



ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

A Parliamentary Democracy

BY

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President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

Collar of the Order of the Liberator (Simon Bolivar)

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING

OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT

ON MONDAY, 21st JUNE, 1993

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

Early Roots of Democracy

We are in an epoch of the observance of Centenaries. For example, the Dominica Grammar School is celebrating its centenary this year. The Roseau Bethesda Methodist Church is observing its Centennial Anniversary, we are commemorating the fifth centennial of Columbus' landing in the Americas. In the United States of America, a year of special events has been planned to celebrate the two thousand, five hundredth (2,500th) Anniversary of the birth of Democracy in Athens. In recognition of this anniversary, I have selected for the theme of my Message "A Parliamentary Democracy". Since preparing my Message, other centenaries have come to my attention. In 1983, Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian lawyer trained in England, visited South Africa and started a struggle against the Apartheid. We also observed the hundredth anniversary of the Tax Uprising at La Plaine, and no less than four of our Senior Citizens celebrated their hundredth birthday.

The real purpose of a celebration or an anniversary, is simply to provide an opportunity for us to raise our minds and hearts above the ordinary thoughts, concerns and pre-occupations of everyday life. It tells us that there is more than what we see, what we hear, what we feel, what we experience as we journey through life. It is an opportune time to reflect on the past and to look to the future.

I have seen it written that Democracy has "Many Footholds and Families". It is general knowledge that the quest for Democracy has its early roots somewhere around the fifth Century B.C. suffering many reversals with the decline of the "Greek States".

Plato and Aristotle despised it. In the 18th Century revolutionaries in France and America died for it. Great wars are fought to make the world safe for it. Today, in old empires and dictatorships and in new struggling republics it is appended to and looked to for answers.

The question may be asked what is this democracy that seems to be all things to all people? It is one of the three great buzz-words in political vocabulary, along with "freedom and justice". For the ancient Greeks, democracy meant the rule of the people against noble classes. For the 17th Century English people, who executed a king and ousted another, democracy meant the rule of Parliament against the power of the Monarch. Today, we like to think democracy means government by the people and for the people, but how often is this true.

Democracy is a high and difficult enterprise. It is a word charged with great human hopes. It is based upon the concept of political liberty, in which personal freedom is limited only by the idea of equality, a thought which is the slow fruit of ages.

Even when a country has all the trappings of a democracy – a constitution, the rule of law, free speech, regular elections and human rights, political power can still be wielded by uncaring

politicians for their own ends. The electoral system itself may not always decide whether or not the government really represents the wishes and best interests of the voters.

Corruption and tyranny have threatened democracy since the beginning; it is a fragile system dependant on the humanity and goodwill of officials and citizens if it is to operate fully.

It is true that the notion of democracy was born in Athens, but it was limited to certain classes of people-participation, equality before law, pluralism and individualism for everyone (except for women and also the many slaves). These were the cornerstones of early democracy, before it disappeared from Greece and the other known world after a brief and unsuccessful revival in Rome.

The Meaning of Democracy

Democracy literally means "the Government of the people". It comes from the Greek words demos, people and kratos, government or power.

The democratic revival did not gain momentum until modern times with the signing of Magna Carta in 1215. Some centuries later, democracy broke new ground with the industrial revolution in Britain in 1688 and the signing of the Bill of Rights in 1689, making Parliament supreme over the King.

The French Revolution in the 18th Century seemed to have been fought on the principle that a government should represent the will of the people.

No man today questions the need for government. All nations desire a strong Government – a government that has power and can use it for the benefit of the people.

Two basic forms of government have evolved throughout the ages – Dictatorship and Democracy. Many countries have undergone a long struggle to rid themselves of despotic regimes. Others have fought dictatorship, but merely exchanged one form for another. In spite of backward steps in some countries, the last two centuries have seen the growth of democracy. And it is true to say that even in countries under a dictatorship there is the cherished dream of a golden age of democracy.

