

PRESS STATEMENT

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For Immediate Release

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The position of Tiyani Behanzin and Sean Douglas on the renaming of Melville Hall airport and the banishment of the legacies of Rosie Douglas and Pierre Charles

1. The decision of the Roosevelt Skerrit administration to rename the Melville Hall airport, the Douglas- Charles airport, is a cynical ploy by this regime to sideline these two great leaders to a mere footnote in the annals of Dominican history.
2. This elaborate renaming ceremony on Monday, October 27th is part of this regime's re-election strategy to win back disaffected Labourites and undecided voters, who feel that the Skerrit government has abandoned the ideals, principles and essential core labour values of not just Rosie Douglas and Pierre Charles, but also Edward Oliver Leblanc and Mike Douglas.
3. Despite Government's investment of over \$130 million at Melville Hall, the airport has no future. Rosie himself recognized that 15 years ago. On his last visit to the United States as Prime Minister in September, 2000, he started

discussions with the Chinese Government through their embassy there on the establishment of diplomatic relations.

4. More than fourteen (14) years ago, the Chinese agreed to fund the construction of an international airport worth US\$300 million in Dominica with work to commence in March of 2001. The contents of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which Rosie Douglas signed with the Chinese was scheduled to be announced by him in his National Day Address on November 3rd 2000.
5. Upon the death of Rosie Douglas in October 2000, Pierre Charles continued this dialogue with the People's Republic of China through the then Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations and a senior Chinese diplomat who assisted the late Foreign Minister of St. Lucia, Mr. George Odlum, with the switching of diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China. The discussions centered on an international airport, an economic zone and deep water port for Portsmouth and ships to transport agricultural produce.
6. The four (4) pillar projects agreed by Mr. Skerrit, David Hsui and Grace Tung with the Chinese government in 2004 are useful projects but these initiatives have not contributed in any significant way to the transformation of Dominica's economy. A great opportunity to construct an international airport with grant funding was unfortunately missed. In addition, we are also witnessing the takeover of the commercial district in Roseau by Chinese businesses, a development that Rosie Douglas advised against in 1992.

7. Roosevelt Skerrit has failed to outline a long-term vision for the country. Rosie Douglas put forward the idea of Dominica building closer ties with Guadeloupe and Martinique as a strategy towards a closer alignment with the European Union. Pierre Charles advocated Dominica's long-term objective to become energy independent by 2012 at a United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002.

8. Mr. Skerrit has a narrow mindset that aid can solve Dominica's problems. In tandem with this, is his skewed thought process that believes people can be pacified by doling out money and other forms of patronage from his office in Roseau and at his home in Vieille Case.

9. As massive amounts of aid from Venezuela have flowed into Dominica in the last nine (9) years, we seem to have compromised our maritime delimitation with Venezuela with respect to Bird Rock. While we may not be able to wrest sovereign control of Bird Rock from Venezuela, we believe its legal definition from the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea is highly desirable. We should not accept our economic zone on the west coast being reduced to 100 miles instead of 200 miles because Bird Rock is not yet legally defined. Maritime delimitation has to be one of our national objectives. That was the position of Rosie Douglas and Pierre Charles.

10. Another major departure is the deliberate strategy to destroy the development of a democratic Labour Party where organizational development, accountability, criticism, self-criticism and good governance are the guiding principles. Under Roosevelt Skerrit, what we see is a small clique closely aligned to the leader, steeped in self-serving behaviour and posturing as advocates of the new dispensation.

11. The coalition with Freedom had its risks and what we have seen over the last several years is the "Freedomization" of the Labour Party and the systematic weeding out of stalwarts associated with Rosie and Pierre and the calculated strategy to destroy the Pierre Charles political machinery in Grand Bay.

12. There has also been a deliberate strategy by Roosevelt Skerrit to distance himself from the internationalist political values which Rosie and Pierre espoused. One of them is the right to self-determination and support for liberation struggles. The issue of Western Sahara's right to self-determination is a case in point. In the first half of October, 2014, at the United Nations, Ambassador Vince Henderson, joined by Ambassadors of the OECS, derailed the longstanding CARICOM consensus supporting the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara. It must be borne in mind that CARICOM has always been in the vanguard of the campaign for self-determination for oppressed and colonized peoples, including for Western Sahara. It is indeed a travesty that Dominica has now

distanced itself from the African Union, ALBA, and international consensus on this important decolonization matter.

13. Rosie Douglas, in his inaugural address as Prime Minister, pledged that his administration would “evolve a political culture that is intolerant to corruption”. He placed good governance, transparency, accountability and integrity at the top of his agenda. Pierre Charles was unwavering in his commitment to this principle and passed the Integrity in Public Office Act in 2003. In the last several years, the Roosevelt Skerrit regime has been besieged by scandal and numerous allegations of corruption to which the administration has not responded in a satisfactory manner. What is most disconcerting is the arbitrary manner in which the Integrity Commission has been sidelined, muzzled, and rendered totally impotent.

14. Rosie was a steadfast advocate for campaign finance reform. He spoke about the need for “robust control over election spending to ensure that all political parties are properly accountable to the people of Dominica, to prevent conflict of interest and the exercise of improper influence”. He warned: “We need to ensure that politics in this country does not become a matter of who can spend the most. This is wrong. This is very wrong!” In the last two election campaigns we have seen the Labour Party spend millions of dollars from sources that remain secret.

15. When Roosevelt Skerrit assumed the mantle of leadership of the country upon the death of Pierre Charles on January 8th 2004, there was such

promise and hope of a bright new dawn for Dominica. After ten years, his leadership has become mired in a quicksand of bad governance, lack of transparency, a complete lack of integrity and a deteriorating economy.

16. While progress has been made in some areas, such as in infrastructure development, geothermal energy exploration and education, the Labour Party Government has yet to build the foundations of a sustainable economy, vitally important in the post-banana era. The Government to its detriment has ridiculed concerned citizens who have expressed their concerns about certain aspects of the geothermal energy exploration programme. The inability of Government to attract significant investments in energy, water, agriculture and tourism means that very little progress has been made in building this new economy which was the primary objective of our return to government in 2000.

17. An independent judiciary is at the heart of our constitutional democracy. But under the Roosevelt Skerrit regime, we have witnessed efforts by government officials to undermine the independence of the magistracy.

18. The contribution of Rosie Douglas on the national, regional and international stage was significant. This was a man who the late Tim Hector put in the same league as George Padmore, C.L.R James, Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney. To rename Melville Hall which will be obsolete in less than a decade in his memory is a brazen affront to his legacy.

19.The visionary role of Pierre Charles in rescuing our country from economic collapse between2001-2004 must never be forgotten. Affixing his name alongside Rosie at Melville Hall airport exposes how lowly he is regarded by his successor.

20.This hastily concocted airport renaming on the eve of a general election has little to do with honouring these two great Dominican statesmen. It is about Roosevelt Skerrit attempting to use the huge reservoir of goodwill that Rosie Douglas and Pierre Charles still enjoy to win another term in office. It represents hypocritical posturing of the worst kind.

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Sean. R. Douglas

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Tiyani .I Behanzin