

Address to the Nation
Delivered By
The Honourable Edison C. James
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica
at the Military Parade
On the Occasion of the 21st Anniversary of Independence
Windsor Park, Roseau
November 3, 1998

Your Excellency President Vernon Shaw and Mrs Shaw

Hon. Speaker of the House of Assembly.

Hon. Ministers of Government

Hon. Chief Minister of Montserrat

Hon. Members of Parliament

Former Presidents of Dominica

Your Grace the Archbishop of Castries

Your Lordship the Bishop of Roseau

Your Lordship the Resident Judge

Former Prime Ministers of Dominica

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Secretary General of CARICOM

Director General of the OECS

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Members of the Clergy

Specially Invited Guests

Uniformed Groups

Friends of Dominica

Fellow Dominicans

Happy Birthday Dominica!

It looks good; it feels good; it is good to see so many of you here today. And what a lovely gift is Dominica!

I warmly welcome you all. I recognise among us the presence of the representatives of friendly Governments from around the world - we are glad to have you. In a very special way I welcome all visiting Dominicans. Last year I bade you Come Home, and you have come in your thousands. You are far from Home but close at heart! Welcome to Dominica, welcome to the Windsor Park. It was in this very place twenty-one years ago on November 3rd 1978 that the Union Jack was lowered and our own national flag hoisted. It was on that day in 1978 that we as a people affirmed that the Commonwealth of Dominica is founded upon principles that acknowledge the Supremacy of God. It is to God therefore that we give all praise and glory for guiding us through these past twenty-one years and for sparing us so far this year from the ravages of storms and hurricanes.

As we celebrate our 21st Birthday as a nation, it is fitting and proper that we reflect on Dominica's independence experience. Therefore, I invite all Dominicans - at home and abroad - to put aside a few minutes today or tomorrow or during this week to do some introspection on independent Dominica, on the road we have travelled, where we are now and where we are going both in terms of the direction, the pace and the contents of the baggage that we are carrying into the new millennium.

Yes, it is necessary that we pause and take an audit of the nation and engage in an exercise of strategic thinking for the future. This requires that we examine in an honest and comprehensive way the policies, programmes, projects and relationships that we have pursued since independence. Our projected plans must be constructed in the context of our resource endowment, both real and potential, and the factors, both natural and human, that circumscribe, if not determine the behaviour and viability of small island states like Dominica.

In doing this national stock-taking we must be candid with ourselves. We must not feel embarrassed in posing some serious and searching questions about our leaders, in government and in opposition; about our institutions, both public and private, and about ourselves as a people. What goals did we set for ourselves? What goals did we in fact pursue? What did we achieve? What did we not accomplish? Where did we fail? Where did we fall short? Were our failures self-created through fear, through timidity, through cowardice, through lack of focus, through lack of stamina or short-sightedness? Or were they a result of factors beyond our control - acts of God, market factors, and geo-political realignment?

This exercise requires that we look back, that we reflect, that we ponder. And on the basis of the result and conclusions arrived at by this reflection on our independence experience, we will have to determine in a comprehensive way the direction and modalities of our forward movement.

In 1978, as we approached Independence Day, there was a feeling of gloom and doom among some elements of the population. Small, but powerful interests articulated the fear that we would not be able to make it; that we would not be able to shoulder the full burdens and new responsibilities of sovereignty and of nationhood. They assayed that the State would degenerate into dictatorship or disintegrate into anarchy, because we lacked the will and the capacity to deal with the superficial differences of social origin, class and politics; that we were unable to cohere as one people. But history has given the lie to this lack of confidence in us and in our people. Dominica has survived as a nation for twenty-one years and will continue to do so. As the distinguished West Indian Professor the late Elsa Goveia stated of the Caribbean Peoples and the harsh conditions of Plantation Slavery - "just to survive sometimes is an achievement!"

At this place, in the night, in the closing minutes of the 2nd day of November 1978, the Leader of the Opposition at the time delivered the Welcome Address to Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret at the First Meeting of the First Session of the First Parliament under the Dominica Constitution Order 1978. In that Address, the Leader of the Opposition used the opportunity to lay before the nation and the world the opposition's views on the administration, and her criticisms of the operation of the Westminster model of Government, on democracy and press freedom in the country at that time.

