

POLITICIANS AND THE SEARCH FOR RUMPELSTILSKIN

SURVIVAL NOT INEVITABLE

We have a fatalistic tendency to say “Bon Dieu Bon” and to use that as an excuse for not producing enough and even for not working. This attitude is born of a belief that survival is inevitable. We can take it as given. Right?

Wrong. We should not take survival for granted. Cultures, races, civilizations and whole empires have perished. Ask the Arawaks or the Aztecs, if you can find one of them who once thrived in your own backyard.

HOW BIG ARE WE?

Occasionally we should put our 70K population in a realistic perspective:

WAL-MART is America’s biggest grocery retailer. It is not the largest company in the world in terms of turnover. EXXON MOBIL has that title.

Walmart sells US \$216 billion per year. The Dominica budget is a little less than EC \$380 million for 2001/2002. In today’s money, one only company, Walmart, can finance the Dominica budget for 1534 years. That’s how big and stupid we are.

If you believe it is fine for a micro nation of 70 K to canton out and cannibalize itself, here is additional data for you. Walmart is the biggest private sector employer in the world. It employs 1.2 million people; i.e, the staff of one company is over seventeen times Dominica’s population.

If within this context a local politician still considers himself (or herself) “big” then perhaps he fits snugly within a description that I employed some time ago: Now and then you can make a fortune buying someone for what you think of him, and then selling him at what he thinks of himself.

Under every administration from Oliver Leblanc to Pierre Charles, “investors” came peddling mega-dream projects. Sunday Island (1961/2), Valhala (1978), and Guinness under Dame M. E. Charles were among the better publicized. Those promoters were white.

All had something in common with us: they did not have the millions to invest; they hardly owned the skin on their own backsides. They were merely pedlars of influence.

FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

Some of those men probably acted in utmost good faith and with high hopes that they could raise hundreds of millions of dollars. The government of the day granted them the charity that would never be granted to any local entrepreneur. It was all in the genuine belief that the mega projects would materialize and employment would be created for hundreds, perhaps thousands of Dominicans.

Everyone of those dreams has been shattered yet men of like ilk keep coming and we foolishly continue to fall for charlatans. We seem not to understand that those people have no money. Rational entrepreneurs who have ideas and money do not come here. This is why we must do it ourselves. Begin where you are. Go to your backyard and start growing some food for your own consumption. Re-invent the school-garden at every institution of learning in Dominica. There is no justification for an agricultural country not to have the capacity to feed its 70 K people.

We must now consider rational behavior. Assume you are a rich person, corporate or unincorporate, with millions of U.S \$ to invest. Where would you invest? Where would Dominica come, if at all, on your priority investee list?

SOME CURRENT DATA

The following statistical information is based on "POCKET WORLD IN FIGURES, 2002 EDITION," published by The Economist. Not every bit of data therein is necessarily to be trusted. For example, we may not have done enough to ensure the inclusion of statistics on Ma Pampo and her contemporaries. But I believe that the data I have cited for purposes of this our discussion is, by and large, unassailable.

Dominica with its 70K population has not got enough people to meet criteria for mention in The Economist publication. And our population seems diminishing. China has 1.2 billion, India almost a billion, and USA is a distant third with 273 million. In terms of market size, however defined, rational behavior would not determine in our favour.

In terms of GDP, the world's biggest economy is the USA which is more than twice as big as Japan, which is more than twice as big as Germany which is third. In terms of purchasing power, the honours go to the USA, China, Japan, India and Germany. The USA dominates but not everything. In terms of real GDP, 1990 to 1999, fastest economic growth occurred in Bosnia, China, Sudan, Vietnam, Singapore, Lebanon, Malaysia, Chile and Uganda, and Ireland.

The USA receives more money from tourists than does any other country, US \$74 billion. The highest industrial growth, and the highest services growth occurred in Bosnia, China, and Uganda.

Top ten scores under "Business Environment" were attained by USA, Netherlands, Hong Kong, UK, Canada, Singapore, Ireland, Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden. That category reflected opportunities for conduct of business or hindrance thereto. Factors such as market potential, tax and labour market policies, infrastructure, skills and political environment were considered.

For their creativity and research, USA, Finland and Singapore featured best. In terms of stock markets, largest market capitalization is easily the USA. But the highest growth in market capitalization is happening in Russia, Poland, and China.

All the countries mentioned above and many others not mentioned would be favoured for investment before Dominica.

ROAD TO JAIL

In face of all that, it is clear that we must develop our own country. We can begin by producing and consuming our own food. Those hundreds of millions will not come via Rumpelstilskin.

There will be NO development without sacrifice, without production or without pain. The road to the fabled spinner of straw into gold is thorned and narrow and mined with explosives. Recent experiences suggest that it is the road not to prosperity, but to jail.

Recently, one “investor” asked the Agriculture Minister for a licence to explore for petroleum in Dominica waters. The Minister, to his great credit, dispatched his P.S. to seek advice from the Ministry of Petroleum and Mines in Port-of-Spain. He also sought guidance from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. He acted on the advice he received. It was a welcome departure from “small-island” gullibility.

THE MEDIA TOO

Meanwhile, the “investor” announced that he had no time to waste; and there was even a suggestion on a local talk-show that the Minister was too tardy. The cannibalism was evident even when the Minister acted properly. The media too must cease that religious belief in Rumpel, or become irrelevant in the demise of the nation.

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