

REPATRIATION ADDRESS

BY

PREMIER/MINISTER OF FINANCE

THE HONOURABLE R MILTON CATO

FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 1979

FELLOW VINCENTIANS

You will recall that the pattern which seemed to have emerged over the first two weeks of the eruption which commenced on 13th April last was one of intense volcanic activity alternating with periods of almost complete, if not complete inactivity.

There has since been a stoppage of explosions with a great reduction in the number of seismic events and the scientists have reported and some of you will have observed that a dome is growing in the crater indicating that a new phase of volcanic activity is taking place. This new phase involves the quiet emission of lava and is similar in pattern to that of the 1971 eruption.

As advised by the Scientists, the likelihood of further major explosions, i.e. explosions representing a danger to any area other than the upper slopes of the volcano is considerably reduced. Because of the unpredictable nature of volcanoes, however, it is conceivable that there may be a resurgence of major violent activity. In this case the possibility of seeing symptoms before a new outbreak is the same as it was before the 12th April, 1979, except that with our additional modern monitoring equipment we have a greater chance of a longer warning period.

It must be emphasised that an eruption is still in progress. This is now a relatively mild eruption but the upper slopes of the volcano are a dangerous area and should not be visited except in emergency or for genuine scientific investigation. It appears also that the rainy season has begun and already heavy rains have generated floods and mud-flows repeatedly on both the Windward and Leeward flanks of the volcano. This is an added danger to persons wishing to visit the volcano.

Following discussions with the Scientists, it was decided that the restricted areas in the State should be those north of the Dry River on the Windward Coast and those north of Chateaubelair on the Leeward Coast. Since this announcement was made, approximately three weeks have passed and as far as we can humanly predict it is now considered safe for all evacuees, with the exception of those north of the Dry River to return to their homes. Government however had to consider a number of factors before inviting the evacuees to return to their homes, the chief of these being the safety of the people more immediately involved, as well as others and then the numerous aspects of a repatriation and rehabilitation programme.

One can well understand the fears and uncertainty in the minds of the evacuees, but we as Vincentians must be prepared to live with the knowledge that there is an active volcano in our midst. We can also be consoled with the fact that we are not alone in this regard. The people of Martinique have learnt to live with Mt. Pele; the people in Sicily have learnt to live with Mt. Etna; so too have the peoples in Hawaii, Japan, North Borneo, Java and Indonesia learnt to live with the volcanoes in their midst. Even as I address you the Government of Papua, New Guinea is contemplating evacuating the people of that Island because of increased seismic activity of the volcano there.

I would again emphasise the fact that the monitoring system for

the observation of our volcano is being given top priority by my Government, assisted by the seismic unit of the University of the West Indies and other visiting Scientists. Apart from the main Observatory at Belmont there are about eight other monitoring stations throughout the State and the acquisition and installation of more sophisticated equipment is being actively pursued. The possibility, therefore, of being caught unawares by a volcanic eruption is almost negligible. The other factors are largely of an economic and social nature.

When I spoke to the Nation on the 16th April, I took the opportunity to remind you how badly our school system had been disrupted by the enforced closure of all schools on the mainland and on Bequia until further notice. This meant that only schools in the Southern Grenadines and Mustique could hold their regular sessions from Tuesday 17th April.

On the day that Secondary Schools were due to be opened for Term III of the current school year, the Chief Education Officer met the Heads of all schools on the mainland and discussed the situation as it related to the education of our children.

That meeting set up a Committee to draw up a format for collecting information on the whereabouts of teachers and students and after much discussion proposed:-

- (1) postponement of all examinations due to be held in April and May except the external ones including CXC and GCE;
- (2) deployment of teachers in the work of the evacuation camps including informal education activities;
- (3) that a further meeting of secondary heads be held early to work out a system of starting classes for fifth (5th) and sixth (6th) Forms of secondary schools.

On 27th April the Heads of Secondary Schools discussed with the Honourable Minister for Education proposals for extending classes beyond 5th and 6th Forms using the available buildings in Kingstown.

That meeting also recommended that the Common Entrance Examination should be held in the very near future as this examination was of vital importance for determining the secondary schools intake in September, 1979.

Within a fortnight of that meeting a majority of secondary schools in the State had started formal classes on a shift system, and at the present time the Petit Bordel Junior Secondary School is the only secondary school which has not been able to begin some formal classes for its students.

Obviously these classes were limited in scope, but in the circumstances, were the best that could be done, considering that twelve (12) secondary school buildings out of a total of nineteen (19) are still being used as emergency centres.

Later, the Pupil Teachers returned to their regular classes,

though those from the Layou and Georgetown Centres had to be accommodated in Kingstown for the time being.

