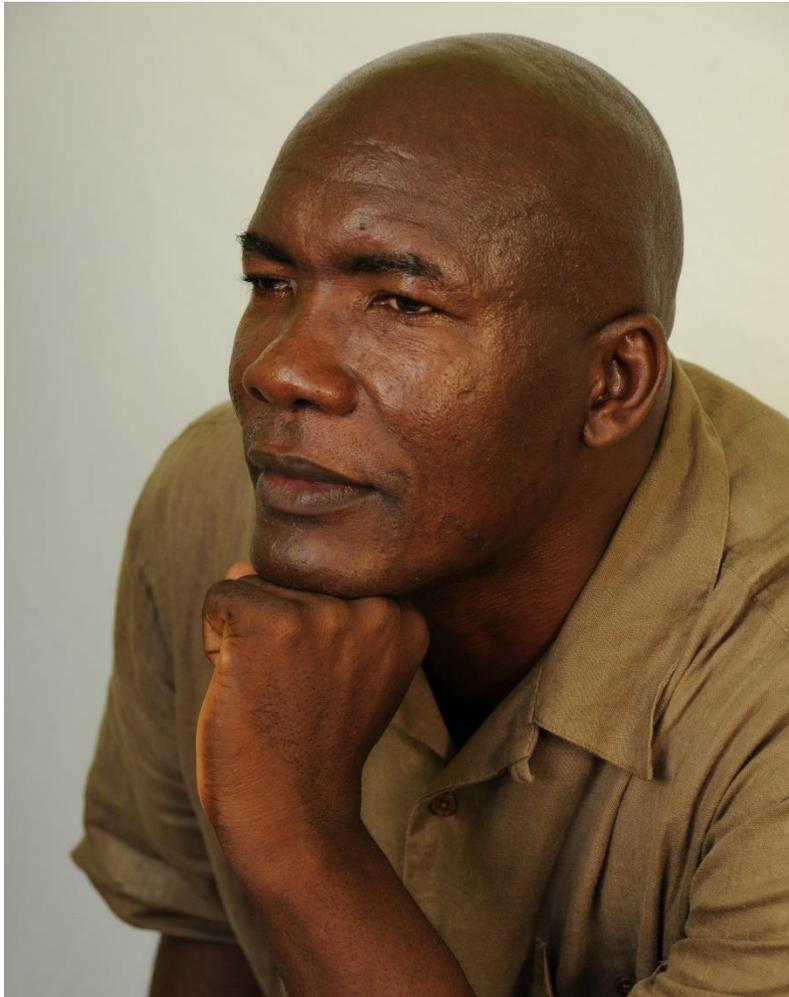


The Pearl of the Caribbean

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The Pearl of the Caribbean is a ten-part article on the DSH agreements, which was carried in the Voice newspaper early 2017. Born and raised in Vieux Fort, Dr. Anderson Reynolds is an economist and an award-winning author. Dr. Reynolds and social historian, Dr. Jolien Harmsen, are the two foremost writers on the history of Vieux Fort.

Part 1: The Deal of the Century



For a while now it appeared that nothing much in the way of job creation and economic development was happening in Vieux Fort. Worse, with the economic recession that began in 2008 followed by the imposition of VAT, the opposite of what doctors would have ordered, businesses closed down, turning Vieux Fort into a near basket case. The popular song by Ras Isley, *Nowhere to go, nothing to do*, aptly described the plight of young Vieux Fortians. The town's economic decline was best epitomized by the contraction of its port which some have blamed on SLASPA's insistent on the use of an unreliable, often broken down and obsolete crane. Winfresh's announcement last year of discontinuing Vieux Fort as a banana export point was just the latest example of shippers and shipping lines abandoning Port Vieux Fort. Vieux Fort wasn't alone in its economic plight; communities across the land were crying out for relief. Indeed, the Labor Party defeat at the 2016 general elections was partly a manifestation of the nation lashing out in economic anguish.

Then, all of a sudden, as if Vieux Fort had just caught the eye of the powers above, the town and neighbouring areas were singled out for several development projects that promised to transform the economic and social landscape of the South, if not the entire island.

But for the changing of colors, the \$65 million government administrative complex at Beanfield, across from Builder's Choice, would have been well on its way. The Caribbean Grains Flour Mill at Port Vieux Fort, which promises to employ over 100 workers is near completion. The contract for the multi-million-dollar Public Private Partnership (PPP), Hewanorra International Airport (HIA) Redevelopment Project, which can be expected to increase the flow of air traffic to St. Lucia, should have been awarded in January 2016 under the previous administration, but with a new government that seems to be more about stopping projects than initiating them, the future of the PPP-HIA project is in doubt.

The often contentious and controversial Citizen by Investment Program (CIP) can be expected to add further impetus to this recent spate of developments. On the west coast, in February/March 2016, the former administration sold the Sab Wisha Beach Park area of Choiseul to the European GP Group for the establishment of Sunset Bay, a US\$200 million resort said to include 40 villas and about 110 rooms, and which will employ about 200 workers during construction and upwards of 300 workers when in full operation. A few months later, again under the CIP, the government signed an agreement with Caribbean luxury hotel developer, Range Developments, to transform 180 acres of Black Bay, Vieux Fort, into a luxury branded hotel with villas, a marina, and an equestrian centre.

On the east coast there is a CIP proposal under consideration to turn about 247 acres of Canelles, Vieux Fort, in the Honey Moon Beach area, into an all-inclusive resort hotel, spa, upscale residence, and a Nicklaus residence golf course. However, perhaps the mother of all developments, also on the east coast, is the more recently signed government CIP agreements with Desert Star Holdings (DSH), a Hong Kong based equine management and investment company, expected to transform over 700 acres of Vieux Fort lands into what is called The Pearl of the Caribbean that promises a marina, horse racecourse, resort hotels, luxury villas and apartments, shopping mall complex, casino, and originally a board walk and museum in the mangrove forest. The Pearl of the Caribbean was first touted as a US\$1 billion investment, and then a US\$2.6 billion investment, and now a US\$3.0 billion investment. Regardless, if implemented the initiative will be tantamount to depositing overnight a whole city on Vieux Fort's seaboard and turning the area into a replica Miami Beach.

Suddenly it appeared that Vieux Fort will take off; finally Vieux Fort, for the longest while considered the last frontier, will realize its full potential, will fulfil its promise; its rendezvous with destiny had finally arrived. For to find a development of that scale, we would have to bypass the Halcyon Days Hotel of the 70s and 80s, bypass Sir John Compton's industrialization of Vieux Fort, and enter the era of World War II when the Americans transformed the Vieux Fort landscape into a military base, and overnight turned it into a boomtown, where prostitution was rampant and Vieux Fortians felt so wealthy that they were using dollar bills to roll cigarettes and calling themselves one-day millionaires.

No one need be an economist to anticipate the potential economic impact of a project of that scale. Depending on how much the development will rely on neighbouring communities for services, labor, and consumption items, it can provide the critical mass of demand and income to allow Vieux Fort to take-off. The transformation may begin even during the construction phase. The initiative might leave no sector untouched, and the synergies with the local economy can be endless. Potentially it would be like taking the impact Halcyon Days Hotel had on the south in the 1970s and 1980s and multiplying that impact manifold.

The initial reaction of some Vieux Fortians was how selfish was their District Rep and former Prime Minister, Dr. Kenny D. Anthony, the one to whom much was given and from whom much was expected, to hold on to that secret for so long. *No wonder he lost the elections. That's the problem with Kenny, he takes too long to do things.* Those with a memory of the *Halcyon Days*, and the *Time of the Americans* were probably rejoicing at the good news. Finally Vieux Fort would take its rightful place in this beautiful country of theirs. Housing developers and land owners had probably started to count their riches in rising property values. Vieux Fortians were probably envisioning a Rodney Bay (and accompanying economic prosperity) right at their doorsteps. In anticipation of taking advantage of the horse racing opportunities presented by the proposed horse race course and the prospect of raking in millions in winnings, one stable owner in Castries, pronouncing the DSH agreement a done deal, was already sourcing out thoroughbred horses in the US. Suddenly, Allen Chastanet, who, before entering politics, most St. Lucians didn't even know existed, was smelling like a hero; and Kenny Anthony, representative of Vieux Fort for 20 straight years and prime minister of St. Lucia for 15 of those 20 years, was a villain personified. *A good thing we kicked him out.*

Part 2: Please Don't Call It Rain



But as they say the proof is in the fine print, or the devil is in the details. No sooner had St. Lucia gotten the good news, the DSH agreements were leaked and went viral, and it appeared that the deal of the century was too good to be true. Using a phrase—*don't piss in my eyes and call it rain*—from Rick Wayne, St. Lucia's prime minister-maker and most famous, if not most celebrated, journalist, DSH had apparently *pissed* in the eyes of the Prime Minister and called it rain, or the Prime Minister had *pissed* in the eyes of St. Lucians and called it rain, or both.

According to the first signed agreement, called the Framework Agreement, the Pearl of the Caribbean would occupy about 700 acres of land stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the Mankôtè Mangrove forest area, crossing the Vieux Fort-Castries Highway (which would have been redesigned or rerouted) and subsuming Beauséjour Farm, which comprises of grazing pastures and a government experimental farm. The marina would be built on the Atlantic coast, with the seabed dredged and a waterway created alongside the Mankôtè Mangrove; and to sweeten the deal and maybe to quiet or placate nature lovers the developers had planned to build boardwalks and a museum in the mangrove forest. However, protest from the St. Lucia National Trust, environmentalists, and other concerned citizens against predictable damage to seabed, beach and mangrove forest, resulted in a change of plans and a second agreement, referred to as the Supplementary Agreement.

Of course, the protest was well founded, for Vieux Fort's eastern seaboard comprises a unique set of natural, ecological, cultural and historical assets. The seabed at Bois Chadon (sea egg forest), the northern end of Vieux Fort's eastern coastline, in the Mankôtè Mangrove area, is home to the island's largest seagrass forest, a major breeding ground for sea urchins or sea eggs. Pointe Sable Beach, stretching from the foot of the Moule-a-Chique peninsula to Bois Chadon, is the longest uninterrupted stretch of sandy beach on the island. It is a major sea turtle nesting ground, and offers the best kite and windsurfing beach on the island, and one of the best in the Caribbean. Occupying over 98 acres, the Mankôtè Mangrove forest is the island's largest remaining stand of mangrove, accounting for 20% of St. Lucia's mangrove acreage, and home to 17 species of fish. Nearshore, the Maria Islets serve as a nesting ground for many migratory birds, and a sanctuary for the St. Lucia Racer or Kouwess snake and the St. Lucia Whiptail Lizard (which bears the same colours of the Saint Lucia national flag), both of

which are endemic to the islets. The Moule-a-Chique peninsula at the extreme southern end of the island offers a breath-taking, panoramic view of the Vieux Fort landscape and seascape and beyond and is said to be home to the second highest lighthouse in the world.

Such is the social, aesthetic, and environmental importance of the area, that it has gained national and international attention. Together, Savannes Bay Mangrove (a short distance north of Bois Chadon) and Mankôtè Mangrove were declared Ramsar sites in 2002, and the off-shore islands of Scorpion Island (in the Savannes Bay area) and the Maria Islets were declared wildlife reserves. In 2001 the government declared the four-square miles or 2,565 acres of Vieux Fort's eastern coastal strip, including Pointe Sable Beach, Mankôtè Mangrove, and the Maria Islets, a protected area—Pointe Sable Environmental Protection Area (PSEPA)—and ceded its management to the St. Lucia Natural Trust, the official protector and conservator of the nation's natural and cultural heritage. There is now a move afoot to designate Moule-a-Chique a national landmark in the manner of Pigeon Island at the northern end of the island.

To the deceiving eyes, PSEPA generates little economic activity. However, the mangrove forest, beach and coastal waters support several livelihoods including charcoal production, horseback riding and nature tours, sea moss farming, and sea egg harvesting. In addition, the mangrove serves as critical nursery for reef fish thus helping to maintain the viability of Vieux Fort's fishing industry, the largest in the country. The value and productivity of the PSEPA could not be more contrary to the Prime Minister's expressed view that all lands not crowded with homes, commerce, and industry were wasted lands.

In the Supplementary Agreement and the reconceptualization of the Pearl of the Caribbean that followed objections to interference with the coastal ecosystem, the mangrove and the seabed were left untouched. The marina would be built on the Caribbean side of Vieux Fort. And in terms of land allocations, 290 acres in the general Beauséjour area will be used for the horse race course and other equine activities; a second parcel, acreage not specified (but maybe 300 acres or more) will be held in reserve for future development, and another 90 acres, inclusive of the George Odum Stadium, may be added to facilitate the establishment of education institutions within the project.

