Burke address to delegates

ADDRESS GIVEN BY V. NAZIM BURKE POLITICAL LEADER OF THE NDC ON THE OCCASISION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL HELD ON JULY 1ST 2018 AT THE GRENADA TRADE CENTRE.
My Brothers and Sisters,
I want to start by thanking you for coming out today and being a part of the General Council. As you already know, the theme chosen for this year’s General Council is “Facing the Future with Resilience, Inclusion and Determination”.
In my view, we could not choose a better Theme for this event. Because your very presence here, without more, is evidence that you are ready, willing and able to face the future, in and with the NDC working with determination, in collaboration with other patriotic Grenadians to build a better Grenada for ourselves and our children and Grandchildren.
Your presence here today is evidence of your resilience. It shows that when you are knocked to the ground, you are willing and able to get up, dust yourself off and get going again towards your goal. This quality is a noble quality of the Grenadian people which has been demonstrated time and again and the members of the NDC are no exception to this.
Every election is a hard-fought battle, and this one was no exception. For those of us who choose to be contenders and go into electoral contests, we go about it as a win-lose proposition. We go in fully understanding that one side will enjoy the ecstasy of victory and the other will endure the agony of defeat. And so, the willingness and ability to get up after defeat is a commendable quality of which we should all be proud.
Your presence is also evidence of your spirit of inclusion and inclusiveness. General elections test your ability to work under difficult conditions- conditions of rapid change, conflict, chaos and uncertainty. Those conditions provide a foundation for stress, anxiety, impatience, intolerance, intemperate behaviour and a lack of sensitivity. They create sharp tensions and even resentment between and among individuals who would be good friends under normal conditions. I have no doubt that some of this happened among and between some of us during our campaign. And so the fact that you are here today willing and ready to collaborate with others whom you may have been upset with tells me that you recognize that we all need each other, that no one of us is as strong as all of us and that there is a place for each and every one of us on this journey to Make Grenada a better place.
Your presence here today is also evidence of your determination – your will to achieve the NDC vision and objectives. Sisters and Brothers, the ability to act is rooted in determination. For a team to be effective, determination is more important than intellect. While determination without intellect can be dangerous, where there is intellect but little determination, we will not even dare to attempt our goals. And so, your presence here today tells me that you are ready and willing to go beyond fancy talk and to act for the benefit of our party and our country.
Sisters and Brothers, the results of the general elections have not only left many of our members and supporters disappointed, angry and confused; it has left many independent observers shocked and disappointed. In the view of many objective observers, the NDC ran a superior campaign in many respects:
• Our Campaign was issue –driven
• We developed and presented a Vision of where we hoped to take Grenada
• There was a very direct and active involvement of our youth both in crafting and delivering our messaging
• Our digital media campaign was superior in every respect
• The attendance at our major rallies were larger in many instances
• Our printed promotional material were considered by many to be far more attractive
• The songs and music that were generated for the campaign had far more appeal
In the end, however, we did not find favour with the electorate. The reasons for this are the source of much debate and discussion both within and without our party. Some people attribute it to the abuse of the authority of the state by those who controlled to gain the upper hand; some attribute it to widespread vote buying and the widespread use of state resources to influence the electorate; some blame it on the multitude of irregularities and the failure or refusal of the Parliamentary elections office to remedy them in a timely way; some argue that tactics of intimidation were employed which directly and negatively impacted the attitudes of many persons towards voting; some say it is because of the negative campaign mounted against yours truly personally, leading to the view among some Grenadians that I was the cause of Grenada’s problems and once they got rid of me all of Grenada’s problems will be solved.
Comrades, we may never manage to establish definitively which of these or indeed whether any of these factors played a role. Yet, despite this lingering and perhaps inevitable uncertainty, we find encouragement in three certain and inescapable truths: first, that the majority of the electorate chose not to vote for the NNP- that is, the number of registered voters who chose not to vote for the NNP was over ten thousand more than those who chose to vote for the NNP.
Second, of those who exercised their franchise, 41 percent voted for the NDC and against the NNP. Unfortunately, despite this sizable minority, this group of voters have no representation in the House of Representatives.
Third, despite five years of singular and unchallenged control of the state apparatus; despite five years boasting of exceptional economic growth, low deficits, economic surpluses, drastic reductions in unemployment and increased investments; despite the claims of strong economic management; despite the claims of strong leadership; despite the boasts of special relationship with the social partners; despite the claims of popularity, likability and being a people’s person; Dr. Mitchell and the NNP could only increase their vote count over the 2013 result by just over one thousand, while Nazim Burke and the NDC were able to increase our vote count by just under one thousand votes.
Notwithstanding these partly encouraging outcomes for our party and our democracy, however, there remains one lingering major source of distress for our party and that is the number of people who chose not to vote on Election Day.
According to the figures released by the Parliamentary Elections Office, some 21,000 registered voters chose not to exercise their franchise on Election Day. Whatever the particular reason for their individual decision, the clear and unmistakable implication to be drawn from this is that neither party was able to sufficiently inspire them with what they had to offer so as to move them to vote- either for change or for a continuation of what now exist.
The implication of this choice for the two political parties is dramatically different. For the NDC, it means that we will simply manage to hold on to their base of approximately 23,000 but lose the election. For the NNP, it means they will not merely hold on to their base of 33,000 but win the election.
