

Empowering the People

A strategic vision
for the future

ANTIGUA LABOUR PARTY MANIFESTO 1999

The Choice

At the General Election the people of Antigua and Barbuda will be called upon to make a choice that will decide whether they continue up the road to known economic prosperity and social progress, or go down the path of extermination, victimisation, bugle and fumble.

None of the candidates of the UPP have any experience in domestic government or in international relations. They would have to experiment with the lives of our people and with our future. Every bungle and every fumble they commit will cost the country dearly.

The majority of the UPP candidates have no experience managing anything. Such experience as some of them have, do not recommend them. For the enterprises operated by many of them have all failed, either collapsing altogether or sold by their creditors. Trusting such a group with the livelihood of the people and the future of our children is a huge and unacceptable risk.

UPP candidates, including its leader, are on record as stating categorically that they will scrap the Mount St. John hospital - a facility much needed by the people of our country. Yet, on page 27 of their manifesto for the 1994 elections, they pledged to "establish a new 200-bed modern hospital as the flagship of a new health system."

In deciding in advance that they will scrap the hospital, they not only show that their pledge was meaningless, they also deny the people the hospital they deserve and they deprive workers of the jobs to which they are entitled.

The same UPP candidates have declared that they will scrap the Asian Village Project, turning away an investment of US\$200 million, a 2,000-room resort and 6,000 jobs. Yet, on page 19 of their 1994 manifesto, they pledged to "attract two five-star hotels of 500 rooms each and an additional 500 rooms for the Asian Market". Again, by scrapping the Asian Village project, they will not only have reneged on a promise to the people, they will also push our tourism industry into decline, deprive the people of employment and rob our economy of investment that would help to continue our growth and prosperity.

Choosing the UPP, therefore, is opting for disaster.

It has been shown time and again that if we, in Antigua and Barbuda, are to maintain our high wages and salaries, keep our savings high, continue to provide large sums of money for education, health and physical infrastructure such as roads, we need the confidence and trust of private investors in tourism,

in the offshore sector and in utilities to invest at least EC\$400 million a year into the economy. However, no investor trusts the UPP. Having taken investors to Court for simply wishing to invest in our country, no investor will risk a penny in Antigua and Barbuda if the UPP is in office. Further, existing investment will decline, and people will take money out of the country to bank it abroad. The economy will slip quickly into the doldrums. Again, it will be the dark days of 1971-1976 under the PLM, but this time even worse.

Choosing the UPP is opting for calamity.

In the absence of investment that the people will need to maintain and improve their standard of living and quality of life, the UPP will have to reintroduce personal income tax and other taxes to pay for the costs of their government. They have already said they will introduce additional levies. That means taxes in a different form. They have already said that they will streamline the public service. That means they will lay-off public servants.

Choosing the UPP is opting for more taxes and unemployment. They will have to do it, for they will get money no other way.

No candidate for the UPP has any experience of dealing with other governments and international organisations. Even if they could learn, while they mark time and make mistakes, every advantage that our country has gained will be lost and every opportunity will be squandered. There will also be no experience in growing the tourism industry and none in the offshore sector. Our country will lose its place of leadership in the Caribbean and will have no influence in international affairs. Antigua and Barbuda will be poorer for it.

In office, the UPP will launch a vendetta that will cripple our country, turning away its talented and experienced people and victimising anyone against whom they hold a grudge however slight. No one will be safe from them. Our country will be consumed in wasteful victimisation with little attention being paid to development.

Choosing the UPP is opting for catastrophe.

While we do not claim to be without fault, the Labour Party has a tried and tested track record of success for the people of Antigua and Barbuda. It is reflected in our strong economy, our high wages, our large national savings, our prolific house construction, the large amounts of investment in our country, the leadership position we hold in the Caribbean and the influence we exert in the international community. The Labour Party has delivered for the people of Antigua and Barbuda and we are committed to continue to do so.

The choice is FURTHER PROSPERITY WITH THE ALP or calamity with the UPP.

"When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change"

-John F. Kennedy

President of the United States of America

The Labour Party

Despite unusual setbacks the Labour Party has delivered for the people of Antigua and Barbuda. No other government in the history of the country has had to cope with the effects of four hurricanes in four years. In 1995, Hurricane Luis alone caused US\$500 million in damage, closing down the tourism industry and wrecking property countrywide. To deal with the effects on the economy, there were cries to lay-off workers and impose taxes. The Labour Party government did neither. Maintaining people in work and refusing to burden the people with taxes, the Government created conditions for hotels to be rebuilt quickly so that people could get back to work. Over the period, jobs increased, the economy grew, salaries and wages increased and savings in the banks also increased.

Below are highlights of the achievements of the last five years.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Strong Economic growth despite four hurricanes in four years. The economy grew by 9.95% in 1996, 7% in 1997 and 4.7% in 1998.**
- Lowest unemployment in the entire Caribbean. Ninety-five point five per cent of the workforce is in jobs, and some have two jobs. Only 4.5% of the workforce is not working. In some Caribbean countries, unemployment is as high as 28%.**

- ❑ **The people of Antigua and Barbuda enjoy the second highest wages and salaries in the Caribbean at US\$8345 per head of population. Only the Bahamas is higher.**
- ❑ **2,543 new jobs created between 1994 and 1998.**
- ❑ **Highest savings in the banks of the OECS countries. Up to September 1998, individuals had saved EC\$834.4 million, the highest figure in our history. Total National savings rose from EC \$1,241.0 million in 1997 to EC\$1,320.4 million by 1998.**
- ❑ **Our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the second highest in the OECS countries at EC\$1.4 billion in 1996. Only St. Lucia, with twice our population, is higher.**
- ❑ **No dismissals in the public service despite effects of hurricanes.**
- ❑ **Increased salaries to public servants and police. Back pay of EC\$7.5 million paid out.**
- ❑ **No income tax despite demands for more expenditure to counter hurricane effects.**
- ❑ **Antiguans and Barbudans retained ownership of 95% of the land in the country. Foreigners own only 5% and most of this is for hotel that provide employment.**
- ❑ **More than 90% of the houses in Antigua and Barbuda remain in the hands of nationals.**
- ❑ **Vast increase in house construction. 4,734 applications were made to the Development Control Authority in 5 years. Value of construction in 1998 alone was EC\$350 million.**
- ❑ **480 acres of land made available to 2,346 young people on easy terms so that they could own "a piece of the rock".**
- ❑ **More Government scholarships than at any time in our history. 239 students are presently on government scholarships.**
- ❑ **More money spent on education and health than at any time in our history.**
- ❑ **United Nations rated Antigua and Barbuda 29th of 174 countries in the human development index. Only Barbados of the entire Caribbean and Latin America is ahead of us.**
- ❑ **Infant mortality rate dropped to 18 per 1,000 live births.**
- ❑ **Life expectancy raised to a high average of 72 for men and 75 for women.**
- ❑ **Free medical attention given to Antiguans and Barbudans, including free medicines for chronic illnesses.**
- ❑ **Government paid for medical attention abroad for any Antiguan and Barbudan whenever necessary.**
- ❑ **Started construction of modern, state-of-the-art hospital at Mount St. John's.**
- ❑ **Almost completed Vendors Mall to give small businesses a better opportunity for growth.**
- ❑ **Almost completed Fisheries Project to provide refrigeration and marketing facilities for fishermen.**
- ❑ **Started work on three markets to develop small businesspeople even more.**

- ❑ **Expanded the telephone network so that Antigua and Barbuda has more lines per 100 of population than any Caribbean country. At 50 lines per 100 population, we are just behind the United States.**
- ❑ **Antigua and Barbuda has more Internet connections than any other Caribbean country on a per head of population basis. In total terms, we are still ranked at number 3 even though our population is smaller than our closest rivals.**
- ❑ **More than 1,000 people trained by the Government and now fully computer literate. They are ready for the Information Age of the new century.**
- ❑ **Committed EC\$2.5 million to put computers in all schools. Already 300 computers have been distributed to all High Schools including in Barbuda.**
- ❑ **Recognized and respected gender equality. Promoted women to senior positions in the Government based on merit.**
- ❑ **Introduced maternity benefits for policewomen similar to those enjoyed by women in the public service.**
- ❑ **Adopted social legislation to improve conditions of women including legislation to combat domestic violence.**
- ❑ **Improved conditions for the police force to fight crime. Police now better equipped and more mobile than any time in their history.**
- ❑ **In a continuing road programme, rebuilt major roads and highways in the country at a cost of \$64.2 million in three years after hurricanes Luis and Marilyn.**
- ❑ **Rebuilt the Antigua Recreation Grounds with new pavilions to highest test cricket standard at a cost of EC\$7 million for the enjoyment of Antiguan and Barbudans.**
- ❑ **Supported our athletes financially to allow them to gain experience competing abroad.**
- ❑ **Managed the national debt effectively. Repaid arrears to the Caribbean Development Bank, paid off several UK debts, rescheduled and started repayments on debt to Japanese Government for desalination plant and Italian Government for the Royal Antiguan Hotel. Made the country full creditworthy.**
- ❑ **Attracted 2,000-room resort at Guiana Island with investment of US\$200 million to provide 6,000 new jobs.**
- ❑ **Encouraged private sector to invest in the economy and provided concessions for them to do so. Among these are Ryan's City View Hotel, Cecil Wade's Amaryllis Hotel, private sector housing projects at Cedar Valley and Friars' Hill, and Stanford Development Project of hotel shops, cricket stadium at the Airport vicinity. All of these provided employment and opportunities for Antiguan and Barbudans.**
- ❑ **Kept our country politically stable and peaceful.**
- ❑ **Maintained the democratic rights and freedoms of our people including the right to worship, to free speech, to political association, to join a trade union.**

 **Gave our country effective Caribbean and international representation, including a leadership role in the Caribbean and a respected place in the international councils of the world.**

Eleven Commitments

The Eleven Commitments of the Labour Party

A Message from Lester B. Bird



The Antigua Labour Party (ALP) does not believe in empty promises as gimmicks at elections time simply to fool a few into voting for us. We regard the pledges in this manifesto as a commitment. Therefore, we have set out eleven commitments that we fully intend to implement over the next five years. They are very specific. They are real. They are achievable. They are not 'pie in the sky' promises. They will ensure our country's continued economic prosperity and social advancement.

