

**Up you mighty people, you can accomplish what you will!**

**Independence Message 2015 from Arnhim U. Eustace**

**Leader of the Opposition New Democracy Party (NDP)**

**27 October 2015**

Last year, my Independence message caused a stir. In it, I time-travelled to Independence 2019 to speak of what Vincentians could expect four years into the first NDP administration of government since 2001. Reactions ranged from kudos to curses. Some declared me senile for celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> rather than 35<sup>th</sup> Independence; others expressed concern that a self-congratulatory look back from the future would read as arrogant, while some simply found the idea preposterous and trite.

What I gleaned from the message's critics, is that in present-day St. Vincent and the Grenadines, many of us dare not court hope.

This discomfort wasn't sage political advice along the lines of "don't promise more than you can deliver". What I heard was battle-weary Vincentians who, having taken more than a decade of hard economic blows, are left bent over, one hand on one knee, and the other hand, palm forward and raised high as if to say, "No more".

But that's the effect of battery upon the national psyche: we lower our standards because we have started to believe we deserve less. After all, we've been told the worst things about ourselves. We're invisible, dunces, dirty dawgs and internet crazies who wouldn't know what to do with a constitution but wrap it around salt fish. We should be grateful to receive "poor relief" from the government and aid instead of trade from other countries. We should be satisfied that while the rest of the region and the world recovers from the global recession, we can't move past it.

And so we accept what is unacceptable everywhere else: police commissioners who wear party colours to party events; farm lands lying fallow; potholes holding more water than some households can joag from the standpipe; threats to public servants on the eve of a strike; smug

college officials who speak glowingly of their associate degree courses, even as their own Minister is forced to admit that none is accredited. I could go on.

Maintaining Independence is not easy. But contrary to what has been hammered into us for fourteen years, we Vincentians are capable of restoring and keeping that Independence. I say to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, "We shall be great again!" because we have been great many times before. Go tell your children and grandchildren how great we were when we staved off colonial forces so long that we were the last in the region to be colonised. Wake them up and tell them about the 1937 labour riots that swept the region. Tell the children that Elma Francois, the great Trinidadian trade unionist, was a Vincentian woman. Tell the children that in the 1990s the same IMF that hovers over us now marvelled that there was "much to praise and little to fault" about our economy. Make sure to teach the children and grandchildren that banana was our green gold; and how every Tuesday you had worst gridlock than on any single day in the last decade because the banana trucks used to hold up traffic from Geest shed all the way to Arnos Vale. And tell them that there was a time when any Vincentian – Indian, Black or White – could be prime minister. Run, tell the children the truth.

I dare you to dream about a St. Vincent with economic growth, statesmanship in political leaders, affordable quality healthcare, equal opportunity for employment, robust trade unions, sound infrastructure, diverse and profitable farming, a thriving private sector, integrity legislation, true freedom of information, sexual harassment policy in the public sector, prosecution of corrupt officials, free speech and a free press.

I know. The present day reality hurts. But there is hope. Let's take back our Independence. Up you mighty people, you can accomplish what you will!