

ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL JOHN CUMBERBATCH MEMORIAL LECTURE.**“Caribbean Teachers: Pillars of Caribbean Unity”**

by

**Robert L. Morris, C.H.B., G.C.M, Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2011.**

I am deeply honoured at this invitation to address such an august assembly on such a stellar occasion and on such a topic, which for a number of reasons , one of which will be revealed in the fullness of times, is fitting and appropriate for me to share my thoughts with you on matters which are dear to us all. I therefore thank those who have provided me with the opportunity to engage in this discourse.

At the outset, I wish to express my public acknowledgement and appreciation of the role which Carl Springer, as President of Division 4 of the then Civil Service Association, the late John Cumberbatch, as Secretary, and stalwarts such as Marjorie Marshall, Harriett Jones, Alfred Trotman, Alfred Nurse, Orrie Marshall, Errington Massiah, and George Gibson played in welcoming me to the Executive of the body, when I was elected as a young man of twenty two years, to represent the Erdiston Student Body. I remained active with the Union which I had joined on the commencement of my duties as a teacher in 1965, throughout the period when it became an autonomous trade union in 1974, and switched my representation to WIGUT when I was engaged as a Tutor by the UWI, after graduation therefrom in 1974. During the years 1969 to 1974, John Cumberbatch, Carl Springer and O’Brien Trotman taught me trade union basics, introduced me to the mind numbing grind of trade union representation through many work filled and sleepless nights where intellectual discussions seasoned with good humour sharpened my debating skills. Darkening my palms with the ink of an aged gestetner machine taught me to appreciate the colour black and how difficult it is to erase it. Expositions on the radical/progressive agenda introduced me to my lack of appreciation for dogma as an alternative to Ideology, and the occasional libation induced an aversion to any product that would serve to dull the mental faculties. Those years exposed me to the tender mentorship of ladies like Marjorie and Harriett, who reinforced my appreciation of the fact that while the labour movement has generally been interpreted from a male perspective, the role of the female has been insufficiently represented. Finally, the tumultuous years of the late 70’s and the early 80’s were impactful years for us baby boomers. Persons of my generation were in the grips of a strong sense of Nationalism, as we took ownership of our new found Independence. In time we had to distinguish between Nationalism as an Identity against Nationalism as an Ideology. We started the Barbados Writers’ Workshop and worked with the Barbados Dance Theatre to transform our cultural Identity. I was fortunate to co-write **‘Unchained’** with my lifelong friend Anthony Hinkson, and to play a dramatic role in our first play presented at

CARIFESTA. While I never became fanatical about black power, Rastafarianism, Pan-Africanism or the closed politics of scientific socialism, I was a frequent writer for the radical newspaper '**Manjac**', with Trevor Marshall and others, lectured at **Yoruba** for Elombe Mottley and wrote for his publications, and was a part of a radical agenda for bringing change to my country through purposive non-violent, committed activism, and as I matured, it became clear to me that the labour movement would be the appropriate channel for my aspirations.

At the same time the formation of CARICOM in 1974, mainly through the leadership of the late Rt. Excellent Errol Walton Barrow was a giant inspiration to action for those like myself who had attended Erdiston when the student body was still West Indian rather than Barbadian, and who at Cave Hill, rubbed shoulders with the brightest and the best, was taught by the brightest and the best, and who imbibed the writings and research of the brightest and the best in the Caribbean. My life as a trade unionist has caused me to live a Caribbean rather than a Barbadian national reality. My eternal thanks are pledged to John Cumberbatch and the Comrades of 1969 to 1974 for helping to shape how I think and who I am.

As early as 1935 the first Conference of the Caribbean Union of Teachers called for the development of a West Indian based Education system. Over the years this challenge has been met with some success. Quality education is generally accessible throughout the Region and we can boast of innovations such as The Caribbean Examinations Council, The West Indian Science Innovation Project and the West Indian Science Curriculum among other things.