Democracy is not an easy word to define. In principle, Democracy is government by the elected representatives of the people. It supposes universal adult suffrage. But more than that, in the words of the American President Abraham Lincoln, it is "Government of the people, by the people and for the people". It pledges itself to provide the greatest good for the greatest number. Democracy recognizes the right of every man to speak out, to express his opinion on all matters, including matters of national policy. It was Thomas Jefferson who said "An educated and enlightened public and leadership is necessary for democracy to work".

Democracy recognizes the right not only to choose one's representatives but also to dissent. And so the role of the opposition is officially recognized. Inherent in the system of democracy is the principle that Government, although formed by the majority of elected representatives, is not infallible and as such needs to listen to the opinions of others, including those opposed to it. The Opposition is guaranteed a voice, but a vote in its favour is not assured.

As a way of life it is not easy to describe, it can only be lived. Democracy is something far more than a Constitution. It is far more than some sort of agreement between people. It is something which transcends the three branches of government – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Democracy is based on the dignity of man. It is a system which has been contrived – rather, it is a way of life which man has been led to adopt – which best safeguards the cherished gifts man has received from his Creator, the gift of liberty of self-expression – the liberty to do anything that he wants, provided he does not infringe on the rights of any fellow-man or acts against the common good.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Democracy has developed in countries where certain factors prevail. One is the existence of a strong press and pressure groups, the development of strong associations of people with vested interests and, generally speaking, an enlightened electorate. Democracy has never been maintained as such by the Government alone. Rather, the Government has had no alternatives but to maintain the democratic system!

In developing countries like ours, however, a great burden will rest on the leaders to maintain the democratic way of life, for in most developing countries, the Press is weak and there is a lack of strong and influential institutions in existence and an unenlightened electorate.

Democracy is fragile, and no one knows how long it will stand up against the ever increasing pressures of inequality, poor social conditions, ever increasing debt crises and the many problems and strains under which governments function today.

Indeed, we must not assume that a democratic country will always remain so. The nations leaders as well as the people, will have to fight for it. As one author puts it most pointedly, "Every good and excellent thing stands moment by moment on the razor's edge of danger and must be fought for." It will need courage, self-discipline, a spirit of compromise and real dedication to all that is beautiful in man and in society to refrain from seeking absolute power.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Democracy is government by the majority. However, it does not necessarily mean that the majority – or what appears to be the majority – is right. And there lies the role of the responsible minority. Democracy invests leaders with the certain powers. But it does not necessarily follow that these powers are always rightly used.

The complexities of managing the democratic system, particularly in the Westminster style, were recognized by no less a parliamentarian than Sir Winston Churchill, who once remarked that "democracy is the worst system devised by the wit of man – except for all the others".

"Democracy" means to us a form of government for free and upright people who take pride in governing themselves. The wise laws and just restraints decided by their freely-elected government are not chains restricting their freedom. Laws promote harmony. They are not meant to coerce members to conformity but to be guidelines for moral living.

Social Disorganisation

A West Indian politician once said: "We face a crisis of community itself, political, economic, sociological, personal, psychological and moral at the same time, and it is the community which must work together to identify solutions to the threat of democracy," end of quote.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

If a sense of injustice or inequality persists too long untreated, it will produce social disorganization. This being evident, we must therefore devise ways and means of working out just and equitable solutions to preserve democracy, while offering a better quality of life to our people.

I have sympathy for the enormous economic problems facing this Country, and a great deal of admiration for the resolute and intelligent way in which My Government and the people of Dominica are attempting to solve our problem.

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Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Dominica Constitution Order 1978

I would have liked to read to you the preamble of our Constitution, but time is of the essence. I suggest you do so at your leisure. However, advantage should be taken on every suitable occasion to actively educate our people on the Constitution which is the very foundation of our freedom. Unfortunately, these are not very well known or understood by the vast majority of our population. Our Parliamentarians must be well versed in its provisions and also understand the spirit of the document having regard for the system of government under which we operate.

