



# **ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT**

**BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY VERNON LORDEN SHAW, S.A.H.**

**President of the Commonwealth of Dominica**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING**

**OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**ON MONDAY, 2<sup>nd</sup> JULY, 2001**

Madam Speaker

I thank you for the invitation extended to Her Excellency to attend the formal opening of Parliament, (First Meeting of the Second Session of the Sixth Parliament under the Commonwealth of Dominica 1978 Constitution) and to me to address the House.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

The capacity to inspire and mobilize masses of people is really what makes the world go round and that I dare say is leadership. It may alter history for better or for worse.

Leadership is essentially a relationship in which a person uses his power and influence in getting a number of people to work together and accomplish a common task. There are, after all, only a limited number of ways in which one person can get others to do his bidding . He can drive, order or direct them or he can guide, cajole or get them involved in the task. The leader can devote himself to directing the task or he can devote himself to seeing to it that his members become self – motivating and self-directing.

Leadership isn't mystical and mysterious. It has nothing to do with having charisma or other exotic personality traits. It is not the province of a chosen few. Leadership is aligning people. This means communicating new direction to those who can create coalitions that understand the vision and are committed to its achievement. Achieving a vision requires motivating and inspiring – keeping people moving in the right direction, despite major obstacles to change, by appealing to basic but often untapped human needs, values and emotion.

Achieving grand visions always requires an occasional burst of energy. Motivation and inspiration energize people not by pushing them in the right direction but by satisfying basic human needs for achievement, a sense of belonging, recognition, self esteem, a feeling of control over one's life and the ability to live up to one's ideals.

Since the function of leadership is to produce change, setting the direction of that change is fundamental to leadership.

Setting direction is not the same as planning. Planning is a management process, deductive in nature and designed to produce orderly results not change. Setting a direction is more inductive; the direction – setting aspect of leadership does not produce plans; it creates vision and strategies. What is crucial about a vision is how well it serves the interests of its constituencies.

A big challenge in leadership efforts is credibility, getting people to believe the message. Many things contribute to credibility: the track record of the person delivering the message, the content

of the message itself, the communicator's reputation for integrity and trustworthiness and the consistency between words and deeds.

Speed in making decisions has often come under consideration in connection with successful leadership. On the one hand, one hears that a leader must make his decisions quickly in order to avoid giving the impression of hesitation or insecurity. On the other hand, one is told, the leader needs time to consider many factors in order to reach sound decisions. The findings of some studies would suggest that speed in arriving at decisions is a critical attribute of successful leadership.

Good leaders motivate people in a variety of ways. First they always articulate the organization's vision in a manner that stresses the values of the audience they are addressing. They regularly involve people in deciding how to achieve the organization's vision. This gives people a sense of control. They recognize and reward success which gives people a sense of accomplishment.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

Solomon King of Israel recognizing himself as a servant inadequate to fulfil the responsibilities of leadership by himself asked of God a discerning heart to govern his people and to distinguish between right and wrong. He declared:-

*"Where there is no vision the people perish." King Solomon enunciated a principle which history through all the passing centuries has firmly established. He recognized the truth that leaders need a framework as a guide for their actions.*

Given that framework they can order all their activities and those of all who are responsible to them. But can they provide such visionary leadership without dependence upon the wisdom of God?

In addressing this matter Abraham Lincoln said:

*"I should be the veriest shallow and self-conceited blockhead upon the footstool, if, in my discharge of the duties which are put upon me in this place, I should hope to get along without the wisdom which comes from God and not from men."*

Lincoln was saying "I need to get my instructions from the ultimate ruler over my nation."

Edmund Burke the political thinker of Eighteenth Century England, wrote and I quote:

*"The great difference between the real statesman and the pretender is that one sees into the future, while the other regards only the present; the one lives by the day and acts on expediency; the other acts on enduring principles and for immortality."*

According to Burke the statesman envisions where the country must go. He acts as if he believes a plan for his nation exists, a plan that is a guide for his actions. He operates with the conviction

that there is a plan that transcends the particular leader. His major effort is to discern the plan and to implement it. He is more concerned with what is best for the nation than his own political future.

J. F. Clarke declared:

*"A politician thinks of the next election, a statesman of the next generation. A politician looks for the success of his party; a statesman for that of his country. The statesman wishes to steer while the politician is satisfied to drift."*

and

Lord Morrow stated:

*"The difference between a politician and a statesman is that the politician sees which way the people are going and tries to stay ahead of them, whereas the statesman sees what is best and right and does that even if no one follows."*

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

Every person elected to Parliament is a leader in that he represents hundreds of persons in their effort to build a community in which they can live safely and happily. The future of this country depends upon the willingness of the people to be led by competent and conscientious representatives in Government and on the willingness and ability of the leaders to serve the people upon such terms, as the democratic people will accept.

