

THRONE SPEECH

By

**HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL
SIR WILLIAM GEORGE MALLET**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**FORMAL OPENING OF THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF SAINT LUCIA**

June 17, 1997

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly

On May 23rd 1997 an unprecedented wind of change swept St. Lucia creating political history as the people voted decisively for a new government representing a new vision for the new Millennium. This overwhelming verdict represented an affirmation of a more inclusive, more people-centered and more technocratically competent governance.

The electoral campaign that we have all experienced was the most intensely contested electoral struggle that has ever been waged in St. Lucia since adult suffrage. In many ways there was an unavoidable fervor because that campaign was a battle for our people's confidence as they faced the uncertainties and challenges of the new millennium. The election is now over and my Government has repeatedly emphasized that it has assumed its responsibilities as a government of the whole nation and will exercise its duties without fear or favor, and with compassion to all. As my Government has stated elsewhere, it is time to move away from the fractured partisanship of the last few months. We are one nation, one people, we are all St. Lucians and our survival depends on our acceptance of this simple truth. It is necessary now to look beyond the things that divide us to the necessities that bind us; to look beyond the differences that separate us to the ties that unite us. It is time to continue the historical task of building our nation and developing our people.

Even as this 7 Parliament opens a new chapter in our history, we ought to, with full objectivity, recognize those who wrote the preceding chapters. My Government regrets that the Hon George F L Charles, our first Chief Minister and the Head of the first Labour administration, is unable to honour us with his presence today because of ill health. We give thanks to the Almighty that he has lived to witness the decision of the people of Saint Lucia to confer authority on my Government to manage our affairs after the many years in the wilderness. My Government is pleased to announce that our most active gateway to the Caribbean — Vigie Airport — will be renamed the George F.L. Charles Airport. It was in the early phases of the construction of this airport that this patriot commenced the unionization of workers in this country. My Government is determined to ensure that succeeding generations do not forget those whose struggles and sacrifice have contributed to the benefits that we enjoy today. In time, we will make a special point of commemorating and celebrating the achievements of those heroes and heroines who, until now, are unsung in their own homeland.

Even as we have pointed to their failings in the heat of the electoral battle, my Government accepts the contribution made to the nation by the former administration and in particular by those whose long public service ended with the last parliament. Sir John Compton, and Mr. Allan Bousquet, to name two, have now moved from active politics to deserved retirement and we know that history will be the final arbiter of their contribution.

The international environment today is dramatically different from that of yesterday. We have witnessed unprecedented changes in the alignment of power and the irreversible emergence of a truly global economy in the past seven years. A unipolar world and the hegemonization of markets make life for small island states increasingly difficult. We in St. Lucia have experienced some of this reality in the crisis that the banana industry — an economic lifeline for thousands of our small farmers — has faced.

The new global environment is one with many problems but it is, at the same time, one of unparalleled opportunity. How we manage ourselves in this new age of competitiveness, of science and technology, and of information will determine whether we will sink or swim. Small states that do not re-engineer themselves for this reality run the risk, as one academic writer put it, of “moving from a structural position of dependence to a structural position of irrelevance”.

In the face of these challenges, one needs to be realistic about what can be accomplished in the region to avoid disappointment and frustration. By establishing a single Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, my Government has started the process of matching our diplomatic conduct to our vital trade interests. In the conduct of its diplomacy, my Government will be guided by the principle of reciprocity among states. Saint Lucia cannot give more than it receives. We will play our part fully in the regional and international community of nations but we will insist on our right to be treated with sovereign respect, with equanimity, and with fraternal regard.

The policies that my Government will follow are clearly spelt out in the manifesto that was put forward for the consideration of the electorate and whose process of formulation involved broad consultation with significant social partners, individuals and experts in various fields. This document which constitutes a contract of faith with the people of St. Lucia will form the basis for the fundamental policies that my Government will embark on.