ONE

Further empowerment of the Antiguan and Barbudan people, including our youth, will be our number one priority. We will establish full employment. We will provide opportunities for Antiguan and Barbudans to own land, property, businesses and shares in companies, and we will facilitate higher level training to put Antiguan and Barbudans in top managerial positions.

TWO

We will promote strong economic growth by further developing tourism and the services sector and by focusing on specific areas in agriculture and fisheries. We will also improve the environment for doing business and create new opportunities for the private sector.

THREE

We will build an inclusive society. The most needy will be assisted and the most deserving will be promoted based on merit. We will place our qualified and skilled Antiguan and Barbudans who work in the private sector on boards and advisory bodies to Government to ensure the widest utilisation of the talents of all our people. We will establish a Charter of Civil Society for inclusion in our Constitution.

FOUR

We will improve the social sector in health and housing even more. We will institute further measures to eradicate the pockets of poverty in our society, and we will lay the foundation for a modern pension system and care for the elderly.

FIVE

We will further improve infrastructure such as roads, ports and utilities.

SIX

We will further modernise the educational system and position our young people to compete effectively in the new technological world.

SEVEN

We will introduce NO NEW TAXES. We are convinced that our existing tax base is enough to pay our way. We will make tax collection more efficient. We will develop a modern and transparent financial system and restore fiscal balance.

EIGHT

We will reform the Public Sector to provide better services to the people and to improve the opportunities for public servants.

NINE

We will continue to fight crime vigorously. Our people must be safe in their homes, businesses and in the streets.

TEN

We shall establish a Constitutional Review Committee to devolve greater powers to Barbuda over its affairs. In full consultation with the people of Antigua and Barbuda, the Committee, as part of its review, will consider the possibility of forming a Federation of Antigua and Barbuda.



ELEVEN

We will continue to keep our country engaged and fully respect at the pivotal point of regional and international decision-making so that our people can continue to gain advantages from the international community and be proud of their country's contribution to global affairs.

We have already substantially started the job of modernising our country and making it prosperous. We are doing much better than many. This is a tribute to the management of our economy by a seasoned and experienced Labour Party Government that knows what it is doing.

Our country has a full cup. And, a full cup must be carried steadily. It cannot pass from one hand to another without spilling or the risk of falling altogether. If we are to keep that cup full, if we are to ensure that it does not fall, we must resolve that it is carried steadily.

This nation's future is safer with Labour. We are moving in the right direction. The Antigua Labour Party is ready to make our nation even stronger and more prosperous as we approach the new century. Our team is a blend of seasoned experience and new, younger talent.

I ask you to renew our mandate for a second term, and together, we will continue the task of shaping a future with benefits for all.

Lester B. Bird
Leader
Antigua Labour Party

We will further empower Antiguans & Barbudans including our youth



The Labour Party Government's number one priority is the further empowerment of the people including our youth. We have already done a great deal to empower the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

Over the years 1994 to 1998, we created 2,543 new jobs reducing unemployment to only 4.5% of our work force. This is the lowest figure in the entire Caribbean and much of the world except for some highly developed ones in Europe. In some CARICOM countries unemployment is as high as 29%. We have given our people the means of keeping themselves and their families. We have empowered them to buy the things they need, and allowed the majority of them to save.

With the exception of The Bahamas, our average wages and salaries are higher than every other country in the Caribbean. The average earnings of our people per head of population are EC\$22,531.50 while, in some CARICOM countries, it is almost ten times lower at EC\$2,109.60.

Unlike many other countries in the world, Antiguans and Barbudans own more than 90% of the houses in our country. They either live in them or rent them to others.

95% of the land is fully owned between the Government and the people of Antigua and Barbuda. Foreigners own only 5% of the land which is used mostly for hotel resorts providing thousands of jobs to Antiguans and Barbudans.

With one exception, Antiguan and Barbudans have taken over all the once foreign-owned supermarkets. The food distribution business is now largely in the hands of the Antiguan and Barbudan people. The same is true of the motor car distribution business and of the care rental business. These are both firmly owned by nationals of Antigua and Barbuda.

Increasingly, with the help of concessions and incentives from the Labour Party Government, Antiguan and Barbudans are moving into the Hotel industry. In addition to guesthouses on both Antigua and Barbuda, there are presently 14 hotels owned by Antiguan. The latest are Cecil Wade's Amaryllis and Ryan's City View Hotel. Our nationals also own the majority of shops and boutiques that service the industry and all of the taxi and car rental businesses.

By our policy on no personal income tax, we have created conditions in which our people's money remains in their pockets to dispose of as they please. Consequently, between 1993 and 1998, some 4,734 applications for the construction of new homes were received by the Development Control Authority. In 1996, alone there were 1,027 applications. The value of house construction rose from EC\$150 million in 1994 to EC\$350 million in 1998.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS TO FURTHER EMPOWER THE PEOPLE



Within the earliest date over the next five years the new Labour Party Government will implement the following specific projects to further empower the people:

- We will provide government scholarships for Advanced Managerial and higher skill training to facilitate the promotion of Antiguan and Barbudans to top positions in the hotel industry, the banks, telecommunications, the airlines and other businesses. We will waive the requirement that beneficiaries of these scholarships be required to work for government. We will not accept foreigners in senior positions in the private sector if there are qualified Antiguan and Barbudans to do the job.
- We will create new business and investment opportunities for Antiguan and Barbudans by making available equity shares in government corporations

such as APUAA, the Airport Authority, the Port Authority, ABS Radio and Television and the Central Marketing Corporation. These shares will be available at prices to allow any Antiguan and Barbudan to buy. Sales of the shares will also be restricted so that the more well-off in our community do not acquire a disproportionate quantity. The dividends that will be payable on these shares will augment the income of our working people, and will be additional earnings for people who stop work and live on pensions.

- We will create several hundreds of small private contractors and service providers in public works, public health, public utilities and government housing construction programmes by giving out contract for the delivery of these services. Services will include construction, road building, dam construction, maintenance of government vehicles, computer installation and maintenance, repair of buildings, garbage collection, street cleaning and the maintenance and enhancement of public areas. While contracts will be awarded on merit, careful attention will be given to spreading such contracts over a wide number of persons and not restricting them to a few.
- We will increase the rate of land development and sale to citizens of Antigua and Barbuda who do not yet own a piece of land. New lands will be opened-up and provided to The Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHAPA) which will be provided with the resources to speed up the process of selling land to citizens. A means test will also be introduced and where there are citizens who need to help to buy land, we will lower the deposit requirement and increase the period over which payment can be made.
- Already, we have introduced a "Land for Youth" programme that is operated by a Board constituted by the Governor-General. Under this programme, young people between the ages of 18 to 36 are able to buy 480 acres of land in plots of 9,000 square feet by depositing 10% of the purchase price and paying the balance over five years. If this programme is oversubscribed, i.e., if more young people apply than there is land available, we will open more lands to accommodate the applications. We will leave none behind.
- We will develop a special 100% mortgage housing programme for lower income citizens for the construction of modern concrete houses through the National Mortgage & Trust Company (NMTC) which the Labour Government established in 1995. The NMTC has constructed 84 homes and is financing another 300 through local developers at Cedar Valley Gardens, Bayview Heights and Paynters. The NMTC has influenced the lowering of mortgage interest rates by commercial lenders to 8.5% and caused some of them to extend the repayment period to 30 years.
- We will place a special focus on the creation of small business opportunities in craft, souvenir manufacturing, agro processing, and light manufacturing through the provision of loan facilities, business development, production and marketing assistance. We will complete the Vendors Mall, which is almost finished construction, and we will finish the Fisheries project and the meat,

vegetable and crafts market giving our small business people a big boost. However, we recognise that loans as well as production and marketing assistance will be necessary to help grow these businesses. Therefore, within the Antigua and Barbuda Development Bank we will provide financial and trained resources to help small business people.

- We will provide generous incentives to nationals who are willing to take significant risks in establishing productive enterprises such as hotels, and in exporting products and services such as pelagic fish, fruits and vegetables, informatics, auditing, accounting, engineering, and computer technology.
- We will establish ten 200-acre farms with water catchment and irrigation infrastructure for privatisation to nationals.

SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

The new Labour Government will expand its small business loan facility at the Antigua and Barbuda Development Bank (ABDB), and provide free technical assistance to entrepreneurs in the documentation, design, feasibility studies and accessing of appropriate technology essential to establishing a new business.

In addition, we will establish a special new entrepreneurial market where potential entrepreneurs with new creative products can test the market for their products. Two special sales points in the Vendor's Mall and the Public Market will be established. Individuals with creative talent will be able to apply for specialised training in product design, development and small business management.

We will also provide special training and support for the creation of intellectual goods including T-shirt design and fabric design, music production, carving and painting, and other productivity enhancement products, especially in the computer related field.

We will continue to promote strong economic growth



Over the years, the Labour Party Government has achieved strong and sustained growth for our economy giving greater prosperity to the people of Antigua and Barbuda as a whole. Throughout the 1980s, our growth rate never dropped below 5% and rose as high as 9%. While our economy was growing, the economies of several of the CARICOM countries had little growth or no growth at all.

But, it is over the last five years, that the Labour Party government showed its capacity for growing the economy even in adversity. Despite four Hurricanes in four years (Luis and Marilyn in 1995, Bertha in 1996 and Georges in 1998), government plans and policies resulted in continued growth for the economy. After the two 1995 hurricanes, our policies caused a dramatic economic recovery in 1996 with growth of 9.59%. No other Caribbean country did as well even though many of them had experienced no hurricanes. The economy grew again in 1997 by 7% and despite heavy destruction in the South of Antigua by Hurricane Georges in 1998, the economy still grew by 4.7%.

