process.<sup>8</sup>

Ideally, effective executive actions are legitimized by a responsible, supportive legislature. Caribbean legislatures are pliant and dutifully supportive of executives, but such support more often than not is devoid of the input of the elected opposition in the legislature. But the government does not need the opposition to make policy. This makes a mockery of parliamentary democracy which insists that elected leaders of the state must take all the time it needs and talk to as many people as possible to convince people that the actions of government are both inevitable and absolutely necessary. By continuously listening, the government is making itself sensitive and "coherently responsive to the interests, broad and narrow, and to the opinions, vulgar and expert, of its people."<sup>9</sup>

In the absence of the above, the state devolves into being a unit dominated by an arrogant faction which by its actions, undermines democracy. This surely compromises the evolved notion that the state functions as an adjunct to private individual actions and that the individual citizen retains the absolute right to define, express and assert self in any way that the state permits.

Added to this *l'état c'est moi* principle is the high premium placed on secrecy, certifying the exclusion of the opposition. The conventional wisdom says that efficient government is secret government. The exclusion of the opposition is further exacerbated by the economic distributive function of the state, which is usually dominated by the reigning government.

## **ECONOMIC POWER OF THE STATE**

The Caribbean state is the major employer in most, if not all Caribbean societies. The settlers did not, as a rule provide adequate opportunity for the emergence of an indigenous, private entrepreneurial class.<sup>10</sup> The large non-renewable resources such as Bauxite, Gold and Petroleum fell into the hands of the transnational corporations. A small peasant class survived, but the nascent private sector comprised a small expatriate clique of individuals who had been displaced from their homelands by political strife.

The local inheritors (the politicians) of the state initiated a dual course of action. Domestically, some attempted to assert a controlled nationalism. They were fearful that an intense nationalism could have alienated the departing colonial authorities who ultimately had veto power over their assuming political office.<sup>11</sup> And in an effort to become acceptable to outside forces, the local intelligentsia sought to align themselves with world capitalism. They had to prove that they were non-threatening to economic arrangements which predated independence. They continued the old policy of inviting foreign capital to invest in their country to create jobs for the unemployed citizens.<sup>12</sup> George Beckford suggests that the foreigners were eager to oblige because they had found energetic, discipline and inexpensive workers to ensure the maximization of their profits.<sup>13</sup>

This is precisely what Patrick John tried to accomplish when he entered into an agreement giving 45% of Dominica to a Texas consortium to create an "independent" enclave inside Dominica shortly after independence in 1978. Obviously John felt emboldened enough to make such an arrangement without the input of the opposition because as the leader of government, he was also the economic strongman.

The state that John acquired in 1978 might have been dependent on international capitalism but as a conservator and benefactor of capitalism, the state remained stunningly independent.<sup>14</sup> Its domestic controllers simply had to behave according to internationally prescribed rules and they remained relatively free from attacks against their rule.

Consequently, as a major economic energizer, the state required that individuals, in search of lucrative contracts with and within the state, discretely declare their party affiliations. Contracts are still almost exclusively awarded on the basis of party affiliation and loyalty.

This politicized economic environment weakens the private sector's ability to aggressively pursue any investment strategies which are perceived to be inimical to the government.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, there have been rare situations where the private sector has had the upper hand over government's efforts to stymie it. In the late 1970's, the embattled private sector of Jamaica simply withheld its participation in the society until appropriate policies were enacted to recognize its importance to the economic well being of Jamaica. But that Jamaican case seems to be the exception rather than the rule. More often than not, as long the government is accepted globally, the private sector is forced to become beholden to that government, if it wishes to become a significant economic player in society.

Finally, Caribbean governments are strengthened at the expense of the opposition by the incredible amount of "raw" money which finds its way into the coffers of the ruling party. The narcobusiness has already been well documented. Caribbean governments have sheltered drug lords and in turn, have received an ample amount of money to stave off any challenge to their rule.<sup>16</sup> It is a rare instance where incumbent governments have gone down in defeat because of their association with drug money.

Foreign money is also flowing to governments to wage political campaigns against their opponents. A special category of citizens has been created in Dominica and St. Kitts to accommodate Asians who are desirous of acquiring Caribbean citizenship to shelter their assets against an illusive Chinese foe. The opposition cannot compete with the government at that level. The opposition is of little value to these desperate people seeking a safe haven to live the good life. Incumbent governments

certainly control the flow of money into their countries. Thus Eugenia Charles interrupted the clean water project of the UN's Save the Children funds because the project director, a Dominican, was affiliated with the opposition.<sup>17</sup>

There is no doubt that the faction which happens to control the state, has used the economic resources herein contained to strengthen its dominance over society. This compromises the ability of the opposition to organize a credible challenge to the incumbent regime. It debilitates the democratic system that governments vow to uphold.