For hotels and villas, the development will also include 92 acres of Pointe Sable Beach, stretching from Hewanorra International Airport to the foot of Moule-a-Chique, and including the area south of the airport fence, going across the Filao area, Pointe Sable Recreation Park, and into Bruceville. Apparently, the government has informed some of Bruceville residents in the path of the development that they have to move, but the government hasn't presented them with any relocation plan or compensation package. The fear among Bruceville residents is that they will be shaft: kicked out of their homes with no adequate or acceptable alternatives, particular since they are squatters and it is the government and not the developer that is responsible for the removal of people and obstructions in the way of the development.

An additional 43 acres of land along the Caribbean Sea, between Vieux Fort Town, El Parata and the Vieux Fort-Laborie Highway will be used to establish a marina, a casino, and related commercial enterprises.

So in total the project might engulf 800 plus acres of Vieux Fort lands, and would cause the disappearance of some of the town's most important recreation spaces. The project will be implemented in stages, and the agreement allows 20 to 25 years for its implementation, so

lands set aside for the development could lie idle for up to 25 years, yet unavailable for any other development or residential use, local or otherwise.

Some of these lands will be sold to the developer at US\$60,000 to US\$90,000 per acre, or US\$1.4 to US\$2.1 per square foot, considerably less than current market rates, which starts at about US\$5.5 (EC\$15). Other lands will be leased at US\$1 per acre per year for a period of 99 years. In cases where the asking price of private land exceeds US\$90,000 per acre, the government will be responsible for paying the amount in excess of the US\$90,000. For some lands the developer will have the option of leasing or buying; and in the case of buying, the developer will only pay for a parcel of land after the development for which the parcel was earmarked is completed. The developer will be free to sell any such lands acquired from government to other investors at whatever price and terms he decides. Notwithstanding, if after two years of the project launch the developer hasn't secured at least 200 investors (sold 200 passports) for the project, upon the developer's request the government is obligated to not only buy back the land but pay the developer the full value of infrastructure established on the land.

Since the development will subsume the Beauséjour Farm, the developer will acquire the abattoir building, a EC\$12.5 million donation of the Taiwanese government that sits on the farm, and outfit it to serve equine related uses. In return, the developer promises to build an abattoir at another location of government's choosing.

Before the advent of DSH, recognizing that an abattoir was useless without meat to process, the government had sought and received a US\$1.26 million grant to implement a livestock development program at Beauséjour. However, with these new developments, what will happen to the grant funds and the livestock development program is any one's guess.

The Supplementary Agreement stipulates that, at its own cost, government is to discontinue use of the Vieux Fort landfill by the end of March 2017, and to decommission the landfill by the end of 2017. In fact, the government will bear the cost of removing and relocating any structure or infrastructure or public utility that is in the way of the development, and will be responsible for bringing public utilities such as water, electricity, sewage, refuse collection, postal service, and telecommunications to the doorsteps of the development. The government is also responsible for establishing an Educational Training Fund for the equine industry, and an Equine Disease-Free Zone to safeguard the health of the imported thoroughbreds, and those to be exported. The Equine Disease-Free Zone may mean no animal husbandry within a certain number of miles from the equine establishment. Therefore, animal husbandry farmers, especially pig farmers, in such places as Pero, Belvue, Cocoa, La Ressource, Vieux Fort, Augier, Laborie, etc., may be required to cease operations, which obviously will have startling livelihood consequences.

The developer will be exempted from income tax on interest earned, value added tax, property tax, alien landholding license fees, stamp duty and vendors tax, custom duties on imports, and on alternative energy, corporate tax, withholding tax, and any other tax exemptions allowed under the Incentives Act & Tourism Stimulus and Investment Act. In addition, the government cannot approve any new licenses for casinos, horse racing wagering and betting, and free trade zones for any other development in any part of the country.

The Southern Equestrian Association (SEA) has been conducting horse racing for over a decade now, and for just as long they have been proposing and advocating for a permanent horse race

track that would allow gate fees, concessions, and betting. In fact, the Vieux Fort stables were not perturbed about the DSH project at all, because they were confident that once they have their own modern track, their half-breed and creole races and bareback racing will continue to draw large audiences among St. Lucians and visitors alike. But the clause in the DSH agreement that precludes the government from issuing new wagering and betting licenses, will seriously undermine their ability to conduct a viable horse racing enterprise. However, even more detrimental to SEA is the Equine Disease-Free Zone, because it is very unlikely that their horses will meet the requisite health requirements, and so the horses will either have to be put down or moved outside of Vieux Fort, beyond the disease-free zone.

After all what St. Lucia has to give up to facilitate the development, the only capitalization pledge made by the developer in the agreement is US\$5 million earmarked for the Phase 1 of the development, involving the establishment of the horse race track and related activities. Apparently, all other capital for the Pearl of the Caribbean will come from other investors, mainly through purchase of St. Lucian citizenship. This suggests that the Pearl of the Caribbean is a pie in the sky. The only phase of the development for which there is any certainty, meaning for which the developer has the capital or is willing to invest in, is the equine related phase, all other activities are dependent on the sale of St. Lucian passports, yet over 800 acres of land would be set aside for up to 25 years for in case the developer can swing deals with potential purchasers of St. Lucian citizenships. Now, doesn't it stand to reason that the only agreement the Prime Minister should have signed with the developer is one pertaining just to equine activities, and if need be hire him separately for his architectural and passport marketing services?

Part 3: The CIP Ecstasy



Coming on the heels of the Citizen by Investment Programs of several Caribbean Islands (St. Kitts, Dominica, Antigua, and Grenada) and learning from their mistakes, St. Lucia's CIP was meant to be an elite and very exclusive one. Accordingly, qualification required a minimum net worth of US\$3 million accompanied with a sworn affidavit financial declaration of said

amount; applications per year were limited to 500, and the government allowed itself up to three months to subject applicants to a rigorous vetting procedure.

The St. Lucia CIP, as envisioned under the former government, offered four investment options—Government Bonds, National Economic Fund Contribution, Real Estate Investment, and Enterprise Investment. Under the bond option, a single applicant (an individual) is required to purchase US\$500,000 non-interest-bearing government bonds to be held for at least 5 years, while an applicant and spouse would purchase US\$350,000, and more if dependents are involved. Similarly, under the fund option, a single applicant is required to contribute US\$200,000 to a National Economic Fund specifically established to receive such funds, while a family of two must contribute US\$235,000, and more if dependents are involved. Under the real estate option, an applicant must invest a minimum of US\$300,000 in a preapproved real estate development, namely upscale branded hotels and resorts, and upscale boutique properties. And under the enterprise option, where the approved enterprises include specialty restaurants, cruise ports and marinas, agro-processing plants, pharmaceutical products, ports, bridges, roads and highways, offshore universities, research institutions and facilities, an individual applicant must invest at least US\$3.5M in an approved enterprise that would create at least three jobs. However, two or more applicants can jointly invest at least US\$6M that would create at least 6 jobs, with everyone contributing a minimum of US\$1 million.

CARICOM members' CIPs have been plagued with problems. In some countries large amounts of CIP cash are unaccounted for, and quite a few CIP recipients have been found to be wanted for bribery, money laundering, and financial crimes. In one country diplomatic passports were being sold unbeknown to the public. Under the current administration, St. Lucia's efforts to avoid the mistakes of its neighbors and to create an elite and reputable CIP have been undone. To facilitate the Pearl of the Caribbean and to increase the saleability of St. Lucian passports, the government has amended CIP regulations to allow an unlimited or indefinite number of CIP applications per year. It has removed the requirement of applicants providing a sworn affidavit to declare financial resources of at least US\$3M, and it has reduced the minimum required investment in the National Economic Fund for an individual applicant from US\$200,000 to US\$100,000 and for an applicant and spouse from \$235,000 to US\$165,000. Additionally, the regulations was also changed to allow the purchase of thoroughbred horses as an admissible CIP investment. With these changes, when both investment requirements and fees are considered, the St. Lucia CIP gained the unfortunate reputation of selling the cheapest passports in the region.

In the original CIP, government was responsible for the vetting, issuance, and management of the program, and the proceeds deposited into an irrevocable escrow account managed jointly by the developer and the St. Lucia CIP Unit. But once again protocol or regulations will be bent for the Pearl of the Caribbean. DSH will be directly responsible for the selling of the citizenships, which can be an indefinite number, the proceeds of which will be placed in an offshore escrow account from which DSH will withdraw at its discretion; its only accountability to government is that it provides notice of each withdrawal. Any monies left in the escrow account at the completion of the project will go to the developer. Moreover, to expressly cover marketing and agent cost, the developer will be rewarded upwards of US\$15,000 for every concluded investment (sale of citizenship).

Clearly, this agreement is tantamount to giving the developer the nation's choicest assets (prime land, beach, and citizenship) to turn into a hustle for himself. The developer is taking minimal risk. In fact, most of the risk will be borne by the state, the affected communities and the investors who will at least be walking away with St. Lucian citizenships. Regardless of whether the development reaches completion or fails, the developer is assured of returning to Hong Kong with a pocket full of money (from sale of land, citizenship, and marketing and agent fees).

Now, one would think, after agreeing to give so much that the government would gain or be rewarded with shares or equity in the development, but the agreements make no mention of such. Neither is there any provision for local investors to acquire shares or equity.

So then, what is in this deal for St. Lucia? Well here is what the agreement states, "it is understood that the Government has agreed to the foregoing on the understanding and expectation that the approved project is intended to develop the land significantly, and to lead to significant job creation and retention and shall be construed as a fundamental term of this agreement." The statement suggests that the government isn't even sure what's in it for St. Lucia. The jobs created will go to whom: St. Lucians, Chinese? It is difficult to say, because the agreements spell out that the developer is free to source its workers from anywhere it chooses, local or foreign, without interference from government. The land development is to whose benefit? It isn't for the use of St. Lucians. It isn't even clear that St. Lucians will be allowed to access it. Clearly, no one can fault St. Lucians for believing they have been duped, for this is the only statement in the agreements that alludes to what the project has in store for them.

Before the DSH conversation, St. Lucians probably thought that the way the CIP works is that investors embarked on a development of a certain magnitude and in return received citizenship. They probably didn't realize that it was the money raised in selling the citizenships that would constitute the investment. If that is the case, then why do the government need the developer? Why can't government decide what development it wants where, and sell a sufficient number of passports to implement the development. And if government feels it isn't qualified to establish and run the development, then it simply enters into PPP arrangements. So for example, if government wants to build and operate a horse racing enterprise costing US\$6 million to establish, then government sells one enterprise passport to raise US\$3.5M, provide the land, and enters into partnership with a private party that operates horse racing. The third party puts up the other half of the capital, manages the enterprise, and shares the profits with government.

In opposition to Kenny Anthony's Hewanorra International Airport Redevelopment PPP initiative, Allen Chastanet reasoned, why give or pay a foreign entity to do what the country can

do for itself? Now, it is unclear whether he is aware that in all likelihood SLASPA isn't running the operation at a profit, or that the trend all over the world is to turn over the management and operation of airports to companies specializing in such undertakings. However, if the policy of the Prime Minister is that the country should do it itself, and hold on to its resources, why is he so intent on giving a foreign developer so much for so little? The guess is that it is much easier to stop projects than to plan, conceptualize and implement them, and putting in place all the necessary safeguards.

Government has established Invest St. Lucia and the CIP Unit, housed them in plush offices, pay them healthy salaries, to do exactly that, i.e. bring in foreign investments. So if the developer is the one designing the developments, dictating all the terms, selling the passports and using the proceeds at his discretion with little oversight from Invest St. Lucia or the CIP Unit, why do the country need them? And to add insult to injury, St. Lucians are being told that it was Invest St. Lucia's lawyers who drafted the initial DSH agreement. Of course, some would find that hard to believe. For how could any self-respecting St. Lucian citizen or organization draft an agreement giving away so much to a foreign entity, while asking for almost nothing in return? How could they include nothing to safeguard the interest of their country, while saturating the agreement with clauses protecting the interest of the foreign party? If indeed it was Invest St. Lucia who drafted the agreements, then most would agree that this wasn't just an act of betrayal but an act of self-hatred.

In response to the question of why didn't the former administration bring this project to the awareness of the public, the former prime minister, whom Vieux Fortians once thought would be the hero to take them to the promise land, has said that his government had spent 18 months negotiating with the developer, and he hadn't closed the deal because there were several vexing issues, not least being the developer's insistence of having full control of the sale of St. Lucian passports, an activity that should be the sole domain of government.

Now one has to always be cautious about what politicians say. For example, maybe what pained the Labor Party administration the most about losing the elections was that it would be UWP and not them who would fill their pockets with CIP monies. Because all how one looks at this CIP adventure, it lends itself to politicians filling their pockets. It is no wonder that, as noted above, in some CARICOM countries large sums of CIP funds have gone astray. And talking about disappointments, maybe some Vieux Fortians greatest disappointment with Labor losing the elections was not necessarily because they are fans of Dr. Kenny Anthony or that they are Labor Party diehards, but because instinctively they knew that Chastanet and the UWP would stop most of the projects on stream in Vieux Fort, including the government administrative complex and the airport redevelopment project.