The enterprise of government will entail four major strategic priorities that my Government has pledged itself to fulfil. These priorities will set the stage for our emergence in the 21st Century as a small island state with a strong capacity for achievement.

The four strategic priorities of my Government are:

1. The institution of good Governance and a fresh commitment to constitutionality;
2. The intensification of social development;
3. The establishment of a more diversified economy with expanded scope for local participation, and clear parameters and encouragement of foreign investment;
4. Public sector reform and modernisation.

Good Governance And Constitutional Reform

My Government is committed to extending democracy by making existing institutions more accountable to the people and creating new mechanisms for stimulating greater public participation in the processes of government. Of necessity this will involve my Government in developing new modalities of governance, in re-designing and relocating political authority within the parameters of our Constitution. Ultimately it is about making Parliament more accessible to the people and creating new possibilities for self-representation.

To this end, my Government will commence work on the restitution of community government. My Government will initiate a thorough consultative process to engage the communities in dialogue on the parameters of these structures. Moreover, my Government will recognize and seek to work closely with representative civic and community organizations and with professional organizations to ensure that all social sectors are more involved in public policy formulation.

As we seek to bring Parliament closer to the people and to introduce greater transparency in its operation, my Government intends to permit Parliamentary debates to be televised and transmitted by radio. To facilitate this and also to ensure that there is a more vibrant dissemination of public information, my Government will be activating the channel reserved for the Government Information Service on Cable Vision . Consistent with these efforts, my Government will also be examining the possibility of allowing the use of our native Creole language in Parliament. **“Kweyol say langue ek lam pep-la”**: **“Kweyol is the language and soul of the people”** and Parliament as the supreme expression of the sovereign will of the people must accommodate itself to that reality. The institution of Parliament must become an integral dimension of the psyche of the people, a part of the interior landscape of freedom and citizenship. To the extent that people come to see the Parliament as the accountable repository of their hopes and their aspirations to that extent they will participate more actively in the processes of governance. As a result their confidence in the democratic process will be strengthened.

My Government wishes to re-design the relationship between Government and Opposition to engage the Opposition in new modalities of collaboration. There are many pressing issues on which we need to forge a national as distinct from a partisan consensus. There are also many decisions which, although they are the prerogative of Government, ought to be shaped with the input of the Opposition to ensure that the resulting policies are bi-partisan in character. My Government has already started this process by inviting the Leader of the Opposition to nominate one member to the Board of Radio St. Lucia and by requiring that all local committees of the National Disaster Preparedness Committee embrace representatives from both political parties. The challenges that we encounter as a small island state are too great for us to attempt to confront as a divided people. The competition that we must face is too intense and too unrelenting for us to ignore the necessity of using all available talent in the national interest. It is initiatives such as these that put flesh on the bones of our Constitution.

In our thrust to deepen dialogue and to prepare for the 21st Century, my Government has already created a Prime Minister's Advisory Council. The business of this Council is solely to generate new ideas to prepare this country for the 21st Century. The Council is not intended to advise the Prime Minister on all matters pertaining to the functioning of government. Once the apparatus of government is fully in place, it is the intention of my Government to broaden the representation on the Council to bring in our marginalized groups.

More than any Government in our history, my Government will have a heavy legislative agenda. There are many changes that need to be made in the way in which we do things and these changes need to be made in a manner that creates a level playing field for all citizens. My Government's agenda is predicated on a vision of the State as both a regulatory and a facilitatory mechanism. My Government will seek to strengthen the regulatory functions to the extent that the social relations require the definition of a framework of equity, justice and opportunity and it will seek to develop a facilitatory culture in which citizens can be empowered to exercise their democratic rights, discharge their citizenship responsibilities and realize their entrepreneurial potential.

Corruption has been identified as the number one issue in the minds of St. Lucians. The extent of the public sentiment has found expression in popular culture, in Calypso's such as Jaunty's "Bobol List" which expressed in no uncertain terms the revulsion that the ordinary St. Lucian felt at the abuse of public office for private gain.