We must regard our major role as one of promoting democracy, but you really cannot promote something unless you have really looked into what makes it tick, or what stops it from ticking.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Since Dominica is a member of the United Nations, it is apposite to use the axiom of representative democracy as stated in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was proclaimed some 45 or 50 years ago:- I quote:-

- Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of the country, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- secondly,
- Everyone has the right of equal access to public services in his country;
- and thirdly,
- The will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government, this will shall be expressed in periodic or and genuine elections which shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Within the framework of this enunciation, certain basic rights are to be guaranteed protection. The right to life and security of the person; the right to freedom of expression, thought and opinion; the right to freedom of association and assembly. These rights are sometimes called democratic rights, sometimes human rights and sometimes civil political rights. But by whatever names they are called, they constitute desirable standards for measuring the extent to which human beings are

entitled to enjoy human life in relationships among themselves and with their elected representatives.

Our Dominica Constitution provides for the enjoyment of these rights and freedom. There should therefore be no lack of awareness in this Country of our Rights, and we should have no difficulty in practising them.

Protection of Rights

Our laws must play an important part in the protection of our democratic rights. We must be aware of the legal machinery which exists or should exist for the maintenance of the democratic structure, and what remedies according to law are provided by the legal system.

Threats to Democracy

We need first of all to establish whether there are threats to democracy in Dominica. If so, these must be identified as well as the sources and their interests. Secondly, we need to identify the reasons, and thirdly, we must identify the means of dealing with them, and of eliminating them.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Dominica has been governed by the democratic process since the introduction of legislative government elected by the voting process. Originally, it was only the land owners and merchants and propertied people who could vote, but with the introduction of adult suffrage, all citizens who reached the qualifying age were given the right.

On the 3rd of November, 1978, Dominica became a Sovereign Democratic Republic within the Commonwealth, styled the Commonwealth of Dominica. From then on our Country became important to the more developed industrial nations, in forums like the United Nations and the Organisation of American States, and therefore important in the ideological war aided by our under-development.

Our history has been one of struggle. We must therefore guard our freedom and strive to improve the economic and social structure for our citizens.

Let us therefore join hands and demonstrate t least according to a renowned Professor:-

"Free government has truly come of age and offers the millions upon millions whose minds and characters have never yet been given the opportunity to contribute to the common good, a broad avenue of advancement. Men have the right to comprehend and employ their confidence and make of their increasing abundance and power, a yet more sensitive justice with more abundant Freedom".

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Honesty

We must ensure the integrity of our government at all times. We need moderate, honest government with policies aimed at addressing programmes that will bring social and economic justice, that will ensure our rights and freedom.

We need honest government, not only in the political directorate but we also need honesty in the administration.

Any democratic government that is successful in removing the frustrations of poverty and unemployment, and ensuring that our human rights are protected, and provide social services such as health and education would have succeeded in preserving our democratic way of life.

Corruption

We sometimes allow ourselves to think that direct violation of our human rights by repression or suppression of them is the only or worst form of their abuse. We so often tend to overlook more subtle forms of violations which sometimes become norms in certain societies and which wittingly or unwittingly people grow to accept, to tolerate, and unfortunately for some to practice.

Thus, the denial of freedom of expression by a government's closure of a newspaper will bring shouts of protest from a vociferous number of people, but a government Minister who may be known to take bribes for dispensing favours is quietly allowed to remain in office. Officials who use government property indiscriminately for their personal needs – vehicles, the telephone, officials who have no regard for punctuality and poor attitudes. Also those who sustain lucrative business interests by using their official influence in engaging in business which inevitably interferes with their official duties, are not seen to deprive lesser advantaged citizens of the right of equality of opportunity in the society.

The weakening of moral conscience in man and in society is a result of the crisis of values, is the root cause of the corruption phenomenon; many objectively corrupt circumstances end up becoming generally accepted conduct.

Governments operating under a democratic system are expected to be corruption free at all times. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Health of a Democratic Society

The health of a democratic society requires constant maintenance of its institutions in order to keep them strong and vigorous. Churches, courts, Parliament, the press, universities, community service organizations, Trade Unions. If any of these do not function or are not allowed to function freely, or cease to exist, then there will lurk a continuing threat to democracy in any society. The human factor in all these institutions is the key to their vitality. The calibre and character of the persons who administer them, the lawyers, magistrates and judges in our legal system, the owners and writers of the media, the clergy, the trade union officials and members, and last, by no means the least, public servants.