Significantly, during this difficult period, and even though there were calls to lay off workers and introduce taxes, the Labour Party Government did not lay off a single worker, nor did it impose a single new tax.

Our Gross Domestic Product - the total value of goods and services - produced in our country amounted to EC\$1.4 billion in 1996. The average in the countries of

the OECS was EC\$973 million and only St. Lucia, with a population twice our size, surpassed us.

SPECIFIC GROWTH PLANS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



Over the next five years, strong economic growth will be pursued in the context of an improved fiscal environment by focusing on further development of the services sector especially on new private investment and intensification of earnings in tourism and offshore financial and gaming services. We will aim for an annual growth rate of 6%. In addition the agricultural sector will be specifically targeted as a further driver of economic growth with specific focus areas.

Direct Private Investment

The economy requires EC\$400 million of investment per year to sustain our relatively high standard of living and to maintain and increase employment. This figure is easily achievable under the Labour Party Government which courts investors. It will never happen under the United Progressive Party which takes investors to Court. No investors trust them, and instead of new investment, the country is likely to see a massive reduction even in existing investment leading to negative growth, loss of jobs and a decline of the economy.

Under the Asian Village project alone, there will be investment of EC\$540 million. The Stanford development, which has already started, will provide another EC\$270 million constructing a two-storey 80-room four-star hotel, office complex, a Village Centre with two movie theatres, a 12-lane bowling alley, restaurants, cafes and shops, an information centre, a health spa, an Olympic size swimming pool, and a cricket stadium of Test match standard.

Tourism

Tourism earns our country EC\$151.45 million per year and this figure is rising. We welcome 500,000 tourists per year shared between cruise ship and stay-over visitors. We currently have 3,500 hotel rooms and villas and our plan is to double that number increasing visitors to one million over the next five years.

In addition to the 2,000 additional hotel rooms which will come from the Asian Village project, the Labour Party Government will add another 1,000 rooms through investors with whom negotiations are already in progress. These alone will provide more than 6,000 permanent new jobs over the five-year period.

Our strategy is to expand the sector and intensify returns to locals so that the people get a fair share of the benefits of the industry.

Over the next five years we will do the following:

- ❑ Achieve 7% per annum growth in tourist arrivals ensuring that tourism revenues remain high and profitable to the government and the private sector including vendors, taxi drivers and small businesses.
- ❑ Contract high quality, proven international marketing expertise to sell our tourism product in North America and Europe. These marketing arrangements will be contract-based with performance requirements and regular monitoring of results.
- ❑ Implement a Tourism Marketing Corporation for which we legislated last year. The Corporation will be managed and financed by the private sector with government support and participation.
- ❑ Rationalise government's existing tourism marketing expenditure to improve returns by introducing an automatic funding mechanism jointly financed by government and the private sector and with decision making on expenditure taken jointly by Government and the Tourism Marketing Corporation.
- ❑ Develop high quality vendors centres in each resort area to ensure that vendors get a fair share of visitor expenditure.
- ❑ Ensure that our local farmers and fishermen and service providers are able to sell more goods and services to the industry.
- ❑ Assist smaller hotels and guest houses to market their individual properties through helping them to participate in international trade shows and by providing space for them on the Government's Internet web sites.
- ❑ Complete the V C Bird International Airport expansion project by which a new terminal will be built to accommodate arrivals only. The existing terminal building will be used exclusively for departures. New shops will be added to the arrivals terminal giving Antiguan a further opportunity to own their own businesses. A new parallel taxiway will also be built giving us the facility to accommodate more aircraft. Funding for this project of US\$7.2 million has already been negotiated as a soft loan from the Kuwait Fund.

- ❑ Provide contracts to locals who want to develop hiking trails, flower gardens, natural zoos, and other heritage tourist attractions. Government will enter these enterprises as a joint venture partner by providing the land and issuing contracts to locals who would provide the services.
- ❑ Provide contracts to locals for the cleaning-up and beautification of the streets through Antigua and Barbuda.
- ❑ Complete the hotel training school with advanced management courses.
- ❑ Establish a wild life park on Barbuda and a natural zoo in Antigua.
- ❑ Continue major local human resource development training and placement in the tourism industry, targeting chefs, financial controllers, management, engineering and foreign language workers.
- ❑ Complete Wallings hiking trail and the improvement of the botanical gardens as tourist attractions.

Offshore Sector

The Offshore Financial Services Sector is already becoming a big contributor to revenue growth. With the new legislation which the Government has put in place to promote the sector and the bright response to Antigua and Barbuda as a jurisdiction, this sector is expected to bring in more than \$40 million per annum in the registration and operations of International Business Corporations.

Over the next five years we will:

- ❑ Market Antigua and Barbuda as a premier centre for international business and financial services.
- ❑ Encourage international confidence in the sector by implementing and supervising closely our anti-money laundering legislation.
- ❑ Raise the profile of the sector by strengthening its institutional framework so that there is regular consultation between the regulators and the industry on ways to enhance the sector and maintain its international integrity.

Niche Agricultural Opportunities

A new aggressive commercialisation approach to agriculture development will be pursued with the objective of doubling agriculture's contribution to the GDP. Institutionally the agricultural expansion strategy will focus on the creation of internationally competitive, modern agro-business production centres, utilising modern technology managed by highly skilled farmers and trained agricultural professionals.

In addition, the service flow from natural resource assets will be more intensely developed and targeted for expansion and significantly increased benefits including the development of heritage sites, hiking trails, bird sanctuaries, golf courses and marine parks.

Focus will be placed on enterprises that are internationally competitive. These include cotton, melons, hot peppers, pineapples, tree crop, and fresh vegetables, sheep and goat and honey production. Therefore, over the next five years we will concentrate on these niche areas providing concessions, incentives and training for our farmers and fishermen to maximise their earnings by sales to the local market and overseas.

This is what we will do:

Agriculture

- ❑ Develop ten 200-acre farms with water catchment and irrigation infrastructure for privatisation to local investors.
- ❑ Provide soft loans and early retirement options to extension and agricultural officers to facilitate their transfer to the private sector to own and operate the new agro-businesses.
- ❑ Provide investment in mechanical harvesters, export storage facilities at the airport, export market research and support, and plant protection services.
- ❑ Fund 100 acres of pineapple tissue culture production.
- ❑ Privatised Central Marketing Corporation (CMC) with preference in share ownership given to farmers.
- ❑ Open-up lands and offer contracts to Antiguan and Barbudans to develop these lands for recreational purposes. Among these will be hiking trails, bird sanctuaries and large flower gardens. We will provide skills to help farmers grow flowers both as a tourist attraction and to market flowers to the rich export market abroad.

Un-utilised land owned by foreigners will be taxed.

The new Labour Government will strictly enforce legislation providing for the taxation of land owned by foreigners which is not developed. No land speculation by foreigners will be allowed. We will also introduce legislation requiring foreigners to sell land to locals at the prices at which they bought such lands if it remains undeveloped after five years. In the absence of any local purchasers, the Government will purchase the land.

Fisheries

In Fisheries, over the next five years we will:



Fish Landing Conceptual Drawing

- ❑ Complete the new Fisheries Complex at the West Bus Station.
- ❑ Develop three rural landing points for fishermen at Parham, Urlings and Barbuda.
- ❑ Provide loan facilities and duty-free concessions for fishermen to buy deep sea fishing boats and equipment.
- ❑ Provide an internationally acceptable fish processing facility to support high quality fish exports from Antigua and Barbuda.
- ❑ Continue to provide training for our fishermen in deep sea fishing techniques, engine maintenance and safety at sea.
- ❑ Improve hurricane safe harbour facilities in Parham and Urlings.

Livestock

- ❑ We will provide long land-leases for live stock development and open opportunities for financing sheep and goat farms. Our aim will be to market meat to the entire Caribbean area including CARICOM and neighboring countries such as The British and US Virgin Islands, and Guadeloupe.

Information Technology and Telecommunications

The Labour Party recognises that the world has entered the Information Age. It is a time when almost every activity is linked to the computer. Increasingly, services, such as auditing, accounting, insurance, airline ticketing, purchasing via the Internet or telephone, are all transferring to developing countries from the industrialised countries where costs are prohibitively expensive. We firmly believe that Antigua and Barbuda could position itself to attract many of these informatics industries which would be located here, but would provide services to companies globally. These industries would add hundreds of high-paying jobs to our economy.



To position Antigua and Barbuda effectively to attract these industries, the Labour Party government has already trained more than 1,000 people in the use of the computer at the Free Trade Zone Institute of Training and Technology. In addition, we have introduced computer training in all high schools.

Already we have the highest number of Internet connections on a per head of population basis in the entire Caribbean. We are also the country with the third

highest total Internet connections in the entire Caribbean although our population is among the smallest. This shows that we are also geared for the Information age and our people have benefited from our policy on telecommunications.

Over the next five years we intend to harness the informatics industry to further boost our economy.

We will:

- ❑ Intensify our computer training programme at all levels of education throughout the country.
- ❑ Offer incentives for informatics companies to locate in Antigua and Barbuda providing they offer a high level of employment to Antiguan and Barbudans.
- ❑ Re-negotiate the existing contracts with the external telecommunications services providers to make rates competitive and to ensure that the equipment being utilised has the capacity to satisfy the needs of a modern informatics industry.
- ❑ Open up the external telecommunications sector to allow competition for the provision of services. This will have the effect of making the country more attractive to the informatics industry and it will reduce rates for our business community and for domestic use.

