

**THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES:
THE ON-GOING QUEST FOR ENHANCED PRODUCTIVITY AND A
BETTER DELIVERY OF SERVICE**

by

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Office of the Prime Minister
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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[FORMAL GREETINGS!]

INTRODUCTION

On August 10, 1999, at this very Methodist Church Hall, on the occasion of the 29th Annual Conference of the Caribbean Public Service Association, at the invitation of the Public Service Union of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I delivered “The Dr. Kenrick Rennie Memorial Lecture” entitled “*Survival of the Public Worker in the Twenty-First Century*”. I was at the time the recently-elected Political Leader of the then opposition Unity Labour Party (ULP). You may find that speech an interesting read; it is available in the book, authored by me and entitled, The Politics of Our Caribbean Civilisation: Essays and Speeches. It was published in 2001 and is now out of print, but I am advised that copies are available at the Modern National Library.

Some seventeen years after that speech, I am here with our public servants, and others, yet again at the same venue, this time at the invitation of the Cabinet Secretary on the occasion of “Public Service Week” to address you on the subject “*The On-going Quest for Enhanced Productivity and a Better Delivery of Service in the Public Service of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.*”

This is a subject on which I have been reflecting for some fifty years since I first entered university in 1966. Over these years, I have read extensively on the bundle of issues arising therefrom over that time. I have studied, written and spoken on, the subject as a social scientist, a lawyer, a political activist, a parliamentarian, the Leader of the Opposition, and for over fifteen years continuously as the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I have learnt a lot on this subject; daily I learn more and more; and I still have more to learn. From my long association with the Public Service and public servants, you may consider that

what I have to say may be useful. I hope that I do not disappoint you.

First, the existing constitutional and legal framework within which the public service in St. Vincent and the Grenadines operates, possesses strengths and possibilities, despite its several weaknesses and limitations, for enhanced national development, greater productivity, and better service. The Public Service functions within a rationalist matrix of laws, rules, and institutional arrangements which engender or facilitate public responsibility, responsiveness, and accountability. The laws and regulations touching and concerning the public service, public servants, financial administration, and governance have served our nation well, broadly speaking. Similarly, the various institutions which connect to the public service's role and functioning are proven as necessary, desirable, and viable including: the Public Service Commission, the hierarchical authority structures in the Public Service (Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments, and other ranks), the Office of the Director of

Audit, the Tenders Board, the Law Courts, the offices of the Governor General and Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and Parliament.

Secondly, the public service functions more broadly within the context of a competitive parliamentary democracy, constitutionally-protected fundamental rights and freedoms, a vibrant free press, a mixed economy awash with economic freedoms, a sufficiency of material means for civilised life and living generally, a modern and sophisticated society within the frame of an ennobling Caribbean civilisation, and a well-functioning state system, with regional and international linkages. All of these connected factors in the real world of life and living, ensure the sustainability of the public service as a viable and vital institution for the delivery of public goods and services to the nation.

To be sure, within the public service there are weaknesses and limitations, some of which are structural and others are day-to-day operational or even episodic in nature. Undoubtedly,

there is need for further public sector reform of both a structural and operational kind, and I will talk of some of these to lift further productivity and service to the people. But many of the difficulties encountered in the public service as currently structured and operated can be resolved by the public servants themselves; and the public servants so persuasively inform me. I will list some ways in which productivity and service can be enhanced:

These include:

1. Love your job, respect and cooperate with your colleagues at work, and care for those you serve. Have integrity. Have an excellent spirit. Each of these considerations and values is a foundation stone for enhanced personal performance of public servants.
2. Public servants ought to better acquaint themselves with the laws and regulations under which they function. One cannot play cricket unless one knows the rules of the

game. The laws and regulations in relation to the Public Service are available; public servants ought to read them; and the senior public servants and the Training Division at the Service Commissions ought to ensure that this is done. Indeed, some senior public servants need a refresher.

3. Better and more productive attitudes to work and production need to be inculcated, and made manifest at the work place. Although most public servants are disciplined in their work, there are too many who are addicted to lateness, absenteeism, time-watching, and time-wasting, and disruptive work attitudes (for example: excessive bickering and complaining often about trivia; inter-personal jealousies; listening to radio constantly at work; using the computer for personal purposes, etc., running a mini-bus or doing some other personal work during working hours and so forth, and lack of focus or diligence on assigned tasks, etc.)

4. Cutting out the misuse or abuse government property for personal or other person's benefit which conduct is in contravention of the public service regulations or, sometimes, of the criminal law. Waste and corruption are to be absolutely avoided.
5. Correcting the inadequate or poor leadership of some Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Department, or other senior public servants.
6. Organising the work schedule or programmes in a practical way. Making sure, too, that the staff buy into this work programme.
7. Ensuring internal checks and management/performance audits are carried out on an on-going basis.

8. Leave your personal problems outside the office.
9. Work in a coordinated, unified way, towards set goals; avoid divisiveness. Unity is always preferable to disunity.
10. Be neutral in a party political sense. At the same time respect the democratic wishes of the people and understand that the government sets public policies within the framework of the Constitution and the law; thus such policies are required to be implemented professionally and with commitment. A public servant is not a political sycophant of the ruling or opposition party; he/she is a servant of the people with a specific role in the state administration.