Persons of integrity committed to humanitarian principles and democratic ideals, should always try to faithfully monitor abuses of basic freedom.

They should work fearlessly for the strengthening and preservation of our democratic institutions, and also for the rights of our people.

The Individual

The first tenet of democratic theory is the importance of the individual. Each person has a worth and dignity of their own that society must recognize and respect.

The Drug Threat

I believe that one of the greatest threats to democracy at the moment is the use of dangerous drugs and the drug trade. Drugs have become so prevalent, I fear that a large percentage of our youth are going to be totally useless by the time they have reached the age to take over the reins of the government of this Country and elsewhere.

Illicit drugs have brought in guns and have put much money in the hands of unscrupulous persons that it is quite possible, in the near future that many of our institutions will be corrupted.

Drugs can destroy the minds of our present and future generations. The interests behind the drug trade are very powerful financially, and often have connections with influential persons in the community. With the monetary power and the connections, small countries like ours are vulnerable. It is therefore important that anyone with inside knowledge of the drug trade should co-operate fully with the authorities in an effort to stamp out this scourge.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Democratic Experiments

A democratic society experiments with different public policies and social arrangements, and learns by making mistakes; but for it to succeed, ways must be found to correct these errors.

Seldom are the solutions so satisfactory that there is no room for further improvement. Moreover, one democratic society may find very different solutions to certain problems than does another, and yet both sets of solutions may be good and satisfactory depending on the particular state.

Equal Opportunity

We must understand that democracy does not assert that all men are born with equal talents or that all men should share equally in property or income, but it does hold that all men should enjoy an equal opportunity to make use of their talents; to take advantage of the opportunities that life offers, and to equal justice under the law.

All t his is easier said than done. Man's ability to make both moral judgement and sensible decisions about the problems that life offers, often become warped, twisted or impaired because of his poor social conditions, his being in a state of poverty as well as his inequality with his fellow-men. Poverty, inequality, unemployment, curtailment of expression, suppression of rights, restrictions on the media, indifference on the part of the political directorate, are some of the causes that can lead to political friction and create an environment for the enemies of democracy to flourish.

It has been said that to understand poverty in the Caribbean, is to understand slavery which involves Slavery, Women and Land Reform. Indeed, we must try to understand that in our fight against poverty, inequality and poor social conditions, while we are struggling with distribution of the national cake, while we are seeking solutions to crime and violence, we must face the reality that in a poor developing country as ours, we do not have enough to do all we would wish to do. How do we order our priorities will determine, in the long run, whether we remain free and democratic or accept another system.

Poverty is the lack of money and material possessions, and when a large percentage of any people live in a state of poverty they become prime targets for political fanatics and so-called intellectuals who seek to indoctrinate them in some form of alternative system. Many insurrections or rebellions have been born out of ignorance or fear, because those who are reasonably educated have sought to use ignorance and people's fear to incite them to revolt. This then is the great danger we face.

Participation of Citizens

The chances to rise from poverty, inequality and poor social conditions cannot be achieved at by bureaucratic jargon, but from massive participation of citizens, youth groups, women's

organizations and other social organizations, through dialogue, so that decisions may be taken on what is achievable.

We must do all we can to eliminate the problem of having thousands of our people unemployed, ill-housed, ill-clothed, uneducated and sometimes even ill-fed. The real circumstances of our less fortunate in our society cannot be ignored. The real efforts to protect our democracy cannot be left to the few who show remarkable self-discipline, patriotism and sacrifice. It is the responsibility of everyone.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

A Parliamentary Democracy

My Message would be lacking if I said nothing about "A Parliamentary Democracy" – indeed the Theme of my address.

Government is the vastest of all human enterprise, and it needs to be constantly examined to see that it is functioning well. It is the organization through which the State manifests its will, issues its commands, and conducts its affairs. The State is given that power by the will of the people expressed through the vote of a free, unfettered secret ballot. They wish to have a hand in promoting welfare; they want to be part of life.

When a voter touches pencil to paper in casting his or her ballot they are reminded that they are not living alone. They are one of the whole community, sharing at that moment in choosing the persons who shall carry out their wishes in the government of the nation. They exercise one of the greatest privileges of democracy – the right to vote!