That same night, or more accurately, at the very beginning of the new day, Independence Day, the 3rd day of November 1978, the first Prime Minister of Dominica addressed the nation. He too gave his perspective on the problems of the nation - on the baneful effects of world inflation and the impact of escalating fuel costs on the economy. He referred to the climate of industrial unrest and confrontation and their effects on the country's development.

But nevertheless, and significantly, both speakers, the Leader of the Opposition in the midnight of the 2nd day of November 1978, and the Leader of the Government at the beginning of the 3rd day of November 1978 were able, in the substance of their addresses to transcend narrow political concerns, rivalries and interests, and rise to the high heights required of the occasion, and focussed on the higher national interest - national unity, national mobilisation, citizen cooperation and the responsibility of each Dominican to self and country.

It is good and proper that we can again hear their submissions. In her summing up, the Leader of the Opposition had this to say [and I quote from the Hansard of the said Meeting]:

"...if Dominica is to go forward successfully, and for the good of all the people it is necessary that every ounce of potential must be mobilised to help to develop the nation. We do not only want unity but we must have singular goal; we must have the desire to conserve the resources at our disposal and then to exploit them for the betterment of all the people of Dominica..."

The Leader of the Opposition went on to say that independence is *"...something we have to work for, and above all it will not be for the few but it will be everybody's business."* And she added: *"...let us all realise that with liberty comes duty. We must be ready to shoulder our responsibilities and we must be ready to be concerned about our new responsible role. We must not be satisfied to ask 'what are they doing about it'... We must develop the 'let's do something about it ourselves'. Acceptance of responsibility in our new found liberty leads us to use power justly and wisely and to cooperate with others to find a good life for all Dominicans."*

After repelling the attacks, expressed or implied in the Leader of the Opposition's speech, the first Prime Minister also focussed on the larger public interest. He said: *"To those persons in our society who may continue fruitlessly to be an adversary we offer a simple request, a request demanded by our people at home and abroad that both Government and Opposition should now embark on a quest for internal peace."*

He issued a call for both parties to, *"seek ways and means to eradicate the hate, envy, class prejudice and suspicion which so tragically exist in our society."* And ended with a resounding call for national unity. He said: *"Therefore, let us stop wounding and slandering ourselves and appear before the world truly as we really are - as friends, not masters; as apostles of principle, not power; in humility, not arrogance; as champions of peace and not as harbingers of war. For our strength is not as divided but united as a people."* I am advised that these words were very true then. I know that they are sound advice now.

I have referred to the speeches of the 2nd and 3rd November 1978 essentially for two reasons. Firstly, to elucidate the point that in small island states partisan rhetoric tends to permeate or raise its voice on practically all occasions. We seem to take our political selves too seriously.

And secondly, and more importantly, that the geographic and economic realities of being a very small island state and the sociology of small size compel us to put the brakes on that very partisanship and parochialism and elevate our focus and perspective in order to lead and harmonise with the real needs and higher aspirations of our people.

And so Fellow Dominicans, as we celebrate the 21st Anniversary of Independence, as we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, I invite all Parliamentarians, political parties and political power brokers and seekers to commit ourselves to raising and advancing the welfare of Dominica and to put the national interest above all other interests and ambitions. This will not be easy. We are not saints. We are not heroes. But the conditions and harsh realities of the time require that we make heroic efforts, say a little prayer, and light a candle of hope rather than curse the darkness of despair. For, against even the smallest of lights darkness cannot stand! Those still lost in the woods can be led safely and can be guided home by a flickering flame from a single candle. So keep the candle burning.

Keep that candle burning as we observe the passage from one century to the next, from one millennium to the next. Keep that candle burning as time moves on.

This passage of time reminds us that there was a past, and that there is a future. What we have, and what we celebrate today has come about through the hard work of industrious Dominicans. Some of them have passed on, but some are still with us. They have handed over to those of us who are here today, and we are continuing the work they have begun. Sooner or later, we too must hand over to those who are ready to take up the mantle.

Let me pay tribute today to those who brought us to independence and to those who so far have helped sustain our country in its development. We must pay tribute to Mr. Patrick Roland John, the first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica. We pay tribute to you and your team which finally sealed the deal which brought about the hoisting of our flag on 3rd November, 1978.

We pay tribute to Mr. Oliver J. Seraphin. We pay tribute to you and your team for holding the fort in that critical period in the immediate aftermath of the destructive force of hurricane David and intense industrial unrest.