The Labor Party would no doubt also be disappointed that it won't be their administration that will preside over the period that so many of the CIP projects they initiated will commence, for with so many developments likely to take place at roughly the same time, the country's employment and economic growth is sure to get a big shot in the arm. Therefore, whichever administration that would be in power during that period is likely to hold onto it for awhile. It would appear that the Labor government did all the hard work, but it is the UWP government that will enjoy the fruits of that labor.

Yet, admittedly, the requisite investment funds are not the only sources from which the politicians can fill their pockets. Besides these funds, government collects license fees and application processing fees. For example, real estate and enterprise investment applicants are

required to pay a non-refundable administration fee of US\$50,000, and an additional US\$35,000 for dependents 18 years or older, and US\$25,000 for dependents under 18 years. All applicants are required to pay a due diligence and background check fee of US\$7500, plus US\$5000 for each dependent over 16 years. Applicants are also required to pay non-refundable processing fees of US\$2000, and an additional US\$1000 for each dependent. Marketing agents are required to pay an annual license fee of US\$30,000. Authorized agents pay an annual license fee of US\$10,000 plus an application fee of US\$1000; and promoters pay an annual license fee of US\$5000 and an application fee of US\$500. Clearly, with this melee of investment funds and fees the CIP presents plenty of opportunities (a field day, really) for politicians and their lawyer supporters to fill their pockets. Furthermore, the UWP recent track record with money leaves a lot to be desired. During their previous stint in government, Taiwanese monetary contributions to government ended up directly in the hands of ministers, with no accountability. Under this present UWP government will their handling of CIP investment funds and fees be any different?

Notwithstanding, the former Prime Minister's expressed concerns about the developer being in charge of selling St. Lucian citizenship is believable because one can rest assured that he would have liked nothing better than to have announced the signing of the DSH agreement well before the elections. After all, a better negotiated DSH agreement could have changed the course of the elections.

The author is a testament to some of the former PM's misgivings about the project. Late 2015 he invited the author to represent the interest of the Southern Equestrian Association at a meeting that included government ministers, permanent secretaries, the executive director of the National Trust, Invest St. Lucia and the CIP Unit, at which the developer presented The Pearl of the Caribbean. It was a glossy, bewitching, mesmerizing, captivating presentation. The developer was all passion, all urgency. He gave the impression that he cared nothing about money, all he wanted to do was paint his masterpiece across the landscape and seascape of Vieux Fort. But when issues were raised about the people: their livelihoods, jobs, opportunities for them to invest in the project, opportunities for Vieux Fort jockeys and stables to participate, etc., one sensed that he had given no thought to the people on whose land he was to erect his dream. It was as if he had just happened to land in Vieux Fort and found it empty of people, empty of civilization, so his only consideration was how masterful would be his creation. Of course, when one reads the fine prints of the agreement (which wasn't available at that time) one realizes that however much the developer is passionate about his project, he cares dearly about the bottom line, and leaves no stone unturned to safeguard his financial interest. After all, one doesn't become a billionaire by not protecting one's financial assets.

In brief conversations with the author both before and after the meeting, besides concerns about sovereignty, the former PM expressed concern of the negative social impacts of such a large development on Vieux Fort. He would have been aware of the social consequences of the American World War II military occupation of Vieux Fort, Trinidad, and other places. Even the ill-fated El Paradis caused a rise in prostitution in the Praslin area during its aborted construction. And he would have definitely been aware that notwithstanding the benefits of the Rodney Bay Marina, and Rodney Bay being the Mecca of the St. Lucia tourism industry, Rodney Bay and surrounding areas harbored the highest incident of HIV/AIDS in St. Lucia, with Castries, Gros Islet and Babonneau ranking one, two and three, respectively.

The PM was also concerned that the Vieux Fort horsemen and stables would be left high and dry because they would be unable to upgrade their operations to profit from the DSH horse

racing enterprise, yet they were the ones who had kept horse racing and horse culture alive in Vieux Fort for decades, ever since adopting the practice from the World War II American soldiers. Off course, as mentioned above, the Vieux Fort stables and horse men and women are not that interested in the developer's horse racing enterprise, they just want their own facilities, and are quite prepared to live and let live.

In such conversations, the former PM gave the impression that it was months he been agonizing over the DSH deal, and he probably wished that DSH had never set foot in St. Lucia. The picture that came to mind was the devil visiting Christ when, after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, he was at his lowest point, and tempting him with an offer of the whole world. Here was the PM being offered a development that potentially can transform not just his district but his whole country, and Lord knows his district needed some straw of hope, yet the deal was so flawed that to him signing the agreement would be tantamount to selling his soul or committing an act of treason.

If, in accordance with the signed agreements, St. Lucian sovereignty means so little to its citizens, then an alternative or better approach to the CIP would be to give up their independence, and become a dependency of say France or the US (not Britain, their dependencies don't fare as well), like the US Virgin Islands or the French Antilles, this way they would enjoy a much higher standard of living, and unrestrained access to Europe and North America (to the whole world, really). Or in hindsight, when the Americans were here during World War II, St. Lucia should have begged them to buy the island outright from England, which England may not have minded at all, because the War had left it in shambles and desperately in need of resources.

Part 4: It Was a Beautiful Thing



When the details of the DSH agreement came out, Vieux Fortians' joy turned to vexation. Allen Chastanet, Rick Wayne, Nichole McDonald, Invest St. Lucia, and Teo Ah Khing were telling them that it was rain pouring over their heads and burning their eyes, but it didn't look like rain, smell like rain, taste like rain, feel like rain, therefore it couldn't be rain. Their anger turned into action. Suddenly Vieux Fortians who have been accused of not supporting each other, of lacking leadership and togetherness, of being apathetic toward their community, banded together to say loud and clear that the days of slavery were long gone, that there can be no DSH development or any other development without consultation, that their lovely Pointe Sable Beach must remain forever in the possession and use of St. Lucians, that their green spaces and recreation parks are sacred, that their sovereignty and patrimony are not for sale, that people come before thoroughbred horses, that their local developers, investors and entrepreneurs come first and their foreign counterparts a distant second, that St. Lucia is for St. Lucians and not for foreigners, even if they have no objections to sharing their beautiful district and country with them, that Shantytown residents maybe poor, landless, squatters, but they are St. Lucians, this is their country, they are human beings with unalienable rights therefore deserving of utmost consideration.

Overnight the ***Vieux Fort Concerned Citizens Coalition for Change (VFCCCC)*** sprang up. The youth of the country often accused of mindlessness, self-centeredness, don't carishness, possessing a blocko mentality, instant gratification at the expense of long term development,

defied such expectations and formed a national organization—***I Will Stand***, with the mission: Will Stand for My Country, for My People, for My Land, and for My Future—to not just add their voices to the protest, but to lead it. For example, armed with placards, flyers, and T-Shirts that read: *For my land; Save our Sandy Beach; I will Stand; 100% St. Lucian; Stop Destruction, No DSH*, and joined by concerned citizens of the South, hundreds converged at the grounds of the house of parliament during the Tuesday 20 December sitting expressly to deliver a letter of protest against the DSH deal to all parliamentarians (previously presented to the Prime Minister).

Following in their footsteps, the VFCCCC put out a press release and presented the Prime Minister and all parliamentarians with its letter of concern. The Roman Catholic Church hasn't always come down on the right side of history. But not this time. The protest march on the house of parliament was joined by a Roman Catholic priest from the Vieux Fort parish, and he was one of the protestors interviewed by the media. His televised interview prompted talk show hosts and other not so public citizens to press on authorities to revoke his work permit because as a foreigner and a priest he had no business to be meddling in such matters. Unperturbed the priest initiated on Saturday 7 January a Solidarity March in which about a hundred residents from all works of life and from various southern communities walked in pairs from the Philip-Marcellin grounds along the Vieux Fort-Castries Highway to Pointe Sable Beach, and then back to the grounds through Bruceville, the community likely to be most affected by the DSH project.

Spontaneously, concerned citizens are printing T-shirts and the DSH supplementary agreement for distribution in their communities. At a VFCCCC strategy meeting, two participants become so impassioned that they promised to put their bodies between DSH tractors, and to even go as far as firebombing such equipment. It took the priest and other high profile attendants to caution against such violence and to emphasize that the VFCCCC is a peaceful, non-violent movement. The outburst of the impassioned concerned citizens brought to mind Shanty Town turned Bruceville when back in the 1980s residents had placed their bodies between their homes and the tractor the government had send to dismantle their residences.

Then at 7PM Wednesday 11 January 2017 the VFCCCC held a town hall meeting at the Vieux Fort Primary School that may well become the defining moment of the protest, the point when the protest became a movement, threatening to become a revolution; the point where the waves of the Atlantic Ocean gather up strength and fury, threatening to become a tsunami, in preparation to sweep across the nation.

The assembly hall, the length a soccer field, was packed with people. All seats taken, all standing room taken, outside, a third as many people as inside. It was a three-hour meeting, but no one left until the very end. It was something that probably has never happened before, so many people coming together in Vieux Fort in a non-political forum to combat a common cause. The air was saturated with expectation and anticipation, but it was a disciplined, no joking audience; few spoke out of turn, all listened diligently.

Persons from all works of life were there. From unemployed residents of Bruceville to District Reps, lawyers, doctors, community leaders, school principals, business owners, writers, poets, musicians. All works of life. They came from all corners of the country and beyond. Vieux Fort, Soufriere, Castries, and in between. They came from Canada, the UK, the US. Normally it's as difficult to get the media to Vieux Fort as pulling teeth, but on Wednesday most of them were

there. HTS, Calabash, Choice, DBS, etc. Audience count: three to four hundred. It was a beautiful thing.

Richard Frederick was the star; masterful, full of controlled passion, fury and indignation. He was to the point, explaining the salient features of the agreements in a language all could understand, delighting the audience with humour, wit, and eloquence. It was a beautiful thing.

By the time it came to question and answers, it was clear the audience had heard enough, all the questions had a common theme: what can be done to stop DSH in its current form, legal or otherwise. A few in the audience offered to put their bodies between DSH tractors and their beautiful Vieux Fort. Opting for nonviolent means, the VFCCCC circulated a petition which most, if not all, of the audience signed.

What else? Island-wide motorcades, synchronized weekly matches in every major community in the country, weekly town hall meetings in every nook and cranny of the island, spamming the email boxes, Facebook pages, twitter accounts, and cell phones of all parliamentarians with messages of “no deal without representation.”

What else? Island-wide strikes. The Protest has become a movement, threatening to become a revolution. It’s a beautiful thing.

The movement proves that Allen Chastanet and Teo Ah Khing are dead wrong if they think DSH is just a Vieux Fort issue, that only Vieux Fortians are against the Pearl of the Caribbean as presented in ink. Dead wrong if they think they can pit North against South, East against West; Vieux Fort against Castries, Vieux Fort against Soufriere. The message that our sovereignty and patrimony are not for sale, that there will be no development deals without consultation, that the sale and loss of use of Pointe Sable Beach and Recreation Park is unconscionable, has swept the country, so the whole nation is now joining their voices to that of Vieux Fortians, and saying loud and clear: NO DEAL UNTILL WE GET BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD. NO SUPPER WILL BE SERVED UNLESS WE ARE SEATED AT THE DINNER TABLE. The protest has turned into a movement that is threatening to become a revolution, and that is a beautiful thing.

Of course, notwithstanding the excitement, passion, solidarity, and communion, one couldn’t help muse whether DSH will be Richard Frederick’s saving grace, his return ticket to politics, to carving a lasting political niche for himself, a phenomenon that may have started with the hosting of his own talk show? Only time will tell. But for now the controversial and charismatic lawyer turned politician turned talk show host, whom, though a minister of a sovereign and friendly state, the US, for reasons undisclosed to the public, had revoked his visa, for how long I don’t know, thus dulling his political coinage, is riding the waves of a hero, liberating his people from the jaws of calamity, and for this Vieux Fort and the nation need to be thankful. This proves that the epics are not mere myths; heroes do come from unlikely sources.

If DSH becomes Richard Frederick’s saving grace, one wonders whether it will become his nemesis’s (Allen Chastanet), downfall, aborting his political career in its infancy. However, given the DSH counter movement that is threatening to become a revolution, Chastanet is not the only one who should be worried about his political career. It may well come to pass, that, in the absence of the mythical and mystical Sir John Compton, UWP is destined to remain a one-term government party.

The movement is national, however most UWP supporters are not adding their audible voices. And the voices of those among them who are lending support are subdued and circumspect. So

the movement is not totally devoid of politics. For example, I was surprised of some of the people leading the movement, for rarely have I seen them at community events. I never knew that they cared so much about their Vieux Fort. So I suspect their colors partly explain their impassioned participation. And I also suspect that if it was Kenny Anthony who had signed the agreement, the roles would be reversed, it would be those in yellow leading the protest, while those in red would have kept their silence.