## THE ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION

Robert Dahl suggests that the

circumstances most favorable for competitive politics exist when access to violence and socio-economic sanctions is either dispersed or denied to both opposition and government. The least favorable circumstances exist when violence and socio-economic sanctions are exclusively available to government and denied the opposition.<sup>18</sup>

The above suggests that to make the *obertura* (open political system)<sup>19</sup> complete, the opposition is just as important as the incumbent government. The opposition is the significant other, the alternative to the band who happens to capture the state at the last election. It is there to ensure that minority rights are preserved and respected; to avoid a permanent majoritarian system, composed of the same cast of characters.

As a product of the market, capitalist society, Caribbean states were designed to operate by competition between political parties. In this environment, citizens have to be given the opportunity to voice their dissenting views and must be able to discriminate among the alternatives presented to them. A high premium is placed on disagreements which make the system even stronger and resilient. Thus it behooves governing factions not to attempt to discombobulate all the opposition's plans for society even if governments must aggressively pursue their own interests.

The several democratic types have somewhat achieved the above through creative means. The Communists have democratic centralism. Intense debates are encouraged and tolerated within the party mechanism of rule. And once decisions are detailed, the implementation process almost always follows the script as handed down from above.<sup>20</sup>

The Americans have their checks and balances even though the executive branch is generally considered as first among equals. However, power is distributed among four branches of government. The executive is supposed to be checked by the legislative arm of government which carries out that function through its ability to set limits on spending, if not detailing policy prioritization. The judiciary flexes its muscle through judicial review. It rules on the legality of all laws. And finally, there are the regulatory commissions which regulate the actions of government and citizens.<sup>21</sup>

The Caribbean system deposits supreme power and authority in the executive branch of government. The opposition is expected to provide real checks and balances to the government. The salient aspects to opposition activity are the following.

First, the opposition is there to present a reasoned challenge to the incumbent government when there is a crisis or whenever it suits its fancy to question government on issues. Second, it is permanent and constitutionally required. But the official loyal opposition must have a clear majority over other opposing forces in the legislature to be designated as *the* opposition.

Further, a Dominica Government document produced to commemorate the 21st. anniversary of

independence states that before the Prime Minister takes any major decision, by law, he is required to "consult the Leader of the Opposition." And of course, the ultimate power of that Opposition is embodied in the possibility of engineering a vote of no confidence in the sitting government; thereby cutting short the life of that government. But that same official document quickly warns that this possibility exists mainly in the realm of theory because "in reality such votes of no confidence are exceedingly uncommon."

Third, the opposition is representative, in that it represents the views of a group of people who are united in their resolve to question every act of government. Fourth, it is an alternative to government. The opposition is the government in waiting. As such, it is incumbent on it to behave responsibly. It must have qualified candidates to fill the elected positions which already exist in the government.

Fifth, it is an interested, if not influential participant. And while *de jure*, its most productive efforts are to be realized within the legislative chamber, more often than not its best work is accomplished by taking its case directly to the public by way of public lectures, demonstrations, disseminating literature and taking to the airwaves. As a matter of course, the opposition is routinely excluded from the decisionmaking process because its effective participation (shaping policy) in the legislature is not institutionalized.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously, the niceties of democratic political structures are to be found in the Caribbean, but the cult of personality and limited economic opportunities predominate over structure and substance. Consequently the opportunities and strategies which could enhance the effectiveness of the opposition are elusive. In gist, small size, scant economic opportunities and mesmeratic leadership have reinforced the dominance of strong personalities who in turn, trivialize the role of the opposition.<sup>23</sup> Under these circumstances, how can opposition parties best challenge and defeat incumbent regimes? What are the chances of the Dominica Labour Party of ever defeating the United Workers Party to form the government of Dominica?

## THE NEW LABOUR PARTY AND LESSONS FROM ABROAD

The Dominica Labour Party (DLP) was humiliated in 1980 by the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP) in a 19-2 electoral thrashing. It managed to survive that onslaught to become the official opposition in 1996. Its traditional base of rural/peasant elements, together with an urban disaffected group and a spattering of business elements unraveled under the weight of a leadership squabble. The 1980 general election was contested by two separate DLP's. By 1981, one of its strongest leaders, Patrick John, was unceremoniously carted off to jail for trying to compromise the country's constitution. By default, a second tier of individuals assumed the mantle of leadership.

There is much dissatisfaction with the current leader of the party because of his Marxist radical black "power" nationalist past. He is often portrayed as an individual who lacks convictions and one devoid of any discipline. He has been caricatured as one who will associate with anyone or engage in any activity which will help him secure the opportunity to run the government of Dominica.<sup>24</sup>

However, the DLP is patently cognizant of the pitfalls which await it as it attempts to dislodge the United Workers Party (UWP). The DLP knows that reigning governments usually have a monopoly on the communication networks and have a well oiled organization structure, complete with private and public sector support whose interests are served by having incumbent governments returned to office.