Persons of my generation are likely to respect the Seminal "Time For Action: The Report of the West Indian Commission", which was published with the Chairman's Preface dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1992, as the New Testament of Caribbean unity. Next year marks twenty years of the existence of this report, which was produced in the crisis years of the early 1990's, and it would be useful if the members and associate members of CARICOM could agree to pursue a follow up of the Report. I take the opportunity to congratulate Sir Shridath Ramphal, the Chairman of the Report on his latest honour from the University of the West Indies which he has served with distinction. That report can be considered the blueprint for Caribbean Unity, the Architectural plan for the future Caribbean, and it is instructive to refer to a brief quotation, at page 27 of that document which speaks to: "**Education-youth: the twin pillars of a nation in the building.**" Recognising the role of the teacher in preparing the youth, it is evident that the eminent compilers of the report placed the responsibility for building the Caribbean Nation squarely on the shoulders of the Teachers of the Nation. I am not aware whether the very apt theme for this lecture derived from this quotation, but the coincidence is amazing.

This should hardly be surprising as twelve of the fifteen wise persons who served on the commission under the patronage of the late Excellent Dame Nita Barrow, including the Chairman, **Sir Shridath Ramphal** and his Deputy Chair, **Sir Alister McIntyre**, were themselves

eminent teachers. I recall for you, and to impress their names where they should be, in the forefront of your memories, the contributions of **Leonard Archer, Howard Fergus, Marshall Hall, Allan Kirton, Vaughan Lewis, Sandra Mason, Rex Nettleford, Roderick Rainsford, Frank Rampersaud** and **Neville Trotz**, as the dozen teachers who were the pillars of this seminal report. I have not burdened the presentation with the titles held then or now by the illustrious wise persons, and I recognise with a sense of loss that some have exited the worldly stage.

Allow me to refer to two quotations from the document to contextualise my discourse. The first is: ***“Nothing has come through clearer in our consultations, and we believe nothing will be more clearly reflected in this report, than the vital need to improve educational infrastructure in the region and multiply many times over the educational and training opportunities for all West Indians”, and the second is: “the future belongs much more certainly to the land which possesses an educated, well-trained, entrepreneurially-minded population. That is the true, modern equivalent to the wealth of the Indies, and it is a treasure, moreover, which we more than anyone can exploit.”***

The provision of educational infrastructure is left to those who control the purse strings in our nations and to the policy makers but the role of teachers in advising on the infrastructure and for lobbying in relation to decisions about the infrastructure is of seminal importance. Who will determine how much money is spent on tertiary educational infrastructure, and whether that money will be spent on the preparation of lawyers, doctors, scientists, entrepreneurs, inventors or rather on legal assistants, paramedicals and biotechnicians, computer assisted designers, small business persons, agriculturalists, technicians and technologists? Who will determine rather that greater sums should be spent on expanding early childhood education making provision for access to a plethora of para-educational professionals to pilot our youth in mastering literacy, numeracy, operacy, foreign language capacities, values, and interpersonal skills at arguably the most important formative stage of our development? Who will continue to call for and ensure by the power of lobbying and persuasion that many of those who end up at Dodds, in the criminal underworld, or dead, may , through early detection by teachers, counsellors, educational psychologists and social workers, be channelled into schools of special design and adaptation, staffed by teachers with the appropriate expertise, commitment, compassion and with an empowering pay package save our countries and our region from deteriorating further into being stigmatised as crime capitals of the world. Or are we perhaps more satisfied to spend the nation’s resources on majestic courts of law and prisons, on police forces and on armies which are geared more to protect us from domestic rather than external threats to our sovereignty?

