

ADDRESS

BY

THE MOST HON. P. J. PATTERSON, ON, OCC, PC, QC

***"REGIONAL RELEVANCE:
INTERNATIONAL CREDIBILITY"***

AT

LAUNCH OF BOOK

***"HISTORY OF CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL -
CXC"***

JAMAICA PEGASUS HOTEL

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2014

6.00 P.M.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND SALUTATIONS:

Vice Chancellor, Dr. Nigel Harris

The Hon. Rev. Ronald Thwaites
Minister of Education

Professor Emeritus Patrick Bryan
(Author)

Dr. Didacus Jules

Distinguished Guests

Delighted to have been invited to deliver the Feature Address at Book Launch to celebrate 40th Anniversary of Caribbean Examination Council.

- Lured out of pavilion to settle a special institutional obligation – not at liberty to publicly disclose.
- There is also a congruence of circumstances and events which induced me to accept this remarkable honour as

the Region badly needs at this time voices which will champion the integration agenda.

Let me begin by congratulating those who had the foresight and the tenacity to commission this history of the Caribbean Examination Council as a narrative of the struggle for scholastic emancipation and to refute thereby any notion that we are incapable of creating in the region something which is superior to anything which is imposed or imported from abroad.

Let me next proceed to warmly commend the Author – Professor Emeritus Patrick Bryan - for a brilliant work of scholarship which is well researched; is replete with incisive analyses; which pinpoints the roadblocks encountered along the journey and yet manages to illumine the course ahead.

FEAR AND TREMBLING

In the usual order of things, the examination or judgement comes at the very end and is countenanced by most of those who face it with fear and trembling. They worry about their shortcomings, frantically attempt to fill gaps of knowledge that in their indolence, which is now causing shame and severe stomach pains, had become yawning holes in the course of study.

Meanwhile, those who judge are the calm and measured ones, possessing if not omnipotence, something akin to it, especially in comparison to those being examined. My own experience in the field places me much more firmly with the examined than with the examiner.

EMPHASIS ON THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SYSTEM

In days of long ago, the curriculum at the elementary level stressed reading, writing and arithmetic. There was no systematic provision for a student to continue learning in any of these areas upon leaving elementary school and the vast majority of students were therefore left to fend for themselves.

Far more deplorable, much of what we were taught was self-demeaning and repulsive. On Empire Day, we were expected to sing - Rule Britannia – “Britons never, never shall be slaves.”

Barely moving beyond foreign nursery rhymes, fittingly lampooned in Sparrow’s “Dan is the Man In The Van”, the lessons at Infant School shaped how we saw ourselves in

the several stages of growing up and even how we judged
the beauty of the fairer sex –

As the Barbadian Poet, H. A. Vaughan reveals:

*Turn sideways now and let them see
What loveliness escapes the schools,
Then turn again, and smile, and be
The perfect answer to those fools
Who always pirate of Greece and Rome
"The face that launched a thousand ships"
And such like things, but keep tight hips
For burnished beauty nearer home.*

ADVENT OF HIGH SCHOOLS – INVOLVEMENT OF TRUSTS AND RELIGIOUS BODIES

Places in high school were scarce and expensive and only a few scholarship places were available. Our Headmaster would remind us of the great sacrifices made by our parents. In fact, only 1.5% of Jamaican children had the privilege of going to high school. This percentage was particularly low in Jamaica. As Professor Errol Miller tells us, the percentage of high-school attendees was considerably higher in the French Caribbean colonies.

Were we still being punished for the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 or for Boukman's obstinate unruliness, in his learning to read and write, and daring to teach fellow slaves those arts that were absolutely prohibited to them?

Our high schools were “overseas extensions of British Grammar School models and therefore mirrored the anglophile outlook.”

The system “had little reference to our social surroundings”
– *Reginald Murray.*

There was little concern or inquiry into what would stimulate our interest in learning.

The British did not really want to know us, or far worse, allow us to know ourselves.

They largely disregarded our aspirations, ambitions and interests. Their design of our education to age 15 implied that we were essentially being prepared for work in the menial services at imposed wages which would cause no strain to the plantocracy and for the chosen few to sign off in the Civil Service as “your obedient servant.”

The regime was designed -

- to perpetuate division based on class, thus disguising as privilege what was in fact a process of alienation.

N.W. Manley – "was critical of the emphasis on the teaching of British and Imperial history – leaving us in ignorance of our own history."

The British orientation of the curriculum did not entail access to the cultures of our region. The literature of Latin America was out of bounds for us. Instead, we were compelled to read, along with valuable excerpts from *Don Quijote*, obscure regional Spanish peninsular novels. The same restrictions were applied to the subjects of French and Literature.

