

Proposed cut in the pay of public officers may not be the best way forward

by

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Our historian's should guide us as to whether or not there has ever been any cut in the wages of public officers in the history of Dominica. This writer is not aware of any instance of such a cut or proposed cut in the salary of civil servants. This means that the proposed cut is a historically unprecedented move, which may have unexpected consequences for the economic and socio-political stability of Dominica. There are many more progressive options, some of which it is the aim of this article to discuss. As a people, we only need to think, plan and act creatively.

Firstly, the cutting of salaries in and of itself would shrink the spending power of a major sector of the population; this in turn would greatly reduce spending in the economy which will have the consequent domino effect of reducing economic activity.

It may therefore be a better idea to grow the economy on the areas of tourism, to increase the foreign exchange earnings by increasing exports and to source massive amounts of foreign capital; so that the tax base can be expanded. Secondly, employees should only be cut from the public service if these employees can be guaranteed jobs in the private sector. This means that the private sector organizations must form a central part of the planning and implementation process of Government.

There must be specific duty free and other concessions given to every private sector organization to ensure the creation of at least 400 jobs, which are going to be cut from the public sector. That way, there would be doors opened for employment of the employees which would be laid off from the public service.

We do not need any IMF, World Bank or Caribbean Development Bank experts to tell us that every employee of Government is already under extreme stress, given the high cost of living, and the freeze of salaries over the last few years. Also, the illegal late payment of salaries by this Government is generating much frustration already. To go further, to cut salaries by ten percent would trigger massive civil unrest. There are many members of Cabinet who themselves have been involved in the organization and execution of some of the major incidences of civil unrest, strikes and demonstrations in Dominica in 1974 and 1979. Both of these events led to the downfall of the Hon. E.O. Leblanc and Hon. Patrick John.

Common sense should tell everyone, both inside and outside of Government that the consequences of a cut in salary can be similar to those of 1974 and 1979. No one needs any expert, consultant or advisor to realize this. It is only common sense.

It is therefore my humble view and that of the sober-minded citizens of this Isle of Beauty and Splendour that it will be a much better option for Government to expand the level of economic activity, create new jobs in the private sector, generate new industries in informatics, tourism, commercial services, cultural industries, the financial sector, agriculture, trade and health tourism. The simple fact is that Dominica must invest its way out of this crisis.

It must be understood that any job cut or salary cut in the public service is a backward step which cannot produce any new economic activity. In addition, the civil disobedience which this historically unprecedented act would produce would destabilize the peace and tranquillity of Dominica. This in turn would have far reaching negative consequences of driving away tourists and foreign investors. Dominica cannot afford to go back to 1974 or 1979!

By now, it must be clear that the increasingly high level of frustration and very negative talk of job cut and salary cut is already encouraging many Dominicans to migrate. This is causing a reduction in the already small population who we need to purchase goods and services locally. Further, Dominicans who are resident abroad are following all this negative news and are discouraged from returning home to invest in a home or a private business. This is hurting the economy and Dominica's image overseas. This cannot continue.

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