Hurricane Preparedness

Recognising that the frequency and intensity of Hurricanes are increasing and that these storms could have a catastrophic effect on the lives of our people, property, and the economy, the new Labour Party Government will institute the following measures:

- ❑ Apply building codes rigidly to every new construction of homes, offices, hotels or any other buildings. These codes will conform to standards which can withstand up to category four hurricanes. We believe that this is a sensible measure since the cost of rebuilding will far exceed the initial capital costs over time. Further, there are other social costs involved including job losses and these must be avoided.
- ❑ Build shelters specifically for hurricanes in designated areas throughout Antigua and Barbuda. These shelters will be capable of accommodating people whose homes would not be able to withstand hurricanes. They will be built with adequate toilet and shower facilities as well as separate sleeping accommodation for men and women in the event that they have to be utilised for long periods.
- ❑ Stockpile non-perishable food and water at these shelters in secure rooms built for this purpose. These supplies will be monitored at the end of each hurricane season and replenished. The shelters will be placed under the

control on non-governmental organisations, such as the Red Cross and the Churches, working closely with the Disaster Preparedness Unit.

- ☐ Take out insurance on all Government buildings, including schools, to ensure that adequate funds are available for the swift rebuilding of damaged buildings and minimal disruption of education and public service.
- ☐ Bury public utility transmission lines so that electricity, telephones and water distribution will suffer from the shortest possible down time.

Business community and Customs

The Labour Party government is keen that the business community should play a full part in the economic life of the nation. In this regard, the new Labour Government will streamline customs procedures in consultation with both the Customs department and the business sector.

We will establish a system that allows Customs to check for illegal imports and fraudulent invoicing while making customs clearance easier for legitimate business.

We will also lower the duties on many of the large-quantity imports to encourage the private sector and Customs to work harmoniously in clearing imports and settling payments promptly. In deciding which large-quantity imports should be given reductions in duty, the new Labour Government will draw on the expertise of the Customs department and officers of the Ministry of Finance in full consultation with the business community.

We believe that genuine collaboration between government agencies and the business community will result in an equitable system to which all parties can be committed.

Duties on motor vehicles to be lowered.

We will also significantly reduce the level of import duty on both personal and industrial vehicles in an effort to make vehicles more affordable to Antiguans and Barbudans and encourage small businesses in trucking and equipment operation.

Study of flat rate for duties

A new Labour Party Government will undertake a feasibility study of introducing a flat rate of tariffs for duties on all imports rather than different rates for various commodities. Participants in this study would include representatives nominated by the private sector.

Labour and Industrial relations

Generally a good industrial relations climate exists in Antigua and Barbuda. The Labour Party Government has done all in its power to foster such a climate and to engender co-operation between unions and employers in conflict resolution.

We hold the view that in today's world of increasing globalization and trade liberalization, employers and employees and their representative organisations have a common cause with Government to protect the jobs of employees and the businesses of employers, both of which could be under threat if national programmes, supported by all local organisations, are not devised to meet these challenges. All three of these groups are represented on the National Labour Board.

Over the next five years, the Labour Party Government will continue to promote industrial peace and collaboration between the Government, the employee organisations and the employers' representatives.

Specifically, we will empower the National Labour Board as the nation's vehicle for wide consultations between the Unions, Employers and Government on economic, social and industrial relations policy.

We will charge the Board to advise on:

- Promoting low and predictable inflation.
- Establishing political and social solidarity on major external economic issues facing the country.
- National economic issues that affect the Labour market.
- Increased national competitiveness.

The Role of the Labour Department

We believe that the Labour Department is strategically placed to implement an Industrial Policy agreed at the National Labour Board by Government, Unions, and Employers Organisations. Such a plan would embrace manpower planning, development of indigenous industry, skills training for local workers, and tight control of work permits supplying foreign skills to the market.

Therefore, the Labour Department will be charged with the execution of an Industrial Policy agreed by the social partners at the National Labour Board.

Work permit committee

It is obvious that for some time to come, our country will have fully employed all Antiguans and Barbudans who want to work. Therefore, it will continue to be

necessary to import skills from outside. In doing so, the new Labour Party Government will remove the granting of work permits from the authority of the Minister of Labour.

We will establish a Work Permits Committee drawn from the members of the National Labour Board and they will jointly decide whether work permits will be granted and on what conditions, including the need for training locals to take over jobs.

Our goal is the empowerment and enrichment of the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

We will build an inclusive society based on merit



The Labour Party is determined to build an inclusive society based on merit. We recognise that our country's population is too small to afford the waste of exclusion. We need the talents of all our people if we are to maintain our national identity, preserve our heritage, and promote our culture.

We also firmly believe that assistance must be given to the most needy in our society and promotions to the most deserving. Merit must become the watchword of all that we do. The system of providing help or giving rewards must be fair, equitable and just.

As earnest of our intent, we have already passed legislation to establish a Board to manage the affairs of the Hospital. We want the Board to be made up of qualified representatives of the private sector, the Churches, the trade unions and Government. We want decisions to be non-partisan and equitable.

Therefore, over the next five years we will:

- ❑ Set-up a broad-based Commission to take evidence from the public throughout the country to establish a Charter of Civil Society. We would recommend that such a Charter become our Bill of Rights and that it be added to our Constitution as the Articles of Faith of the people of our country.
- ❑ Encourage a participatory process by putting our trained and well-qualified people from the private sector on Government Boards and Advisory Bodies to help Government to make decisions based on equity and fairness.
- ❑ Establish principles, with the help of advisory bodies, that will guide the decision-making of all Government Ministries, Departments and Corporations.
- ❑ Establish independent bodies drawn from the private sector, the trade unions and government to issue government contracts for the provision of goods and services and to decide on the granting of work permits.
- ❑ Place our national festivals, such as Carnival, in the hands of qualified and skilled persons in the private sector with Government providing core financing while these festivals become commercially sustainable events managed and driven by people representing the community.

Constitutional Review

Within the next five years, a new Labour Party Government will appoint a Constitutional Review Commission to consult widely with the people of Antigua and Barbuda and make recommendations for reform. In appointing such a Commission, the Prime Minister will consult with the Leader of the Opposition and seek his agreement on its composition, particularly its Chairman.

The Review Commission will do the following:

- ❑ Take evidence from the public on the Charter of Civil Rights referred to earlier in this section. We recommend that the Charter should become our Bill of Rights and that it be added to our Constitution as Articles of Faith.
- ❑ Consult on whether our people would like the country to remain a Monarchy with The Queen as Head of State, or evolve to a Republic with a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda being appointed as a titular Head of State, but with the Governmental system remaining the same, i.e., an elected Prime Minister and Parliament and not an Executive President. The titular President would

continue to exercise the powers and functions now carried out by the Governor-General.

- Review the way in which the Public Service Commission and the Police Service Commission are appointed to allow for greater consultation and agreement between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition.

Electoral Reform

Our current electoral system was introduced by the Progressive Labour Movement (PLM) when it was in office between 1971 and 1976. The system is in need of reform particularly as registration can take place for only one specified week during a year and this can prove inconvenient to people. Further, once persons are placed to register, it is very difficult to remove them even though they may have migrated and not lived in the country for many years. This conveys an entirely wrong impression of the size of the electorate.

Therefore, a new Labour Government will introduce Electoral reform that would make for a more-up-to-date system. Reforms would include:

- Re-registration of all eligible voters To remove the names of dead people, those who have migrated from the country and to solve duplicate registration.
- Extend the registration period so that it becomes continuous for persons moving into a constituency.
- Introduce voter registration Identification cards with photographs.
- Revise the qualifications for registration so that it is clear who qualifies to vote and the period of qualification required.
- Develop manual for the guidance of candidates, canvassers and political agents.
- Utilise the media to explain registration and voting procedures to the public.
- Establish an Electoral Commission made up of Government and Opposition members, with an independent Chairman and the Supervisor of Elections as an ex-officio member.

Culture and Carnival



The preservation and promotion of Antiguan and Barbudan culture are becoming increasingly more important as our society is exposed to the effects of foreign media. We have to maintain our identity as a people and continue to celebrate our heritage, our traditions, our values and our community. In doing so, the Labour Party is resolved that the society as a whole should be actively involved. Our culture is society-wide, it is not limited to one group or another.

In any effort to provide greater opportunities for involvement by community groups and organisations, the new Labour Party government will establish a non profit Carnival Development Corporation with a mandate to manage Carnival and develop the performing art.

Shares in this Corporation will be made available to the private sector and the civic organisations. This change in status will permit the new Corporation to access international grant funding for cultural development and will allow greater participation in the arrangement of Carnival. The activities of the Corporation will be managed by a board of directors dominated by the private sector and civic organisations who will be responsible for making all final decisions on the operation of Carnival. Merit will be the guiding principle of decision-making.

The new Labour Party Government will continue to provide support to Carnival but we are also fully committed to creating some social space for other development partners in civic society to play a meaningful role in this important area of our cultural expression.

National Dance and Drama Theatres

The Carnival Development Corporation will also be responsible for developing the performing arts. Specifically, it will be charged with establishing and promoting a National Dance Theatre and a National Drama Theatre. The Multi-purpose Centre at Perry Bay will be the temporary home of the Dance and Drama Theatres until they each reach the stage where they can construct their own buildings.

Music

We have shown through groups such as Burning Flames and many of our Calypsonians that we have a wealth of musical talent in our country. We want to develop this talent further. Therefore, we will establish a Private non-profitable Company for the promotion of music and musicians. Government will provide the Company with an annual subvention, but the Company will raise its own funds through public performances by its musicians and a percentage of sales of recorded music at home and abroad.

The Company will be owned by the Government as a minority shareholder with other shareholders drawn from individuals and groups who wish to participate in the shareholding and work of the Company. Decisions of the Company will be made entirely on the basis of merit.

The Media

The media in Antigua and Barbuda is amongst the freest in the world. A cursory glance at the contents of The Daily Observer and The Outlet attests to the fact that the Government does not interfere in the media. They are unfettered and unrestricted except for the limits of the law of defamation and libel. Often, these publications have abused the freedom enjoyed by the press as a license to publish anything about anybody without regard to the right of privacy, the laws of libel, the necessity for truth and importance of objectivity.