The quotation made above alluded to the fact that early European explorers were guided by the myth of the existence of a plenitude of gold and other mineral resources, the famed “El

Dorado” in the Caribbean. The economic history of our region, and even our current experiences tell us that while Guyana’s gold, bauxite and other resources are helping it to sustain growth at this time of recession and depression, mistakes made about how the human resources should be developed, especially in relation to ideological and values orientations, as well as to the management of conflict and differences, have posed a huge burden to a country which should be a net importer of human resources, but is instead shedding a load of disengaged citizens to other countries, not in a programme of managed migration but in what appears more to be migration of escapism.

The real wealth of the modern West Indian Nation is to be found in the way how we prepare our youth to relate to the phenomenon of Globalisation. An intellectual tradition has developed in our countries rooted in an anti- slavery, anti-imperialism, anti-colonial ethos, which has an inexorable bias in conditioning us as confronting the world from the perspective of the victim, the underdog, the warrior, the struggler, the people on the periphery, the ones who have been hewers of wood and drawers of water. The planters, the merchants, the administrators have been seen as our natural enemies. As our societies unfolded educational opportunities through church based institutions, we were allowed to infiltrate the lower rounds of the public establishment as pupil teachers and then gradually as trained and then graduate and now a complex network of officialdom has been created in the education arena. Our **General Orders** and our **Public Service Act** make it mandatory for public servants to seek permission to have a second job, primarily to prevent conflict of interest and using the employers’ time and resources for personal gain. It appears to me that only a very limited number of teachers, over time have shown that their tremendous skills and expertise can be put to entrepreneurial advantage. Has teaching been mainly a safe job with a guaranteed pension with gratuity at an end, a position bringing some respect and status in the society, but no commensurate obligation to be innovators, wealth creators and mentors of possible young businessmen? Have the Indians, Chinese, Syrians and others come to our countries with the same mindsets?

As we continue the debate on the development of a Caribbean Civilisation, hopefully we will not be caught up in an ethos that is negative to engagement with capitalism, to entrepreneurship and to wealth creation? Hopefully we will not be misguided into believing that we can address the needs of the poor and those outside of the mainstream without using our collective and individual wisdom to create wealth before we can distribute it. Hopefully we will not believe that we should favour any one stream in our historical development over the other, but accept the fact that our potential exists greatest in the syncretism and creolisation which is fundamental to our basic identity and existence which must be marketed as a powerful brand in the world. Hopefully, while we will be wary of the possible pitfalls of globalisation, we will embrace the opportunities which globalisation can bring to those who rise to the challenge.

The refrains we hear about the race to the bottom, the greater expansion of wealth to the few, the greater number of persons who live below a poverty line, the rising power of the transnationals can be used as drum beats to muster forces against the system or as a call to arms to seek areas of competitive advantage, to develop the appropriate mindsets that must accompany success, to shrug off expectations of sympathy, and to depend more on self reliance. Access to paradigm appropriate education and training can make our region one of the most successful in the world and can give expression to Professor Schumacher's observation that small can be beautiful in economic terms. The call goes out to teachers that the wealth of the Indies lies in the education, skills and entrepreneurship of our human resources and that the teachers are our Alchemists and Midases.

Allow me further to quote from two other Caribbean visionaries, both departed but not lost to us as they have left words and ideas as guides . **Rex Nettleford** has advised us: ***"The collective wisdom and intellect of our people are yet to be tapped and given central place in the development strategy of our nation...we forget that we have a life and history of our own to be examined, dealt with and used as a source of energy for the development of this nation/region and the shaping of a civilised society,; and the late Rt. Excellent Errol Walton Barrow has opined, "I believe we have been failing in finding a way of using the 'collective wisdom' of our people. We have not been able to communicate the essence and the cultural infrastructure of the regional integration movement. We have not been able to get people's minds to move beyond the constraints of trade."***