To defeat such an entrenched government, oppositions must engage in shocking, dramatic acts, aimed at portraying incumbents as dilettantes, incompetents and ill-equipped to manage the affairs of state in the best interests of all the people. Individuals like Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and even Bill Clinton convinced the masses that the left leaning politicians had become too

complacent. They had become careerist politicians and to protect their jobs had to overextend the functions of government, which ultimately hurt the very people government expected to help.<sup>25</sup>

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan used government to protect the power and wealth of the few because it was that same few who had the overwhelming ability to create the mechanisms to help the struggling underclass. The Reaganites maintained that a government intent on waging a war on the wealthy for redistributive purposes was a coercive and destructive government which ultimately compromised individual freedom. Under these circumstances, the poor would suffer the most since they hardly had the means to counter that hyperactive government.

In Jamaica, Edward P. Seaga's dramatic announcement on the eve of the 1980 elections that he had already identified an investment portfolio of \$350 million to be infused into the Jamaica economy, went a long way to legitimize his Jamaica Labour Party. To be sure, the People's National Party was ripe for defeat because of its people oriented, radical, leftist policies. But Seaga's confident Prime Ministerial demeanor even before the elections was probably the proverbial last straw which pushed his JLP along to defeat the PNP. Seaga convinced Jamaicans that Michael Manley had simply lost touch with reality and had failed miserably in his attempts to create that misguided utopia in Jamaica.<sup>26</sup>

The Dominica Labour Party's first dramatic eye catching effort was to rechristen itself as the *NEW* Labour to reflect similar centrist stance as NEW Labour of Britain.<sup>27</sup> Like Britain's New Labour, it wants Dominicans and the world to know that it has moved away from its fundamental left, socialist ideology to a more pragmatic position. This is significant because both the party and present leader were noted for their leftist rhetoric, even if as early as the 1970's, the party had become a captive of important Dominican merchant classes. Already there was a pragmatism in the party. It was Patrick John, then leader of the party and Prime Minister, who consorted with South Africa at a time when the world sought to treat South Africa as a pariah country because of its racist policies.

But more important, in the 1990's the DLP found itself having to embrace the policies of the Right-Centre DFP, led by Ms. Eugenia Charles. Ms. Charles managed to make personal rule, authoritarianism, respectable as she aligned herself with the US to further legitimize her style of rule. She never openly attacked government for being too intrusive; she wisely and judiciously used government perks to selectively reward friends, confidants and associates, including the poor. She so perfected patron-client politics that she earned the sobriquet MAMO, mother, mother to all Dominicans, even though she has no children and was never married. She paid the tuition for a number of youngsters, who otherwise would not have attended secondary school. She was also compared to Margaret Thatcher and dubbed the iron lady of the Caribbean. It was that rugged individualism she so sternly cultivated that gave her the reputation as a guardian of freedom against invasive government.<sup>28</sup>

By personally controlling the state within the context of a capitalist system, Eugenia convinced Dominicans that she was personally guaranteeing them their freedom and regaining the respectability that Dominica once enjoyed before John sullied the good name of the country. She could point with pride that Dominica could never be another Grenada or Cuba under her watch. She used all the institutions of the state to prevent her detractors from ever succeeding in their efforts to compromise freedom and eliminate democratic elections as had been done in Grenada. She eviscerated her opponents and her persona evinced unprecedented confidence.

Thus sensing that most Dominicans felt that Mamo was believable and trustworthy, the DLP had no choice but to concede victory to her, if not to her party. The New Labour Party has begun a replication of the Charles genre. It is attempting to create a coalition of rural/peasants, urban underclasses and business elements to sustain a more friendly orientated state that is expected to do less for people. But that friendly entity will provide the environment for a more responsible citizen to feel satisfied that the state affords every opportunity for the realization of one's life chances.

## CREATING THE RESPONSIBLE DOMINICAN

The DLP has sought to redefine the relationship between Dominicans and their state. In the late 1970's Caribbean regimes came to power by convincing the polity, whom independence had failed, that the state existed to provide a cradle to grave service to them. To make matters worse, the small native middle class did not measure up to the task of playing their traditional role of creating jobs for a growing population. And in their search for immediate solutions for constant underdevelopment, the political elites sought to use the state as a business class to deliver on their perennial promise of "better must come."

