

Opinion

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC - Criticism is Easy: Political Discourse in the 2008 Dominican Presidential Election

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This past weekend, I invested some time in trying to figure out if any of the three leading presidential candidates had a coherent list of political positions and/or policy program that they would support, if elected. I could only find a 2004 PLD [1] document which excellently detailed the PLD's policy goals for 2004 to 2008. In that document the PLD outlined a whole slate of economic, social, environmental, infrastructure industrial policies. I congratulate the PLD for such a wonderful document and forward planning. However, for the 2008 elections, the PLD and the other two major parties have chosen not to have a single document outlining their political platform; at least not on their campaign page, which would be the place I would place such a document. Instead the PLD has chosen to continuously highlight its "achievements" - mostly the economic stability - but none of its failures or lessons learned. Reading the PLD website, you would think the DR is an economic and social paradise because the PLD has done everything right. Reality does not support the PLD's cheerful assessment. The PLD should recognize its flaws and shortcomings and propose ways to address these; such shortcomings as distribution issues, corruption, arrogance in planning, ignoring the interior, and so on.

The other major parties, PRD [2] and PRSC [3], have chosen a politics of criticism. This is a logical strategy for an opposition party, BUT they do not provide any alternative political program. Their entire site criticizes the PLD for its "many" flaws, but after spending time reviewing the respective PRD and PRSC presidential and party pages, there was nothing that indicated what the each party or its candidate stood for. I only learned about the many mistakes the PLD had committed, and that the PRD and PRSC would be different. But neither the PRD nor PRSC detailed how they would be different, just that they would. There is no substance as to how each of the parties or candidates would govern.

I sent emails to the communication offices of the PRD and the PRSC and got some response. I started a good dialog with Modesto Reynoso, the Subsecretario de Relaciones Internacionales del PRD, who forwarded a series of documents that gave me a better idea of who Miguel Vargas is and what he stood for. After reading about 20 documents and piecing them together, I got a better idea on a few of Varga's positions. Mostly, the documents criticized the PLD and the Fernandez administration. The PRSC sent me a standard response, letting me know that they will send me some info as soon as possible. This is forgivable, since it was the weekend, but let's see if they respond.

I propose that this lack of information is unacceptable! If the PRD and the PRSC want our support, they need to tell us why. It is not enough to tell us that the PLD is corrupt and incompetent. They need to tell us how the PRD and the PRSC will be different. Furthermore, it should not take 20 documents for me to learn more about the PRD platform; nor should it take emails for me to get this information; this information should be readily available for all.

Here is some free advice to the opposition parties: CRITICISM IS EASY.

It is easy to attack the governing party, but it is much harder to develop policy recommendations. Everyone knows the flaws in the PLD; but guess what, everyone knows the flaws in previous PRD and

PRSC governments - who can forget the corruption under Balaguer and the 2003 PRD melt-down. You need to tell the public HOW YOU WILL GOVERN. Why should we expect that this time around the PRD will be different? How will the PRD avoid another Plan-Renove or another Baninter? What should we expect from the PRSC, besides giving out chickens and money to BUY political support? In other words, you can start by telling me to vote for you b/c the PLD is incompetent, but then be prepared for me to ask, "What do you have to offer?" The old adage of "A devil known, is better then a devil unknown" comes to mind.

Unless you give us a clear idea of what you stand for, I am afraid the

PLD will cruise to victory. The people hear from the PLD, "remember Hipolito", and that scares them away from the "devil unknown". The PRD and the PRSC need to continue highlighting the flaws in the PLD approach to governing, but they need to propose a detailed recipe of alternative policies in order to recapture the hearts of the people. What do you mean by "Empleo!" or "Pro-Poor"? To me that means nothing!

The PLD, for its turn, needs to do some introspection, stop hiding its flaws (lack of transparency, arrogance, pro-elite, so on), and propose ways they will address these flaws.

So here are four questions to all the parties:

1. What do you perceive as the main economic, political, social, environmental problems that face the nation?
2. How do you plan to address these? Providing details.
3. How do you plan to include the public in the public decision-making process?
4. What is your vision of progress?

I implore the parties to move away from political-clientelism - e.g. vote buying, trading political posts and contracts for support - and the politics of empty slogans, and give us substantial details of their political mentality so that we can have and make a true choice between the parties. If the opposition parties choose to continue politics as usual, expect a PLD victory, and expect us to search for a new political movement that will pay attention to the public. We are frustrated with the status quo, and are looking for leaders that propose change from the cronyism that all three major parties have engaged in, and continue to support. We are willing to lend our support and resources to a movement that outlines to a more public oriented mentality.

I hope the parties take this article as a challenge to provide us with information, and that they realize that there is a simmering unrest that is ready to turn its back on yesterday's political tactics, and ready to embrace a new way of relating to and being included in politics.

We have nothing to lose but our chains, and the world to win- well, at least a better country.

Footnotes

[1] Partido de la Liberación Dominicana.

[2] Partido Revolucionario Dominicano.

[3] Partido Reformista Social Cristiano.