A Parliamentary representative's duty *inter alia* is to persuade his fellow citizens to pursue not that which seems most pleasant, easy or profitable at the moment, but to prefer that which is just and honourable and best in the long run. He would be delinquent in his duty if he presented a picture postcard view of the promised land as the ideal to be aimed at.

The building of a utopia must be in line with the resources of the country.

He should not allow himself to be oppressed by granitic convictions on a subject under debate. He should be willing to hear what is said to him by his constituents, his party members and those opposed to him.

He needs to be sensitive to what is significant and what is trivial and to be prepared to rise above sectional and selfish interests. He needs to have his mind attuned to coping with events and crises. He should cultivate a capacity for uniting people and lifting them above what divides them.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

There can be no substitute in any area of human activity for the person of integrity. "Though we may rightly try to be all things to all men what really matters, surely, is that we should be one man to all men. That is what the man of integrity is." Sir John Maud

Dwight Eisenhower said:

"The supreme quality for a leader is unquestionably integrity .... His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need therefore is integrity and high purpose."

Integrity is an essential quality in government. The strength of a government lies in the belief of the people it rules that it is inflexibly open and truthful. Integrity means "uprightness; moral soundness; honesty; freedom from corrupting influence or practice; it applies to the man who habitually discriminates between just and unjust; good and bad, noble and disgraceful, and follows the better path. It is summed up in an old and honoured tradition of British Law that he who comes to the courts must come "with clean hands." Thus we might say that he who comes to govern must come with clean hands. It involves having standards and a sense of values by which we shape ourselves.

A sense of values is a personal thing, not to be measured by a yardstick common to all humanity. In applying it to our special cases we learn to tell truth from falsehood, fact from opinion, the real from the phoney and the beautiful from the tawdry. We develop consciousness, enabling us to discriminate the quality of things.

There are many occasions in life when there is no one to make us do the right thing. Then our good sense in passing on the quality of the act is called conscience.

In that private court we admit that we have all sorts of faults but we know that there are things we would not do; our personal code puts them out of consideration. Of all paths a person can take at any given moment in business, public or personal life there is a best path and to find it and walk in it, is the one thing needful.

When people err it is often because of their faulty choice between alternatives. They may emphasise "bigger" rather than "better" the quantity rather than the quality; they may choose an immediate pleasure at the expense of a future benefit of greater importance. Though they may have all other perfections, if they lack discrimination in making choices they will be of no great consequence in the world.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

To stick by one's principles calls for courage. Most of us have found ourselves in situations where doing what is right puts our own interests at stake. Either we do the right thing or we don't; often

no one else is any the wiser. It is merely a matter of being able to look at ourselves unflinchingly in a mirror.

It is fine to let our consciences be our guide but as someone put it our consciences themselves are sometimes in need of guidance. We need to remember the age old adage that today's gratification is sometimes tomorrow's grief.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

Democracy is government of the people by the people for the people. It follows that the moral qualities of the State and of the people are inseparable. No one is exempt from either contributing to the quality of the State or detracting from it as the case may be.

It follows that if high standards of integrity are not upheld in every avenue of society – business, the profession, the arts, education, sports – we can hardly expect the standards in politics to be any higher. There is in fact an unhealthy tendency to make politicians scapegoats for social ills people have helped to bring upon themselves.

Citizens are always calling upon governments to do something about problems that arise from mass attitudes and berating them for being so lacking in leadership that they let those problems emerge in the first place. Instead of looking to our legislative bodies for causes and solutions, perhaps we should look more to the most important institution of all in our society everybody's home. It is largely in the home that attitudes are established and examples are set. People who consciously act with fairness, honour and moral courage towards those immediately around them go some way towards counteracting the corrosive influence on character of the outside world.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

Henry James wrote "The first thing to learn in intercourse with others is noninterference with their own peculiar ways of being happy provided those ways do not assume to interfere by violence with ours." Nothing is more friction-making than the complacency with which some people assume that what is good for them must be good for and should be imposed upon everyone else.

Tolerance is the cordial and positive effort to understand another's beliefs practices and habits without necessarily accepting them, and the making of allowances for errors in thought and act.

