

COULD THIS ALEXANDER BE GREAT?

Among the pantheon of historical figures, few names inspire more fascination than Alexander III of Macedon, known colloquially as Alexander the Great. By age 33, his extensive military campaigns had conquered most of the known world.

However, classical academia teaches that it was his father, King Philip II, who paved the way for the young Alex's successes.

Despite the deserved reputation of being a ruthless warlord, Philip was also a visionary who reformed the Macedonian army and subjugated the Greek city states, establishing a hegemonic alliance to support the invasion of Persia.

Their achievements were the result of careful planning and the shared ambition of forging a new empire for the benefit of human civilisation.

I am reminded of these towering personalities because for the past few weeks I have been coming across their names in the combined form of Phillip Edward Alexander, self-proclaimed social activist and founder of the recently registered Progressive Empowerment Party (PEP).

Mr Alexander has been in the public eye for a while now and is connected to a number of noteworthy ventures. He helped found the humanitarian Jericho Project, lobbied for the construction of the

traffic bypass at Four Roads, and ran as an independent candidate for the Diego Martin West seat in the 2015 election.

Though his bid to enter the political realm was unsuccessful, he remains undeterred in making it his new career path and has been slowly building up a support base—holding cottage meetings and organising the infrastructure for his new party.

Although the PEP is still in its infancy, with few resources at its disposal, its greatest asset is Mr Alexander's commitment to getting his message out to the masses. To that end, he's bypassed the traditional media outlets and has taken to hosting nightly live broadcasts on his Facebook page.

These sessions, usually lasting an hour, begin with voicing outrage against the Government, transitions to presenting plans on fixing our country and ends with a short call-in segment. I will admit to listening every so often, paying close attention to the number of people tuning in (average four or five hundred) as well as the comments that are made on the accompanying thread.

Enthusiastic as the participants may be it's still too early to label any of them "likely" PEP voters. But at the very least, they are definitely interested in hearing what he has to say.



RYAN HADEED

When it comes to the choice of governance—T&T's electorate is caught between a rock and a hard place.

In a comparison between the current PNM administration and the past stewardship of the UNC, both have proven themselves to be equally disappointing. But what makes this situation worse is the knowledge that we can expect no better. And the constant cycling from one party to the other negates any chance of achieving meaningful and lasting progress.

In a previous column printed on February 28, I briefly mentioned Mr Alexander and the PEP, suggesting that: "...his crowds may be small, but what he does have on his side—is time".

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Anyone who has ever watched a parliamentary debate knows our MPs spend most of their time either criticising a policy or having to defend it.

This is where being an outsider puts Mr Alexander in an advantageous position. He can self-righteously criticise both parties while not having any political track record to defend. That being said, some of his proposals do have merit, but as we've seen with past governments, the problem lies with implementation.

It would be naive of Mr Alexander to think that all he needs to fix T&T is the will and a few good ideas. And that's something voters need to take into account before throwing their support behind the PEP or any other third party.

As with the wave of political populism that has swept the United States and Europe, fiery rhetoric, grandiose promises and the blame game are all effective tools when it comes to getting elected.

We've had our hopes crushed too many times by phoney leadership

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and the last thing we need—especially now—is more of the same from someone different.

Much like the Macedonian conquest of Persia by the famed father-son duo, solving the multitude of problems facing T&T will neither be a quick nor easy undertaking.

The move forward is going to be wrought with stiff resistance, pushing against archaic systems that are steeped in corruption and inefficiency.

Thus far, the PNM and UNC seem disinterested in fighting the necessary battles, legislative or otherwise, for the sake of a better country.

The PEP might have very little presence on the political landscape, but if it does become a force to be reckoned with, we can only hope that Phillip Edward Alexander turns out to be a leader worthy of his namesakes.