

FINAL REPATRIATION

BROADCAST BY HONOURABLE PREMIER - 26th JULY, 1979

FELLOW VINCENTIANS

You will have observed that of late reports on the activities of the volcano over Radio St Vincent have been few and far between. The old adage that no news is good news is very apt in this case.

The latest reports from the scientists at the Belmont Observatory indicate that there is a minimum of seismic activity at the volcano and that the dome-building phase should not give cause for special alarm, subject, of course, to the oft repeated caution that volcanoes are always unpredictable.

Since I last addressed you, the dome has continued to grow slowly, and at present its east-west dimension is measured at 2,380 feet and its height 300 feet. In addition a small subsidiary dome has grown to the south of the main dome in an area previously exhibiting fumarolic activity. This subsidiary dome is estimated to be 60 feet high and 200 feet wide in the East West direction. I am advised that such parasitic domes have been observed to form in other volcanoes such as those in the Kamchatka region of the USSR. The rains over the last few weeks have resulted in water entering the crater thus causing the formation of two small lakes to the east and west of the dome. In the meantime observations of the volcano is continuing 24 hours per day and the Scientists have repaired the damaged monitoring equipment around the volcano which thoughtless visitors to the Soufriere had damaged.

It is evident that the rainy season and consequently the planting season for our farmers is on us as our economy is based almost entirely on agriculture we have had to give serious thought to the question of the return of all evacuees to their homes.

In an attempt to have a first hand look at the Agricultural areas north of the Dry River and to obtain an indication of the wishes of the people living in those areas, I have visited the area North of the Dry River accompanied by other Ministers of Government and officials, and held discussions with a number of residents who had returned to their homes voluntarily. I also visited several camps housing evacuees from North of the Dry River and had dialogue with some of the evacuees who had not yet returned to their homes.

At Sandy Bay, Owia and Fancy, the landscape has been transformed from ash-grey to green and the arrowroot fields especially looked very healthy. The main matter of grave concern and which caused some worry was the sight of animals roaming free among the arrowroot fields and other crops. This situation is being alleviated as more and more evacuees return to their homes.

In discussion with many of those evacuees who had returned home, I was exhorted to give the all clear for those persons still remaining in Camps to return in order that anxious farmers can commence preparing their lands for planting. They argued that it would be futile to do so unless those who had animals on the loose returned to take care of them.

During my visits to those camps housing persons from North of the Dry River also, it was the expressed wish of the majority of them that they should be sent home as soon as possible as they feared that further delay might result in their inability to make use of the rains and thus cause low yields in agricultural produce this year.

After discussing the matter with my Cabinet colleagues and with Scientists advising my Government and taking into account the expressed and implied wishes of the people I have decided that if our economy is not to suffer any further loss this is the time for the remaining evacuees to return to their homes.

The scheduled return of persons in areas other than those north of the Dry River was carried out as planned and preparations were made to house those north of the Dry River in some schools, churches and other buildings on the Windward side of the island. It however became necessary to transport a number of residents across the river as they had expressed the desire to return. The position as of today is that there are now about 500 persons still remaining in about seven Camps, since we have been able to close ten of them between Friday the 20th and today 27th July. The seven remaining camps at Park Hill Community Centre, Prospect House, Stubbs Day Nursery, Mc Connie Yammie Building, Richland Park, Marriaqua Primary School and Calliaqua Town Hall will be vacuated over the weekend.

The same procedure with regard to the issue of rations will be adopted in this case - that is on leaving camps persons will be given two (2) weeks rations and subsequent supplies of rations will be distributed in the several communities if the need arises and depending on the resources of Government.

In order that the traditional services might be available my Government has arranged for Police Stations at Sandy Bay and Owia to be opened. Arrangements have also been made for all medical personnel such as District Nurses and the Dispensers to report for duty immediately and for the District Medical Officer to provide the usual medical coverage of the area.

My Government is also conscious of the fact that there has been damage to certain houses in the areas which were evacuated. It is our intention to assist persons with damaged houses with roofing materials and lumber as may be required. A survey of the damage done to houses is at present being undertaken and estimates have been completed for the area from Fancy to Overland in respect of over 600 houses.