Obviously not all Vieux Fortians are opposed to the DSH agreements. Some are apprehensive about missing out on the DSH deal. They may feel that they can't afford to let this one pass them by. And who could blame them? Vieux Fort is in dire need of economic restitution. However, the letter by Kenny Anthony dated 9 February 2016, just months before the general elections, in which the then prime minister was responding in the positive to a proposal by Equator Lands, an European developer, suggests that Vieux Fortians need not worry. It is Vieux Fort's time. The North is congested. Gros Islet aside, no other district has the development favorables of Vieux Fort. Like it or not developers have to come to Vieux Fort. In this development proposal, the developer promised to not only take over the ill-fated El Paradis and turn it into a world class resort, but to also establish factory plants in the South, which collectively would utilize a 1000 acres. The developer promised that initially the venture will employ 4000 to 5000 workers, and more as the projects unfold.

The letter was leaked, probably by proponents of the DSH agreements to show detractors that Chastanet wasn't the only one negotiating development deals without consultation and giving developers plenty of land and an array of concessions. But it would appear the letter had the opposite effect. It said two things. First, thanks to the CIP, the Vieux Fort area is becoming a development magnet, so Vieux Fort and St. Lucia should not feel pressured into entering into any given agreement. Second, it partly explains why Kenny Anthony didn't jump headlong into the DSH deal. There were other deals on the table, and likely more on the way. At the very least the Equator Lands' proposal would leave the Mankòtè Mangrove, Pointe Sable Beach, and other recreation spaces intact. Of course, nothing to prevent the two developments from taking place concurrently.

Allen Chastanet prides himself as a businessman, a deal maker, so he should understand this better than most. Businesses weigh investment options, and select the one most advantageous to them, based on such measures as the rate of return. If so, why doesn't Chastanet follow this concept in running the country? Why doesn't the government put out a call for development proposals, and based on a set of pre-set criteria choose those most beneficial to the country? Ok, a call for proposals maybe going too far, but at the very least take a long, hard look at all the options on the table. If a deal is too good to be true, then it probably is.

Notwithstanding political persuasions or apprehensions about the future, the time has come to paint the whole island, not red, not yellow, not even green, but the blue of the national flag, for too much is at stake. What good will it do for one's party to be ruling over a country whose sovereignty and patrimony is in the hands of a foreign dominion? What is the joy of being a puppet government, where the strings are being pulled by the likes of Teo Ah Khing, who before his search for somewhere to plant his billionaire enclave probably never heard of St. Lucia, much less could locate it on a map? What long-term joy is there in prostitution? Yes, it can start well. Yes, it may initially enable an affluent lifestyle, but is invariably like a sugar-

coated, poison pill that taste sweet in the mouth, but turns bitter and poisonous in the stomach. What joy is there ending up with fatherless children and with more diseases than you can count? So St. Lucians should paint their island blue, and transform it into an even more beautiful place.

Life is so full of ironies. It was the Socialist/Marxist Kenny Anthony who, as a teacher at the Vieux Fort Secondary School, was allegedly indoctrinating students in the ways of communism, and who was the protégé of George Odlum—the bigger than life, lifelong militant socialist, a direct replica of Fidel Castro, credited to have raised the St. Lucian political, social, nationalistic consciousness like none other before and none after, and who had amended the country's constitution back in 1979 to allow Kenny Anthony to become the youngest person to ever hold a ministership—had moved the country decisively away from agriculture to tourism and introduced CIP, both of which spells loss of sovereignty and patrimony.

The pasture is always greener on the other side of the fence. St. Lucians probably envy the standard of living enjoyed by say Martiniquans and their access to the world, yet speaking to some of them, leaves one with the impression that they envy St. Lucians' nationhood, their independence, their sovereignty, their freedom to run their country as they see fit. Again the good Book says man shall not live by bread alone, meaning living involves both tangibles and intangibles.

Life is so strange. In 1979 John Compton of the UWP won St. Lucia's Independence from Great Britain; now, 38 years later, his protégé, Allen Chastanet of the same UWP is about to hand over St. Lucia's Independence to a Chinese developer!

Be careful what you start. Kenny Anthony cracked Pandora's CIP box, Allen Chastanet dynamite it wide open.

Part 5: Teo Ah Khing, The Master Developer



The DSH website says that the company was founded in 2012 as a Hong Kong registered management and investment company in the equine business. The website also says that the company is wholly-owned by TAK, which is Teo Ah Khing's architecture firm. So Teo Ah Khing, the Master Developer referenced in the DSH agreements, is the man behind this DSH that is causing such a stir in the country. So who then is Teo Ah Khing?

According to the Southeast Asia magazine, *The Peak*, the 55 year old billionaire, the last of ten children, was born and raised in Malaysia to Chinese parents. His father a fisherman and his mother a housewife. He earned his bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of New South Wales, Australia, where he was awarded best architectural graduate. After working in Australia for a few years he attended Harvard University and graduated with a master's in urban design. Following Harvard, he established Teo Ah Khing (TAK) Design Consultants in Singapore in 1993, and in 2005 opened a branch office in Dubai. For his firm's first major assignment, he redesigned the Putrajaya township of Malaysia, to become the country's new federal administrative city. Next he build military headquarters for the government of Pakistan, and then a US\$11 billion, 12,009 acre township in Rawalpindi, in the Punjab, Pakistan, for Malik Riaz, a Pakistani property tycoon and philanthropist.

His opening of a branch office in Dubai paid off handsomely. He served as an advisor to Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Al Maktoum for seven years, during which he first designed two palm tree-shaped island developments for the Sheikh, and then designed and build his masterpiece, the Meydan Racecourse, that made him world famous. The racecourse, which took three years to complete at a cost of US\$1.25 billion, can accommodate 60,000 spectators, and came with a

285-room hotel and museum. Completed in 2010, the Meydan hosts the Dubai World Cup, the world's richest race with over US\$29 million in prize money.

Before Khing worked for the Sheikh, he knew little about horses and racetracks. But according to him, "to design for horses, I had to understand horses." So in his seven year tenure with the Sheikh during which he traveled around the world twice, visiting all the elite horse race courses in the world, he absorbed all he could about thoroughbreds and horse racing. Breaking into the world of horses and horseracing was an obvious challenge, but Khing admitted that he had an advantage. His architecture training gave him an eye for detail and a good sense of a horse's proportion, such as its space, curvature, stability and muscle distribution.

Properly schooled in the ways of horses and horse racing and the building of horserace courses, Khing had an itch to put to the test all he had learned. So he established the China Horse Club (CHC) in Shanghai as an expression of his late parents' wish to pay tribute to his motherland, and to create a sustainable breeding industry that will create jobs and boost the economy, and also to "bring high class thoroughbred racing and the experiences that come with it to a population that has not experienced the social, cultural and lifestyle aspects of the sport;" for you see, the sport hasn't taken off in China as it should because betting is illegal.

The China Horse Club specifically targets China's bulging class of nouveau riche; indeed a fertile ground, for China's 251 billionaires make it second only to the United States and accounts for 14% of the world's billionaires. The CHC has over 200 members, each having paid a membership fee of US\$1.4 million and required to own thoroughbred race horses. Imagine that. At US100,000 per citizenship (assuming investment in the National Economic Fund), the CHC membership fee buys 14 St. Lucian citizenships. Capped at a membership of 2000, besides the thrill of horse racing, the CHC provides its members opportunities to hobnob with other wealthy people and with national and international industry leaders. Khing's promotional pitch presents the CHC as "Asia's premier racing, business and leisure club, offering members and guests peerless service, experience and top-tier racing all within a luxury equine environment... a doorway to a world of opulence and extravagance."

Khing's venture into horse racing has probably exceeded his own expectations. Over the past two years CHC has spent over US\$11 million on race horses and breeding stock. Its 200 racehorses are racing in as many as eight countries. Just a few years in the business, CHC horses have been winning 53 percent of the time and have claimed 63 titles in eight countries. CHC investments doesn't stop at horses. It owns a ski resort in Switzerland and a US\$4.28 million, 100-acre property outside Sydney for the leisure of its members who are scattered across 19 countries.

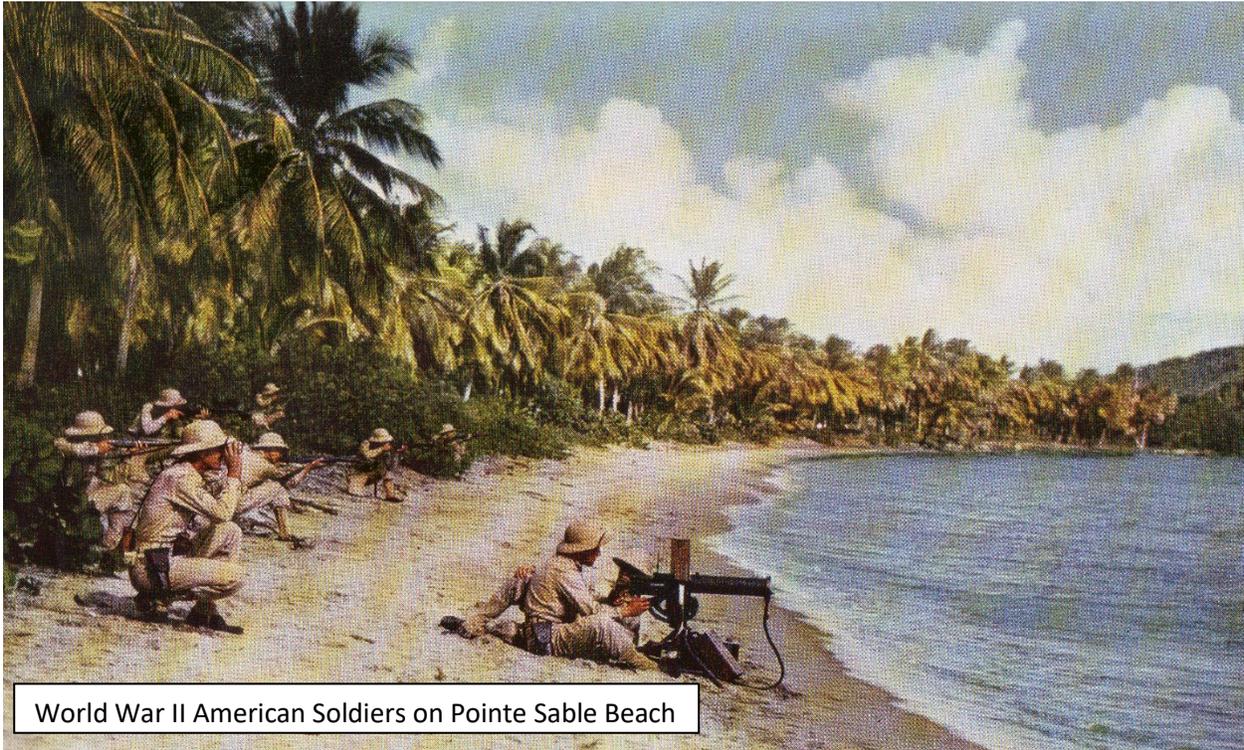
With such success and in possession of a horse club whose members probably have more money than they know what to do with, the next logical step in Teo Ah Khing's career projectory would be to have his very own horse race track. But China doesn't allow betting. So Khing probably reckoned that *If the mountain won't come to Muhammad then Muhammad must go to the mountain*. He must build a horserace course outside China, and given his great success as an architect / developer, why stop there, why not create a whole world within a world so his rich horse club members and wealthy friends around the world can come and play with great abandon. And so the ***Pearl of the Caribbean*** was born, a development that would serve as an enclave, likely cut off from the rest of Vieux Fort and the island, and to which St. Lucian's will have little access. But nothing new here, one finds few

locals guesting at St. Lucian hotels.

Clearly, in Teo Ah Khing the movement to protect the country's sovereignty and patrimony has found a formidable foe, for he is a man on a mission, a man of passion and great self-belief. He is also a man of great tenacity. A man that refuses to take no for an answer. For example, although at the University of New South Wales he was awarded best architectural graduate, he was about to fluke out during his first semester at Harvard. He said because of his limited computer skills he was too slow in grasping concepts and completing assignments. Nevertheless, he buckled down, came up to speed with the computer, such that he graduated a semester early, and was awarded most improved graduate.