In turning to address the core of my presentation, tonight I acknowledge the tremendous role teachers have played both in the pre-Independence, Colonial period and in the current period in contributing to the concept of a West Indian sense of Nationhood and to increasing the store of wealth in this region through their main roles as educators. In the colonial period several of our eminent educators, in addition to the sterling role of providing the young with the requisite knowledge, skill and attitudes to build their individual countries, went further afield in the Caribbean and lent generously of their talents not only in teaching but in other areas of leadership. The Reverend Reginald Barrow, a Codringtonian and sometime Headmaster of the Alleyne School, started the trade union movement in the Virgin Islands! Regional teaching institutions like the Mico in Jamaica, and the Rawle, later renamed Erdiston, the University of the West Indies and its various Extra-Mural offices have provided avenues and opportunities for members of the teaching fraternity at all levels to contribute to the concept of nation building. It is also opportune to mention that the Caribbean Union of Teachers and its affiliated members have played a significant role in building the Caribbean Nation, and that the Union presented an important submission to the West Indian Commission.

We can accept that the three major foundation stones of Caribbean Nationalism at this time are; ECONOMIC INTEGRATION; FOREIGN POLICY COORDINATION, and FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION. The Roof of the Structure is an OVERARCHING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE, which is very much a work in progress. THE TEACHERS AND THEIR WARDS: THE YOUTH are given the mandate to create the various rooms that will lead to the finished building of a Caribbean Nation.

One of the most onerous tasks facing teachers in their role of building the Caribbean Nation is that of forming mindsets away from insularity and xenophobia. In some areas of the Caribbean the garrison mentality derived from a special kind of parochialism hinders the creation of a nation state, and while heterogeneity is not unwelcome nor is homogeneity a necessary guarantor of national success, there is need to reduce the chasms and ruptures which exist at the National level and prevents a full expression of Nationhood. The role of teachers in building national harmony and in removing or at least reducing the existing points of separation is important. So also is their role in helping to ward off the infiltration of the worse influences of cultural, attitudinal and values degradation and in developing critical thinking faculties to contend with the powerful and pervasive influences of the social media, the entertainment goliath and the marketing behemoth. The major deterrent to females exposing what should be private assets, men exposing their underwear and bearing their genitalia to public view, wukking up with accompanying sexually explicit gyrations and body touching, creating a host of poor lyrics most of them based on smutty puns some of which help their creators to win coveted crowns, is an educated and values driven public that will settle for nothing less than excellence. Why have we allowed the excellence of Bob Marley to be bastardised by successor performers and cultural entrepreneurs? Has the teacher as critic, the teacher as standards setter been sufficiently alert and at work? While we are asking teachers to help create nations with appropriate standards and identities, another question arises.

Has the tremendous outpouring of energy towards the creation of small Independent nations between the 1940's and the present now become the single most obstructive stumbling block to a Caribbean Nation? Each year as we reach Independence Day in our several countries we laud our individual national heroes, boast about our insular achievements, and we do not set aside a day in our regional calendar when we celebrate Caribbean day. It is my contention that there is nothing inherently difficult in maintaining national sovereignty, as is the case of the E.U., while building a vibrant supra-nationality. However I am of the view that structured and purposive education is the best deterrent to discriminatory and insular behaviour. There has been a persistent claim that Caribbean politicians and public officials have been stumbling blocks to the free movement of people in the Caribbean. I am of the view that a few salacious incidents, the noises from a particular country, the strident pronouncement of a few have sometimes outweighed the more balanced response of others in relation to this matter.

Where are the town hall meetings on regional migration allowing discourse on the current work permit regime as against the mooted movement of people with special skills? That allows for national and regional discourse on the issue of accreditation? That allows for expressions about the Social Dimensions of labour? That allows for a discussion of how public servants should facilitate the free movement of people within the legal and policy frameworks that exist. I suggest that the Teaching fraternity has multiple reasons why they should play a pivotal role in driving action on this issue which calls for using the collective wisdom and intellect possessed by them in helping to chart a way forward in developing a development strategy in this area. Teachers are critical beneficiaries of the right to freedom of movement; they can benefit from accreditation; they have a strong regional network; as professionals, they are trained in the discipline of psychology, a primary tool in managing change; they have a very important role in persuading the youth that their skills are critical in building a Caribbean nation and that they must be flexible in movement throughout their lives in search of careers and in building experience. Indeed the time is right for national and regional consultations on an issue that continues to rear its head and there is a clear feeling that it cannot be disposed of by meetings of Caribbean Heads of Governments. Most of the beneficiaries of the freedom of movement regime are those who are privileged to have university education among whom are many conscious teachers. Perhaps the teachers associations and trade unions across the region may be challenged to channel this major discourse which at the very heart of building a Caribbean Nation.