In Jamaica, Michael Manley tried to make the government the absolute force driving the economy, with minimal to no help from the private sector.<sup>29</sup> Rapacious capitalism had made it all too difficult for the average citizen to avoid that drastic action. In his efforts to make the "little man a real man," Forbes Burnham of Guyana favoured co-operatives as the main agents of the national economy. Burnham's Guyanese system would be made complete when every Guyanese would refer to each other as Comrade and all government belongings were to be designated as properties of the people. These policies were intended to energize individual participation in all aspects of national life.<sup>30</sup>

But this all inclusive style of governance was perceived by a well organized right leaning group as threatening the social order and dangerously attacking the civility of society. That element felt that such an open participatory society could conceivably lead to an overly permissive situation which could degenerate into lawlessness. And ultimately, this fluidity could threaten the life line of society: the state fathers, the elites, the movers and shakers, those who actually kept the engines of the economy moving.

Eugenia Charles successfully ended all politics of clientelism, but maintained patronism. She convinced Dominicans that this open government style was not only deceitful but was also dangerously disruptive. She skillfully took "permissive" government away from the office and placed it in the community. She cavorted with her gossip mongering clients in the community rather than in government offices.

The DLP has profited from her style. New Labour now calls on all "capitalists" - women and men, workers, youths, artists, farmers, business people at home and abroad to join in ... social justice and economic regeneration." In theory, the DLP has always insisted that individual citizens not only have a right but also the obligation to participate in the business of governance. But it had conveyed that entreaty in such a way that it became threatening to the business interests and other established institutions such as the Church. A past DLP Premier once told secondary school children that they could drop in on him unannounced and he will do everything in his power to address any concerns that they may have. Institutional leaders saw that style as undermining their authority over their flock.

More directly, that open door policy was perceived as an attack on the bourgeois class who preferred to have the business of government conducted with more decorum and behind closed doors. That attempt at comprehensive inclusion was equated with anarchy and if left unchecked, could lead to a highly fractious society bereft of strong institutions such as school and family.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the DLP has been put on the defensive to prove that should it form the government, it will not put the state at the disposal of non-productive elements. Instead, it will uphold individual freedoms and rights just as the Eugenia DFP had done. It will merely make it easier for all energetic and hard working people to have equal opportunity in open competition, to participate in the economic development of the state. The DLP will mold the new energetic Dominican citizen; the one who will categorically renounce any claims that the state owes anything to anyone. That new Dominican with the help of that new Labour Party will be made to ask not what the state can do for

him/her, but what can he/she do for the state.

Of course, New Labour will provide the tools and environment to help the individual make that contribution. And to reassure the doubters of his commitment to personal freedom, the party leader has renounced his affiliation with Fidel Castro who previously provided several medical and other technical training to Dominicans on the behest of the leader. The leader has since embraced Carlos Menen of Argentina, Tony Blair of New Labour of Britain, Nelson Mandella and Japanese business elements. New DLP has now landed in the real world; it is now mainstream.

## **NEW LABOUR'S NEW ECONOMICS**

The Caribbean political parties defeated in general elections in the late 1980's recognized that their usual political stance had atrophied and oppositions had successfully portrayed them as having lost touch with reality. The Michael Manley regime, soundly defeated in 1980, restructured itself and was already an effective challenger to the JLP by 1983.<sup>32</sup>

The JLP was failing in its attempts to reinvigorate elite economic dominance; it could not eliminate many of the state enterprises that the Manley government had erected and at the same time give Jamaicans the economic good life it had promised during the 1980 campaign. By making goods readily available, Seaga was compromising the ability of the economic elites to profit from a situation of shortages. The JLP had to rely on the 1983 Grenada leftist fiasco to secure a second term even though constitutionally, there were two remaining years on the life of the government. The party disingenuously convinced Jamaicans that a return of a Manley regime would spell disaster in Jamaica as befell Grenada. Despite American effort to prop up the JLP, Seaga could not convince the people that the system created by Manley was unrealistic and destructive.<sup>33</sup>

However, Seaga managed to return a great deal of social, if not economic stability to the state. He accomplished such by reminding Jamaicans that their dominant sensibility was to emphasize individual responsibility and self discipline. That the government was there, not to take away the individual's ability to help self but to provide an environment for business to thrive, which in turn, would enhance individual productivity through the creation of much needed jobs.

Similarly, the PNP realized that while its people empowerment rhetoric garnered much votes in the context of a propagandizing machine, that atmosphere of confrontation with the private sector and its international sponsors was not helping the domestic situation. The PNP recognized that capital was drying up or moving to more hospitable climes. To regain power, the PNP knew that it could not continue to denigrate international capitalism and expect that system to come to its rescue. And besides, it knew that the fortunes of capitalism have rose considerably. Such are the examples the New DLP has had to mimic.