With a view to catering for the needs of those persons in the previously evacuated areas distribution centres were set up at Chateaubelair, Petit Bordel, Rose Bank, Rose Hall, Troumaca, Coulls Hill and Spring Village on the Leeward side and at Mt Grenan,

Colonarie, Park Hill, South Rivers, Byera, Chester Cottage, George town and Mt Bentick on the Windward side. Teams have already issued supplies of rations from these centres to needy persons including those who had returned home about six week ago. It is proposed to establish similar centres in areas north of the Dry River.

It must be remembered that in the communities mentioned above, there were those persons who had not left their homes during the crisis and those who had returned home before the all-clear was given. Obviously those persons were also considered for assistance. The main criteria for the issue of rations in the areas which were evacuated were therefore those of need and inability to support themselves and their families. These same criteria will apply in the case of those persons north of the Dry River.

The Building Section of the Public Works Department has been very busy over the past few weeks cleaning and repairing various school buildings as they became vacant and the Ministry of Education with the cooperation of the Teachers was able to open some Primary Schools on a staggered basis over a three week period before the vacation as the school buildings became ready for classes.

There has of course been extensive damage to buildings and school furniture and our Public Works Department and Housing Authority as well as private contractors are now engaged in the task of carrying out the necessary repairs so that the new school term will meet us prepared to place the students back in their classrooms and in clean surroundings.

Ladies and gentlemen, during crises such as this through which we have just passed, one tends to take for granted the services given by certain individuals and organisations. I will however be very remiss if I did not express appreciation for the yeoman service given by the officers and men of the St Vincent Cadet Corps under the able leadership of Captain Leacock. From the very outset they were on the go assisting here, there and everywhere. I can say without a doubt

that the Corps has justified its existence. The the officers and I wish, on behalf of my Government, to say a hearty thank you for a job well done.

Then, too, we had the Royal St Vincent Police Force whose resources were stretched to the limit. From the Commissioner down to the Cadet placed country before self and played their part always in ensuring that law and order was maintained throughout the State and that every department of the Force was manned 24 hours per day. At times this meant that certain officers and men had to work around the clock. During all this the conduct of the men and the morale of the Force were at the highest level.

As their motto indicates the Guides and Scouts seemed to have been prepared and they too carried out their various chores willingly and enthusiastically.

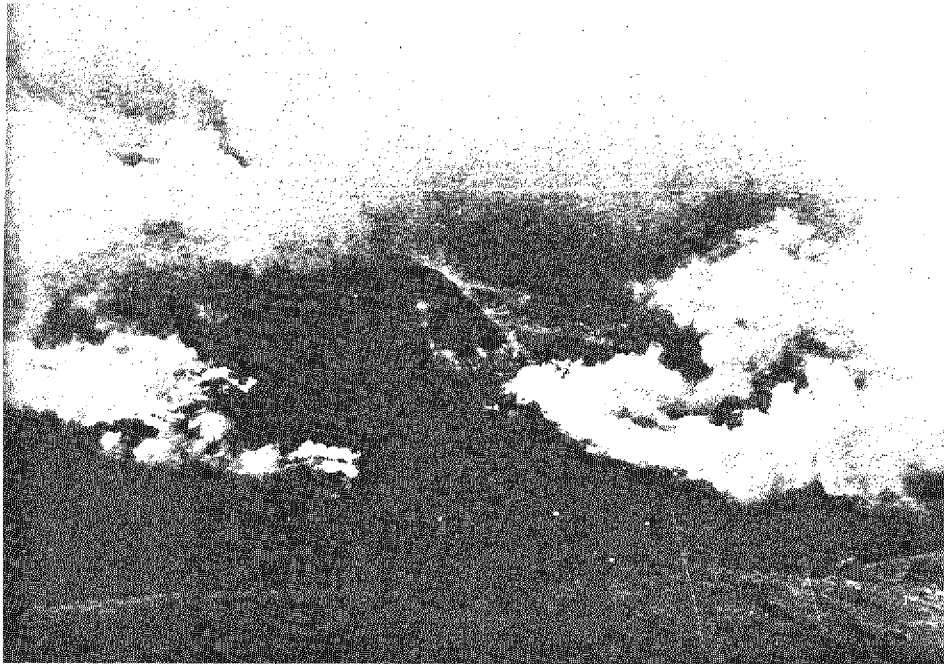
Of course, too, organisations such as the Jaycees, the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, the Lions, the Red Cross and the National Council of Women were towers of strength and the Christian Council did not cater only for the spiritual welfare of the evacuees but it contributed in no small measure to their material needs. I must not overlook the many Civil Servants who worked beyond the call of duty and give considerable and valuable assistance in many ways. And finally, I again wish to thank publicly the various overseas governments, agencies, firms, organisations and individuals within and outside of the Caribbean who demonstrated concern for our welfare and contributed and still continue to contribute both materially and in a number of ways to our general welfare.