I throw out a challenge to teachers not to shirk away from the task of continuing to uplift women and to change the age old imbalances that have led to the treatment of women as secondary in our societies. I have interpreted the proliferation of discussions about the role of women in leadership positions in the educational system, in government, and in business with an underlying suggestion that such a development is bad for mankind, as being negative and malicious. While I agree that there is need for more males in the system for the purpose of balance I am convinced that women are earning their places on merit, hard work and dedication. They certainly cannot depend on any old girls network nationally or regionally.

I have this one issue about the role of women in Caribbean education and it relates to their tendency to resort to corporal punishment, both in the homes and in the schools as we know from studies sponsored by UNESCO. I cannot vouch for those who make claims that receiving corrections by flogging from women made them better men or women. I have just read two powerful statements, one a semi-biography on the life of the late Lawrence C. Didier of Dominica, teacher, farmer, community activist and politician. He was an avid and expert flogger, reserving more lashes for the author and his siblings than for others. He writes of a public flogging before the entire school for one of the siblings who defied an instruction from his father. He also wrote of students and parents taking revenge on the gardens and livestock

of the renowned Headmaster in retaliation for his floggings. In “The Making of the Comrade” Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves described the type of floggings usually given by a Barbadian Headmaster of his local Secondary Grammar school which left him with a disdain for corporal punishment. I know of many of my secondary school colleagues who still carry the psychological wounds of such violation of their bodies. I am heartened by the way how such punishment has been limited by legal fiat and hope that more enlightened approaches to the use of psychology to affect behavioural change will be the way we approach instilling discipline in our schools.

Let me remind you of those women who wear the coveted fifteen carat gold pin of the Caribbean Community: Nesta Patrick of Trinidad and Tobago, the late Excellent Dame Nita Barrow, Dr. Peggy Antrobus, a national of Grenada, Citizen of St. Vincent and a denizen of Barbados for many years, Magda Pollard of Guyana, Dr. Lucille Mair of Jamaica, Professor Joycelin Massiah, national of Guyana and citizen of Barbados, and Professor Rhoda Reddock, national of Trinidad and Tobago. Let me applaud the recent book launched by Cynthia Barrow - Giles who has made a name for herself as a teacher of politics at the University level and the continuing works of Vice- Principal Eudeen Barriteau both of whom are making vital contributions to the building of our Caribbean nation state.

I recognise that a call has recently been made for Barbados to host Carifesta once again. The festival has been hosted by Barbados in 1981, by Trinidad and Tobago in 1992 and 1995, by Guyana in 1972, by Jamaica in 1976, by Cuba in 1979, by St. Kitts and Nevis in 2000 and by Suriname in 2003. There is a view that the time has come for this important Caribbean Nation festival to be mounted again and the voice of Teachers should not be silent on the matter.

I end by alluding to what Caricom sees as the major challenges to the Caribbean workforce and the challenges for teachers:

- Mastery and appropriate use of new technologies;
- The ability to discover and manage knowledge growth;
- Developing the ability to speak more than one language;
- Provision of life long, continuous learning;
- Developing an entrepreneurial and innovative culture;
- Upgrading technical, professional and managerial competence in the private and public sectors;
- Fostering new partnerships with non- governmental and other community institutions;

This agenda is recommended to the Pillars of our Caribbean Nation.