Dr. Eric Williams – "deplored the exclusive concentration on a middle class education in the Caribbean which overlooked the human resource of the region."

THE INHERENT CONFLICT

As the wave of nationalism spread throughout the Caribbean, following the previous labour unrest and social upheaval which sparked the Moyne Commission, the sixth forms became a locus of political engagement where tense verbal battles were waged between students and teachers. A new level of scrutiny developed with regard to the textbooks and their orientation.

The ideological tension that developed particularly in history and literature, and whose polemics enlivened some classes, ultimately presented a quandary for the students, as the examinations were set and marked by distant people in Cambridge.

THE REGIONAL IDENTITY

John Figueroa – "Inherent contradiction in transferring political responsibility to the Caribbean and leaving examination policies to overseas institutions."

"should be an index of Caribbean naturalness, pride, self-image, dignity and independence."

The Book reveals the long and complex negotiations, conducted after the hurricane force winds which destroyed the Federation and eventually resulted in the signing of a

N.B. SUPPLEMENTARY AGREEMENT

10TH APRIL, 1972

At the birth of this new creature -

Willie Demas Secretary General of CARICOM described it as - "Part of a conscious effort by regional Governments to restructure, redirect and re-model the school systems of the Caribbean with a view to relating them to the environment, the problems and needs of our society."

In this Publication -

Prof. Woodville Marshall – *one of our finest historians and sharpest minds, draws parallel features between UWI and the CXC -*

- (i)*** *"domestication of the idea of the University."*
- (ii)*** *A continuous, self, conscious search for relevance and education."*

These two features encapsulate the history of the CXC.

The big difference – *he states*

"UWI was a British initiative.

CXC is indigenous to the region – the product of a Caribbean vision and initiative."

METHODS OF TESTING

Leading educators over the ages and worldwide have differed sharply on the fairest and most efficacious methods of measuring the aptitude and skills of each student.

It is therefore no surprise that the CXC has been forced to grapple with this conundrum during its existence and been forced to use a variety of methods to judge measures of proficiency.

The most frequently deployed systems that cater to memory do not meet the needs of societies in a highly competitive and innovative era. The most successful individuals are often not those who have by the standards of current examinations been adjudged to be at the top of their classes.

Examinations are too often pitched to assess the recall of content and much less so for the full appreciation and the creative application and innovative use of this content.

As content rapidly expands from the results of scientific research, learning has become inordinately onerous, as students spend extended periods trying to memorize mountains of facts and information.

The inordinate emphasis on memory across a variety of fields and the explosion of data, discourage a majority of students from studying the sciences because they find the material boring and irrelevant. This has caused an alarming growth of scientific illiteracy which is crucial for ordinary existence in a scientifically driven age. That yields a serious shortfall of the advanced skills to ensure innovation and global competitiveness.

The celebrations of memory are not confined to the classroom and examinations, but also are to be found in the wider society. Students whose recall is exemplary are lauded and awarded in popular TV competitions. Here the memory marathon is taken to almost ridiculous heights, as contestants are often shown faces to measure instant recall. Many of these have little connection to local culture and are mere concoctions of the market.

To promote the type of education that should be undertaken for contemporary society, it is suggested that examination questions be designed to determine abilities to understand and use information in practical situations, to collate facts across disciplines, to find appropriate answers to real life problems, and reinterpret old questions in light of new facts.

In the light of the conflicting views on the best forms of testing, the introduction of School-Based Assessment is welcome – Affords

“(i) flexibility of Teachers to choice of assessment methods

(ii) Students subject to continuous diagnosis

(iii) Credit for class work assignment.”

EDUCATION FOR ALL

I presided at the Montego Bay Summit in 1997 which considered the Report from the Minister of Education.

"CARICOM – Committee to Universal Secondary Education by 2005."

We recognized the need to modernize and restructure our education at all levels.

W.I. Commission Report 1992 – "Students entered Secondary Schools without having mastered the numerical and cognitive skills needed for employment in the modern sector of the economy."

The Book fully accepts –

"National economic interests generate a demand for national competency-based examinations and the demands of the labour market."

The Author posits the question – “*What is the relevance of education and certificates as solutions to the formidable economics and social crises?*”

VISION 2030

Our National VISION STATEMENT, JAMAICA 2030 reflects that to achieve their fullest potential, the emphasis must be on equipping school leavers to “access further education, training and/or work –

Creating and implementing a standards-driven and outcomes-based education system.”

In putting the issue of human resource development at the top of our growth and social agenda, I have repeatedly asserted that the centrality of knowledge and information is at the core of our present reality.