The Commission of Inquiry established by the former administration to investigate the so-called UN Scandal exposed to public view the sordid dimension of this phenomenon. Although the work of the Commission was never followed to its logical conclusion, it showed St. Lucians how the levers of power could be manipulated, and punctuated the need for tighter public accountability.

My Government will, in conformity with the promises made during the election campaign, establish a Commission to investigate all cases of alleged corruption and to establish which cases warrant further legal action and prosecution. We are resolute to pursue this course of action because the people have cried for justice, and once a blind eye is turned to corruption the institutional environment is created for its unchecked proliferation.

International bodies such as the World Bank and the IMF have been so concerned about the effect of corruption on the body politic and on the developmental potential of countries that they are themselves beginning to institute strong anti-corruption measures and conditionalities within their borrowing mechanisms.

We need to recognise, however, that a Commission of Inquiry is not enough; the passage of new laws is not enough. It is not enough to simply examine and seek to punish those guilty of past misdeeds. We must develop a culture of outrage against corruption. We must cultivate an intolerance of dishonesty. My Government is determined to close the door on all avenues for venality and to prevent any possibility of future recurrence.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, the accountability of parliamentarians to the electorate, over and beyond the exercise of the universal franchise, is an important step in the strengthening of democracy. As a first step in this direction, my Government will bring to parliament legislation mandating that any parliamentarian wishing to transfer his or her allegiance away from the political party under which he or she was elected, must compulsorily resign his or her seat and face a by-election under the new political association.

Accountability must first begin at the top and then be instituted below. Having sought to make Parliament thus, one can then seek to broaden the accountability of the apparatus of government to civil society — to the people at large. My Government is of the view that the era of arbitrary, capricious and reckless decision-making must be brought to an end. Consequently it will bring to parliament an Administrative Justice Bill to modernise the approach to judicial review of decision-making by public officials and authorities, and to ensure compliance with the rule of law. Among other things, this legislation will require public authorities and functionaries to give reasons for their decisions unless, of course, the Constitution so prohibits. An essential element of good governance is the framework of law and order. My Government is of the view that our judicial system has been brought into disrepute by the incremental negligence it suffered from the political directorate. This is evinced in the unacceptably high number of cases that have not been heard by the Courts, the long delays in obtaining justice, the inhumane overcrowding in the prisons, and the de-motivation of the Police. My Government will commence work on the redesign of the judicial infrastructure. This will involve the conduct of an open assessment of the Magistracy in order to determine the areas that require strengthening. Every effort must be made to restore public confidence in our courts of law, if civil order is to be effectively maintained.

One cannot over-emphasize the importance of a framework of law and order to reclaim the streets, to bring back a sense of safety and order to the public, to make citizens feel secure, make business feel confident in the impartiality of the systems of law and order. My Government recognizes the pivotal role of the Police in this imperative and will seek to effect the transformation of the Police from a **Police Force** to a **Police Service**. To serve and to protect must be the watchwords which will bring the return of professionalism, community engagement and community support to those courageous men and women who are in the domestic front line to keep us safe and at peace.

The Social Development Agenda

This country for all practical purposes has a relatively good physical infrastructure but we have consistently ignored the need to upgrade our social infrastructure. This task is not only about the construction of new hospitals and schools but equally and fundamentally, it is about paying attention to the quality of the social interaction that occurs in these facilities. Social development is in the long run, about the emergence of more compassionate social mentalities, about the evolution of a distinctly Caribbean civilization. It is people development.

Cognisant of this, my Government has been meeting with the executives of the representative organizations such as the St. Lucia Chamber of Commerce, the St. Lucia Industrial and Small Business Association, the St. Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association, the Mini-bus

Drivers Association, and the Trade Unions. Meetings with other social groups will follow. These meetings are intended to set a tone and establish a framework for the fuller participation of these bodies in people and national development.

