

Who will "take charge" of returning this nation to socio-economic stability?

by

[Aurelius Gordon](#)

Across time and space and beyond any considerations of culture and/or political systems on the planet, no society has ever made any bold socio-economic, cultural or spiritual progress without first having sound, decisive and dynamic leadership within all its functionally critical institutions such as Government, education, the economy, churches and culture; and throughout history, every known civilisation has always summoned its most talented strongest and most decisive leaders to provide the leadership and direction needed to ensure the survival and prosperity of that society in times of crisis.

The English looked to Winston Churchill during the second world War; the French turned to Napoleon Bonaparte after the French Revolution; the Americans summoned George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and closer home the Cubans looked to Fidel Castro in times of national crisis. In Dominica, at this very moment, the nation is rapidly sinking into the precipice of socio-economic depression and cultural and moral decay. This tragedy cannot be allowed to continue any longer since too much damage is being done to the quality of life of every single Dominican - young, not-so-young and old alike.

Further, as a direct result of the chronic state of indecision and inaction of Government, the private sector, the Labour Movement and the churches who continue to play the infantile and dirty game of "WHO TO BLAME" and nasty party political tribalism, the national crisis which this nation faces will in fact get much worse before it gets better. We live in a culture of empty and cheap talk by politicians; and presently, it appears that most of those in Government are convinced that the very serious business of Government is all about good looks, the pomp and pageantry of high office, showing one's face on television or speaking at "official" functions saying anything about nothing! So far, in this New Millennium, our politics, has been little more than a pissing contest among pre-school boys and girls. What is even worse, is that the Dominican public particularly the media seem to tolerate this bad joke!

Most of our journalists, who could more accurately be called reporters, seem to take much pleasure in broadcasting the every bowel movement of ignorant and misguided politicians of all shades! They never consult any professional on any issue to give some depth or scientific perspective on any matter of national importance. This is infact a most vivid form of mental slavery that the media keeps subjecting the Dominican public to. When will our journalists learn to demand answers from our political leaders of all shades on the very burning issues of the day' When, oh, when will they learn to phrase a question of depth and substance when they interview individuals who have taken an oath of office and are responsible and accountable to every citizen of Dominica' Do our journalists understand that the true science and art of journalism is the passionate search for the truth and the impartial defense of the public's right to know'.

The very survival of Dominica's democracy and future socio-economic prosperity beckons forth national heroes and heroines, no matter their party political persuasion, surname, or colour of skin; statesmen and women of sound character and most importantly of solid professional experience and training who fully understand the dynamics of the socio-economic realities of Dominica, the Caribbean, the Americas and wider world. Most of our present politicians are much too uneducated and obsessed with local party political tribalism to fully embrace the depth and dignity of Dominica's nationhood and sovereignty so as to respond to the dreams and aspirations of our people both at home and abroad. And this is in no way a criticism of any one person; it is only a simple but tragic fact of our society which we as Dominicans have to do something about before it's too late. As a nation we cannot continue to tolerate a political culture where ignorance is considered blissful! There is a misperception in Dominica that all politicians need to be able to do is win elections by destroying the reputations and good name of their opponent. The most serious aspect of political leadership which has to do with the efficient management of the nation's business gets lost in the trivia of party political mudslinging.

Further, everyone seems to know everything which is wrong with the economy and who in the past Governments is responsible, however, no one is prepared to do anything to fix it. At the moment Dominica needs doers and fix-up-ers not talkers!

Someone has to be "in charge" to take full responsibility for providing immediate and tangible solutions to Dominica's problems. All members of Parliament, the private sector and the labour movement must meet immediately to pin-point at least ten practical measures which must be implemented immediately.

- Firstly, the Cabinet must be cut in half! At least five million dollars can be saved annual by doing this. Also, it would justify Government's request that public servants and other private sector employees take a wage freeze. The Ministers who would be cut from Cabinet can be reemploy in other areas in the public or private sector where they can get some real work done. What the Cabinet really needs are consultants like Gordon Moreau, Dr. Bill Riviere and others to give solid advice and guidance to the policy-making process.
- Secondly, in the up-coming national budget some concrete measures need to be taken to jump-start the economy: for example,
 - the duty free concessions on building materials must be re-instated;
 - interest rates at all banks need to be reduced by forty percent, and
 - the repayment of all loans to banana farmers need to be frozen for one year.
 - Also cheap housing and agricultural land need to be made available to all Dominicans for housing and productive purposes.
- Further, serious work on the international airport must be started on the presently proposed sight. The land has been bought already so the present madness of wasteful studies must end so that work can begin. To delay this critically important project any longer will plunge Dominica's economy even deeper into crisis!
- Also, the five percent sales tax on consumer goods should be removed. Government should seek to increase revenue from an expansion of the economic base and not by the over-taxation of the shrinking economy. The farmers and others who own any productive land, as well as small business owners should be given incentives to expand their businesses and create more jobs. And all employers need to be encouraged, through incentives to freeze all layoffs. Something has to be done!

- Very importantly, a programme of food import substitution must be started to reduce, by at least half, over the next two years the over fifty million dollars food import bill. For instance, the importation of water, orange juice, eggs, fish, carrots, British meat products, teas and other food items which we produce locally must be stopped immediately.
- As we approach independence, our nationals abroad, who have funds to invest locally must be provided with incentives to return home and invest as was done in 1988. The Youth Skills Training Project needs to be re-energised to equip the many young people who are sitting at home and on the side-walk and street blocks, with some productive skills to keep them employed, off the street and out of trouble.

These are just a few of the practical measures which have to be taken immediately to prevent a socio-economic crash in Dominica. Finally, our politicians, particularly those in government have to begin to deliver the socio-economic progress which Dominican citizens demand. Excuses will not do! It is time to stop talking about "Special relations with France, massive amounts of Libyan economic aid, or milk and honey" and do something about it now!

After all is said and done the job of building Dominica has to be done. And notwithstanding what name Government's give themselves, be they Labour, Freedom, Coalition or UWP, Governments and political leaders should be judged not on how much or what they say but on whether they "take charge" of the serious business of making Dominica socio-economically stable and prosperous.

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