The New DLP has finally realized that Dominica, like the rest of the region operates within the context of a regional, international market economy. It recognized that this economic system is sustained by a cultural tradition which accepts the reality that Caribbean economies are dependent economies.<sup>34</sup> And further, that these economies have always been marginalized and used to sustain the needs of the more developed countries. That tradition says that citizens are owed nothing other than compensation for work rendered in the pursuit of economic transformation of the region with the help of the transnationals.

New Labour has correctly pointed to the looming crisis should the European Union stop preferential treatment for bananas from the Windwards and Jamaica. In the past, Old Labour would have taken to the streets; it probably would have burnt a few US flags to protest the latter's insistence that Europe remove that protection for Caribbean bananas. Instead, New Labour has taken a more conciliatory stance and has even attempted to negotiate the issue with the appropriate authorities, a sure sign of this new maturity.



Of course, New Labour is also aware that the Centre-Right coalition is always suspicious of past leftist assertion that the state was created to uplift the average citizen. Such help is perceived as ultimately making cheats of people and in the process, weaken them to the point of forcing them to become lazy and listless. That coalition has always maintained that the individual is best served by providing the mechanisms, with which to secure gainful employment rather than make the individual dependent on that benevolent state.

To be sure, the capitalist mainstreamers are not totally opposed to some form of welfarism. They know that the poor are non-threatening and actually want their children to grow up with the same aspirations as those of the elites. The centrists are prodded by their Calvinistic tendencies to help those who are in dire need. They may be minimally afraid that their conspicuous consumption juxtaposed alongside the squalor of the poor may eventually lead to uncontrollable, needless confrontation. But they are certain that all this can be averted by extending some support to a handful of the neediest of society. But they are categorically opposed to the overcrowding and all intrusive state which they believe make people hapless as they are increasingly cuddled.

It is this realization of capitalist success, a fighting individualism, the market system as opposed to the command economy which propelled New Labour to extoll the virtues of privatization. Accordingly, privatization will be spearheaded by an institutionalized Divestiture Implementation Committee that will dismantle all state run enterprises. New Labour's acceptance of individual responsibility and a reduced role for the state, will be reinforced by the appointment of one of the most successful Dominican entrepreneur, Philip Nassief, to lead the privatization, market oriented imperative. And the regime's total commitment to capitalism, individualism, will culminate with demanding that the Dominican Association of Industry and Commerce "assist in appointing the Ministers of Finance and Trade."

Apparently, the New party has had to overcompensate for the past of its current leader and earlier errant policies of Old Labour. Having been dubbed as a rudderless party, devoid of a pragmatic approach to addressing the significant issues facing Dominica, the party now suggests that it is willing to surrender its mandate to rule and award that right to a non-elected Dominican capitalist. This is to reassure the polity that it has embraced capitalism and is seeking only individuals who will work to improve conditions rather than those who expect the state to improve their situations with minimal effort on their part. Indeed, as New Labour reinvents itself, it is attempting to create a new Dominican citizen to satisfice its other public, the right/center business elements that it is about work and production.

## **CREATING THE NEW CARIBBEAN/DOMINICAN WO(MAN)**

Edward Seaga's 1980 victory returned stability and civility to Jamaica. The US demonstrated its pleasure with this turn of events by making Seaga the first head of state to meet President-elect Ronald Reagan. It also attempted to immediately prop up the moribund Jamaican economy by agreeing to purchase \$100 million worth of Bauxite even though the US already had an oversupply of the metal.

Other signs of Jamaican stability took the form of business revitalization. Much needed foreign exchange became available again. The stocks on supermarket shelves were replenished overnight. Basic commonidities such as bread, flour, shoe polish, tooth paste, rice and cooking oil mysteriously reappeared in large quantities.

Overall, Jamaican citizens began feeling better about themselves. They walked openly and proudly in streets they once shunned. Now the Jamaican state was perceived to exist to protect individual rights and not to engage in economic redistribution from the wealthy to the poor. Taxation for social engineering was totally condemned as a failed policy of an overzealous government.<sup>35</sup> And Seaga's JLP had made Jamaica liveable again. Eugenia Charles demonstrated a similar success story in Dominica, though that success was probably not as dramatic as that of Seaga. But she rescued

Dominica from its enemies when she took office in 1980. She will become a larger symbol of freedom in October, 1983, when, as chair of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, she stood next to Ronald Reagan to legitimize America's "rescue" mission to Grenada. She became, to many Caribbeans, freedom incarnate.

By contrast, Eugenia's predecessor, Patrick John, had squandered his chances of using the state as an instrument of opportunity creation for the little person, his natural constituency. He dragged Dominica's good name to the depths of degradation by associating with a racist pariah country. He even offered to compromise the recently won independence of the state by awarding a sizeable portion of Dominica to a foreign group who wanted to establish an independent enclave within the state itself. Eugenia had become the answer to Dominica's problems; she was the only and *the* correct way.