We pay tribute to Dame Mary Eugenia Charles. We pay tribute to you and your team for guiding us through those fifteen years of our development.

I pay tribute to my solid team, I pay tribute to all of you for the solid work done over the past four and a half years.

During our 21 years of Independence we were served in the highest position by seven presidents; Sir Louis Cools-Lartigue, Messrs Fred DeGazon, Jenner Armour, Aurelius Marie, Sir Clarence Seignoret, Mr. Crispin Sorhaindo and the incumbent Mr. Vernon Lorden Shaw. To them all we express profound gratitude.

Those aforementioned are the leaders. But leaders without followers would lead nowhere. And so we lift up the public servants, the police, the doctors and nurses, the teachers, the store clerks, the farmers, the agricultural and road workers and others too for their sterling contribution to national development. You are all special.

And it takes special people to build this Commonwealth. The very attributes which make us that "Gem beyond compare - our rivers, valleys, hills and mountains- make it a Herculean and expensive endeavour to effect infrastructural and physical development, and severely tax our human and financial resources. This notwithstanding, we have over the years built our roads, and built our bridges; schools were constructed and our agriculture developed. Port facilities, both sea and air were increased, and public servants, albeit with some agitation, have been reasonably well served. All this we did through thick and thin, through hurricanes, floods, drought, volcanic tremors and the ruling of the World Trade Organisation. We have been resilient.

Fellow Dominicans! The past is behind us. The future beckons. What future and what mantle will we hand over? It is a future in which globalization and its handmaiden, trade liberalisation are the in-things. These twin bedfellows have spelt despair and dismay for many small and vulnerable economies. Witness the deleterious impact on our banana industry. It is only the tenacity of our farmers and the determination of a committed leadership which have so far maintained our hold on our market. Discussions for a negotiated settlement have intensified and a satisfactory conclusion is in sight. The continued production of good quality fruit will strengthen our hands. Last week's dividend payout to banana growers, even at one cent per pound should send the signal that we are in the business for the long haul.

Fellow Dominicans! Political independence has given us the right to make major decisions affecting our lives. But there are other major decisions of immense significance to us. They are made in Geneva, in Brussels, in London, Ottawa, Washington and New York. We at home will continue to seek to influence those decisions in our favour. Visiting Dominicans, you of the Diaspora, you can help. But you can only do so if you are organised and focussed on the relevant issues as they evolve and develop. I urge you to be so organised and focused. The special desk for overseas Dominicans now established in the Prime Minister's Office in collaboration with our embassies and missions is at your disposal. We are counting on you.

Unfortunately, bananas is not alone in receiving the attention of these champions of liberalisation, free trade and competition. How ironic, Fellow Dominicans that these very advocates of competition, member countries of the OECD fraternity, now seek protection from what they describe as the regions "Harmful Tax Practices". So our efforts to secure a share of the lucrative off-shore financial services sector are stigmatised and equated with money laundering. This is the sinister face of globalisation in which the weak must be crushed by the strong, the rich must get richer and the poor remain in their rightful place.

And even as I speak to you, there is a practical example of this evil act of the strong destroying the weak. It concerns the cruise industry, and the danger now being posed to the livelihood of hundreds of people in our sister OECS state of Grenada. Carnival Cruise Lines is now for the second time in three years threatening to pull out its services from Grenada in its continued battle against the payment by its passengers of a meagre U.S. \$1.50 environmental levy.

As current Chairman of the OECS, I urge all member states of the Organization and of the wider Caribbean Community and indeed the Caribbean people, to be prepared to stand in solidarity with Grenada at this time. It is in our region's own self-interest.

Fellow Dominicans! This is the future in which this nation must nonetheless chart its development path.

A nation is its people. We must first and foremost be a people true to our affirmation as expressed in our Constitution and Anthem. We must be a people who acknowledge the Supremacy of God, and a people full of Godly reverent fear. We must be a people who go to Church, who love each other, who are kind and gentle towards each other. We must be a people ever willing to build each other up and to embrace each other so that we can truly embrace the new millennium together as one.

Together we will build our future. That future will be built on knowledge. The development and expansion of information technology is therefore pivotal; hence our determination to obtain a better deal in the telecommunications industry. Recent reductions in rates point in the right direction. Yet our ambition is to go past the tip and get to the base of this vast telecommunications iceberg. We continue to work through the OECS Reform Project and will soon take appropriate legislative action to facilitate the achievement of our objectives.