There are no direct or indirect methods of coercion or control of any of the newspapers. For example, no restriction is applied on the importation of newsprint or presses; no prohibitive license fees have been established; no censor of the media exists.

With respect to ABS Radio and TV, these are owned by the State. This State ownership has led to a perception of 'control'. To promote transparency in the operations of ABS Radio and TV, the Labour Party is resolved to privatise them giving participation in their decision-making to the widest cross-section of the people.

ABS Radio/TV to be privatised

Within the next five years, a new Labour Party Government will:

- ❑ Constitute ABS Radio/TV as two separate private companies and sell shares in them to the public at prices that will be affordable to everyone.
- ❑ Restrictions will be placed on the number of shares purchasable by individuals or groups to ensure that no person or group gets a disproportionate share.
- ❑ The companies will be run by elected representatives of the shareholders who will serve terms decided by the shareholders.
- ❑ Decisions of the Companies on all matters will be made by its shareholders and management on the basis of merit. These will include allocation of financial resources, and decisions on programming and personnel questions such as recruitment and promotions.

Women

The Labour Party has a high regard for the women of our country who have made an equal contribution to men throughout our history.

The Labour Party Government has promoted women in the public service on merit. If they were better than men, they got the job. Under the Labour Government, women occupy senior positions as the Governor-General's Deputy, Permanent Secretaries, Director and Deputy Director of Audit, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House and Ambassadors.

We have also introduced legislation in Parliament to curb domestic violence which is often aimed at women. Recognising that women also have a role as mothers, we have made provision in our legislation for women to have adequate maternity leave with pay.

Over the next five years we will:

- Continue to promote women based on merit.
- Enshrine legislation making it mandatory for men to meet their obligations to women with whom they have children in or out of wedlock.

Sports

The Labour Party has always promoted sport in our country as means of developing the physical, mental and social attributes of our people. We have done so without favour. All our people have equal access to the many sports facilities that we have built, and we have been fair and non-partisan in giving support to any of our sports men and women who have been outstanding.

Our record in Sport, given the demands on the Government's financial resources, has been remarkable. We have built basketball courts across the country and have lit them for night use. We have provided a multi-purpose sports facility for netball, basketball and volleyball in St. John's for the use and development of our young women. At a cost of EC\$7 million, we have renovated the Antigua Recreation Grounds to the highest international standard cricket ground. And, we have given financial support to our sportsmen and women to attend regional and international events.

We purpose to do much more. Over the next five years we will:

- Build a football stadium to host local, regional and international games.
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In all this, we are determined to build an inclusive society which gives all our people equal opportunities to participate fully in every aspect of our nation's life.

We will continue to improve the Social Sector

Over the last three years, Government spent EC\$115.8 million on health care directly from the Treasury. This is one of the largest slices of our budget expenditure. With the exception of the Bahamas, we spend the most on health per head of population of any CARICOM country. In addition, the Medical Benefits Scheme spends EC\$3.9 million per annum on free medicines for people with chronic illnesses, EC\$4.6 million per annum to fund medical treatment abroad for those who need it, and another \$5.4 million per annum for specialist treatment at the Holberton Hospital.

The United Nations now ranks our country among the top 30 countries of 174 nations in the human development index. Only one Caribbean country -

Barbados - is ahead of us. Our infant mortality figure is down to 18 per 1,000 live births and our average life expectancy has risen to 72 for men and 75 for women. This is much higher than the majority of developing countries and is comparable to the United States of America.

Our society has reached the point of its economic development where we can further improve the social sector to eradicate the areas of poverty in our society, lay the foundations for a modern pension scheme, provide more care for the elderly, and improve the quality of our health delivery systems.

Therefore, we shall transform the Ministry of Health into the Ministry of Health and Social Improvement. Its purpose will be the improvement of health care delivery systems, health education and training; implementation of programmes to eradicate poverty; provision of assistance to the elderly; help for single mothers and their children; control of the prices of basic commodities; an end to child abuse; promotion of gender affairs; pension reform; better care for the mentally handicapped and the physically challenged; and specialist programmes for Aids sufferers and drug addicts.

Several programmes are already in operation including home care, pre-natal and post-natal clinics, increased pensions, job creation and spouse benefits.

Over the next five years, we will:

Health care

- ❑ Complete the 188-bed state-of-the-art Hospital at Mount St. John's on which work is already in progress. The Hospital will be managed by an independent Hospital Board which will be fully responsible for managing its affairs. We intend that the Board should be made up of representatives of the private sector, the trade unions, the Churches and government.
- ❑ Complete four new fully-equipped health centres at All Saints, Brownes Avenue, Clare Hall and Piggots.
- ❑ Refurbish another four centres and clinics damaged by Hurricane activity and complete a Health Centre at Johnson's Point.
- ❑ Reintroduce free mobile dental and eye clinic services for school children.

Care for the Elderly

We will improve our care for the elderly by:

- ❑ Providing government pensioners with free medical clinic and hospital care.
- ❑ Converting the Holberton Hospital into a live-in retirement home.
- ❑ Encouraging trade unions and other workers's organisations to build and

operate homes for their elderly members. Government will provide the land and grant duty-free concessions for construction material and equipment.

- Establishing standards and training programmes for day care providers.

Eradication of Poverty

We are determined to eradicate the pockets of poverty that exist in our community. The Labour Party Government has already conducted a study to examine poverty eradication. It has been decided to target a number of areas starting with Point and Villa, Grays Farm and Green Bay, Ottos and Browne's Avenue. Specifically, early focus will be given to youths, families with single mothers, the elderly and the disabled.

Over the next five years we will do the following:

- Provide duty-free concessions for some food items presently under price control.
- Provide for lower rates of duty on a few selected items most utilised by poor families.
- Bring a few other items under price control.
- Begin a school feeding programme targeted at children whose parents' means fall below a predetermined level of earnings (this is fully explained in the section on Education).
- Redevelop Point and Gray Farm and examine ways in which poor persons from these areas who own their own lands might be assisted with the improvement of their homes which have fallen into despair.
- Expand adult education to provide vocational skills such as plumbing, carpentry, and joinery to help young men to find employment and a programme of training for young women in the commercial and hospitality industries. This will be combined with an active programme to help place them in jobs.
- Index pensions to cost of living increases to keep pensioners abreast of the increased movement in prices of basic food basket goods and standard services.

The Labour Party is committed to improving the physical environment of every community and engendering a sense of community pride in their environment.

Child Care and Abuse

Over the next five years we will tackle the problem of child care and abuse in the following ways:

- ❑ Enact legislation establishing panels which will ensure that fathers pay support for their children according to their means.
- ❑ Provide assistance to unskilled parents to be trained for work and help them to locate jobs.
- ❑ Establish a Child Care Board which will be responsible for investigating reports of Child abuse and deciding how such cases should be treated.
- ❑ Enact legislation requiring police, doctors, teachers and social workers to report cases of suspected child abuse to the Child Care Board.

We will further improve infrastructure

The Labour Party Government has spent a great deal of money in building up our country's physical infrastructure. We boast of two deep water harbours and an excellent International Airport. Our telecommunications system is better than any in the Caribbean and is comparable to that of the United States. We have more telephones per head of population than any other Caribbean country. We have installed desalination plants to make our supply of water secure.

Four hurricanes in four years took their toll on our roads system and on our electricity generation plants. Nonetheless, we have tackled these problems even while other demands were being made on government revenue.

Our main roads and highways are now almost completely rebuilt to international standards. Over the last three years, we have spent \$64.2 million on road rehabilitation, and the programme is continuing.

Over the next five years we will:

- ❑ Complete the rehabilitation and resurfacing of all our roads including secondary roads in the villages.
- ❑ Install new electricity generating capacity to ensure continuous and reliable supplies of electricity including when plants have to shut down for maintenance.
- ❑ Take electricity to every home in Antigua and Barbuda.
- ❑ Construct electricity, water and telephone infrastructure to withstand

hurricane damage and ensure minimal down time when repairs are being effected.

- ❑ Continue the rapid development of our telecommunications infrastructure to ensure that 100% of the population have access to telephones.
- ❑ Ensure that the continued expansion of telecommunications brings the information super highway into the homes of as many people as want the Internet and other information technology.
- ❑ Install water capacity and transmission lines to carry water to every village throughout the country.
- ❑ Build the new terminal at V.C. Bird International Airport to accommodate arriving passengers and complete the parallel runway to facilitate more aircraft. The US\$7.2 million for this project has already been negotiated with the Kuwait Fund.
- ❑ Continue to develop the Ports as major destinations for the cruise ship business and for cargo carrying vessels.

Sustainable Development

The Labour Party recognises that economic, social and environmental factors must be taken into account to ensure sustainability in the development process. In this regard, along with its aggressive work in the economic and social areas, the new Labour Party government will strengthen its work in environmental management by introducing new, comprehensive modern legislation which will do the following:

- ❑ Make environmental impact assessments mandatory for large projects.
- ❑ Make public access to environmental data mandatory.
- ❑ Provide penalties for polluters.
- ❑ Enshrine environmental standards.
- ❑ Support Biodiversity.

A new Labour Government will also do the following:

- ❑ Seek external financing to construct a modern sewage system for St. John's.
- ❑ Make it mandatory for land developers to install infrastructure including paved roads, electricity, water and telephone before selling these lands.

We will further modernise the Educational System

Over the last five years the Labour Party Government has done much to advance education in our country. In the last three years alone, we have spent EC\$121.1 million directly from the Treasury on education. In addition, over the same three-year period, the Board of Education has spent another EC\$47.7 million on various education projects including EC\$12.6 million on full or partial scholarships for 239 students for higher education abroad. We now have more students, per head of population, on government scholarships than any country in the Caribbean.

In the world today, only one in every six children is literate. In Antigua and Barbuda every child is literate.