The persons chosen are our constitutional leaders in domestic and foreign affairs. Great responsibility rests upon them. But their responsibility is first of all our responsibility, because we choose them. Democracy is a form of government for free and upright people who take pride in governing themselves.

Democracy is defined as a system of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. The essence of democracy is that consent is free after free debate.

The principle that what concerns all must be approved by all is impossible of attainment, because, human nature as it is, there will always be a dissenting minority.

Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and secret choice of representatives are all part of the fabric of democracy. Parliamentary democratic government is direction of the affairs of the State by a majority that provides the minority with the possibility of becoming a

majority by the education of citizens to its point of view. I repeat, the Opposition is guaranteed a voice, but a vote in its favour is not assured.

I think I can say without any hesitation that we have confidence that our aspirations can be met within our system of democracy. Tolerance, respect for one another are the hallmarks of the system. It is important that we recognize that a democracy harmonizes the various forces at work and takes society towards a common goal. It works through various institutions within the framework of the Constitution. It is therefore the duty of our leaders, of our political parties, and every citizen of this Country to ensure that these institutions work properly and harmony is assured. We have to maintain and strengthen the basic unity of the country. Adhering strictly to democratic ideals, we have to accelerate our economic progress. If we develop any differences, these can be resolved through discussion and mutual goodwill.

The unity of Dominica comes above all other considerations. It is not only the political unity, but the unity of the spirit, sentiment and emotion, the roots of which lie deep in our national consciousness. It is based on eternal values like truth, love, compassion, tolerance and respect for others. It is, however, unfortunate that some decline in the observance of these values have been evident. It gives rise to many undesirable consequences. For this decline in values, we can only blame ourselves ... People look up to the leaders for high moral standards. Let all political parties set high moral values and sustain them with their own actions and deeds.

On the other hand, we who believe in freedom and democracy agree that the majority must rule, but show respect for the "loyal opposition" and respect individual rights and liberties. We believe that there must be inner checks to control the power of the State, that there should be more than one political party, a free press, with regular, free and fair elections, for wherever there is a choice, there is freedom. Democratic governments must conduct themselves according to Equitable, Known and Agreed procedures, and must promote popular participation, discussion, amendment and agreement and subject to the Executive to investigation.

We must guard our liberties, since history has shown that free government can become so 'wedded to power' that they become increasingly autocratic and degenerate into a tyranny. It has been well said that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance; freedom-loving people must be much more alert, united and determined to preserve and promote the ideals of democracy; we must never let down our guard. We must be watchful and strong if we are to be really secure and free. Indeed, we must be ever prepared to make a positive response to new hopeful approaches and new initiatives.

We must set high standards. We must stop squandering limited resources. We who embrace freedom must deliver the goods and indeed practice what we preach! We must understand that whenever there is too much dehumanizing poverty it is difficult for anyone to be really secure or free.

There is an urgent need for all of us to realize that Justice, Security and Peace will really be won when democracy is seen to bring freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from misery.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Obviously, the government cannot be looked upon as an institution that acts in a Santa Claus way, handling out goodies. Before a government can become kind it must be right. Rightness is the virtue every citizen requires above all other government virtues.

Unfortunately, the word "politics" has become tarnished by confusing it with party political feuds. Politics is not a thing apart from civilization, but a manifestation of civilization in growth. It changes form and functions in accord with changes in the composition and ideals of society.

As long as we live in a changing world about which our knowledge is incomplete we must be prepared to listen to other people's opinions about government and government measures. Political parties keep us reminded that there are at least two fairly meritorious sides to every major political question on which men disagree.

Parliament is not the tilting ground of factions or a forum for the recital of wrongs inflicted and sustained by various groups, but a place where representatives of the people can talk over the nation's problems. Thus people from every part of the country have a voice in deciding policies.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Duties of Parliament

An historian and an authority on parliamentary government has written: 'the principles that lie at the base of English parliamentary law have been always kept steadily in view: these are to protect a minority and to restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every member to express his opinion within the limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; and to prevent any legislative action being taken on sudden impulse. Parliament can be the scene of great decisions greatly made or the arena in which small matters are bloated into time-wasting talk. Legislators must see that the things are accomplished.