The chances of a bright and prosperous future will be significantly enhanced when all our people have equal opportunities to access the knowledge which will drive the future. This as a Government, we well appreciate as reflected in our action in facilitating the youth, the elderly, the disabled and the women's organisations in better equipping themselves to face the future. There must be some concern though about our men folk - young men who seem to be

overshadowed by their female counterparts. This is no time to be laid back. Come ye forward sons!!

It is our wish that all ideas should contend. Our numbers are already too few to accommodate any alienation. Our numbers are also too few to bear further reduction through drug abuse, violence against each other and HIV Aids. We desperately need "Mens sana in corpore sano" - "a sound mind in a sound body".

Fellow Dominicans! In charting our path into the new millennium, we are not alone. We are part of the wider regional family as members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We are members also of the extra regional groupings, Cariforum, the ACS, OAS, the Commonwealth of Nations and the ACP, as well as International Organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations. Through these relationships we have taken on responsibilities and obligations and have given ourselves opportunities to derive certain benefits from them.

The OECS and CARICOM are our extended families. I acknowledge the presence of the Director General and the Secretary General respectively. These institutions have been very much a part of our past twenty-one years and will be an even more significant part of our future. Though there is diversity, we have so much more in common as a region. We have advanced from the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973 to the Consensus of Chaguaramas in 1999. In that Consensus, the region's leaders have expressed their firm determination to bring to fruition in the shortest possible time the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, including the free movement of labour, capital and services, and the rights of establishment of businesses as well as the operationalisation of the Caribbean Court of justice in both its original and appellate jurisdictions.

Fellow Dominicans! We need to prepare and position ourselves for these developments. I plead particularly with the private sector and say to them that it is infinitely better to embark on the bus in the comfort and safety of the designated stop, rather than to seek to hop on as it passes by at full speed. The Consensus of Chaguaramas provides for the building of regional consensus through a planned encounter with Civil society in the year 2000 and annual briefings of the Parliamentary Opposition by the Chairman and Secretary General of CARICOM. We in Dominica have already started that process of dialogue with the opposition on key matters like bananas. It is good when ideas contend.

Fellow Dominicans! Even as we look to a future of strengthened regionalism, we acknowledge the support of the international institutions and friendly countries. The European Union, the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Japan and the United states to mention some. Thanks to one and all.

We owe a special thanks to the Republic of China on Taiwan for their assistance and support. A special thanks because their assistance is special - special because it is delivered on a timely basis, it is untied to obligations to purchase goods and services from their country, and it demonstrates a high level of respect for the ability of our people to plan and execute programmes and projects which to many seemed near nigh impossible.

I take the opportunity to publicly express, through Ambassador Chan and Chargé d'Affaires Wu, our profound sympathies to the Government and people of the Republic of China on Taiwan on the loss of life and property as a result of the recent earthquake. We in this region know very well the pain of destruction through natural disasters, and we look to the support of all our friends for the establishment of a Disaster Reconstruction Fund to facilitate a rapid and effective reconstruction in the aftermath of these all-too-frequent but unwelcome visitors.

Fellow Dominicans! Disasters may throw us down, but they can never keep us down. Not if we are prepared to work and work hard. And I can assure you that your government is working and working hard.

- We have worked hard to construct roads from Petite Savanne to Delices, from Warner to Jimmit, from Campbell to Despor, and from Wotten Waven to Trafalgar, and we are working to construct the Gillett to Blenheim road.
- We have worked to bring pipe-borne water to our indigenous people and other villages throughout the state.
- We have worked to construct brand new secondary schools at Castle Bruce and at Grand Bay and to build additional capacity at Portsmouth and Roseau.
- We are working to build a brand new secondary and tertiary institution at Londonderry to complement that already in operation at Stock Farm.
- We have worked to train our teachers and librarians to drive the education standards to higher heights.
- We have worked to ensure that universal secondary education will become a reality and that our students have the financial support for college and university education.
- We have worked hard to construct the intensive care unit at the Princess Margaret hospital and to commence work on the new operating theatre.
- We have worked and are working to build and rehabilitate health centres throughout the State.
- We have worked to defend our market for bananas and to develop new markets for non-banana crops.
- We have worked to secure better trading arrangements in the New World Economic Order - post Lome and in the Seattle negotiations.