I feel sure that the soon-to-be-finalised Code of Ethics for the Public Service and the Charter for the Public Service will undoubtedly assist in enhancing productivity and lifting excellence in service.

More widely, on-going public sector reform should be pursued by the state administration to better enhance productivity and excellence in service. Several important reforms have already been initiated and are on-going, including: Institutional or organisational reforms within and across the public service and connected public sector bodies, for example the setting up of specific units, agencies or departments for specific tasks; the appointment of personnel appropriate to the tasks to be performed; the widespread application and upgrade of information technology; the reclassification exercise in respect of jobs, their definitions, and remuneration; the lifting markedly of the level of training and education in divers areas; the focussed improvement in the material conditions of public servants' employment (physical work environment, salaries, benefits); and improved communication, linkages, and participation within and between Ministries and Departments and with the public who are the beneficiaries of the public service.

There are clearly several institutional barriers arising from formal structures and solidified behavioural clusters of a non-formal kind which militate against enhanced productivity and excellence in service. Some have been already highlighted. Others to be emphasised, and which demand ongoing correctives, include:

1. Bureaucracy: that is, the incapacity of too many public servants to adjust positively to rationalism, formalism, routine, and procedures of organisation.
2. Too much centralisation in some areas, and too much diffusion or incoherence in others.
3. The insufficiency of popular controls, and the inadequacy of some existing formal controls on the public service.
4. The imprecise demarcation of many political and administrative roles which sometimes lead to confusion

especially if over-zealousness for excessive authority grips public servants or politicians.

5. The still too frequent occurrences of manipulation and even coercion of some public servants by senior public servants and the latter by ministers of government. Sometimes, too, some senior public servants do manipulate ministers. Skewing information disclosures or withholding some or all relevant information is a not infrequent tactic of manipulation used by public servants and ministers in relation to each other. “Coercion” is a species of manipulation.

6. The too frequent unwholesome influence on some public servants (and politicians) by external agencies and other governments on public policy and practical administration. There is oft-times too much pre-occupation by some public senior public servants in serving external agencies and not St. Vincent and the

Grenadines. Some cynics conclude, perhaps unfairly, that the availability of unnecessary overseas travel loans too large in their order of priorities.

7. Dramaturgy or the creation of “impression management”, devoid of substance, by too many public servants, including senior ones.

8. Bureaupathology: A condition of anxiety and even despair, lack of a sufficiency of motivation, loss of self and a sense of apathy by too large a minority of public servants. Across the public service, public servants comment upon a “don’t care” attitude of “going through the motion” of some of their colleagues. This is a complex subject of social, institutional, and even psychological nature. It requires care, attention, and sensitivity by senior managers and others in the public service to identify and properly address.

Across the board, there is a limitation of insufficient material resources to meet all the pressing demands in the public service and from the general public. Thus, prudence is to be exercised in ensuring an efficient allocation and use of the scarce resources which are available. This is a matter both for policy-makers and the public servants themselves.

I know that there are complaints from several public servants regarding what they consider to be inadequate remuneration.

I ask them, however, to reflect on a few relevant facts:

- (i) Since 2001, the public servants have had a real increase (after account is taken for inflation) in their salaries of some 43 percent, way in excess of national productivity and in excess of the 28 percent real increase in salaries and wages for the country as a whole. In other words, the public servants are absolutely, and comparatively in relation to other employees, much better off than in 2001.

- (ii) Over 60 percent of total recurrent revenue is consumed by salaries, wages, and allowances for public servants, employer's contribution to NIS, and retirement benefits (gratuity and pensions) for retired public servants. Personal emoluments alone amount to 50 percent of current revenue. In the OECS countries as a whole, personal emoluments amount to 39.4 percent of current revenue. Monthly, this expenditure amounts to roughly \$28 million for central government employees.

- (iii) The single fastest growing item of expenditure relates to retirement benefits. It amounts to 11.7 percent of current revenue in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; the OECS average is 6.9 percent.

Two other persistent complaints among many public servants relate to appointment and promotion. Undoubtedly these are

challenges given the structure of the public service, the limitation of financial resources available to the government, and the vastly improved education and training, especially university education, of increasing numbers of public servants. Addressing some of those challenges such as the structure of the public service and resource limitations are works in progress, but fairness, objectivity, and merit must always determine appointment and promotion. I caution that “merit” does not simply mean formal qualifications. “Merit” is a much wider and, objectively, more all-embracing category devoid of any favoritism, prejudice, or other wholly subjective preference. The role of the Public/Police Service Commission is critical in the appointment and promotion processes as advised by the Permanent Secretaries and the Prime Minister when appropriate.

On another occasion, I hope to be accorded the opportunity to speak to the issues of enhanced productivity and excellence in service delivery in specific reference to the teaching, police and medical services. Clearly, though, many of the general

comments which I have made on these matters can be applied to those other specific categories of public servants.

In closing, I reiterate the gratitude and thanks of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and of me personally, for the gift of a professional public service (civil servants, teachers, nurses, police officers, and other central government employees) and for the commendable quality of public service delivered by our various categories of public servants. Still, as always, we can no doubt do even better. I hope that this conversation contributes to a better Public Service.

Thank you!