

OPINION & INSIGHTS

Paying tribute to Andre 'Pancho' De Caires and the National Green Party **PART 1**



Saint Lucian politics operates primarily within a competitive two-party framework, with the SLP and UWP vying for state power every five years. This system, an integral part of our Westminster-modelled government, relies on the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral method, where the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins parliamentary representation, and the party securing the majority of seats claims the government. While effective in producing decisive outcomes, FPTP often results in manufactured majorities, as seen in 1997 and potentially even now. More critically, it risks leaving opposition voices and minority factions underrepresented, or worse, politically marginalised.

In previous writings, I have joined many others in critiquing FPTP's inherent inequities and advocating for proportional representation. The current system can produce distorted outcomes. In some other Caribbean territories, elections have resulted in no parliamentary opposition or parties losing the popular vote but winning the government. Scholars like Professor Cynthia Barrow-Giles, Justice Peter Jamadar and Selwyn Ryan have reinforced this critique, arguing that FPTP fails to capture the full spectrum of public sentiment, whereas proportional representation fosters a more balanced and equitable parliament.

Beyond structural flaws, my deeper concern lies in the philosophy underpinning our politics. Governance should not be reduced to a zero-sum game of winners and losers but should embody compromise, consensus, and the accommodation of diverse perspectives—principles

championed by Nobel Laureate Sir Arthur Lewis. He contended that the current system is ill-suited for emerging nations like ours and our responsibility is to ensure that we make "liberal democracy more liberal". Sadly, our current system sidelines not only opposition parties but also smaller movements with distinct agendas and independent candidates lacking established political machinery.

It was against this backdrop that I felt a pang of dejection upon learning of Andre De Caires' departure from politics. As leader of the National Green Party (NGP), his repeated electoral defeats were less a reflection of his efforts than of a system that does not accommodate third parties, hampered by restrictive financing, institutional biases and a narrow focus on issues.

His departure should not go unnoticed or ignored as it provides us with an opportunity to thank him for his resolute advocacy on matters of national importance, but also to appreciate and assess some of his party's underlying philosophies, ideas and policy proposals and see whether they apply to the body politic of Saint Lucia, particularly in this period of global turmoil and uncertainty.

This article seeks to honour De Caires' legacy by examining the NGP's core philosophies and their applicability to Saint Lucia's current challenges.

The National Green Party's vision

True to its name, the NGP anchored its platform in sustainable development, diverging from profit-driven market ideologies and state interventionist

approaches. It focused on environmental protection, sustainability, climate change, coastal erosion, food and water security and a greater role for agriculture while tackling the unwise decision to utilise tourism as our main economic driver,

Food security: A case study

The NGP prioritised food sovereignty, highlighting Saint Lucia's alarming reliance on imports (nearly 90 per cent of consumed food, per the World Bank). Though the party offered no exhaustive plan, its warnings now resonate acutely. Global shocks, like the pandemic, the Ukraine war, climate disruptions, and supply chain crises, have inflated prices and scarcity, undermining our goal to slash the \$489 million food import bill by 2030. The poor bear the brunt, forced into cheaper, less nutritious diets while sacrificing essentials like healthcare and education—a trajectory exacerbating our NCD epidemic.

De Caires was right. There must be a greater effort by everyone, led by our leadership, to eat what we grow and grow what we eat. We also require systemic investment in climate-smart agriculture—high-yield drought-resistant crops, renewable-powered irrigation and sustainable land management.

Crucially, we must rebrand farming for youth, divorcing it from outdated stereotypes of backbreaking labour and infusing it with technology and innovation.

Practical steps could include:

- Leasing idle crown lands at affordable rates to aspiring young farmers.
- Guaranteeing public-sector

procurement from local producers.

- Supporting cooperatives to streamline financing, marketing, and bulk purchasing.
- Incentivising agro-processing and farm-to-table ventures to add value locally.

Notably, only a third of the tourism sector's demand is met domestically. Policies must mandate "buy local" commitments where feasible, alongside investment in production systems, agro-logistics and marketing to ensure that local farmers can supply fresh produce all year.

Moreover, as Sir Arthur Lewis cautioned, we must break free from colonial-era dependency on raw exports.

Vertical integration and value-added processing are essential to capturing higher revenues and job opportunities. Collaboration with Guyana, the Caribbean's breadbasket, could further bolster regional food security.

Ultimately, these efforts must be anchored in a coherent national food security policy, one that the NGP, despite its electoral shortcomings, helped bring to the fore.

To be continued in Part 2

Rahym R. Augustin-Joseph is a 24-year-old Saint Lucian pursuing his Bachelor of Laws at UWI Cave Hill, after earning first-class honours in political science and law. The current Commonwealth Caribbean Rhodes Scholar and a former UWI valedictorian, he is dedicated to using law and politics to transform Saint Lucia and the wider Caribbean.