It allows free trade in ideas. It stands firmly on both sides of every great issue insisting on the right of their supporters to be heard, until there is enough hard evidence to support a reasonable judgment. It takes note of the differences in people's upbringing, education and experiences.

It is broad-minded. It gives latitude to the beliefs which others hold. One may still speak with conviction and sincerity, while making allowance for another point of view. There is no surer sign of imperfect development than giving way to the impulse to snigger at other people or wanting to shout them down because they seem different, or naive, or do not conform to our codes or standards.

It behoves us to be constantly on guard against intolerance. But to do so we must know it when we see it and that is not as simple as it may seem. It is easy to detect when it bursts forth in rampaging mobs. It is harder to identify and much harder to acknowledge and condemn when it exists within oneself.

Genuine tolerance does not come easily. Giving the other fellow his due may often entail the sacrifice of one's own advantages and perquisites. Harder still, it may entail the abandonment of one's own inherited attitudes.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

We mass produce almost everything but we cannot mass produce character because that is a matter of personal identity. It belongs to those who have found the part they are to play, who are doing the work for which they are best endowed, who are satisfied that they are filling a vital need; who are meeting their obligations and standing up to their tasks.

Character is a positive thing. It is not protected innocence but practised virtue; it is not fear of vice but love of excellence. It is not something inherited. It is won by hard work, integrity, faith, moderation, unselfishness, unity of purpose, great mindedness, intelligence, benevolence and self-reliance. These are all qualities that appear desirable in individuals. When they become universal in the people of a nation, that nation will have character.

A person of character is one who hates cruelty, despises softness and detests those who climb on the shoulders of others. He recognizes the dignity of duty, fairness, sympathy, cooperation and all other things that make a decent society possible. He has taste which is the instinctive and instant preferring of one material object to another without any obvious reason.

The person of character endeavours to be really what he wishes to appear. Character deals with substance not show. It is complexion not cosmetic: the outward expression of an inner reality, not something stuck from outside.

A person of good character does not try to evade his duties to society nor does he allow himself to become negligent of them. He does not display that abominable form of arrogance of thinking himself above the laws which apply to all other people.

He knows that his greatest significance must consist in his contribution to the lives of others. The more complex, the more highly organized our society becomes, the more it requires competent, self-respecting, well rounded individuals to make it work.

The man of character is not constantly reflecting whether he shall be honest or not. He is honest by habit and as a matter of course. He does not give promises lightly but lives up to those he does give.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

Character takes no account of what one is thought to be but what he is. We have our own laws and court to judge us and these persuade us to be what we would like to seem. Character is having an inner light and the courage to follow its dictates; as Shakespeare put it:

*"This above all  
To thine own self be true  
And it must follow, as the night, the day. Thou canst  
not then be false to any man" - HAMLET SHAKESPEARE*

Being true to one's self is anything but easy if the moral standards of his associates conflict with his. The herd instinct is strong in the human animal and the phrase "everybody else is doing it" has an insidious attraction. To resist what "every body else" is doing is to risk being ostracized by one's peers and it is normal to dread rejection. Nothing takes more strength than swimming against the tide.

And moral strength is not something one just happens to have like physical or intellectual strength he might be born with. It is built through hard work and the exercise of will. The concentration of mind and spirit that must go into the making of character explains why it is frequently equated with quality. It is like the work of a fine craftsman – a manifestation of diligence, care and self-respect.

People need something to believe in. Principles of behaviour give stability to the world. To have a set of principles is not at all to become a starry eyed dreamer but a person who knows simply and convincingly what he is here for. There are certain things one has to believe in, or civilization will die – permanent truths which, though they have their roots in the far past are important for the present.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

In the words of the Apostle Peter to the Elders of the Church throughout the Northern part of Asia Minor, I exhort you "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers not because you must but because you are willing as God wants you to be, not greedy for money but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being ensamples to the flock."

A shepherd is the servant and not the master of the sheep. He has complete responsibility for the safety and well being of the sheep. He leads all the sheep to pasture; none is excluded.

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

*"God give us men,  
A time like this demands  
Strong minds, great hearts,  
True faith and ready hands.  
Men whom the lust of office  
Does not kill,*

*Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;  
Men who possess opinion and a will;  
Men who love honour,  
Men who cannot lie,*

*Men who work while others sleep;  
Who dare while others fly  
They build a nation's pillars deep  
and lift them to the sky."*

*J.G. Holland*

May God bless this Honourable House.

May God bless the Commonwealth of Dominica!