Thus the New DLP has had to follow this focused act of Eugenia. The party must operate within a structure that Eugenia did not create but one she customized to suit her ideology. That ideology is grounded in strong personal rule which abhors a condescending attitude toward the citizenry. It is one informed by a belief in the ability of individuals to fend for themselves if given the chance.

Since Eugenia, New Labour has pushed to convince Dominicans that individuals can fully participate in the affairs of state and can make a difference, but that has to be in the context of global capitalism where there is no room for the lazy or the underachiever. Of course, the party cannot honestly tell the people that capitalism is of little consequence to their survival. But it believes that it can use the products of capitalism to make life more beneficial by harnessing the skills of all Dominicans. It may not need to make the foolish assertion as it does, that Dominicans are fully capable of utilizing capitalism to become more economically successful because of the Asian (the Caribs) presence within their midst. But it can categorically assert that history has shown that poor people can become beneficiaries of a capitalist system as long as mechanisms are put in place to give these people a fair chance at competing.

The image of New Labour is one that is non-threatening to mainstream business interests. In fact, during its first stint at governance, it was said that it had lost its grassroots orientation. Its eventual demise in 1980 was the result of great disillusionment of a coalition of civil servants, trade unions, religious interests and significant others in the business class. That coalition, spearheaded by the elites were angered by the government's open defiance of an international ban on South Africa.<sup>36</sup>

But what disturbed that coalition the most was that government's action was being orchestrated by non-elected operatives. The elites knew that they had the power to accomplish whatever they set the sights on but were also aware that it was not always the right thing to do to openly flaunt that power. In other words, the elites would have preferred keeping their influence concealed to dispel the notion that they are only concerned about themselves. Elites thrive best in situations where they appear to place the people's concerns ahead of theirs, even if they remain the dominant players in society.<sup>37</sup>

Thus it should surprise no one that the pronouncements of New Labour are almost identical to those of the current government of the United Workers Party (UWP), which in turn has learnt a great deal from Eugenia's DFP. New Labour intends to produce a better and reliable Dominican citizen who can better serve the new demands for the world economic restructuring, in the wake of the passing of Communism.

The new party will empower Dominican citizens by making education and training more readily available, with the participants even paying for part of the cost of their training. A better trained society will emerge which in turn, will become more attractive to international capitalist interest.

The DLP is projecting the image of a contented citizenry awaiting to be placed at the service of foreign investors who are willing to work with them rather than exploit them. The party no longer

threatens big business and will work with that interest to give the *new* Dominican the chance to participate fully to earn a decent wage to improve the quality of life. Of course, the marriage of business and citizen, the entire transformation of that relationship, though very urgent, will eventuate incrementally.

## **RADICAL SOLUTIONS INCREMENTAL APPROACH**

Caribbean opposition elements know that to be taken seriously, they must present dramatic solutions to the current problems affecting their state. They also know that citizens are not easily fooled by quick solutions to intractable problems such as inadequate infrastructure, unemployment or insufficient health care. They understand the urgency for immediate solutions but the funding to solve these problems are almost always unavailable. Even the radical conservatives recognized that to govern successfully, government must move incrementally to implement "radical" policy. In his first term beginning in 1980, Seaga dared not dismantle the public enterprises Manley had established. The Jamaican people had come to rely on these even if they already knew that economic development in Jamaica was made ineffective because of these state enterprises.<sup>38</sup>

More often than not, radical conservative pronouncements are couched more in "principled" rhetoric than endowed with creative substance. Ronald Reagan convinced the American people that he was the appropriate leader to regain America's world respectability. He also promised that if elected, he would reduce the size of the burdensome Federal government to return more money to the taxpayers. He planned to dismantle the education and energy departments since the services that these two provided, he surmised, could be better handled by local governments and the private sector respectively. But when he left Washington, DC, both departments were not only left intact, he also created the new department of Veterans Affairs; a more burdensome \$200 billion deficit was also left behind.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly Reagan's bark was more dangerous than his bite. Indeed, once governments extend their role to service the population, it becomes extremely difficult to reduce such activity because that population has come to expect such services. It is this reality which makes New DLP accept that services to both poor and wealthy cannot be casually terminated. Similarly it cannot advocate an immediate empowerment of the new Dominican citizen if such is perceived as a threat to the middle and upper classes.

The Party's projections are long term. It is concerned with quality of life issues such as home financing, sporting facilities, markets for the bananas and the preservation of the environment. It intends to negotiate with the owners of property, rather than threaten to confiscate unused facilities as was done in Grenada, to acquire the facilities to put to productive economic use.