According to Dr. Kenny Anthony and Dr. Ernest Hillarie (former CEO of West Indies Cricket Board, former St. Lucia High Commissioner to London, former Chairman of the CIP, and apparently Labor's heir apparent to the political throne) Khing leaves no room for negotiations, his approach is: *don't mess with my masterplan, take it or leave it*. Khing has intimated that the same way his eye for detail, shape and proportions gained from his architecture disciple has made him a good judge of horses, his working with horses increased his ability to pick up on nonverbal cues which have enabled him to read and understand human beings better. Apparently, law professor and three term Prime Minister, and regional luminary, Dr. Kenny Anthony, was no match for him; and if the signed DSH agreement is anything to go by, hotelier and first term Prime Minister, Allen Chastanet, is proving to be even less of a match. Teo Ah Khing's ability to read what was never spoken likely a big factor, leaving the two prime ministers with little chance. Now it's left to be seen whether the protestors can fare better than the former and present prime ministers.

Part 6: Much More than Sovereignty and Patrimony at Stake



Besides issues of sovereignty and the selling or giving away of our patrimony with nothing to show, there are several other reasons to be cautious and apprehensive about the DSH development and the prime minister's approach. According to the agreement the government has only one year to decommission the garbage dump and to establish another one at a suitable distance away from the development. So far the place that has been bandied around as an alternative site is an abandoned pumice mine in the La Retraite / Grace area; but this site is next to the Vieux Fort River, a major source of potable water for Vieux Fort, and which may well be the source of water for the DSH development. If the leakage from the current garbage dump, which is a good distance from the Mankôtè Mangrove, is being blamed for the deterioration of the mangrove, imagine the negative impact the garbage dump at the pumice site would have on Vieux Fort's water supply.

When such large projects fail, they often leave a disaster in their wake. Take for example, Le Paradis, the resort at Praslin, Micoud, inclusive of a golf course and a marina, that has left a sore on the landscape, essentially devaluing the real estate, and precluding other developments for the area. Furthermore, given the small size of the country, concentrating such a large development in the hands of a single entity, brings up issues of controlling the political process, circumventing the will of government, excessive influence on the economy. Manifestations of DSH's undue influence is already apparent. The government is now changing its CIP regulations and modifying its policies to conform with DSH wishes, and rumours abound that DSH injected thousands, if not millions, of dollars into UWP's election campaign funds, hence the reason the prime minister signed the agreement with DSH seemingly immediately after the elections. It

doesn't help that the agreements are so heavily weighted in favour of the developer that they give some credence to the rumours, or that in one way or the other Chastanet is indebted to Khing.



If so, this seems to be a pattern for UWP, for in their previous victory, not only was it rumoured that the Taiwanese filled their election campaign coffers, but each minister was said to receive one million US dollars for their support of establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Many are convinced that it was the UWP parliamentarians' threatening confrontation with Sir John Compton over issues surrounding commitments to the Taiwanese, when Compton was having a change of heart opting to remain with China, that led to the premature demise of the Father of the Nation. When so confronted, Compton who was known to rule his government with an iron fist, probably looked upon his cabinet and concluded that he had made a mistake, he had unwittingly put himself in a den of thieves, and upon this realization he was probably trying to extricate himself, not only from the Taiwanese arrangement, but also from his strange bedfellows, but the world had changed.

Even if the DSH project was devoid of issues of sovereignty, patrimony, and loss of recreation space, as the construction of the George Odlum stadium demonstrates, the amount of employment Chinese developments generate and the fairness of the wages they pay are always questionable because of the tendency to import Chinese workers and pay them non-competitive wages. So in terms of employment, it is unclear how much the DSH project would benefit the country.

The case of Baha Mar, a US\$3.5 billion mega resort in the Bahamas, six years in the making, that boasts four luxury hotels, the largest casino in the Caribbean, a championship golf course, and a

200,000-square-foot convention center, is instructive of the need to be circumspect about both large development projects, and Chinese developers. The resort was largely financed by the Export-Import Bank of China with the stipulation that China State Construction serve as the builder and cannot be fired and workers from China must do the work. However, as the project progressed and started falling behind schedule, significant numbers of Bahamian and American contractors were employed. When in operation the Baha Mar was supposed to account for 12% of the Bahamas GDP. So enthusiastic was the prime minister about the resort that he gave up his residence to make way for the development. For a number of cited reasons, including inadequate financing, mismanagement, faulty construction, overly ambitious, the project kept missing its deadlines until, though 97% complete, the developer filed for bankruptcy in the Summer of 2015, causing Standard & Poor to lower the Bahamas' credit rating to one level above junk status, and the IMF to lower its growth forecast. It is reported that Baha Mar has found a new buyer, which should be good news for the Bahamian contractors whom the resort owes an estimated US\$74 million. According to China Horse Club's website, China State Construction, Baha Mar's builder, will play a lead role in the establishment of the Pearl of the Caribbean.

In response to protest over interference with the *Mankôtè* Mangrove, the developer modified its plans to avoid the nature habitat, and instead brought his gaze upon Pointe Sable Beach as the site for his villas and luxury hotels. However, the protest over his use of Pointe Sable Beach is likely to dwarf that over the mangrove forest. Some Vieux Fortians and many St. Lucians maybe only vaguely aware of Vieux Fort's stand of mangrove forest, and even less aware of the important environmental role of the habitat. But the same can't be said of Pointe Sable Beach, for the visage presented by the Maria Islets, the Moule-a-Chique headland and Pointe Sable Beach is arguably Vieux Fort's most alluring and visible landmark. It is impossible to enter Vieux Fort along its 4-lane, American-built highway and not feast eyes on this scenery, and don't feel compelled to take a swim. One would be hard pressed to meet a Vieux Fortians who hasn't set food on Pointe Sable Beach. The sea grapes, fat poke, sea almond and coconut palms that clothe the beach lend to it a cosiness and privacy that enhances its allure. Pointe Sable Beach is one of the most popular beaches on the island. On weekends it is crowded with recreationers from all over the island and beyond. It has become so crowded that people now camp under the vegetation across the highway from the beach, and some have totally moved away from the Atlantic side and now use the smaller and less appealing beach on the Caribbean side near the Vieux Fort River delta.

But why would Vieux Fortians protest so vehemently against hotels going up on Pointe Sable Beach, especially when by law the Queen's Chain will always belong to them? Well, all St. Lucians know that once a hotel fronts a beach, locals shy away from the area, so for all practical purposes, Queen's Chain or no Queen's Chain, that stretch of beach is effectively lost to local use. And the hotels do not help; they usually line up their stretchers on the beach, they are not too friendly to recreationers who have to pass through their property to get to the beach, their gates and checkpoints alone signalling the unwelcome message. Coconut Bay at the northern end of Pointe Sable Beach is a good example. Despite the fact that the lower part of the beach has gotten very crowded, one would be hard pressed to find a single recreationer (other than guests) along the piece of the beach fronted by the hotel.

Vieux Fortians and St. Lucians know for sure that once Pearl of the Caribbean takes over the beach, its use will be lost to them, thereby continuing the trend that the best of what the island has to offer are enjoyed not by its citizens but by visitors or foreigners. It's as if the best of St.

Lucia is too good for its citizens. And to make matters worse, DSH will acquire every inch of beach stretching from Coconut Bay to the foot of Moule-a-Chique. The good Book says man shall not live by bread alone, which also means that man needs bread to live. So everyone understands that development requires compromise, you have to give up something, but what good is development if you have to give up everything. It makes sense then that no matter what, a stretch of Pointe Sable Beach remains public and unencumbered for the enjoyment of St. Lucians.

Last year it came as an alarming surprise to many Vieux Fortians that Invest St. Lucia was considering replacing Pointe Sable Recreation Park in the Filao area with a shopping mall, when, for over a decade now, several Vieux Fort community groups, including the Southern Tourism Development Corporation and Vyé-Fo Mouvman Ansanm, have been advocating for officially designating the space as a recreation park, and transference of the land to perhaps the Vieux-Fort South Constituency Council to hold in trust for use as a community park in perpetuity. The groups saw this as an urgent matter, because the Filao area is one of the few, if not only area suited for a community recreation park in the vicinity of Vieux Fort town. As was expected Vieux Fort residents concerned about the disappearance of their green space put up stiff opposition; the mall was not pursued. Now those concerned Vieux Fortians have an even bigger fight on their hands because the Filao area is included in the 92 acres of beach front land to be ceded to DSH. One can well imagine Vieux Fortians right now asking in frustration what must they do for the government and Invest St. Lucia to get it, that people need green space, recreation parks, places to exercise, socialize, rejuvenate; and that once green space disappears, it is forever. Should they be reminded yet again that man shall not live by bread alone?

It would appear that the UWP has a love affair with the Chinese. The previous administration just about turned the prime ministership to Tom Chou, and now apparently Chastanet wants to hand over the nation's sovereignty and patrimony to Teo Ah Khing.

Now, if the devil is in the details, then the demons are between the lines. Not only does the developer want land for cheap for his development, he wants adjacent lands set aside for him for future developments, and he wants the lands in and around the stadium, land he will not pay for, to be part and parcel of the project so that any future education institutions destined for the area will be housed within his project. Yet Allen Chastanet has never mentioned off-shore schools or educational complexes as part of his vision; this is a Kenny Anthony vision, not a Chastanet vision; Miami Beach, yes, but not University complexes. And prior to coming to St. Lucia the developer has never been engaged or expressed an interest in educational developments. And what does a horse racing enterprise have to do with education complexes?

Reading between the lines, one is forced to conclude that the developer's unstated goal is to ensure he creates an enclave separate from the population so as to control and restrict access to his masterpiece, ensuring that locals don't disturb, shake up in any way the millionaires and billionaires for whom Pearl of the Caribbean will serve as a playground. The extra land that he is asking to be set aside, but for which he will pay nothing, is probably to serve as a buffer zone to safeguard against any other development coming close to his creation, that no other development compete with his, no other development feeds off his enterprise. So whatever local businesses that may be contemplating [setting up shop](#) next to the development to capitalize on spinoffs may be in for a surprise. Reading between the lines, *live and let live* is not part of Teo Ah Khing's vocabulary.

A historian has pointed out that the DSH project may not be about just St. Lucia, or Vieux Fort, or Chastanet, or Teo Ah Khing, but may have serious geopolitical ramifications. For with a large expanse of flat land that can accommodate large infrastructural installations, an ocean going seaport, an international airport, an extensive coastline (Vieux Fort is three-quarters surrounded by water), and the viewing points afforded by Moule-a-Chique and Morne Le Blanc, Vieux Fort is of great strategic importance. So much so that it was here that the Americans established their military base during World War II, and their radar facilities at Moule-a-Chique at the beginning of the Cold War, and then returned to Moule-a-Chique during their 1983 invasion of Grenada. So the question the historian posed was: what would be America's take on a national of a non-too-friendly (or at the very least a non-ally) country owning so much of these strategic lands? This may be cause for concern—especially when it is juxtaposed against the notion that, given the Impacs controversy (of which the police shootings that gave rise to it occurred during the previous UWP administration), the CARICOM CIP programs which a CNN report intimated are causing a US security risk, and the prime minister blaming the country's escalating crime rate on US deportation policy—because America may be keeping a close eye on St. Lucia and the UWP. Some may respond that St. Lucia is an independent, sovereign country, so why be bothered with the US? But then again isn't it the same sovereignty and independence that the government is about to sell cheaply to a developer. If so, why should America be mindful of St. Lucia's sovereignty? In other words, the DSH agreements if acted upon will devalue St. Lucia as a country.

Part 7: The Allen Chastanet Factor



Issues surrounding the prime minister, Allan Chastanet, represent another possible reason why Vieux Fortians and St. Lucians are and should be wary of the DSH development. To begin with, it would appear that Chastanet is under tremendous pressure. Last time UWP was in power it was a conspicuously dysfunctional government, where every minister was a prime minister, and Taiwanese Ambassador, Tom Chou, was seemingly serving as the prime minister among prime ministers. Under such conditions it was probably a relief to many that the government didn't embark on any ambitious projects.

This time around the functionality of the UWP administration appears to have improved, but there are reasons to suspect that this functionality is hanging by a thin thread. The fact that two of the party's heavyweights, Peter Lenard "Spider" Montoute and Stephenson King entered the political race only during the last week or two of the campaign, and all before that were at loggerheads with Chastanet, and whose entrance may have sealed victory for the UWP, is one such indication. These heavy weights, whose presence in the party predated that of Chastanet, have been unaccepting of Chastanet's leadership, and they may be just as keen to get rid of him as the charismatic Richard Frederick, the policeman, turned lawyer, turned politician, turned talk show host, whom Chastanet ousted from the Party and who since then has used his talk show and any other platform at his disposal to lambaste the prime minister. They probably regard the prime minister as an imposter, and upstart propped up by his father's reputation and wealth who hasn't paid his dues and so undeserving of the leadership position he has managed to acquire. In their eyes his legitimacy as the leader of the Party and as the prime minister of the Country is suspect.