Rational democratic government requires intelligent discussion, a sustained, disciplined consideration of circumstances, of proposals and their implications of possible courses of action and their advantages and disadvantages. And through it all there must be maintained the honour and dignity of men and women who represent the people of Dominica.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Official Opposition

The only stimulus which can keep the ability of the government of the time up to high standards is its liability to the well-informed criticism of equal ability outside its ranks. The Official Opposition is an integral part of our parliamentary system. It has been said that "Parliament is an engine which seems to require the fuel of party spirit to make it work".

The Opposition has an independent constitutional base. In working reality it participates in government. It forces the party in power to seek a broad and tolerable synthesis of interests as possible, it ensures that the minority of voters will be represented to some degree in the policies decided upon; it restrains the party in power by examining its proposals for law; it seeks to persuade the government to introduce measures which it thinks will benefit the people; it criticizes, but should not be all negative. It should have valid and viable alternatives to offer. And of course, it stands ready to replace the party in power if that party loses the confidence of the House.

It is no small honour and no little responsibility to serve in the Opposition. A person might be elected to Parliament two or three times and never serve out of Opposition, and yet contribute as greatly to the good and welfare of the country as if he or she had sat on the Government side of the House.

Having an Opposition in the House lessens the burden resting on the shoulders of the voters, it sits in judgment on the Government and can influence events.

Please be assured that the Opposition is not charged with obstructing merely for the sake of obstructing. It may support the Government when it thinks the Government is acting wisely, but its chief duty is to show in a constructive way how it thinks the Government's policy should be improved.

Harrying tactics are tempting to an opposition but if pursued to excess they deprive the Opposition itself of the time to take up useful projects. It must keep a shrewd sense of the perspective of politics as seen from the outside of the House. It must persuade the electorate that it has a robust and valid alternative to offer to the proposal it opposes.

We all know that we are not living under any delusions. We know that we face a great task, that there is much work to be done, and that our efforts may encounter difficulties. We should be engaged in getting things accomplished, and there can be no accomplishment without errors. Government should expect criticism from the Opposition and it may be as penetrating as you like as long as it is constructive criticism that is concerned with the future and fate of our people.

Mr. Speaker,

This is also an opportunity for me to request that Honourable Members do everything in their power to enhance the prestige of the House by comporting yourselves in a courteous and responsible manner.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

On Being a Member of Parliament

The task of a Member of Parliament is to identify the problems of our society, to evolve policies from ideas, to decide upon action, and to carry through the programme.

What gives Parliament its life is the will of its members to serve it with their full capacities of mind and energy and passion.

A few think that upon winning office Alladin's Lamp is part of the furnishings and that they can rule into existence anything that they can dream up. Instead, they find that they have to sit down and diagnose the situation with imaginative insight, do a lot of research, and then go to work. Be assured that government is an art to be learned, like medicine or engineering or law or any other profession, and not merely an office to be won.

Political service means a sacrifice of personal convenience for the public good, he or she is a servant of the people and who are subject to evaluation by every voter in the country.

The member of Parliament needs to keep himself free from obligations and pressure and to avoid even the appearance of evil. The reward of independence was vowed by Pliny, a prominent lawyer, administrator and landowner, he said:

"How glad I am that I have always kept clear of any contracts, presents, or even small gifts for my conduct of cases."

Political machinery does not act of itself. It needs active participation. I think it was Napoleon who once referred to people who have no blood in their veins, nothing but frozen politics. No modern politician can thrive unless he or she has the mental stimulus and capacity to contact with the needs of the country and the desire of the people, and the physical urge to get on with the business of satisfying these needs and desires.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Apply Good Politics

The simple virtues constitute good politics in a parliamentary democracy. Sincerity is a vital quality in the person seeking or holding public office. It means being free from deceit, hypocrisy or falseness.

One duty the parliamentary representative undoubtedly owes to his constituents is to keep them informed about his action and what is going on in Parliament. It is imperative that the people should know the mechanism of government and exercise their rights to operate it.