It is a fair party that is supportive and appreciative of the business class. Radical changes will be undertaken but these will be for all the citizens alike regardless of race, class, gender or ethnicity. It wants to provide the widest choices for all who are willing to work diligently to enhance their earning power to become more middle class and in the process, appreciably reduce the past burdensome responsibilities of the state.

The Party totally accepts the new directions of the state as outlined by the Eugenia regime and continued by the current United Workers Party. It seeks to gradually incorporate all Dominicans as partners in the new Dominica under the guidance of a rapacious, albeit gentle capitalism. It refuses to dwell on the past misdeeds of the colonizers because it knows that its competence is unmatched and that its international economic connections are impeccable and solid. It gladly accepts the new capitalist economic order/challenge and vows to make that system work for and with the New Dominican. The party is now concerned with the independent Dominican whom it will create; that Dominican will expect nothing other than a fighting chance to realize the good life. New Labour is confident that it can initiate that controlled revolution to achieve stated goals.

## CONCLUSIONS

Caribbean opposition parties usually have a difficult time dislodging reigning governments. They are handicapped by their lack of institutionalized structure, underfunding and an inability to convince qualified candidates to seek political office on their behalf. However, opposition parties are competitive and even effective during campaigns because elections are mostly fair and open. But once the contest is over and the elected assumes office, oppositions sink into banal futility.

Conversely, incumbent governments have access to more funds, including a growing source of foreign funds, both legal and illegal. Those who have practiced traditional non-threatening politics can always count on both the private and public sectors for support to help them retain power. Sitting governments have an outright monopoly on the mass media which they cleverly exploit to convey their message to the polity.<sup>40</sup> Thus, aware of the reality of the above, what are the chances of the New DLP ever regaining control of the Dominican state?

First, New Labour dramatically reintroduced itself to the electorate with a chastened leader and a more pragmatic party espousing a mainstream political culture. Second, the party's efforts to create a more responsible Dominican citizen is somewhat credible. But how will the party resolve the inevitable tension between what their constituents need and what the state is able to deliver under the guidance of that Dominican capitalist, Philip Nassief?

Third, were the policies of New Labour that different from those of Old Labour? Old Labour may well have been in mainstream Dominican culture and it simply underestimated the ability of Dominicans to understand that South Africa was not the type of country that they wanted as a friend even though that friendship could have brought economic benefits to the state. Eugenia's successful rule may also have had the effect of reinvigorating Old Labour.

However, New Labour is a clone of Eugenia's DFP and the UWP government was not much different from Eugenia's Freedom. UWP did protect the wealthy few Dominicans and like the DFP, laboured hard to leave the impression that it did remove politics from the governmental process. It was less than convincing. It was UWP's close association with the wealthy that gave the opposition elements the opportunity to charge it with corruption, despite its impressive record of infrastructural development.

Notwithstanding the above analysis, the DLP confounded the pundits and initially gained a ten seat plurality in the 21 member House of Parliament. And because of the intense dislike for the UWP, the DFP joined forces with Labour to form the government.

These results do not contradict the main arguments of the paper. The practicality of the situation dictated that Labour join with Freedom to eclipse UWP. The only interesting aspect of this situation that Ms. Eugenia Charles did permit her Freedomites to join forces with elements in the Labour Party who were considered Communists/Leftists; individuals who have been continuously vilified by the key operatives within Freedom. The former spokesperson for Ms Charles once wrote that "...former radical socialist Rosie Douglas... speak(s) and write(s) convincingly but his [economic] proposals are almost always essentially theoretical nonsense." Rosie Douglas was the Prime Minister in the coalition with Freedom.

Labour's victory was not that decisive and can even be categorized as a fluke. Its triumph may even be shortlived because of the passing of the peripatetic leader, who left no one of stature to replace him. The Labourites appear leaderless and rudderless as they continue to engage in one misstep after another. Thus the prospects of a triumphant return of the UWP are real. UWP does not have to reinvent itself; it is already in sync with the restructured capitalist system. It can simply wait and reconnect with its constituencies as the New Labour works itself into extinction. And in its current state, the Freedomites will not be of any consequence.