In other words, Chastanet has to be constantly watching his back; his colleagues are biding their time. The fact that Chastanet has packed his government with junior ministers new to the Party and likely loyal to him (at least more so than the established hats) partly as a counterweight to the opposition he faces in his government is instructive. All this suggests that Chastanet is

under a lot of pressure to prove himself, to gain the respect of his colleagues, to establish his legitimacy. Winning the elections, especially from a bought seat, is not enough. Conceivably, Allen Chastanet is under pressure and on a mission to prove his doubters wrong. After all, the only governments that seem to work well in the region are those in which the prime ministers stand head and shoulders over their colleagues, and where the prime minister operates like a little dictator. Some may attribute this to the legacy of slavery, but the take of social and political scientists on this perception or phenomenon should be interesting.

For some the prime minister's intellect, professional reputation, and achievements are incompatible with national leadership. They don't see him as a step above the rest; to them he hasn't distinguished himself in any fashion. Instead, they perceive Chastanet as a spend-drift who cannot take care of business. As proof, they point to Air Jamaica's parting of ways with him as vice president of marketing and sales because he was running the airline to the ground. His father, they say, once sacked him as managing director of his hotel because again his allegedly mismanagement of money had turned the business downhill. It is said that as minister of tourism in the previous UWP administration, he irresponsibly racked up tens of thousands of dollars in phone bills. Chastanet opponents refer to him as an empty head and lacking substance, going so far as to question his claim of having college degrees. If one were to believe this assessment of Chastanet, then one would be forced to wonder whether the willingness of the prime minister to sign away so much of St. Lucia's sovereignty and patrimony to DSH, a foreign entity, isn't yet another example of his profligacy and incompetency.

Notwithstanding, the prime minister's hour and a half press conference of September 19, 2016 tells a different story. He was calm, poised, collected, and stately. He answered all questions thoughtfully, substantively, and forthrightly. Even when a question had several parts, he remembered all the parts and answered each in turn. He was definitely not the airhead that he has been made out to be, he handled himself as well as any head of state.

Moreover, while there is nothing spectacular about Allen Chastanet's bio, there is also nothing shabby about it or of which he should be ashamed. He did his undergraduate schooling at Quebec's Bishop's University which has produced no less than 15 Rhodes Scholars, and earned his master's degree at the American University in Washington, D.C., whose graduate program in International Services is ranked 8th in the world, and whose International Affairs undergraduate program is ranked 9th. He served as a tourism director under Sir John's 1992 government, he was vice president of marketing and sales for Air Jamaica, president of the St. Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association, chairman of the marketing committee for the Caribbean Hotel Association, director on the board of the ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies 2007, and minister of tourism in the UWP's previous administration under Stephenson King. He is a co-founder of the Caribbean Media Exchange, and the owner/founder of two apparently successful and award winning hotel properties— Coco Kreole and Coco Palm—in Rodney Bay, St. Lucia's tourism mecca. Clearly, in terms of bio, Chastanet isn't the worst among those who have occupied the prime ministership.

But the area where one cannot be faulted for siding with Chastanet's distractors happens to be his area of supposedly greatest strength—his gift of gab. They say he can talk a good game, he is nothing more than a salesman, a con artist. The prime minister is known for his exuberance of words to which he may not have given sufficient thought. He makes utterances that should have rung a warning bell the second they came out. He has been accused of glib, and misusing or abusing facts and statistics. There are several recent occurrences that lend support to those

claims. During the recent election campaign Allen Chastanet promised to make it possible for St. Lucians' to enter the US without visas, but once in office he sang a different tune, saying he meant that he would improve the state of affairs to such a great extent that St. Lucians will have no desire to migrate to America. He had also promised to virtually abolish VAT, but once in power opted instead to reduce VAT from 15% to 12.5%. His famous utterance on Barbados's Nation News of the US deporting 800 St. Lucian criminals in one year, when, according to the US Embassy in Barbados, only 100 St. Lucians were deported in the past five years, and only 8 in 2015, is another case in point. Once on a roll, it seems Chastanet is difficult to stop. The Nation News reporter, realizing the incredulousness of the statement, kept prompting him for reconsideration, but Chastanet became even more adamant. Of course, the prime minister raised a vexing issue, and his misquote may turn out to be a blessing in disguise, because it forced attention on the problem.

Nonetheless, one wonders whether the prime minister's gift for gab, his ability to talk himself out of trouble, to getting out of tight corners, has informed the ease and haste with which he has signed the DSH agreement, knowing if need be he can talk his way out of it. Indeed, there is already some evidence of that approach, for the prime minister has said, in effect, "don't worry, this is just a broad memorandum of understanding, it isn't cast in stone." Yet to the eyes of many, including lawyers, Richard Frederick in particular, the agreements appear to be legally binding.

Notwithstanding, it would appear that the UWP has a love affair with the Chinese. The previous administration just about turned over the prime ministership to Tom Chou, the Taiwanese ambassador, and now Chastanet is about to hand over the nation's sovereignty and patrimony to Teo Ah Khing, the Chinese-Malaysian billionaire architect.

Whatever are Allen Chastanet's deficiencies, ambition is not one of them. One senses that he is aiming at nothing less than to replicate and even surpass Sir John's colossal political accomplishments. Chastanet is facing the predicament of all sons who grew up in the shadows of a famously successful father. How do you become your own man, how do you forge your own identity, how do you supplant, surpass a legend? It seems that Allen Chastanet may have found the answer in politics, there he can go where his father can only dream of, or the closest his father can get is to bankroll elections, write newspaper articles, and host talk shows.

Allen Chastanet is the parliamentary representative of Micoud South at the center of which is Desruisseaux, a rural hamlet tucked in the interior of the island. Largely rural, Micoud South doesn't lend itself to the type of development that would allow Chastanet to leave an indelible mark on the nation and enable him to securely establish his political base from which to solidify his hold on the politics of the country. So naturally, Vieux Fort, which is just a few miles from Micoud South, and equipped with an international airport, a seaport, large expanse of flat land, a spectacular beach, and well developed infrastructure, all of which go into making it a developer's dream, is where Chastanet would like to paint his masterpiece, for to develop Vieux Fort is to develop Micoud South, and in fact the whole southern half of the island.

So understandably, with one stroke of the pen, the DSH development would go a long way to helping Chastanet realize his ambitions. The Pearl of the Caribbean would be to Chastanet what the Rodney Bay Marina was to Sir John Compton. Nonetheless, the question many Vieux Fortians may be asking is: will Chastanet let his ambition override issues of sovereignty and patrimony? One of the historical criticisms of Compton's UWP was a single minded focus on economic infrastructure at the neglect of social infrastructure and people development.

Nothing like STEP programs, footpaths, universal secondary education, electricity and pipe borne water for seemingly insignificant rural hamlets were in Compton's demonstrated vision. So the question that must be bothering St. Lucians is: **will Chastanet continue that trend, and give little consideration to the fact that the sale of Pointe Sable Beach to DSH will render one more of St. Lucian beaches unavailable to the local population. Will nothing be held sacred in his dream to recreate a Miami Beach?**

During the 2016 general election campaign, some in the Labor Party tried to make political fodder of the fact that Chastanet was a white man (or an almost white man) seeking to be prime minister of a predominantly black country (85.3% Black, 10.9% Mixed, 2.2% Indian, 1.7% Other), and to add insult to injury, that he wasn't conversant in Kwéyòl, the people's mother tongue, signalling he wasn't "okouwan" with the country's culture. One suspects that out of desperation the Labor Party was trying to make the campaign a race issue. Political and social scientists were probably very intrigued as to how receptive St. Lucians would be to having a white or almost white prime minister. Likely almost as intrigued as the prospect of America, purported to be the most democratic of nations, electing a Black president, back in 2008 after Barack Obama had won the Democratic presidential nomination, or of electing a woman, in the person of Hillary Rodham Clinton, in the recently concluded presidential elections.

Apparently, the Labor Party got it all wrong. They were no more successful using the race issue against Chastanet as they were some decades ago using the country of birth issue against Sir John Compton, whom they claimed was either born in St. Vincent or on the Caribbean channel between St. Vincent and St. Lucia. First, they should have realized that since Sir George F.L. Charles served as Chief Minister (1960-1964), the only persons who have run an election as leader of his party and in the process headed the government are those regarded as either half white or almost white. It's a short list. Sir John Compton, Dr. Kenny Anthony, and now Allen Chastanet. It would appear that being light on melanin is a good start to becoming the prime minister of St. Lucia. If so, the Labor Party might be on the right track grooming Dr Ernest Hilaire for the Party leadership and hence the prime ministership.

Of course, with regard to the last elections, there is the perception that people were just fed-up with Kenny Anthony, he had apparently overstayed his welcome. But in fairness to him, VAT didn't help (any Party that had implemented VAT would have stood a good chance of losing the elections), the St. Judes' debacle, for which both Parties should share blame, didn't help either. In fact, some are of the view that, from the imposition of VAT, to buying back the Black Bay lands lost under the UWP administration, Dr. Kenny Anthony did all the heavy lifting for the UWP government, allowing Allen Chastanet who had glibly promised to eradicate VAT to look pretty, to be the hero who reduced VAT by a mere 2.5 percentage points, his promise of radical surgery seemingly going unnoticed.

Off course, to be more accurate, Chastanet's promise was that he would reduce VAT immediately and eliminate it eventually. But in light of St. Lucia's growing debt to GDP ratio, currently at about 79% and projected to balloon to 105% by 2030 if current borrowing trends continue, and the CDB report that VAT reduction won't be an effective means of reducing cost of living and stimulating economic activity because the gains from such reduction will not completely offset the loss in revenue, it is very unlikely (and probably imprudent) that the prime minister will introduce further reductions in VAT. Moreover, he must now be coming to grips with the dilemma most CARICOM governments face—keeping their countries afloat and their economies growing in the midst of perennial financial straits.

It should also be noted that Kenny Anthony may have gotten a raw deal with VAT. As part of VAT implementation, businesses received decreases in custom duties that they were supposed to pass on to consumers in the form of lower retail prices before the application of VAT, so when VAT was added on, the net retail price increase would be insignificant or definitely less than the full 15% VAT. But it seems many retailers didn't pass on this reduction in custom duties to consumers thus forcing them to bear the full brunt of the VAT.

The Labor Party got it wrong, for the substantive issue isn't race or even country of birth. The substantive issue is culture, passion for and dedication to country, affinity with the people and the land, the feeling of *this is my country and these are my people*. Culture is a people's way of life and it says a lot about a people. It is no wonder that the French, I'm told, have always opted to discriminate on the basis of culture than on the basis of race. Apparently, once one can embrace their culture, then regardless of one's skin tone one is welcome into the camp. To accept and embrace a people's culture is to have an affinity with them and the land they occupy. During the 2016 general election campaign, St. Lucian UWI political scientist, Dr. Tennyson Joseph, wrote the following in Nation News, "The son of a wealthy businessman, he (Allen Chastanet) does not speak the native vernacular, and his political involvement has coincided with a hurried crash course in being Lucian." According to this statement, Chastanet was so out of step with the St. Lucian way of life, St. Lucian culture, that he needed a crash course on how to be St. Lucian. If so, it is fair to question the St. Lucianness of Allen Chastanet, not on the basis of race, but on the basis of his affinity with the culture, the people and the land. So how does that relate to DSH and St. Lucia's sovereignty and patrimony? Well, to the extent that one doesn't have much of an affinity with the culture, the people and the land, is the extent to which one is likely to sell out.

As a perfect example that it is culture, not race, not nationality, and sometimes not even species that may matter most, consider the movie, *Instinct*, in which Ethan Powell, played by Anthony Hopkins, who, living in the African jungle for several years with a band of gorillas had gone native, had become so integrated into the way of life of the apes, so accepting of their culture, that when the band came under the attack of Wilderness Park Rangers, he rose up in defence of his band, his people, and killed several park rangers, members of his own specie, if not his own race.

Besides an inability to speak the country's mother tongue, there are other reasons to question Chastanet's familiarity with and integration into St. Lucian culture. In the slavery and colonial era, not bothering to develop a credible educational system, the plantation class sent their offspring overseas to boarding schools. Well, apparently, it seems Michael Chastanet followed in their footsteps. His son, Allen Chastanet, completed his secondary school education at Stanstead College, a Quebec boarding high school catering for grades 7 through 12. He stayed in Quebec for his undergraduate degree and then pursued his Master's degree in development banking in Washington DC. This suggests that the prime minister spent most of his teenage and young adult years outside St. Lucia. And when you consider he worked awhile at Air Jamaica and his primary occupation has been tourism, he likely has not had much time and opportunity to enmesh himself in St. Lucian culture and way of life. St. Lucia may seem to him more like his second home than his first.

So St. Lucians maybe on to something, when they complain about Chastanet's seemingly excessive overseas traveling, giving the impression that he spends more time overseas than in

St. Lucia. Of course, their concerns are the cost involved and the possible neglect of the urgent problems facing the country. But given that Allen Chastanet didn't come of age in St. Lucia, his frequent trips may suggest that he is more at home overseas than in St. Lucia, particularly since being the prime minister of St. Lucia comes with plenty of unpleasantness, not least being people constantly in your face spouting advice, criticism and abuse.