Many of us are unsophisticated politically, and some people vote this way or that way because their parents or friends or benefactors influence them to do so.

The preservation of democratic rule demands that citizens be given a steady supply of correct information upon public affairs. For democracy to survive, it must have the intelligent interest of every man and woman. It is sometimes argued that people cannot vote intelligently in a world where problems are so complicated, but they do not have to vote on details of such problems. Their first obvious responsibility is to choose representatives who are qualified by intelligence and integrity. A second duty is to keep themselves informed about the issues which face the country and the actions of their representatives regarding them. A third obligation is to see that their opinions are conveyed to their representatives on very important issues.

Every voter should demand a clear statement of policy from the individual seeking his or her vote, not vague and cloudy in its terms but specific and clear and honest.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Public Participation

Public opinion is the most potent force in the survival of parliamentary democracy. People who have made themselves sovereign must provide themselves with sound knowledge so that they may discharge their sovereign duties with good judgment. They need to be mature, free and intelligent.

The danger that most threatens democracy is the ignorant and indifferent voter. But education in the duties of self-government does not come alone out of books on civics. It requires that people be inspired from youth to love the free and responsible life that parliamentary government provides, and a sense of obligation to maintain it.

If the citizen does not participate, read, study, and vote, then someone else does it for them and they are a free citizen no longer. Individual rights and freedom can be sustained only so long as the citizen accepts full responsibility for the welfare of the nation that protects them in the exercise of these rights.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Administrative Reform

Unfortunately, in some instances, government has become too remote, inaccessible and unaccountable: the distance between government on the one hand, and citizens, communities and service users on the other, has grown too large; when this happens, choice and control should be restored to 'the people' whenever possible. A means of doing so is by way of administrative reform which has typically been based upon the perception of a range of problems attributable to traditional ways of organizing government. By making administrative processes more transparent and the actions of officials more visible, by strengthening systems of political and managerial accountability, efforts are being made to solve some of these problems.

It is worth keeping in mind that the institution of government, like other organizations within the commercial world, may pass through cycles of crisis, renewal and development.

Besides information and representation, the members of Parliament owe the Country their unbiased opinion, their mature judgment, and their enlightened conscience.

Their parliamentary system of government built up so laboriously over the years will continue strong and flourishing so long as the leaders regard their own interests as best served by pursuing the interests most advantageous to the Country, and the citizens respond faithfully and fully by wise selection and government support.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

As I have already said, democracy is not an easy system to maintain and develop. It must bring together under one roof two different ideas: the idea that the State should provide scope and opportunity for individual enterprise and the idea that the State should be a collection of public services, satisfying people's needs by subsidies, subventions and the like.

We are inclined to take democracy for granted. However, the important question is not whether or not a democratic form of government exists, but whether or not our people accept and care deeply about the principles upon which democratic government is based. The future of democracy, said a 19th Century writer, mainly depends on the willingness of the omnipotent people to be led by highly trained and conscientious statesmen, and on the willingness of these statesmen to serve the people upon such terms as democracy will accept.

The Athenian system of "direct democracy" would be impossible in a modern nation. As population grew, it became increasingly difficult for citizens to attend the assembly. Instead of "direct democracy" we now have government by elected representatives.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Equality

We need to discuss the question of equality of opportunity which is the necessary supplement of equality before the law. It gives everyone an opportunity in developing in equal freedom as differently as is required by the personal nature of the individual. Equality of opportunity for our people must include access to educational facilities, employment, good health care, proper housing, decent and treated water supplies and a good communications network, for the absence of these would become avenues through which democracy is attacked or frustrated.

Every member of Parliament should look for wand work toward better things: indeed, if they do not do so how can they be wise guardians of present things! Then in co-operation with the people, they can address themselves to expanding the satisfaction of life, by binding the parts of our Country together in the bond of participatory citizenship. Instead of seeking merely a higher standard of living, Dominicans should try unitedly to improve the quality of life.