Mine has by no means been the only voice crying for the building of a knowledge economy, fueled by the wealth and depth of our creative talents.

Last year, P.M. Mitchell – Grenada – *"linked the labour market demand for an increased number of well-trained and qualified workers in a knowledge based economy with prospects for foreign direct investment in the Caribbean."*

To provide this, we must be prepared to examine every link in the educational chain.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN

SPORTS is no longer a past time.

It is big business - not one bit less of a profession than law, medicine, engineering, religion or teaching – certainly for those who excel, far more lucrative.

How is our education system to cultivate these skills and promote those talents? It has to be sufficiently flexible to afford due recognition of our students, who are extraordinarily talented in the field of Sports, in Culture and the Arts, so that we do not certificate them purely on the basis of their academic and industrial skills.

Why is it legitimate for students to prefer schools which excel in their area of choice – language, science, mathematics – and illicit for pupils to be attracted to those educational institutions which permit their sporting prowess to show and grow in preparation for the international fields of competition?

In the fields of art and culture – music and painting have long established their rightful places in our examination system - but what about those students who aspire to play the steel pan, or write lyrics for calypso, reggae or dancehall?

How do we promote the skills for those who want to engage in the animation industry – an area of particular appeal to our young men?

What about those who must design and supply indigenous craft for our tourists and the export market?

I raise these questions, purely by way of example, to indicate issues and subjects which our school curricula can no longer ignore and for which our examinations need to cater.

The answers, when found, will compel the Caribbean Examinations Council to look at its existing courses in order to package them better for the spread of the knowledge economy and thereby contribute to the building of our creative and cultural industries as prime assets of the Caribbean.

There are other central ingredients which our education system, and hence the mode of examination cannot overlook.

Time allows me to mention only four and briefly so –

- (i) Science and Technology must be deployed to enhance areas of the Creative Industry. Indeed, our competitive advantage will depend on the levels of scientific innovation.

- (ii) We must engender entrepreneurial skills and realize that many of the jobs to be created will be spawned by individuals and small/medium size enterprises.

- (iii) We must promote a fuller understanding of our environment – climate change, natural disasters, epidemics (however generated), the use of our medicinal plants.

- (iv) There are moral and spiritual values which need to underpin the foundations of every society. Now more than ever – with the horrendous social crises which confront the entire Caribbean on every front, education has to be at the forefront.

The culture and creativity, which our education must seek to foster, are critical tools for enhancing values and attitudes, expanding minds and the frontiers of knowledge, promoting respect and tolerance throughout the social order.

INCLUSIVITY

While we have all identified the inherent contradictions in the colonial system of education and sought to rectify past abuses, let us not deny that it has produced highly qualified and indeed outstanding achievers in a wide variety of fields.

We have unearthed scholars, writers, economists, public servants, engineers, who have reached the pinnacle of their professions.

Let us not fall into the trap of believing that ascribing the term “post colonial” to the changes we have effected in our education system will automatically ensure that they accord with our contemporary needs.

We should not accept any soothing palliative which disguises the plain and simple truth – education is the key to establishing our economic sovereignty, as well as the door to social mobility. It cannot be confined to a chosen few in our efforts to build our democracy and an egalitarian society.

To make our system of education more open and accessible, those who examine must be alert to and insist on pointing out gaps, so that we may build a system of education that fills the future needs and achieves the lofty targets which we promise to our electorates and thereby is inclusive in the search to secure social justice for our people.

A BEACON

The visionaries who founded the CXC in 1973 were influenced at the idealistic level by the Caribbean Integration Movement, but the very failure of The West Indies Federation served as a warning that regional differences had the potential to abort fruitful Caribbean Cooperation.

The CXC at 40 has attained the equivalent of a double century. It has done so by –

“ensuring democratic representation on the Council and providing consultative mechanisms to cope with the challenges of geographical fragmentation, differing political (and sometimes ideological) systems, varied

national interests, different levels of economic and educational development, as well as demographic and ethnic distinction.”

“In an era of declining, enthusiasm for regional integration, the Caribbean base is vulnerable.”

It is entitled to our highest accolades and deserves our rousing applause.

I am supremely confident that with the “New Vision” to which Dr. Jules referred, the CXC will “successfully navigate the waters through the resurgent crosswinds of national and regional interests.”

Four decades ago, the political and intellectual leadership of the Caribbean embarked on building a new framework of functional cooperation as a fundamental pillar of the integration movement. Despite the destructive winds and the turbulent waters, the Caribbean Examinations Council has managed to chart a safe course and traversed that

passage as it proceeds towards a destination which will provide for the upliftment of our people and the enrichment of our civilization.