The prime minister is not the only one Vieux Fortians have to worry about. There is Invest St. Lucia, an organization specifically set up to bring investments to St. Lucia, but whose only apparent accomplishment is the selling of St. Lucian assets. To date, even with the advent of the CIP, I'm not aware they have initiated the flow of any investment that has taken root. Clearly, notwithstanding its highbrow symposiums, and glossy promotional packs, the organization hasn't delivered on its mandate. This means that there is tremendous pressure on Invest St. Lucia to show slate, after all their very existence is at stake. So, like in the case of the prime minister, no matter the cost to Vieux Fort and St. Lucia, the DSH development may be too tempting a deal for Invest St. Lucia not to encourage.

So we have an ambitious, non-distinguished prime minister who is under a lot of pressure to show slate and to prove himself, who is facing silent opposition from within his administration, who is given to rash statements and possibly hasty actions, whose past stewardships few would regard as stellar, and whose affinity with the culture, the land and the people is questionable. And we have Invest St. Lucia an organization that may be in a position to plead caution, but whose very existence, given Chastanet propensity to dismantle projects and organizations, may be linked to the DSH deal coming to fruition. Clearly, St. Lucians, Vieux Fortians especially, have every reason to be apprehensive about this prime minister brokering (with the encouragement and support of Invest St. Lucia) what may well turn out to be the deal of the century, a prime minister with plenty of incentives or pressing temptations to sell them out but lacking the internal restraints, such as affinity with the people and the land, that would make him circumspect.

Part 8: Déjà Vu



Vieux Fortians have seen it all before, and maybe that's why with the DSH development they are drawing a line in the sands of Pointe Sable Beach, and saying enough is enough. And who could blame them. For the history of the people who occupy the district with arguably the most usable land is one of landlessness.

First came the Europeans who decimated the Caribs, the people they found there, and eventually turned the Vieux Fort area into sugar plantations worked by African slaves, the forebears of most Vieux Fortians, such that by 1769 over sixty-one sugar estates were operating in the Vieux Fort area, accounting for over half of the island's sugar acreage. Later the Vieux Fort Central Sugar Factory, the first in St. Lucia and one of the first of its kind in the Caribbean, replaced the sugar mill. Of course, the issue of land ownership for the Africans was mute, after all they were slaves.

Emancipation came in 1838, but the sugar plantations survived slavery, so the ex-slaves in the Vieux Fort area remained landless. In 1937, the Vieux Fort sugar factory closed down, rendering seven thousand people jobless and leaving the sugar lands idle, Vieux Fortians remained landless because they could not afford to purchase the land and they couldn't cultivate it for it still belonged to the owners of the defunct sugar factory.

Without buyers, the colonial government was left with little choice but to purchase the land from the sugar factory, and later sold the land to the Barbados Land Settlement Company who would operate the factory and resettle 2000 land hungry Bajan settlers, while Vieux Fortians remained landless, but maybe not jobless, because they may find employment with the Bajans.

However, in the middle of this Bajan settlement scheme, World War II broke out. In exchange for reconditioned warships the Americans leased from the cash-strapped and war-weary British all of three thousand and thirty-one acres of the plains of Vieux Fort for a military base. The American base subsumed the sugar lands so the Barbadian Settlement Company was dissolved, and the settlement scheme aborted. And any hope of displaced Vieux Fortians owning land grew even more distant because the Americans occupied the plains of Vieux Fort even more extensively than the sugar plantations.

The Americans gave up the lands in the 1960s during the George F.L. Charles administration, but the land reverted not to Vieux Fortians but to the government, so the people still remained landless, living as squatters on land that either belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, or the government.

In modern times Vieux Fort's expanse of flat land combined with its air and sea ports and American leftover road infrastructure has attracted many more large enterprises—Hewanorra International Airport, the Free Zone, industrial zones, the Fishery Complex, Halcyon Days Hotel turned Club Med turned Coconut Bay, the national stadium, and more. For most of these enterprises Vieux Fortians had no more say in their establishment than they had in the establishment of the sugar industry, or the enslavement of their forefathers to serve the sugar plantations, or the establishment of the American military base, and these initiatives were not designed to necessarily serve their interest?

Today the choicest pieces of Vieux Fort's remaining real estate is vested in Invest St. Lucia, which is intent on selling the land mostly to foreign investors at the apparent exclusion of local entrepreneurs, leaving Vieux Fortians landless. And here comes Allen Chastanet joining forces with Invest St. Lucia, to literally give away the best and most sought after of Vieux Fort lands to a foreign developer, without any consultation with Vieux Fortians, without any input from Vieux Fort entities and community leaders, with no clear indication of what is in it for the people.

In a meeting with his rank and file Labor Party supporters to expressly explain why his government hadn't signed the DSH agreement, the former prime minister's main argument for Vieux Fortians to oppose the development was that it would hem in Vieux Fort, precluding the town from expanding eastward, because the lands would be lost to Vieux Fort entrepreneurs forever. It was an ironic argument. The audience probably didn't laugh at the former prime minister either because they were diehard supporters; or noticing how deflated were he and the other three Labor District Reps in attendance, they didn't want to add to their grief; or just maybe they could recall that indeed Dr. Kenny Anthony's administration fostered a kinder and gentler country, providing universal education, laptops for all secondary school goers, electricity, water and telecommunication to every nook and cranny of St. Lucia, footpaths, renovation and the building of health centers, IT centers, and police and fire stations, and they could also recall that if there were any aberration to the landlessness of Vieux Fortians it would have to be credited to his administration's efforts to make affordable land available to Vieux Fortians. The former prime minister's argument was laughable, because whether or not the lands are given away to the Chinese or any other developer, Vieux Fortians will still not have access to them, they would still be hemmed in, because the lands are in the hands of Invest St. Lucia, a Kenny Anthony creation, who while ignoring the proposals of local entrepreneurs stand ready to give the land away to foreigners.

Another aspect to this DSH project that Vieux Fortians probably find hard to swallow, is that while the prime minister is cheerleading Teo Ah Khing as a master developer extraordinaire, most of the activities in the DSH plan have been proposed by Vieux Fort business persons and organizations. Indeed, the master developer has seemingly piggybacked on previous Vieux Fort development plans. It's years now the Southern Equestrian Association (SEA) has been pushing for a proper race track and accompanying stands and fencing that would allow for gate fees and organized betting. Business man, Neil Beepat, has a multiple hundred page proposal for an auto race track paired with upscale hotels and villas, which was presented to Invest St. Lucia sometime ago. The development plans of both Invest St. Lucia and the government's 2008 Southern Quadrant plan include hotel and other developments along Bois Chandon and Pointe Sable Beach, marinas and cruise ship accommodations along Vieux Fort's Caribbean waterfront, a university complex around the George Odum Stadium. In fact, for the past couple years the STDC has been actively promoting and advocating for a marina in Vieux Fort, going as far as hosting marina development symposiums, courting would be investors, engaging marina developer and boat builder, Bob Hathaway, who has developed a detailed marina complex proposal for Vieux Fort that includes a 200 berth marina, 100 room hotel, convention/exhibition center, shopping mall, boatyard, ferry/carenage berth and government (customs and immigration) and marina administrative offices.

In fact, this is one reason some Vieux Fortians were perplexed about the Kenny Anthony proposed \$64 million government administrative complex that Allen Chastanet scraped. Because if that amount of money was available for spending in Vieux Fort, they would have expected it (or part of it) to go towards the establishment of a marina, an enterprise that top their list with regard to stimulating economic growth and job creation in Vieux Fort.

However, government support and encouragement of such initiatives have been far from adequate. If our local businesses and organizations were to receive the kind of incentives, support and concessions DSH is about to receive, there might be no need to set up an entire network of organizations (CIP Unit & Invest St. Lucia) to attract foreign investments, for there may be enough domestic investments to go around.

When a foreign developer simply plops an enterprise on a landscape, sources out its clientele and participants from abroad, the population owning no part of it and are likely to be unwelcome as guests, the enterprise not arising as an extension of the people's culture, their way of life, and wasn't motivated by a felt need, and is not integrated into the society, can this be called a development? Isn't it better that developments, even if on a smaller scale, are initiated by the people, largely for their use and upliftment, they owning a significant part of it? It would seem that, everything else being equal, we would be better off with the latter and thus this should be our preferred approach to development. But sadly, as Invest St. Lucia's attitude towards local investors and the DSH agreement suggest, the opposite seems to hold true.

It would appear that the government and the rest of the country view Vieux Fort as Americans once viewed the wild, wild West, where land, seemingly endless, was a free for all, that is for whomever could grab and hold on to it. As such Vieux Fort continues to pay a heavy price for facilitating the country. Take for example Hewanorra International Airport. The airport occupies a large portion of Vieux Fort lands which has prevented the town from expanding in unbroken fashion across its plains. Moreover, as is well documented, airports endanger people's health by the significant level of noise and chemical pollution they generate. In fact, all such enterprises that occupy a significant portion of Vieux Fort lands, including SLASPA, Coconut Bay Resort, LUCELEC, and Invest St. Lucia, are doing so at the expense of Vieux Fortians, and one is tempted to view Invest St. Lucia as a robber baron, selling national assets to fund its upkeep. Vieux Fort seems to be to St. Lucia what African and other non-western countries were to Europe and North America during the era of colonization, when these countries served as sources of cheap labor and raw materials begotten by their subjugation.

As noted in previous parts of this article, in terms of size, land use, and potential social and economic impact, the DSH project brings to mind the American World War II occupation of Vieux Fort and its accompanying social ills—prostitution, spread of venereal disease, dependency syndrome. Obviously, the main objective of developers is to fill their pockets and to earn returns for their investors, so we can't expect them on their own to take responsibility for addressing these human costs. In fact, the DSH agreements give little consideration to the human aspect of the project such as job training, apprenticeship, opportunities for government and local investors to acquire shares, and the development of the St. Lucian equestrian industry. Instead, as one observer succinctly phrased it, the thoroughbred horses were given more consideration in the agreements than Vieux Fortians.

It is the position of many Vieux Fortians that any entity (SLASPA, Invest St. Lucia, LUCELEC, Coconut Bay) utilizing a significant portion of Vieux Fort lands should contribute a percentage of its revenues to a Vieux Fort Development Fund. Therefore, given the scale of the DSH project and its potential negative social impacts, not only should the development contribute a percentage of revenues to this fund but a percentage of the proceeds of all accompanying passport sales should find its way there.

STDC has presented this concept to the former prime minister, Invest St. Lucia, and SLASPA, but they simply laughed at STDC, as if the concept is so ridiculous it doesn't deserve an answer. But clearly what can be more reasonable than the notion that the person or entity who caused the harm must be the ones to pay for the correction? After all, the principle of regulation is based on this concept: those who profit from an activity are the ones to pay for the regulation of that activity, those who are creating pollution must be the ones to pay for cleaning the environment and compensating those harmed by the pollution.

Isn't it time that Vieux Fort starts to acquire developments meant to serve its best interest and not the interest of outsiders? Isn't it time that Vieux Fort starts to be compensated for the sacrifices that it continues to make for the good of the nation? When will the cycle of exploitation, landlessness and disenfranchisement be broken?

Part 9: A Blessing in Disguise

In a previous article I raised the question: Who Runs Vieux Fort? Who is there to protect Vieux Fort against the whims, idiosyncrasies, misadventures, and experiments of government? Who is there to stand firm when what is good for a politician, for an administration, for a developer is not good for the country, and what is good for the country is not good for Vieux Fort? And shouldn't communities be consulted on initiatives with significant potential consequences to them? Shouldn't they have a say in what goes where in their communities? In a democracy shouldn't citizens have a say in decisions that are going to impact their communities for generations to come? If so, in the case of Vieux Fort, which entity is insisting that Vieux Fort has a say?

Well, with the DSH development where a prime minister, possibly without the consent of his own cabinet, much less parliament, has teamed up with a foreign architect to impose a development on a landscape and seascape that is likely to have far-reaching consequences for impacted communities, not least being total loss of green space, beach space, and other recreation space, environmental degradation, water pollution, and loss of real estate for local residential and business expansion, the question of "Who Runs Vieux Fort?" has come begging.

The prime minister, Allen Chastanet, got it right when he criticized the previous administration for seeking to renovate the Soufriere square in isolation of an overall development plan for Soufriere, yet the same prime minister has signed agreements for a multi-billion dollar project for Vieux Fort without a comprehensive development plan for Vieux Fort. Yet it is a development that potentially can transform the whole town, if not the whole country.