Representatives of the people would be delinquent in their duty if they presented a picture postcard view of the promised land as the ideal to be aimed at.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Blight of Envy

Permit me to sound an alarm about the "Blight of Envy". Unfortunately we experience this everyday. No man who is superior in any particular area escapes envy. People think in terms of comparison. If they have a better garden, they are envied by neighbours; if they gain promotion, they are envied by work-mates; if they cope with events so as to live happily, they are envied by failures. We are all familiar with the Bible story of Cain and Abel. Envy is one of the Seven Deadly or Capital Sins. You are no doubt familiar with the story of "The Fall of Lucifer", "The Light-bearer", "The Sharer of God's Glory, and attendant of His throne."

Unfortunately, Lucifer was consumed with envy and by transgression became Satan, "The Adversary." "I saw Satan falling like lightning from Heaven."

The Story can be applied to our times as it deals with Government. Lucifer and his sympathizers were striving to reform the Government of God.

The range of envy has been greatly extended by the instability of social status and the equalitarian doctrines of democracy. The ancient lines of separation have been erased, so that the envious persons begins by asking: "Why should not I enjoy what others enjoy?" and goes on to demand "Why should others enjoy what I have not?" Instead of desiring pleasures from what he has, he is pained by what others have.

A classical example comes to us from ancient Greece. As recent as in 1932, an archaeologist unearthed tablets of 2,400 years ago voting ostracism for a man called Aristides. He was banished from Athens without fault being charged against him, but merely because people hated him for being so much better than themselves. The story is told that as Aristides was walking towards the voting place he was accosted by an illiterate voter who asked him to mark his tablet in favour of banishment. When Aristides asked: "What have you against Aristides? What has he done wrong?" the voter replied: "Nothing. But I'm tired of hearing him called 'the just'."

Indeed, as the proverb says: "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before jealousy?" Probably the only way is to walk along serenely with Aristides, leaving the envious to stew in their own justice. Envy is the one revenge of mediocrity.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Democratic Education

We should not overlook the need for democratic education which should aim at producing men and women who will be able to maintain a self-governed state because they are themselves self-governed, self-disciplined, self-controlled and self-reliant. But that is not a task that can be left to politicians. It can only be done through ordinary people, because only they can make democracy thrive. They will want to examine how it should work, and how it can be made to work more effectively. They will think very seriously about these things because they realize that a society's form of government is a very serious matter. In places where people have been imprisoned, tortured and executed for the sake of democracy, they know what it is worth.

Anyone can copy out a constitution and translate the democratic ideal into the machinery of self-government. It takes great insight by statesmen, and by sympathetic understanding by every citizen, to devise a practical system of democratic government which will most surely suit the needs and character of the people.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

As we progress into our independent status, it will be for us to examine ourselves sincerely on our attitude to human rights and democracy as a whole. Do we embrace the tenets of democracy merely when they suit us? Or do we cherish the system of democracy as best capable of maintaining these inalienable rights which the Creator himself has bestowed upon us and what efforts are we making to maintain it? Do we cherish the noble principles of justice, liberty of speech, free and honest elections, equality before the law and equality of opportunity, which are enshrined in the democratic system? Do we embrace democracy as the system of government best capable of promoting the development of man and his world? Do we encourage the development of those institutions likely to bolster democracy? (Government and Democracy – Called to Live by Rev. Fr. Clement Jolly C.Ss.R.).

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Parliamentary system of government built up so laboriously over hundreds of years will continue strong and flourishing so long as leaders regard their own interests as best served by pursuing the interest most advantageous to the Country, and the citizens respond faithfully and fully by wise selection and just support.

When we talk of democracy and freedom as well as liberties, we must always remember they involve responsibility and discipline. Without these virtues in the individual group, there is likely to be no true freedom. It is indeed our duty to pledge our responsibility and discipline in order to safeguard our democracy, freedom and liberty.

With the united endeavours of the Nation, we can meet with confidence the challenges that confront us and accomplish the tasks that lie ahead. This we can achieve only if we are faithful to the ideals and goals of our Republic. We must place the National good above any sectional interests. I wish you all success in your endeavours in the year before us.

Mr. Speaker,

As a parting gesture, I ask you to please accept this bound volume of my Messages to Parliament over the years. I hope you will find it a worthy addition to the library of the House of Assembly, and possibly, a useful reference tool.