Now that we are back on the road to normalcy, I wish to take this opportunity to say, on behalf of my Government, a hearty thank you to the Heads of those religious denominations and to those individuals who so willingly placed their churches and houses at the disposal of my Government to be used as camps. Where necessary assistance will be given for repairs to those buildings to be effected.

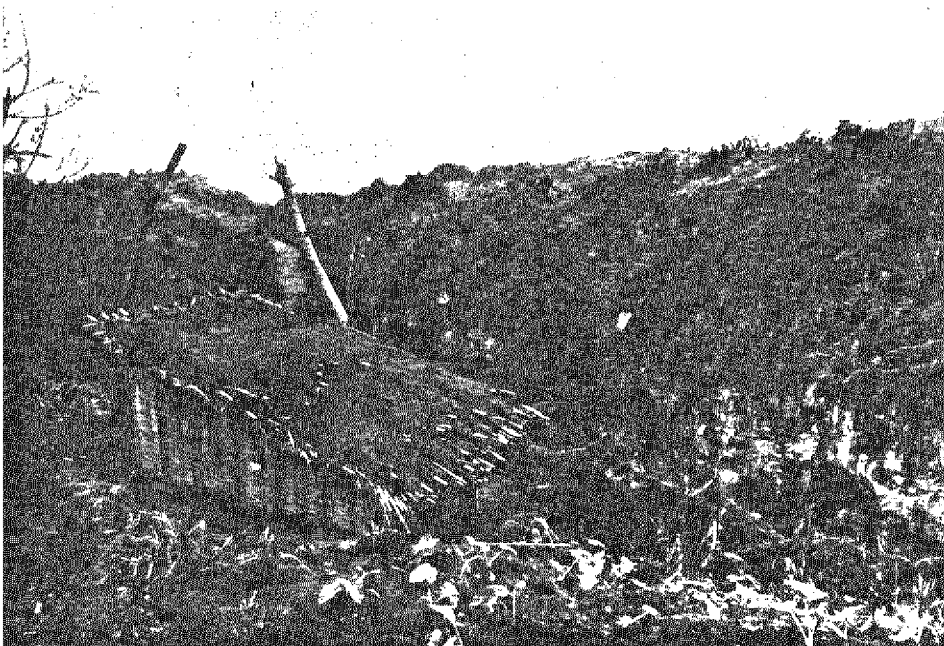
Ladies and gentlemen, the past fourteen (14) weeks have been one of the most disruptive periods in the history of our beloved state. Not only has the economy suffered considerable damage, but every citizen of the State experienced certain stresses and strains above the normal during this period. Those were however borne with great fortitude in true Vincentian fashion. I am confident that in the months ahead everyone will put his shoulder to the wheel, and assist in the drive towards the reconstruction of the economy and the social stability of our State.

It is my sincere hope that we will continue to face the many challenges that lie ahead of us in the coming months and that my Government will continue to serve all the people of our State faithfully and well.

I propose to consult with the Christian Council of Churches with a view to inviting all christians to join on a particular day in prayers of thanksgiving for our preservation and for God's special guidance during the coming months, and I am confident that his will be the wish of all our people. Thank you and Good night to you all.



NEW DOME IN CRATER 15/5/79



WATCH HOUSE COVERED WITH ASH 15/5/79