The Teachers' College, Technical College, and Adult Evening Classes have also been resumed but the Annual Practice Teaching Exercise for final years, normally held in May, will not now take place until September.

Meanwhile the Common Entrance Examination was conducted on 25th May in Kingstown and Bequia, and the written examination for CXC and GCE began on 28th May in fourteen (14) centres on the mainland and in the Grenadines.

The occupancy of several school buildings normally used as examination centres caused a re-location of some rural area centres to Kingstown.

Clearly, the most painful experience of the education system during this emergency is the continued closure of Government and Assisted Primary Schools. Of the sixty-one (61) Primary Schools throughout the State, thirty-two (32) of them have been turned into evacuation camps. Those not in use as such are in the evacuation zone. In fact only three Primary School buildings on the mainland in the non-evacuated zone have not been commissioned into use as camps.

All this means that nearly thirty thousand (30,000) children have been denied several weeks of their schooling by the eruption.

In a bid to cushion the effects of the absence of formal schooling of Primary pupils, the Ministry of Education has set up a Committee to prepare radio programmes for children, and this service is now in operation as from this week over Radio 705.

The closure of schools has therefore been for all of us a grave area of concern, and it will need the co-operation of all citizens in the task of attempting to bridge the gap created by the extended closure of schools. The re-opening of schools will demand the stretching of human and financial resources, but if goodwill prevails on all sides we should return to normalcy in the shortest possible time.

Having concluded that it is relatively safe for persons outside the newly declared danger areas to return to their homes it has been decided that commencing from June 11th, 1979 there will be a phased closure of all camps, excluding those housing evacuees from north of the Dry River. Those persons still remaining in camps on the dates mentioned below will be given full transportation back to their homes on those dates.

The schedule for the closure of camps will be as follows:-

Monday June 11th - Camps in Kingstown and at Prospect House

Tuesday June 12th - Camps in Calliaqua, New Grounds and Evesham

Wednesday June 13th - Camps on the Leeward Coast and in Bequia

Thursday June 14th - Camps at Lowmans Windward, Belair and Gomea

Friday June 15th - Camps at Carapan, Stubbs and Calder

Saturday June 16th - Camps from Biabou to North Union

Monday June 18th - Camps in the Marriaqua and Greggs area

On leaving camps evacuees will be given two weeks rations and subsequent supplies of rations will be distributed in the several communities on times, dates, and at centres to be announced, as and if the need arises, and depending on the resources of Government.

I am once again making an appeal to persons leaving camps to desist from taking camp properties with them as they were merely on loan and will be required for use in the event of any further disaster. I need not remind you that the hurricane season is upon us. We can only hope and pray that the Almighty will spare us from any further disaster, but we will of course have to take the usual precautions.

Sooner or later we must turn our attention to the return of those persons north of the Dry River. For the present however, they will remain in Camps, but it will no longer be necessary for persons wishing to travel beyond the Dry River to obtain passes.

Although the number of camps will be considerably reduced, the need for continued assistance by volunteers in the remaining camps and at distribution centres to be set up in the various communities will still remain. I know that I can rely on our people to offer their services willingly as you have indeed been doing over the last few weeks.

At this point I wish to publicly acknowledge the invaluable assistance being given by those officials and volunteers at the Central Emergency Headquarters, the staff at Radio 705, the Coordinators and Assistants in the several camps, the Roving Coordinators and all those other persons who have given freely of their time to assist in one way or another in ensuring that the herculean task of caring for over 20,000 evacuees is accomplished.

The response from every Vincentian both at home and abroad during this crisis has been nothing short of fantastic. Every one was prepared to and did assist in his own way. Some by way of monetary contributions, some by way of contributions in kind, some by offering their homes to friends and families and others by giving of their time and skills in bringing comfort and cheer to those in camps. This only goes to show what can be accomplished through the United efforts of our people.

From this point onward all attention will be focussed on the reconstruction and rehabilitation process.

As you may have noticed, the use of school buildings as evacuation centres has left us with smashed furniture, defective toilets, and insecure buildings now in dire need of repairs.

Even before the eruption our school facilities were far from adequate, and to meet the emergency, make-shift toilets, additional drinking fountains and other basic facilities had to be hurriedly installed.

Weeks of continuous use of these facilities and premises by 20, 000 evacuees have left us with a crying need for repairs and painting of buildings, reconstruction of furniture, improvement of the toilet system, and general refurbishment of the school buildings.

Community halls at Mesopotamia, Calliaqua, Biabou and Barrouallie have had their share of rough-wearing. The cost of restoring these buildings and replacing furniture is astounding. Although only preliminary estimates are completed the cost for rehabilitation of Schools, Community Halls, Church Buildings, Private Buildings used as camps is \$1,500,000.00 E.C., while repairs to schools and community halls in the evacuated area i.e. Colonarie to Fancy and Chateaubelair to Spring Village will cost a further \$800.00.00.