Over the last 18 months, we have graduated more than 1,000 people from the Free Zone Institute of Training & Technology as fully computer literate. Recognising that we now live in an Information Age which is shaping the future of the world, we are continuing to train even more people in the use of the computer.

The Labour Government has embarked upon a EC\$2.5 million programme to put computers in every school. We have already put 300 computers into the high schools in both Antigua and Barbuda. Within a few months, we will have achieved our target fully of a computer in every school. The United States has the same aim, but will not be able to complete it until early in the 21st Century. We are already giving our children a competitive edge.

At the State College, we have done the following:

- Introduced a University of the West Indies programme in particular disciplines. This means that we are offering Years 1 and 2 of the UWI's programme in certain courses.
- Established a School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
- Established a School of Pharmacy Studies

Adult Education

We have also established an Evening Institute at the National Technical Training Centre offering courses in architecture, building construction, electrical installation, fabric design, plumbing, accounts, arc welding, automotive engineering, computer-aided design, ceramics and food preparation. Preparing our children for the New Century: Education for the Future.

Over the next five years, we will build on the foundations we have already laid to prepare our children for the next century. Through our further modernised system of education, a new Labour Party government will ensure that our children have a competitive edge and are able to hold their own anywhere in the world. Starting with a EC\$44 million project, financed by the Caribbean Development Bank, we will refurbish all school, add new classrooms, modernise the curriculum, and provide training to teachers and administrators. We will also introduce the following changes to the educational system:

- ❑ Provide up to three chances for our primary school children to pass their exams to go to secondary school, i.e. 10 - 13.
- ❑ Develop special programmes for the specially gifted (bright children) and for children with learning disabilities.
- ❑ Strengthen the post primary system, which demotivates some of our children and labels them as failures too early in life.
- ❑ Create a network system of polytechnic schools to train students not qualifying for secondary school.
- ❑ Double the capacity of Antigua State College.
- ❑ Double the number of scholarships granted by the Board of Education and expand the Antigua and Barbuda Development Bank's Student Loan Programme.
- ❑ Complete the establishment of computer skill training in all schools.
- ❑ Introduce a cultural and sport development programme for an hour every day after regular school, where music, other fine arts and competitive sport development would be taught.
- ❑ Introduce an annual competitive fair for schools that would focus on production and display of intellectual products, e.g., music, books, paintings, T-shirt designs, new appliances, new food products, carving and craft.
- ❑ Provide a school-feeding programme for the needy.
- ❑ Guarantee all school students computer literacy training.

Below, we explain some of these programmes in greater detail:

Programme for Gifted Children

The Labour Party recognises that many of our children are specially gifted and need special programmes to provide opportunity for the full realisation of their special gifts. Therefore, we will introduce mechanisms to identify these children. We will ensure that they are given special lessons that will allow them to move at their own accelerated pace. We will also provide special support to the families of these children in ensuring that the appropriate home environment, study materials and tools are available to them. These students will be encouraged to enter specialised professional areas, through special scholarships and attachment programmes to leading world universities and corporations. Specially gifted individuals can provide significant economic returns, pride, publicity and self-confidence to a nation. Hence we believe it right that we should give them every encouragement to fulfill their potential.

Children with Learning Disabilities

The Labour Party understands that a society is best judged by how it treats its weaker elements, minorities and individuals with disabilities. We must cater for the weakest as much as we do for the strongest, for the weak can be made strong and productive with the right attention. Therefore, a new Labour Party Government will strengthen its programme for children with learning disabilities by taking the following measures:

- ❑ Early testing of children to identify specific difficulties.
- ❑ Training of a cadre of teachers to manage and teach these children utilising funds from the Caribbean Development Bank education project.
- ❑ Renovate the special reading clinic at the T.N. Kirnon School.
- ❑ Establish a second reading clinic in the eastern section of Antigua.

School-Feeding Programme

Unfortunately, there are still children in our school system who go to school hungry. These children find it difficult to concentrate on school exercises. But because they are hungry, it does not mean that they are not bright or that they are unable to learn. They simply require a meal to maintain their concentration. The new Labour Party Government will introduce a community-based school feeding programme for poor children as part of its poverty eradication programme. Both teachers in schools and representatives of the community will be constituted as a group to identify needy children. These children will then become beneficiaries of a community-based school-feeding programme which Government will fund and contract to Community-based organisations made up of Church representatives.

Strengthening the Existing Post Primary System through the introduction of Polytechnic Schools

Recognising that secondary level education and technical training will be essential to a programme of developing and maintaining a competitive advantage, the new Labour Party government will introduce several reforms in its education system including allowing up to three chances for our primary school children to pass their exams to go to secondary school.

We will strengthen the existing Post Primary System which de-motivates some of our children and labels them as failures too early in life. We will add a network of polytechnic institutions to the existing system. We stress that, in doing so, we will consult widely with Headmasters and Headmistresses, Teachers and Educational experts in our society. We will also hold a series of dialogue sessions with parents to fully explain the additions to the system. However, we believe that the introduction of Polytechnic schools will ensure a significant improvement in the self esteem of those of our children who are not suited to the existing system and will prepare them better to enter the job market as productive workers.

These Polytechnic schools will provide young people with work flexibility in the labour force. They will also serve as night schools for the retraining of workers seeking to improve or increase their range of skills. The new Labour Party Government will equip these schools and fast track the training of teachers for them. Structured work attachment with commercial entities for the students will be part of the training.

Monitoring Standard in Nursery Schools and Day Car Centers

Increasingly, nursery schools and day care centres are springing-up all over the country. Their presence has been of enormous assistance to working parents and many of them are doing a wonderful job of preparing our children for all future learning intellectually, emotionally, physically and socially. It is vital that these schools and centres uphold the highest standard in the treatment of children, particularly as the children are too young to articulate problems. Therefore, the new Labour Party Government will issue guidelines for the operations of these schools and centres and they will be monitored regularly for compliance. One of the requirements will be that each school or centre should have a percentage of staff suitably qualified to work with these young children. This is as much in the interest of the schools and day care centres with good standards as it is for the children.

Community Libraries equipped with the Internet

The Labour Party has become convinced that a single public library located in St. John's will not be adequate to serve the needs of our communities in Antigua and Barbuda. We cannot expect children to leave the far-flung communities in which they live to travel to St. John's. This is both a costly and time-consuming exercise.

Therefore, we are committed to building several community libraries at strategic intervals across Antigua and one in Barbuda. Such a Library has already been established without Government intervention in the constituency of St. Mary's North by the Representative supported by donations from private individuals. That Library is fully stocked with a wide range of books ranging from manuals on economics and management to novels of fiction. It also has computer and access to encyclopaedias through computer discs. We believe that this community Library serves as a model for others, and a new Labour Party Government will pursue the establishment of similar community Libraries.

In each of them, we will install a computer with Internet connections so that even the child or adult who does not have a computer or the Internet at home can surf the World Wide Web at a nearby community Library. The new Labour Party Government will provide the land and the cost of construction of such community Libraries together with the cost of establishing Internet connections to a computer and we will seek external assistance to equip them.

We will reform the financial system with no new taxes

The Labour Party firmly believes that our present tax base is sufficient to pay for our country's needs. Therefore, we will introduce no new taxes. The UPP is the Party which has promoted new taxes. The UPP is the Party which has promoted new taxes. While we intend to increase revenues from new investment, the UPP has no chance of attracting new investment since they have become known world-wide for taking investors to court simply because such investors want to invest. With the UPP in office, investors will shy away from Antigua and

Barbuda. Therefore, the UPP will have to tax the people and the business sector to pay for their government.

We propose to reform the financial system not only to pay for the programme we have set out in this manifesto, but also to restore fiscal balance.

Restoration of Fiscal Balance

Below we describe in detail how our programme will be funded and the source of these financial resources:

We will broaden the tax base by modernisation of Property Tax.

The Labour Party Government is committed to creating a just and equitable society. The benefits and burdens of developing a modern society must be distributed fairly among all citizens. We will therefore introduce a simple and easily calculated method of assessing property tax. This will replace the old method introduced during the colonial areas. There will be no increase in the rates. In fact several categories of property will be exempted from payment, and land used for agricultural production will pay no taxes. The new method will be based on market value of land and buildings broken down into several categories of economic use. Different rates of taxes will be applied to different classes of property.

An appeal board will be established to settle disputes over property classification and all new residents will not pay tax in the first year. Property below EC\$200,000 in value will be exempted. The tax valuation and administration system will be computerised and staff members trained.

This system has been acknowledged as the fairest and most transparent system with the highest rate of tax compliance.

Land maps will be digitized and managed through a computerised geographic information system that will ensure timely and complete coverage of all properties. All monies collected from property tax will be placed in a dedicated fund for road maintenance. This will ensure that we will have transparent means of ensuring that these funds are put to proper use that will benefit all Antiguans and Barbudans.

We will privatise Government-owned Corporations

As part of its policy of an all-inclusive society fully participating in decision-making in those areas that are of greatest concern to various sections of our

society, the new Labour Party government will privatise several Government-owned entities. Among these will be the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA), Central Marketing Corporation (CMC), ABS Radio and Television, the Ports, and the V.C. Bird International Airport.

By privatisation, we mean that we will make these entities into private companies with Government holding a significant block of shares and selling the balance to the people of Antigua and Barbuda at prices that will allow everyone in the community to buy if he or she wishes to do so. Limitations will also be placed on the number of shares which can be owned by one person or entity to ensure that such a person or entity does not get a disproportionate number.

The privatisation of these entities will result in an inflow of funds to the Treasury to help pay for social development programmes. We intend to direct much of this to the areas of poverty eradication identified in this manifesto.

Thereafter, these Companies will be managed by a Board of Directors made up of representatives of their shareholders. As a shareholder, Government will have representatives on the Board, but they will not be the only voices. Other shareholders from among the public will elect representatives from amongst themselves who will serve their elected terms on the Board and serve the interests of the groups they represent. These Companies will be run competitively with decisions being made in the interest of the shareholders and their customers.