It is a beautiful thing to see a community rise up spontaneously to neutralize a threat that promises to negatively change its way of life, to take away what collectively it holds dear. However, the necessity of having to form new groupings—I Will Stand and Vieux Fort Concerned Citizens Coalition For Change (VFCCCC) — to meet that challenge, essentially says there were no established Vieux Fort entities sufficiently empowered to play that role, to bring the community together to fight a common cause.

There was STDC that in the past year or two had been very actively involved in promoting and championing the development of Vieux Fort, but last year the former government discontinued STDC's allocation, and the new government hasn't entertained the idea of continuing it, leaving the organization unable to meet its operating costs. Therefore, STDC is in no position to lead the fight to save Vieux Fort. There is the Vieux Fort South Constituency Council, but it is appointed by government, has no independent source of finance, and as such is simply a surrogate of the government.

The politicians have disempowered communities by making sure town and village councils have no independent sources of finance, and councillors are appointed rather than elected. Dr. Kenny Anthony is probably thinking he has gotten a bad rap. But much was given to him so much was expected of him. The former prime minister disappointed many when in his first term he didn't follow through with the move to institute truly empowered, independent, local

government. An elected Vieux Fort Town Council would have allowed the possibilities of a UWP government existing alongside an independent or a Labor local government, thus affording the Town Council the freedom to oppose government policies or initiatives it deemed bad for its constituency.

It was ironic to hear the former prime minister explain that he can't take the lead in opposing the DSH agreement because this would be viewed as politics, so it is the communities that need to be in the leadership role. This the prime minister who had all the wherewithal and opportunity to truly take Vieux Fort places, who was the expected hero to capture the elixir that would enable Vieux Fort to prosper, but instead focused apparently more on appeasing Vieux Fortians and competing with Sir John's legacy. So the same politician who when he headed the government disempowered the community by encouraging party hacks to report instances of party disloyalties, refusing to seek the advice and guidance of community leaders and organizations, and fostering weak, subservient but loyal local government, was refusing to put out a public statement on the DSH agreements, but instead calling upon the community to do his job for him and unofficially launch the Labor Party's 2021 campaign to regain control of government.

Fortunately, giving the prospects of the DSH agreement, Vieux Fortians and other St. Lucians needed no motivation from politicians and party hacks to organize and ensure that their sovereignty, patrimony, and recreation spaces are not just given away.

However, in their protest, discontent, and self-empowerment, St. Lucians need to realize that the real or ultimate enemy isn't Allen Chastanet, or Teo Ah Khing, or Invest St. Lucia, or the King Maker Rick Wayne, or the government press secretary, Nicole McDonald. The enemy is much less concrete, much more elusive. The enemy is within. The enemy is in citizens not taking charge and responsibility for their communities; of not forcing politicians, governments, and civil servants to hear and listen to their voices; of not insisting that this is their community and so they have to be a partner in whatever is coming to their community, that they have to be consulted before any projects are implemented, that there can't be representation without consultation, that they must have a say in what projects are to be implemented and where; of not insisting on an overall development plan for their community to which they must have significant input. The enemy is when they put Party before community and before country, when they allow politicians to use them as tools, because this is exactly how the politicians have kept them disempowered, impotent, subservient and stagnant. This is how they have been able to impose buildings and other infrastructure on communities that are more about fulfilling their ambitions and fattening their wallets than serving the people's best interest.

Citizens have to wonder how pervasive it is that projects that could be of great benefit to their communities are rejected because they wouldn't put sufficient money in the pockets of politicians. Meaning, to what extent that one of the selection criteria for foreign direct investment (FDI) projects is how much they personally benefit politicians.

The enemy can't be Allen Chastanet, or Teo Ah Khing, because even if the protestors are able to block the DSH project in full or in part (of course their intentions are

not to block the development but to renegotiate a better deal), tomorrow there will be other projects by other developers facilitated by other prime ministers that may be just as bad as or worse than the DSH proposed initiative. For example, who is to say that the deal involving the sale of Sab Wisha Beach Park in Choiseul to accommodate Sunset Bay Resort isn't worse than that pertaining to DSH, the only difference being that St. Lucians were not privy to the fine prints of the agreement; meaning it wasn't leaked.

To further make this point, we need look no further than Rochemel and Grynberg, two well publicized cases in which the then prime minister, Dr. Kenny Anthony, supposedly entered into business deals without consulting his very own cabinet, much less parliament, where both deals backfired at a cost to the nation. Of course, the question that begs for an answer is why, in this complex and sophisticated world, would a prime minister sign multi-million dollar deals in areas outside his expertise (oceanic rights, business, finance, hotel development), without consulting his cabinet, his decision making team, particularly when there were persons in his cabinet with expertise in the subject matters. Take for example the Grynberg case, which involved fossil fuel exploration. Not even the wordsmith, Dr. Velon John, who was part of Kenny Anthony's cabinet, and whose PhD dissertation, I'm told, concentrated on oceanic rights, was consulted. Why this holding so close to the chest of matters that could benefit from the input of cabinet members, most of whom were elected just like the prime minister. If intentions are wholesome, and not self-profiting, why this secrecy. And who appointed the prime minister god? After all the people didn't even elect a prime minister, much less a god. They simply elected a District Representative; it is the Party that appointed/elected a political leader and hence the prime minister. And if prime ministers insist on signing deals involving valuable state assets without consultation, when these deals go south, costing the country millions of dollars, shouldn't the prime ministers be held accountable for the cost, the payback. Why should a single, jobless Shantytown mother of five in Vieux Fort have to help pay for the go-it-alone blunders of prime ministers.

So the real, ultimate, enemy can't be Allen Chastanet, Kenny Anthony, Teo Ah Khing, Rick Wayne (the prime minister maker), Nicole McDonald, or McHale Andrew of Invest St. Lucia. The real enemy is communities not organizing, planning and empowering themselves to rationalize their land space, to ascertaining what they want where, and how any development to come fits in the scheme of things, and ensuring politicians submit to their demands. If the DSH travesty enables Vieux Fort and other communities to so empower themselves, then it's a blessing in disguise.

Part 10: An Unlikely Hero



Epic movies or novels usually involve a hero embarking on a quest to bring back the medicine, the elixir, the sword, the critical piece of information or technology needed to restore the physical and spiritual health of the community. The hero is usually a character seemingly unsuited for the task, one whom most people would have thought incapable of heroic deeds; or someone with serious flaws that under normal circumstances would disqualify them for the quest.

Notwithstanding what has been said about Allen Chastanet, he may well turn out to be the hero who helps turn things around for Vieux Fort and enable Vieux Fort to realize its great potential, who takes Vieux Fort where none other has dared to venture, who captures the elixir so vital for Vieux Fort's development. Sir George Charles, champion of the people's right to self-determination, didn't do it; Sir John Compton, the Father of the Nation, didn't do it; Dr. Kenny Anthony, the anointed saviour, didn't do it; Stephenson King, the caretaker prime minister, didn't do it. So all eyes must be on Allen Chastanet.

Like the archetypal hero, Chastanet has serious flaws. Although he has a great facility with words, he has a penchant to misquote; he isn't conversant in his country's mother tongue, many question his St. Lucianess and affinity with the people, and his ambition may be at odds with his capabilities.

However, for most of his life Chastanet has been an outsider. Growing up in St. Lucia as an almost white child and the son of a wealthy businessman must have set him apart from the rest of his people, rendering him an outsider within his own country. As an English-speaking teenager and young adult attending school in a foreign land whose official language was different from his own, he was an outsider within an outsider. Returning to St. Lucia he may have become even more of an outsider in his own country because on top of his skin tone and wealth, his non-St. Lucianess would have increased and he would have acquired a foreignness from living abroad.

But what has this outsider business have to do with Chastanet taking Vieux Fort places. Well, though this outsider status may be painful and lonely, as an outsider one gets special vantage points of the societies one becomes part of, and one is forced to go internal, to search for answers why one is different. But this habit of critical, honest, objective analysis that one develops from analysing oneself is in turn applied to society in general. Thus Chastanet's outsider status may allow him to look at things in a more dispassionate manner, may allow him to think outside the box. This combined with his great ambition and the need to prove himself, to command the respect of his peers, may equip and propel him to do for Vieux Fort what none of his predecessors have come close to doing, to go beyond footpaths, drains, promenades, sidewalks, and step programs, and bring quality jobs and real economic development to Vieux Fort. In other words the stage may be set, all the ingredients may be in place, for Chastanet to lead Vieux Fort to greatness.

But as in the epic narratives the hero doesn't go it alone. In the beginning he usually needs a sage to clarify the quest at hand and set him off in the right direction. At critical junctures along the way allies pop up to provide guidance and point out pitfalls. Sometimes he even needs or is accompanied by jesters, sidekicks, who keep him humane, who prevent him from taking himself too seriously. To succeed on this quest the prime minister needs to consult and seek the guidance of community leaders and organizations, he needs to consult with the community, understand their aspirations, and how they want their communities to develop. He needs to treat the community as an equal partner in the development process. He needs to realize the approach taken with DSH is a false start.

Getting rid of Vieux Fort's recreation spaces is a false start; giving away the county's sovereignty to a foreign entity is a false start; selling off the whole of Pointe Sable Beach thus effectively denying St. Lucians access to the beach is a false start; giving away some of the country's most valuable and strategic assets and demanding nothing in return is a false start; displacing Bruceville residents without a credible relocation plan that includes compensation and replacement land is a false start; relocating the Vieux Fort landfill to the abandoned pumice mine at Grace/La Retraite is a false

start; not enabling St. Lucians to buy at least up to 20% of shares in the development is a false start; not ensuring that the developer deposits a certain percentage of CIP receipts, enterprise profits and horse race and casino betting receipts in a Vieux Fort Development Fund is a false start; not preparing a comprehensive development and land use plan for Vieux Fort before embarking on any large scale development project is a false start.

The heroes of the epics never sell the land from under their people, rather they go where no others have gone before to capture and cleanse the land for the people. In this great drama, the battle lines are set, the ball is in Chastanet's court. There is DSH the dominion, backed by potentially 251 Chinese billionaires and by no less personages than the Prince and Queen of England, that want to gobble up Vieux Fort's choicest lands and deny the people access to their beaches and recreation parks; there are tricksters embodied in the likes of Rick Wayne the prime minister maker, Juke Bois the radio personality, and Nicole McDonald the press secretary, to test him, to set him off track, to derail him; there are gatekeepers like Invest St. Lucia, blocking information, disallowing any local investor a piece of the pie.

Indeed, the tricksters are in full force. In response to the marches, town hall meetings, and petitions of the protesters, the tricksters are holding town hall meetings of their own, to give the impression that they are consulting with the people, and to attempt to discredit the protestors, intimating that the protestors have ulterior motives, that they are being disingenuous; all this when most of the objections to DSH is based on the agreements signed by the prime minister. But it's all a farce. At their town hall meetings the tricksters are providing little information, and are deflecting most questions with the propaganda that the agreements weren't actually signed, that they were just an understanding.

Perhaps the sham of the tricksters thinly disguised Vieux Fort town hall meeting was best epitomized when, in the middle of Mr. Julius James' question, a member of the audience came and boo in his mic, which led to a shoving match, and the intruder eventually punching Mr. James in the stomach, causing the meeting to come to a premature close. This, when one would be hard pressed to find another Vieux Fortian or St. Lucian who has earned a greater right to question what is happening in Vieux Fort. For Julius James is a born and raised son of Vieux Fort, a community, social, political, and cultural activist, the executive director of the Southern Tourism Development Corporation, a former Chairman of the Vieux Fort Town Council, founder of such community groups as the Seyans folk choir, Vyé-Fo – Mouvman Ansanm, and the Vieux Fort Tourism Development Group, and more recently the Vieux Fort Concerned Citizens Coalition for Change (VFCCCC), he is a recipient of the Saint Lucia Les Pitons Medal (Silver) for long and meritorious Community service, and jointly with the St. Lucia National Trust he has just secured a grant from 5Cs for the restoration and preservation of Pointe Sable Beach. Clearly, if there were one Vieux Fortian Chastanet should have consulted about the DSH project, it would have had to be Julius James, yet instead of seeking his council, he is being booed and punched. Clearly, this is a false start.

The ball is in Chastanet's court. What will he be? A villain or a hero? What side will he choose? The side of DSH and facilitate the foreign dominion in stealing the land from the people, or the side of his country and go where no other has gone before and take Vieux Fort and the country to new heights? Will he be a man of the people, part of the solution to the people's problems? Or will he choose to be the enemy of the people, helping a foreign dominion trample the rights of the people, steal their sovereignty, deny them their patrimony? It doesn't help that

instead of meeting with Vieux Fortians, the people who will be most affected by the development, he travelled 4217 miles to London to consult with those who are not in a position to grasp the full implications of DSH.

Vieux Fortians, the protestors included, are probably waiting with bated breaths to see whether Chastanet chooses to be the villain, or the hero who not only saves the land from the jaws of DSH, but causes the land to flow with milk and honey