My Government has established a Ministry of Health, Human Services, Family Affairs and Women because it believes that all of the human and social services ought to be integrated and that a focus on the family as a core unit of society will assist in upgrading the quality of life of the nation. My Government will work closely with all social agencies including the religious community to achieve this goal.

My Government proposes to establish a Social Reform Commission as articulated in the Contract of Faith. We believe that it provides an ideal opportunity to provide consensus on the legislative and other reforms that need to be made to improve the social infrastructure. My Government will seek to engage both political parties in this enterprise.

Consistent with its amplified and integrated vision of national development, my Government will seek to give culture pride of place in the national enterprise. My Government intends to introduce legislation to create a National Cultural Institute as a more dynamic structure than the bureaucratic model of a Department of Culture. This Institute will be an autonomous entity governed by a Board comprising representatives of national and community cultural organizations. My Government intends that such a body will not only be charged with dynamizing cultural expression but with the creation of a cultural industry so that our artists and cultural workers may find productive employment in the creation of objects of culture.

Any perspective on social development is incomplete unless it takes into account the framework of labour relations as it is very much about the capacity of working people to be economically self-reliant, to maintain a dignified standard of living and to function without being a charge on the State. My Government believes that it is critical to eliminate the prevailing uncertainties. All parties should be aware of their rights, responsibilities and liabilities and to that end my Government will ensure that our industrial relations practice is brought in line with internationally accepted standards. My Government will commence work on securing the enactment of a comprehensive Labour Code which among other things will seek to resolve the thorny problems of recognition, strengthen the laws governing the process of collective bargaining, define measures for prevention of unfair dismissal and provide for the establishment of tripartite Wages Tribunals to protect workers who cannot enjoy the protective shield of trade unions.

The pillars of the social development agenda of my Government will involve comprehensive approaches to people development in education and human resource development, human services and health. Education reform will be a centerpiece of my Government's social development. The strategic priorities in this field will involve the refocussing of the educational system on the school as the essential unit of the system with all of the attendant support to its instructional and formative processes; the emphasis on more opportunity of quality education at all levels including in the area of adult, continuing and professional education. My Government will also ensure the integration of youth and sports in the education sector so that the experience of schooling results in the more comprehensive and well-rounded development of

the personality of our children. In keeping with its commitment to the harmonization of regional effort, my Government will shortly spearhead a final local round of consultation on the harmonized Education legislation proposed by the OECS before bringing this new regulatory and facilitatory framework into legislative existence. St. Lucia will be the first OECS territory to adopt the new education legislation designed to provide an empowering framework for the 21st Century.

As a signal to our young people, my Government will speedily enact legislation to give the National Youth Council formal legal status to confirm its position as a major non-governmental organization. This step will enable the NYC to conduct its work among young people with autonomy and full recognition. My Government is of the view that youth have to be empowered and challenged to manage their own affairs; they must prepare themselves for leadership in the future by exercising leadership now.

In the view of my Government, social development is not only about the development of our people at home but those abroad as well. The obligations of the State to its citizens do not end when they — often in pursuit of greater opportunity — leave their homeland. Neither does their commitment to St. Lucia diminish as the distance from home increases. My Government will be putting in place measures and mechanisms designed to ensure representation of their rights and interests in the host country whether this is the French Department of Martinique, or Barbados or the United States of America, or Canada or the United Kingdom. Our system of diplomatic representation must also be a system of domestic representation serving our citizens abroad at the same time that it contributes to the friendship of nations and the promotion of our economic interests.

My Government will facilitate investment by nationals abroad and their return to St. Lucia through the creation of a special unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Through this facility, highly skilled nationals may also contribute to national development by registering their expertise within a skill bank.