Roads in evacuated villages and towns were also badly hit by the eruptions. Ash-fall has caused extensive drain-blocking whilst the steep sections become slippery whenever it rains. The blocking of drains causes heavy erosion to all roads where numerous potholes make it almost impossible for vehicular traffic.

The Windward Road starting at the Rabacca Dry River needs special mention. There has been heavier erosion of the Dry River bed. This erosion is increasing as the water together with mud-flows continue, sometimes in waves, down to the sea. North of the River, the road to Fancy is heavily over-laden with ash, making the steep climbs dangerous to traffic. This is due mainly to the fact that this section of the Windward Road is not surfaced.

On the Leeward side damage was done to feeder roads which suffered from the blocked drains mentioned before. In addition, the ash has caused steep grades to become slippery and dangerous to traffic of any sort.

The cost of repairs to roads is estimated to be about \$8,000,000.00

Although the damage to housing directly attributable to volcanic activity has not been as great as feared originally, it has been quite considerable, affecting dwellings extending from Fancy in the extreme north to as far south as Park Hill. Damage to housing on the Leeward coast has been minimal.

Preliminary surveys indicate that in the majority of cases, damage was largely confined to roof coverings with consequent damage to furniture and personal effects by ash falls and rain.

The Housing and Land Development Corporation has already embarked on detailed investigations in the affected villages of Fancy, Owia, Sandy Bay, Overland, Langley Park, Mt. Bentinck, Georgetown, and environs - Dickson, O'Briens, Chile, Byera, Park Hill, South Rivers, Colonarie.

This is a massive undertaking and the co-operation of householders will be necessary in determining the full extent of the rehabilitation required. A preliminary estimate of the cost of rehabilitation is placed at \$4,043,000.00, and Government will give whatever assistance is possible.

Our agriculture has suffered some severe setbacks as a result

of the eruptions. Losses incurred were occasioned both directly, as a result of the fallout of volcanic ejecta; and indirectly as a result of the necessity to evacuate the danger areas. Animals which were turned loose in order to survive also caused considerable damage, chiefly to food crops.

Damage to our banana production has been more noticeable than in the case of any other crops. The ash deposited on the fruit during the eruptions resulted in scorching of the skin. This blemish made the fruit unacceptable to our buyers. This type of damage was island-wide in varying degrees.

Banana fields nearer to the volcano suffered damage from the ash which lodged in the axils of the leaves and the situation was worsened by animals which had been given free range to graze.

It is estimated that production was affected by 50-60%. It will be some months yet before production returns to normal provided that farmers commence a clean-up campaign immediately.

The Banana Association, in an effort to ease the burdens of its members, has made payments to them based on their 1978 production. Proposals are now under consideration to help banana growers to rehabilitate their holdings. In some cases complete replanting is the only possible solution to the problem. In the meantime banana growers are advised to commence cleaning up their fields and to make an early application of fertilizer.

The losses experienced in the arrowroot industry was of a different nature from that in the case of bananas. An estimated 48,000 baskets of rhizomes which had already been harvested have been lost as most factories were brought to a halt during the period of crisis. In addition, an estimated area of 285 acres remain unharvested and are now useless for starch production as they have already started springing. Their starch content at this time (10-12%) will make it a futile exercise to attempt the extraction of starch.

The Association will be having a look at the situation to see what measures may be taken to alleviate the plight of the farmers. Here again, farmers are asked to commence caring for their crops.

The arrowroot industry has suffered a setback in another form. Work on the Owia Factory has come to a halt over the last seven and one half weeks. We are still not in a position to say how soon work on the factory will be resumed.

Farmers in the Rose Hall/Palmyra area lost an estimated 70 acres of carrots which are now spoiling. We appeal to those farmers to reap these carrots and remove them from their fields. This is a necessary step if we are to avoid a build-up of the disease problem which will inevitably lead to further losses of this crop.

Proposals have been put forward to offer a measure of relief to these carrot farmers. In the meantime cleaning up of the fields should commence with the least delay.

With respect to food crops most damage has been caused by stray animals. It is not yet possible to establish the exact extent of

the damage. What is well known is that animals on the loose have caused widespread damage.

We must now redouble our efforts to ensure that both our domestic and export targets in food production are achieved in the minimum of time. In this connection the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture has already received supplies of bean and maize plants which will be made available to farmers in the area which are to be rehabilitated. Proposals for further assistance to farmers are under consideration.

Government in its drive towards greater self-sufficiency has received and is distributing vegetable seeds to farmers throughout the State. Farmers are asked to avail themselves of this opportunity to help to rebuild a healthy nation that can supply its own food requirements. The Extension Staff of the Department of Agriculture is available for advice to farmers and householders.