What does this mean for us? The conclusion to be drawn here is that unless the NDC can find a way to increase its political support base by at least 12,000, the NNP will continue to gain the upper hand in every electoral contest.
The fundamental question facing our party therefore is what does it need to do in order to increase its support base by 12,000 over the next five years?
In addressing this question, we must approach it dispassionately, with openness, honesty and candour. We must do so recognizing that we cannot continue to do the same old things in the same old way and expect different results. We must see this as an opportunity to do things in a different and more effective way.
We must have the courage to go back to the drawing board, put all the cards on the table and carefully and honestly re-evaluate and re-examine how best to deploy them. In so doing, there should be no exception, not even for the position of Party Leader.
And so today, I announce my resignation as Political Leader of the National Democratic Congress with immediate effect. I do so with no regrets, bitterness or resentment but in the genuine desire to afford the party the opportunity to explore other leadership options, as we embark on this journey of renewal and rebuilding our party to achieve its organizational goals.
I wish to make it abundantly clear that I am not been pushed out by anyone. Under our Party constitution, my position as party leader cannot be lawfully challenged until November 2020. I have reached this decision on my own accord, after much reflection and careful consideration. I must tell you that coming to that decision has not been an easy road to travel. But through it all, I have been guided by the firm and unshakable belief that I should do what is in the best interest of the Party, regardless of my personal feelings and circumstance.
Of course, until such time as a new Political Leader is elected, someone must assume the responsibility to carry the most senior responsibilities and duties. With that in mind, I recommend to this General Council that our Deputy Political Leader, Joseph Andall be appointed Interim Political Leader of the Party and be assigned the responsibility to prepare the Party for a Leadership Convention which, I recommend, should not take place before March 2019.
In preparing for this convention, I urge that we do not rush to hasty decisions simply to be able to say that we have a Leader. Settling on the right person- one willing and able to get the job done- may take some time. But it is extremely important that we get this right. Leadership is not a walk in the park; it often requires managing under conditions of rapid change, conflict, chaos and uncertainty and will test the character of those called upon to do so. In trying to decide on that person, not everyone may agree but I would encourage everyone to approach this task with a tolerant and open spirit always keeping in mind what is in the best interest of the party.
So I pray that as we move forward, even as we voice our differences and possibly even disagree on agendas and decisions and other details of governance, we always keep in mind the fact of our shared destiny and the undeniable possibilities of power that exist in our unity.
I know that many of our members will not be happy about this decision. I have received numerous phone calls and whatsapp and facebook messages and have had many face to face encounters urging me not to do so. For those of you who have reached out in that way, I thank you, most sincerely, for your vote of confidence. At the same time, I believe that it is the right and fair thing to do and I hope that the underlying motivations and wisdom of this decision will be appreciated if not now, then some time in the future.
There are those among us who argue strongly and passionately that my stepping down means that we are giving in to the mischievous and arrogant designs of the NNP leadership to see me removed as NDC Leader at any cost and to decide who should lead our party. While this concern is most understandable, I wish to assure you that my political script is not, and will never be written by the NNP. The NNP did not bring me into politics and will never be allowed to take me out of politics. At every stage, the overriding consideration must always be what is in the best interest of our organization.
Sisters and Brothers, my support for and involvement in the NDC have never been conditioned on being the Party Leader. I have had a close relationship with the party long before I became Leader and I will continue that relationship whether or not I am the Leader.
With this understanding, I would like to assure the members of our party and the people of our country of my commitment to the sustenance of our Party. I am unshakably convinced that Grenada, needs a strong, united NDC; not just an opposition to the Government. Our democracy is under threat and we cannot succumb to the cynical machinations of the leaders of the NNP to turn Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique into a one party state. Our party must regard it as its historic duty to lead the charge in the fight to save our democracy. I remain committed to being a part of that effort.
I am profoundly and eternally grateful to the Almighty God and to the members of our party for the opportunity to have served as Party Leader.
Sisters and brothers, it would be remiss of me if I did not take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to the individuals who have made this journey with me.
I wish to thank all of the people who worked on our election campaign for their dedication and tireless efforts.
I wish to thank the leadership of the NDC, all of our members, foot soldiers and sympathizers for their belief in the principles of Good Governance, Self Reliance and Putting People First and their commitment to the vision.
I wish to thank my family: especially my wife, Jackie, my children, my mother, my brothers, and sisters, for standing as firmly with me through the times of challenge and difficulty as they have through the times of achievement and promise.
I want to thank all the members of my Constituency Branch who have stuck with me, supported me, provided for me, defended me and given abundantly of themselves and their resources, especially over the last five years. To avoid the risk of leaving out anyone, I will not specifically mention any names but most of you know who you are and I really want to thank you from the bottom of my heart.
To all of the people who cheered us on, who gathered at rallies to show their support, and who queued in long lines to vote for me, I know that this is not the outcome that we wanted and hoped for, but I say to you that this day should not mark the defeat of your role in this nation’s political process.
It has been, without a doubt, one of the most tremendous privileges of my life to serve this great Party as its Leader and to work on its behalf. For this opportunity, I thank you all.
May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless our Party and our homeland Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.