We will ensure a more equitable sharing of social costs and benefits.

The new Labour Party government will continue to protect and advance the welfare of all its citizens. We regard high quality health care as a right and one which should not be based on the size of an individual's income. We will further secure the welfare of our pensioners and develop a just and caring society where we are all our brothers' keepers with the strong supporting the weak and each citizen sharing equitably in the cost and benefits of a better society.

Consequently, we will review the maximum bar placed on deductions for medical benefits and social security. At the same time, we will increase the benefits to pensioners and the sick.

We will improve the tax administration and collection machinery.

The new Labour Party Government will further strengthen the tax compliance unit, expanding it into a full tax compliance inspectorate by presenting a bill to Parliament that will institutionalise its powers and enhance its enforcement capacity as an oversight body. We will also implement a major programme for

recruiting highly qualified and, experienced tax administrators to strengthen the management of the tax unit. We will introduce a systematic listing of tax payers and tax paying enterprises and link timely tax payment to the accessing of government benefits and services including incentive programmes and government contracts.

Payment of existing taxes is fundamental to the continued development of the country. No one should wish to evade paying them. Therefore, we will introduce stiffer penalties for non-compliance. We will also explore the possibility of consolidating all income deductions into a single deduction to reduce the burden on our taxpayers and facilitate more efficient collection. We will also consolidate various hotel taxes into a consolidated deduction again to facilitate greater compliance and easier collection by government tax collectors.

We will reduce inefficiencies in Government Operations

The new labour Party Government will implement a programme to cut-down on bureaucratic procedures, use of materials and costs. Job descriptions will be reviewed and redesigned and some jobs will be reclassified. Several new technical positions will also be introduced. Several government forms will be abolished and replaced by electronic files that will utilise plain paper.

Incentive programmes will be introduced for managers who cut cost without reducing quality of service. E-mail will be introduced as a major means of communication in the public service reducing paper, storage and dispatching costs. This will also help to reduce the costs of communication now done by international telephone calls and faxes.

We will increase revenue through Economic Expansion in Offshore and Tourism Industries

The Labour Party recognises that the best method of increasing revenue is through economic growth. Several countries have demonstrated the potential for large revenue growth in a dramatic expansion of the offshore sector. We intend to attract enough offshore companies to increase the sector's current revenue to at least EC\$40 million a year over the next five years, through existing taxes. In tourism, we will add another 1,000 rooms in addition to the 2,000 rooms from the Asian Village over the next five years. Additional rooms plus annual increases in tourist arrivals of at least 7% per year should also lead to a 30% increase in tax revenue over the next five years from the tourism sector without any new tax increases. Beyond these projects, we intend to continue to seek investment in our economy on an ongoing basis as we have always done for the benefit of the economy and the country as a whole.

We will create an Incentive System for Tax and Custom Duty Collectors

The new Labour Government will introduce a performance bonus scheme for our tax and customs duty collectors based on revenue targets, fairness, service efficiency and good customer relations. These bonuses will be team-based to support teamwork and will include performances audit responses from clients.

Development of a modern and transparent financial system

The Labour Party recognises that as a Government it is accountable to the people in whose name it governs. We emphasize that no Director of Audit - a position which is entirely independent of the Government - has ever accused the Labour Government of wrong doing with government funds. The present Director of Audit and her team are working diligently to submit government audited accounts to the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Representatives. They do so without any intervention from the Government.

Nonetheless, the Labour Party wishes to develop a modern financial system which is fully transparent. We believe that this will do much to confirm public confidence in the process of government.

Therefore we will carry out the following measures:

Modernise the financial rules and regulations.

The new Labour Party Government will finalise the draft new financial rules and regulations to replace the old financial rules. The new rules will incorporate modern accounting practices, support a new programming budget format, decentralise financial management authority and set management guidelines for investment and cash flow management, computerisation and auditing practices in the public sector. These rules will improve the level of accountability and quality of financial management in the public sector.

INTRODUCE A PROGRAMME BUDGET SYSTEM

We will introduce a programme budgeting system as a fundamental component of a new economic management programme that seeks to enhance efficiency, accountability, transparency and good governance. Government work programmes will be based on set objectives, measurable targets, cosseted activities and projected revenues. This system of budgeting will be introduced in the year 2000, preparing our country for modern economic management. Ministerial managers will be forced to justify programmes in a more rigorous

way and will be subject to annual reviews that will be open to the public. Managers will be assessed on value for money basis, relevance, and appropriate prioritisation of resource use.

IMPROVE ENFORCEMENT IN PROCUREMENT RULES AND PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

We will strengthen procurement functions by reviewing rules and making the necessary adjustments taking into account best practices established by international organisations. We regard procurement operations as an important tool in stimulating competitive business practices among local firms. Small businesses will be specially encouraged provided they are competitive and provide reliable services. We will continue to maintain complete record on all bidding proceedings and we will publish the results of all bids promptly. Records on the performance of private contractors with the government will be kept and will become an important factor in the granting of future contracts.





DEBT

The Labour party Government has been criticised by the UPP for creating debt. The implication is that debt is inherently wrong and the government is mismanaging its finances. The evidence does not support this claim. Every country must borrow money, every country has debts.

The relevant issues are, what projects were the debt used to establish, what benefits these projects are providing for our people, how does our debt compare with the debt of other countries, and, what level of debt is deemed to be too high based on internationally accepted standards.

DEBT FUNDED PROJECTS

Antigua and Barbuda used more than 95% of its debt for the following projects:

-  The provision of a Desalination Plant to provide us with a secure supply of water, power generation and plant distribution system to give us electricity.
-  To build the International Airport and the Deep Water Harbour without which we would have little or no tourists and our economy would die.
-  To build The Royal Antiguan Hotel, Heritage Quay, the Vendors' Mall and the public markets now under construction.
-  To build the new hospital now being constructed, a government office complex, and roads.

These projects are all highly visible, with obvious benefits. They provide the backbone for the development of a modern economy with first class service to our citizens. The government office complex, Royal Antiguan Hotel, Heritage Quay and Hotel, and the Vendors Mall will either earn or save substantial sums of money. They also provide a large number of jobs to Antiguan and Barbudans and opportunities for the creation of businesses. Very few Antiguan, if any, would claim that they are not proud of these projects.

The debt is an investment that creates benefits for our people, modern infrastructure for our development, and a solid foundation for our children. Unlike the Windward Islands, Antigua gets no aid, yet our level of debt is comparable to theirs and better than most other regional countries.

Internationally a country is deemed to have too much debt if its Net Present Value of debt to exports exceeds 200-250% and/or if its Net Present Value of debt to fiscal revenue exceeds a target of 280%. In the former case Antigua is at 90% and, in the latter case, it is well below 200%. By international standards, therefore, Antigua and Barbuda cannot be said to be too heavily indebted.

Debt being Managed

In any event, the Labour Party government has managed the debt. In 1997, all the arrears owed to the Caribbean Development Bank was repaid and loans have started flowing again from that institution. We also repaid several debts to the United Kingdom. In 1998, we rescheduled debts with the Japanese Government for the desalination plant and with the Italian Government for the Royal Antiguan Hotel. All these debts are being serviced as are borrowings from local commercial banks.

WE HAVE SHOWN HOW WE WILL FINANCE OUR PROGRAMMES

We have laid out the details of how we intend to pay for the pledges in this Manifesto because we want to emphasize that ours are not empty promises that will be forgotten once we are in office. We seriously doubt that the UPP will provide any realistic details on how they will fund their promises. For, we know that, apart from taxation and levies, they have no idea how they will raise money or how much they can raise.

We also wanted to show our seriousness in establishing a transparent and accountable system, one which is modern and can carry our country into the 21st Century with the trust and confidence of the public.

We will improve the Public Service

The Labour Party wants to improve the Public Service for two reasons: first, to improve the quality of service given to the public, and second, to improve the conditions for public servants so that they are happy to work in government service.

We have already stated that a new Labour Party Government will review the way in which the Public Service Commission is appointed. We want the system to be participatory and representative and we would like the work of the Commission to be guided only by the merits of the issues they have to deal with. We are committed to establishing such a Commission and such a system.

Beyond this, we commit a new Labour Government to do the following to improve the Service:

- ❑ Review the process of recruitment, appointment, and promotion to ensure that it is guided by considerations of merit only.
- ❑ Establish a comprehensive training programme for each level of civil servants with emphasis on administration procedures, accounting, English, financial management, computer skills, attitudes and quality of service.
- ❑ Institute a system in which promotion will not be based on years of service but on qualifications and performance.
- ❑ Give all non-established workers an option to convert to civil servant status.
- ❑ Introduce a mobile pension scheme under which government workers, after ten years of service, can leave receiving a proportional pension at any time thereafter.
- ❑ Allow up to six months leave without pay for any civil servant who may wish to experiment in the private sector either as an employee or self-employed person.
- ❑ Widen the loan scheme available to civil servants to cover not only cars but also home improvements or advanced schooling.

We believe that the introduction of these reforms will improve the quality of the public service for the public and civil servants themselves. We are committed to their implementation.

We have kept our word to the Public Servants

We said we would raise the minimum wage for the lowest-paid public servants and on 1st August 1997 we did. That minimum wage is now \$1,000 per month. We also said we would honour our commitment to pay Public Servants back pay. In December 1998, we paid EC\$6 million as the first half of the money due to them. We will continue to keep our word.

We will continue to fight crime vigorously

While the extent of crime in our country is not as high as in other Caribbean countries, it is increasing. The Labour Party is determined to stamp it out. Our people must be safe in their homes, businesses and on the streets. Our visitors must also be safe.

The cause of crime in Antigua and Barbuda is not because our people are desperately poor or unemployed. With the high wages and salaries we enjoy, and our low unemployment rate, few criminals can use economic deprivation as an excuse for their behaviour. Crime in our society appears to have three main causes: drug addiction, the influence of foreign media, and a sense of failure at activity other than breaking society's rules. These causes require specialist responses.