Coconuts, mangoes, limes and other tree crops within the disaster areas have suffered in varying degrees.

Direct losses of livestock as a result of the eruptions have been minimal, though it is understood that there was large scale larceny during the period of the crisis. Several farmers slaughtered their animals rather than risk losing them outright.

The Department of Agriculture has started to accelerate its revolving goat and rabbit projects in an effort to assist in the rehabilitation of those farmers who experienced losses of animals.

Areas in the environs of the volcano have suffered immeasurable damage as a result of the loss of vegetation. This is particularly noticeable in the Larikai, Roseau, and Trois Lours areas. These areas must be re-afforested.

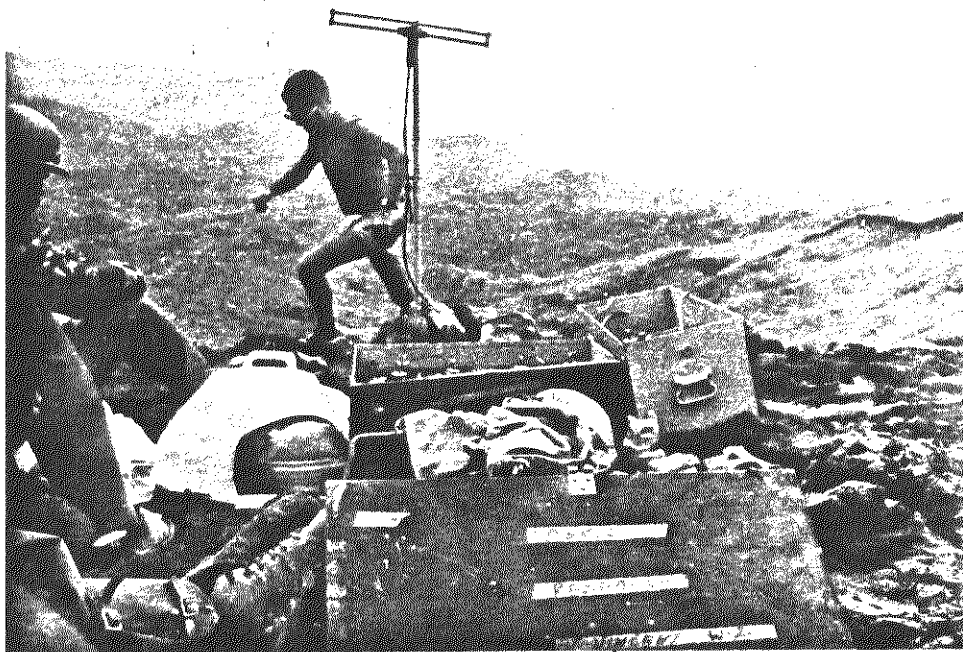
The Ministry of Trade and Agriculture in collaboration with CARDI; the Department of Agricultural Extension, UWI and other related agencies are joining forces to assist with losses which we suffered and to rebuild the agricultural sector of our economy.

The mercantile community, too, did not escape the ill effects resulting from the evacuation of about one fifth of the population of the State. The consequential loss of earnings of a large section of the working force and the fact that Government, assisted by friendly and generous countries, organisations and individuals, had to provide for the needs of persons who would have been otherwise providing for themselves and their families, meant that little or no business was undertaken by some of the commercial houses. Of course the merchants and shopkeepers in the evacuated areas suffered the greatest losses. All this will of course be reflected in the drop in government revenue.

With the commencement of the return of the evacuees, the gradual return of the farmers to the land and an increase in Central and Local Government activities, it is hoped that the mercantile community will soon regain that buoyancy which it experienced before the present crisis. I wish to issue the warning, however, that the Price Control Department of the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture will be placed on the alert to forestall any attempt by unscrupulous businessmen to



SETTING UP SEISMIC STATION AT SOUFRIERE 15/5/79



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recoup their losses over a very short period by placing excessive mark-up on their goods.

The task ahead will not be an easy one and it is our fervent hope that all Vincentians both at home and abroad and those within and outside the public sector will again play their part during this period of reconstruction.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN my Government has been most grateful for the demonstration of loyalty and support which we have received from all sections of our community. This crisis seems to have brought out the very best in the majority of our people who have in most cases put country before self. With God's help and with your support we will rebuild St. Vincent and the Grenadines as we continue our march to full nationhood and justify the confidence and friendship which we have received from so many people and so many countries.

MAY GOD BLESS US ALL.



SEISMOLOGISTS DRS. JOHN TOMBLIN AND KEITH ROWLEY MOVE TO THE TASK



SCIENTIST TOMBLIN STANDING AT EDGE OF CRATER TAKING PICTURES 15/5/79