A More Diversified Economy

The strategic economic platform of my Government involves the establishment of a more diversified economy with expanded scope for local participation, clear parameters and encouragement of foreign investment and an aggressive thrust for niche foreign export and trade opportunities.

The experience of the banana industry in the past five years has punctuated the need to diversify not simply our agricultural production but to establish the principle of diversification in all spheres of our economy. Working closely with our economic partners — the farmers, the private sector, the worker organizations, the credit unions — my Government will encourage and facilitate an aggressive diversification of our trading relations, and our production and export.

The recent moves by my Government to assume the debt of the St. Lucia Banana Growers Association is a concrete expression of my Government's commitment to the indigenous

productive sector and an act of faith in the regenerative capacity of our people in the face of tremendous odds. My Government expects that the farmers of St. Lucia will make use of this and other opportunities that it intends to create to place our agricultural fields in order, to gear themselves for the rigors of international competitiveness and to assume full responsibility and accountability for the management of their own affairs.

The economic policy of my Government will seek to accentuate the growth and development of an indigenous entrepreneurial capacity in many areas. Local small business, the informal and micro-sector, big local business will all find a willing facilitator in my Government particularly if they turn their attention to export opportunity, and job creation. My Government will encourage this capacity further by encouraging the emergence of collaborative economic ventures by locals. This, we believe, will better prepare us for the inevitable liberalization of the economy that will accompany the many initiatives for a single economic space in CARICOM and within the OECS.

Consistent with its policy to strengthen indigenous institutions, my Government will seek Parliamentary approval of legislation to strengthen the Co-operative Sector. The new Co-operative Societies Bill will provide Co-operatives with new latitude and will confer additional powers to Credit Unions to enter into the commercial and financial market place.

My Government recognizes the important function that foreign investment plays in small economies like ours but it recognizes also that the globalization of capital has made the attraction of substantial investment a more competitive process. Investors in this new age of information technology are seeking responsive havens. My Government is beginning the process of transforming the National Development Corporation (NDC) into a one-stop investment promotion and facilitation agency with a mandate to manage foreign investment and to develop local and small business with an export orientation. A new Board has already been selected.

Public Sector Reform And Modernization

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, for my Government to successfully realize the ambitious goals and policies that have been enunciated here today, a modern, efficient, productive and committed public sector is required. My Government has elsewhere shared the view of the previous administration of the urgency of this imperative but has differed on the modalities of its implementation. My Government has already initiated open dialogue with the public sector unions to subject that process to national debate, worker input and critical scrutiny. As a preliminary step, we shall establish a Public Sector Reform Commission whose membership shall comprise public service unions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the public service.

The management of the public sector is already being enhanced by the greater inclusiveness that my Government has brought to the selection of the Boards of Statutory Corporations. My Government has sought to bring young, competent professionals into civic obligation and to marry this infusion of technical competence with the wisdom and experience of longer service. Many have been called to serve but there are many more that have yet to be called and my Government will be seeking to maximize our human resource potential by rotation of

membership of these Boards. As soon as all Statutory Boards are in place, my Government intends to summon a National Conference on Statutory Boards to review and rationalize public policy with respect to these Statutory Corporations and to establish new parameters for intra-corporation collaboration.

All of these initiatives summarise the new vision, the new directions for the new Century that my Government has committed itself to in its Contract of Faith with the electorate. My Government expects that all St. Lucians will look at this moment, and discover the historical resilience that will make it possible for us to enter the morning of the new Century with confidence. We must summon today the courage to do what must be done or we will find that tomorrow we may no longer have the capacity to do it. My Government fully accepts its historical challenge to establish a new social and economic framework within which creativity and entrepreneurial acumen can flourish, confident in the knowledge that as we make our country stronger, safer and fairer, the benefits to be reaped by all will be greater than any that we currently enjoy.

My Government urges all St. Lucians to accept the reality that we can only take out what we are prepared to put in and that with God's guidance, our resolve to stand proudly in the new Century, can and will be attained.