- We have worked to ensure that the less fortunate among us have a bit more to spend through increases in the pension and public assistance allowances.
- We have worked to allow our country to benefit from the off-shore financial sector.
- We have worked to establish Tourism sites at Trafalgar, Emerald Pool, Syndicate, Cabrits, etc.
- We have worked and are still working to increase our power generation capacity to meet the demands of our development thrust.
- We are working to construct the Roseau water and sanitation system, the National stadium here at the Windsor Park, and the Sea Defence walls around the country, and
- We are all working to build an international airport.
- THE WORKERS ARE WORKING!!!

Fellow Dominicans! Much work has been done, but there is much more work to be done. We need to work on our attitude to work. And in this regard I must express my disappointment that the Work Ethics Committee established some time ago has not yet been able to report on its findings. It needs to work a bit harder.

Indeed we should declare the year 2000 as the Year of Hard work.

It must be a year of hard work in which there should be no place for idleness, laziness, absenteeism, and planned illness. It is a thin line between planning to be sick and malingering.

It must be a year of hard work in which we as leaders must lead by example.

It must be a year of hard work in which the public service must shift from a culture of administration towards a culture of management; a process which must be fashioned by constitutional reform which brings responsibility and authority significantly closer together.

In all this I pledge on behalf of my colleagues to continue to report to the nation in the spirit of consultation, transparency and accountability. I pledge also to uphold unswervingly the principles and practice of democracy which is so dear to all of us.

Soon we will all have the opportunity to once again exercise one aspect of our democratic rights, that is, the right to choose the Government for the ensuing five years. Prepare yourselves. You already know the date will be before the 12th of June, 2000. I wish I could be more precise, but I promise I will let you know soon.

This passing reference to general elections calls to mind the way in which we do our politics and politicking. The acrimony, the vilification and the bitterness associated with platform politics wound and hurt each other. They wound and hurt our nation. There must be another way.

There must be a better way. I extend an invitation to those who are of similar disposition to join me in finding that other and better way.

Fellow Dominicans! Twenty-one years ago on this day, this nation was born. Several of our sons and daughters were also born on that day. But one among them was specially singled out as the Independence Baby, having been the first child born at the Princess Margaret Hospital. The Independence Baby was promised a scholarship to facilitate attendance at a secondary school. I am aware that the Independence Baby was "adopted" by the Rotary Club. The young man has done well academically, obtaining eight passes at the General Proficiency level of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and three passes at the GCE Advanced Level. He intends to pursue University level training in the field of Computer science. I am happy to announce today that Government will provide to the Independence Baby, Mr. Patrick Roland Alexander of Pointe Michel a full scholarship to enable him to pursue University studies in his chosen field.

Today also, several other persons will receive awards for outstanding service to their country. A distinguished son of the soil will be bestowed the Dominica award of Honour. I salute and congratulate each of you and your families.

There are others among us who have at some stage strayed from the straight and upright path set by the society and were accorded by their peers the treatment reserved for deviant behaviour. In the spirit of Birthday 21, some of these brothers have been released from prison. I wish them well and trust that they will never again return to the cell.

Fellow Dominicans! I know you expected me to speak for 21 hours, but it would not be fair to the members of our wonderful uniformed groups who have had to stand through all of this. I thank them all for coming, and congratulate them for being so splendidly groomed. We look forward to the display led, of course, by our leading disciplined body, the police. It is good to see you.

When next we meet like this we will be well and truly into the new millennium. Let us therefore go forth from this place with a renewed spirit of nationalism; determined to work diligently and conscientiously for our country. Committed to love and defend each other and our country at all cost and at all times.

We have just emerged from the wonderful spectacle and pulsating rhythms of the World Creole Music Festival, where our culture and much that is Dominican was on display. I am profoundly grateful to the Chairman and Members of the Millennium and Festivals Commissions and of the Cultural Division for their outstanding work. But we often listen to our calypsonians who give us what to them is sound advice. Let us therefore pray to the almighty that we will find the courage to put the brakes on all forms of negativism, hate and mistrust; that we will keep the

candles burning on forgiveness, hope and renewal, inculcating in us that positive attitude which will lead us to embrace each other and the new millennium together as one.

On behalf of my wife, my family and myself, I say Happy Birthday Dominica. Millennium, here we come!

May God bless us all!