## Footnotes

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- <sup>3</sup> Macpherson, C. (1972), *The Real World of Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 47.
- <sup>4</sup> Jones, E. (1992), Maladministration and Corruption: Some Caribbean Realities in Ryan, S. & Brown, D. eds. *Issues & Problems in Caribbean Public Administration*, St. Augustine, Trinidad: The Institute of Social and Economic Studies, p. 39.
- <sup>5</sup> Stone, C. (1986), Democracy and the State - the Case of Jamaica in Davies, O. eds. *The State in Caribbean Society*, Mona, Ja.: The University of the West Indies, pp. 93-95.
- <sup>6</sup> Mills, G. (1992), Neutrality and Commitment in Ryan & Brown, p. 93.
- <sup>7</sup> Singh, P. (1983), Political Change and Political Culture *Transition*, (issue 7), p. 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Domhoff, W. (1990), *The Power Elite and the State*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, pp. 250-254.
- <sup>9</sup> Beer, S. (1998) Strong Government Democratic Control *The Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 25 (4), p. 147.
- <sup>10</sup> Levitt, K & Best, L. (1975) Character of Caribbean Economy in Beckford, G. ed. *Caribbean Economy* Mona, Ja.: Institute of Social and Economic Research, p. 40-43.
- <sup>11</sup> Ryan, S. ed. (1988), *Trinidad and Tobago: The Independence Experience, 1962-1987*, St. Augustine: Institute of Social and Economic Studies, passim.
- <sup>12</sup> Gittens, T. (1983), Political Parties, Electoral Politics and Democracy in Post Colonial Societies: The Demobilization of Mass Mobilization, *Transition* (7), p. 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Beckford, G. (1982), Plantation Capitalism and Black Dispossession: A Review Article, *Transition* (4), p. 136.
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas, C. (1986), The Authoritarian State in Caribbean Societies, in Davies, O., p. 73.
- <sup>15</sup> Mills, G. (1974), Public Policy and Private Enterprise in the Commonwealth Caribbean, *Social and Economic Studies*, p. 218.
- <sup>16</sup> Griffith, I. (1991), *Strategy and Security in the Caribbean*, New York: Praeger, passim.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Chrispin Gregoire, Roseau Dominica 19 January 1999 at the Headquarters of the New Dominica Labour Party. Gregoire was the Director of the Save the Children's fund in Dominica during the Charles administration.
- <sup>18</sup> Dahl, R. (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press,

p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> This concept has been used to describe the democratic revolution in Latin America since the 1990's.

<sup>20</sup> Lenin, V. (1973), *The State and Democracy in the Transition from Capitalism to Communism in Selsam, A. et al ed. Dynamics of Social Change*, New York: International Publishers, p. 348.

<sup>21</sup> Peltason, J. (1988), *Understanding the Constitution*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., pp. 21-29.

<sup>22</sup> Griffin, C. (1994), *The Opposition and Policy Making in the Caribbean: The Emergence of High Consensus Politics in St. Kitts & Nevis* *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* Vol. 32 (no. 2), pp. 231-233.

<sup>23</sup> Danns, G. *Leadership and Corruption: An Analysis of Emergent Post-Colonial rule in the Caribbean* *Transition*, Vol. 3 (no. 1), p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> There are a number of key members of the party who are thoroughly dissatisfied with the direction of the party. Astaphan, a former stalwart of the party and a very successful businessman, will have nothing to do with the party as long as the present leadership remains in place.

<sup>25</sup> Schoch, J. (1998), *Party Politics and Economic Activism: The Reagan-Bush Years*, *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 113 (no.1), p. 115-120.

<sup>26</sup> Stone, C. (1981), *Public Opinion and the 1980 Elections in Jamaica*, *Caribbean Quarterly* Vol. 27 (no.1), p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Dominica Labour Party - General Election, (1996), Our Future is with Labour: Our Vision for Dominica*, Portsmouth, Da.: Uniprint, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Higbie, J. (1993), *Eugenia: The Caribbean's Iron Lady*, London: The McMillan Press, Ltd., p. 207.

<sup>29</sup> Stone, C. (1987), *Democracy and Socialism in Jamaica*, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 19 (no.2), p. 115-120.

<sup>30</sup> Burnham, F. (1970), *A Destiny to Mold*, London: Longman Caribbean Limited, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> Brotherson, L. (1983), *The Failure of Guyana's First Development Plan, 1966-1972*, *Transition* (issue 8), p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Stone, C., (1989), *Politics versus Economics: The 1989 Elections in Jamaica*, Kingston, Ja.: Heinemann Publishers (Caribbean) Limited, pp. 2-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-34.

<sup>34</sup> Beckford, G. (1980), *Sounds and Pressure: Review Article*, *Transition*, Vol. 3 (no. 1), pp. 58ff.

<sup>35</sup> Stone, C. (1984), *Jamaica in Crisis: from Socialism to Capitalist Management* *International Journal*, Vol. 11 (No. 2), p. 289.

<sup>36</sup> Higbie, pp. 169-173.

<sup>37</sup> Cannon, M. (1999), Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy, *Political Studies* Vol. XLVII (No. 1), p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, E. (1987), *Coalitions of the Oppressed*, Mona, Ja.: Institute of Social and Economic Research, pp. 141ff.

<sup>39</sup> Schoch, pp. 125-130.

<sup>40</sup> Reviere, W. (1990) Reminiscences Concerning Mass Work among Farmers in Dominica, 1976-1980, paper delivered at the XV Annual Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association, Trinidad.

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