

OPINION & INSIGHTS

Paying tribute to Andre 'Pancho' De Caires and the National Green Party – **PART 2**



AS I SEE IT

By Rahym R.
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Andre 'Pancho' De Caires

In my last column, I noted that our political system's marginalisation of minority and third parties has led to a lack of recognition for their contributions, particularly their intellectual ones, to the body politic.

The National Green Party (NGP), for instance, has been resolute in its urgency to address the climate crisis, fuelled by rising global fossil fuel consumption. While the party has yet to present a detailed treatise on its strategies, its underlying commitment remains significant. Saint Lucia, as a low-lying island nation, is acutely vulnerable to sea-level rise, which erodes coastlines and displaces communities and industries. The recent election of Donald Trump has further complicated global climate efforts.

Yet, Andre **Pancho** De Caires rightly argues that continued multilateral engagement and diplomatic pressure, particularly with the US, are crucial to operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund and the Green Climate Fund, which promise financing for mitigation and adaptation in small island states like ours.

However, this does not absolve us of our own responsibilities. We must radically shift toward renewable energy to reduce fossil fuel dependence, enact stricter building codes, and incentivise climate-resilient construction, not just for homes, but for public infrastructure as well. Even within tourism, we may need

to reconsider coastal development given its inherent vulnerability. Equally critical is upskilling our workforce to meet these challenges. We must expand educational opportunities for young professionals and integrate climate education into pedagogy, fostering a new generation of Saint Lucians who don't just endure climate events but understand and actively address them.

Crime and violence

The NGP correctly identifies our Victorian-era approaches to crime, such as harsher firearm penalties, as mere "band-aid" solutions. While punitive measures have their place, sustainable change requires long-term strategies: stricter firearm regulations to curb misuse, tighter border enforcement to combat illegal trafficking, and diplomatic coordination with the US and other nations.

More fundamentally, we must address the economic disenfranchisement that fuels crime. Poverty, marginalisation and lack of opportunity breed violence, necessitating deeper social interventions such as educational reform, soft-skills training, community mediation, conflict resolution and entrepreneurship programmes. A research-driven approach is also vital to ensure targeted and effective solutions. The NGP's philosophy provides a solid starting

point, even if further refinement is needed.

Cannabis

A cornerstone of the NGP's agenda is cannabis legalisation as part of a green economy. The party argues it could spur economic growth, revitalise agriculture, create jobs and promote sustainable farming. De Caires says, according to online sources, that it could "empower farmers to return to the land, enhancing food security and reducing import dependency".

The current administration has taken steps toward decriminalisation, allowing up to 30 grammes for personal use and issuing a long-overdue apology to the Rastafari community for decades of persecution. Records of those incarcerated for minor possession have been expunged—a rightful correction. Both major parties, following CARICOM's lead, have explored cannabis for medicinal, religious and recreational use. Yet, the sluggish pace of reform risks squandering economic potential.

Reports suggest that a well-structured cannabis industry could boost Saint Lucia's economy by 10 per cent, generate \$80 million in tax revenue, create over 2 000 jobs, and increase exports by 300 per cent. But these gains depend on becoming a market leader—a challenge, given our delayed entry. The NGP advocates not only for reclassifying

cannabis as a controlled substance but also for leveraging it in sustainable industries, such as low-carbon construction, to reduce cement imports. Crucially, they emphasise inclusion for small farmers and local entrepreneurs to prevent foreign exploitation, akin to tourism's profit-repatriation issues. Regulations must also restrict public use and protect children and youth.

The limits of third parties

The NGP, like other third parties, faces systemic hurdles: their policy focus is often niche, lacking comprehensive economic plans (e.g., education or social empowerment), and they struggle to build the institutional strength needed to win elections. Too often, they emerge only as election-season machinery.

Yet their intellectual contributions remain valuable. Pancho, we thank you for enriching our political discourse. Long live your ideas.

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