A dangerous development has been the rise of guns among those who commit crimes. The Labour Party Government has begun to tackle this problem and will continue to do so vigorously.

We have already:

- Provided the largest fleet of vehicles and motor cycles ever made available to the Force. It is now more mobile and able to respond quicker than every before.
- Improved the salaries and working conditions of the Police Force. We raised the salaries and wages of the Force by thirty-three and a half per cent. Last June the police received EC\$1.3 million in back pay. In December 1998, they received a further EC\$345,485. We have also improved conditions for women

- on the Force in respect to maternity leave.
- ▣ Refurbished some of the Police facilities and we are rehabilitating all of them.
- ▣ Provided equipment, including weapons, for the Police to effectively respond to armed criminals.

The Labour Party is committed to fighting illegal drug trafficking, illegal firearms, and all criminal activity. We will not allow crime in our society to spread like a cancer. We intend to yank it out at its root.

Therefore over the next five years we will:

- ▣ Ensure that all police officers work directly on prevention of crime and capturing of criminals.
- ▣ Relieve police personnel of secretarial and maintenance duties and assign civilians to the Force to carry out these duties.
- ▣ Develop a civilian group of technicians who will provide services to the Police Force in the areas of forensic science, domestic disputes, legal prosecution, electronic surveillance and repair and computerised database management. This is a procedure already utilised in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Europe to good effect.
- ▣ Seek Experts to assist the Police Force to develop the techniques and know-how to deal with modern, sophisticated crime.
- ▣ Seek Experts to help the Police Force to understand the cause of crime related to under achievement in the normal societal setting, and how to combat it.
- ▣ Introduce tough new penalties for violent crimes, doubling mandatory jail sentences. Persons in possession of illegal firearms will also receive stiffer penalties.
- ▣ Continue to improve the terms and conditions of service of police officers.
- ▣ Continue to deport all foreigners convicted of crimes of any kind as soon as they have paid the penalty under the law.

PRISON

The Labour Party does not believe that the prison should be a place of punishment only. We also want it to be a place of rehabilitation. We believe that society is safer if persons leaving prison do not return to a life of crime, but go to productive work.

Therefore, we intend to implement a number of measures designed to prepare prison inmates for re-entry into society.

We will:

- ❑ Retain the services of a psychologist to work with prison inmates to determine why they turned to crime with a view to offering corrective remedies.
- ❑ Contract to private sector groups the task of training prison inmates in productive work for which they are suitable so that they might find jobs when they leave prison.
- ❑ Intensify the training of Antiguan and Barbudans to resume the management and operations of the Prison.
- ❑ Provide better facilities for all prison officers especially women.
- ❑ Examine ways to improve the earnings and conditions of work of prison officers.

New Prison Building

A new Labour Party Government will build a new Prison to serve both as a maximum security institution for prisoners convicted of violent crimes and as a modern, correctional facility where other inmates can be rehabilitated for productive work through training. The design of the prison was completed in 1998 and the new location identified.

Wide consultation will be held to determine the best use of the old prison location since it has considerable historical significance dating back to 1735.

Young Offenders

The Labour Party does not believe that anyone is inherently criminal. In other countries it has been discovered that people turn to crime when they are young because they were under achievers in school. This could be due to learning disabilities which could have been corrected if detected early. In any event, the Labour Party wants to ensure that young people, convicted of first offences, are given the opportunity to reform.

Therefore, a new Labour Party Government will:

- ❑ Build a special correctional institution for first offenders separate and apart from the prison to ensure that these young offenders do not mix with seasoned criminals.
- ❑ Employ a psychologist to work with them to determine whether or not they have learning disabilities which could be corrected.
- ❑ Contract private groups to train them for productive work.

Illegal Drugs

The new Labour Party Government will continue to combat the trafficking and use of illegal drugs. We will work closely with other governments particularly the United States and the United Kingdom on drug interdiction.

We will also:

- Improve the detection capabilities of the Police and Customs.
- Make penalties for drug trafficking stiffer.
- At the same time, we are keen to ensure that no more of our people use narcotic substances. We will do as much as possible to help those who are already addicted.

Therefore, we will:

- Intensify education in our school system and in the media against the use of drugs.
- Strengthen our national capacity for assisting drug addicts to give up the habit.

We will set up a Constitutional Review for Barbuda

The Labour Party regards every social and economic improvement which it initiates to be equally applicable to Barbuda as to Antigua. We see the two islands as comprising one state with every citizen enjoying equal rights and entitlements.

Our aim is to develop our country as a whole, Barbuda included.

We recognise, however, that a problem does exist in relation to land on Barbuda. Some on Barbuda hold to the view that land there is vested in the Crown solely for the benefit of the people of Barbuda; that the right to dispose of land in

Barbuda rests with the Barbuda Council and not with the Central Government; and that Central Government cannot acquire land in Barbuda except on payment of compensation. This is an issue that needs to be resolved.

Referendum in Barbuda on lands

The new Labour Party Government will hold a referendum on Barbuda within the next five years to enquire of the people of Barbuda the answers to the following questions:

- Would they like to buy land on Barbuda and have title which they can use as collateral with Banks?
- Would they agree to Antiguans being able to own land on Barbuda since Barbudans are free to own land on Antigua?
- Would they like the Barbuda Council or the Central Government or a combination to decide on the development of land in Barbuda?

The Labour Party gives the clear understanding that it will do nothing with Barbuda lands that does not reflect the demonstrated wish of the people of Barbuda.

Constitutional Review

The Labour Party believes that the relationship between Antigua and Barbuda must be made harmonious and co-operative. There should be no suspicion of the motives of either side and there should be a will to work together for the benefit of the people of each island. A mechanism needs to be put in place to achieve this. To determine what that mechanism should be, the new Labour Party Government will establish an Independent Constitutional Review Committee to take evidence throughout Antigua and Barbuda and make recommendations on improving the relationship for the benefit of the people.

We are resolved to respect the right of the people of Barbuda to make judgments that affect their lives as individuals and as a community.

WE WILL MAINTAIN RESPECT FOR ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA INTERNATIONALLY.

In the Caribbean and the wider world, the Labour party has given Antigua and Barbuda robust representation. Small though our country is, our voice has been heard with respect in every regional and international organisation, and our country has been given regard beyond its size.

Through sensible negotiation and hard bargaining we have won one advantage after another for our people. Repeatedly, we have played a leadership role in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and CARICOM.

The Labour Party has the proven talent and skill to maintain and improve Antigua and Barbuda's place in the international community and to advance our country's interest.

Our nation must remain as strong abroad as it is at home or external influences will weaken us and erode the advances we make. Our country cannot afford to squander the influence that the Labour Party Government has achieved.

The international environment is both competitive and complicated. To retain and improve our position, our nation must remain fully involved and fully respected at the pivotal point of regional and international decision-making. The new Labour Party government will continue to give our country high quality representation.

Over the next five years, we will:

- 📌 Give strong representation to our country in the councils of the Caribbean.
- 📌 Advance the case in international fora for wider criteria to determine economic assistance to small states such as ours.
- 📌 Work in the World Trade Organisation to achieve 'special and differential' treatment for small countries so that we can continue to enjoy trade preferences for exports from our country.
- 📌 Negotiate bilateral investment in treaties with countries in Europe, North America and South East Asia to promote private sector investments from those countries into Antigua and Barbuda. We already have such treaties with the United Kingdom and Germany.
- 📌 Strike alliances with organisations and investors to attract more tourists and business to Antigua and Barbuda for the benefit of our people.

A new Labour Party Government will continue to give Antigua and Barbuda representation that will result in tangible gains for our economy and pride to our people.

Conclusion

This manifesto is designed to empower the people of Antigua and Barbuda still further. It is a Strategic Vision for the Future. It contains details of our plans for the next five years. They are not empty promises. They are real pledges by a Labour Party that you know will deliver because we have delivered in the past.

Our unemployment rate is low, our national savings are high. Our wages and salaries are the second highest in the Caribbean and our country is ranked 29th in the human development index of 174 countries. Only Barbados ranks ahead of us. Our infant mortality rate is low and our life expectancy high. Our physical infrastructure is much better developed than most and our social infrastructure is getting better. We spend more on health than any CARICOM country except The Bahamas on a head of population basis, and we have more students on government scholarships on a per capita basis than any country in CARICOM. Even despite Hurricanes, the Labour Party government's policies have grown the economy.

Our nation has much to protect and preserve. We cannot endanger all that we have attained, nor can we risk our future prosperity.

Let us go forward together and continue the job of building Antigua and Barbuda. Our economy is Safer with Labour. Our country is Moving in the Right Direction.

The Labour Party's Pledge

We, the candidates, of the Antigua Labour Party in this 1999 General Election, having set out our eleven commitments and explained them in detail, having shown how we will continue the growth and prosperity of our nation at home, and having demonstrated how we will maintain the leadership role abroad that we have already established.

Now solemnly pledge as follows:

First, we see every national of Antigua and Barbuda as equal under God and we pledge to serve them equally to the best of our ability. From this article of faith we will not be moved.

Second, we believe in democracy and those democratic principles that we fought to achieve for the people of this country. We pledge to uphold them and to ensure that the people of Antigua and Barbuda continue to live their lives in peace and freedom.

Third, we are fully committed to the further economic development and prosperity of this nation. We are determined to seek out every means of advancing the economic prospects of this country and to ensure that the benefits are shared widely and fully throughout our community.

Fourth, we are dedicated to the continuous betterment of the quality of life of our people. We are determined to improve health care and education facilities, and to expand access to water and electricity to every home throughout the country.

Fifth, we are committed to continuing the process of making Antigua and Barbuda a modern, technological nation fully capable of participating competitively in the global community.

Steadfast in our faith in Almighty God, in firm belief in the capacity of our people, and with confidence in our own ability, we pledge to devote our strength and our energy to the fulfillment of these broad objectives.