

WHEN '10' MAY HAVE BEEN AN ODD NUMBER:

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE WEST INDIES

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of The West Indies Federation

'ROUGH HANDLING FEDERATION'

***THE PROJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES AND POLITICAL
ARRANGEMENTS.***

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The Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination

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Greetings:

This Lecture Series commemorates an anniversary; it is not inappropriate, therefore, that I begin with a reminiscence that is both personal and apposite. Fifty-eight years ago, in 1950 (I was 22), I had to decide the subject of my LLM dissertation. I chose "Constitutional aspects of Federalism in the British West Indies". Why? It was two years after the Montego Bay Conference and Norman Manley was in London. He came and talked to the London University Students Union at the LSE about 'Federation'. I was totally captivated by his passion and his eloquence and that began my federal journey - which has not ended. I knew that day what the subject of my dissertation had to be; and that decision has shaped my life.

Many years later in Jamaica when I was briefly at the bar and Norman Manley, now retired from politics, had his Chambers nearby in Duke Street I reminded him of that lunchtime address and told him how it had affected my life. He was pleased; he was still a West Indian regionalist and sad about the outturn of the referendum and the dreams it shattered - including mine. Years later still, I was moved by his grand-daughter's tender reminiscence of her encounter with him at 'Drumblair' hours after the results of the referendum had come in. " Did we win, Pade? ", the little girl asked. "No Pie; we didn't win; everybody lost ". And in this at least he was right; everybody did lose, including generations of West Indians not yet born, like many of you here tonight.

It is 50 years since the Federation was born; since The West Indies became, all too briefly, more than a geographic expression. However flawed the process by which we got there, however imperfect the consummation, however brief the period of promise, that moment of creation in 1958 was one of the worthiest in the history of the Caribbean region. All those who have come together to make possible this series of Lectures to commemorate that moment - deserve our gratitude: the University, the Federal Archives Centre at Cave Hill, the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, and the Barbados Government through the Division of Culture.

Your collective enlightenment in ensuring reflection on this defining moment in West Indian history recalls T.S.Elliot's verse:

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.*

The organizers chose as the theme of the series 'When '10' may have been an odd number'. I am not sure exactly what they meant; but I want to take advantage of what I suspect is their deliberate ambiguity to make a point of my own - which is that 10 should have been 11 from the outset. Had it been so, we may not have come to a moment of surreal subtraction, but even if we did, 1 from 11 would surely have left 1. I refer of course to the country of my birth which chose to stand aside from the regional effort -- the regional struggle - to achieve unity through Federation, and to do so in a strange congruence between an elitist old guard who talked of 'a continental destiny' as an excuse for preserving the status quo, and the revolutionary *avant gard* who, making the best the enemy of the good, also preserved the status quo. British Guiana needed the Federation and the need was mutual. 'BG' played an early role in the Caribbean Labour Congress and through individuals like Nathaniel Critchlow and Ayub Edun, but throughout the federal negotiations British Guiana was an observer - and I was an adviser to that observer - an adviser, as it turned out, to the process itself, thanks to my early work in comparative federalism that Norman Manley had inspired all those many years ago.

So I was a player of varying sorts from the outset; I don't suppose there are so many of us left. I was an Assistant Legal Draftsman when the Federation started 50 years ago and we were housed in the 'stables' at the back of 'Whitehall' - and happily so. Later when the decision was taken to proceed to Independence and the upper levels of the public service were indigenized I became Assistant Attorney General to Jamaica's Harvey DaCosta.

The London Conference of 31 May 1961 had contemplated 31 May 1962 as the date for the independence of the Federation. Well before we got there, Jamaica's referendum and Trinidad's mathematics had ensured that we never would. I will come back to this, but for the time being let me note that the day the Federation of The West Indies was to become independent as one nation, May 31, 1962 - was the very day on which the Federation was formally dissolved. We had come that close to West Indian nationhood.

.The Federal Government had shut down by then and the Governor General had gone. Only the street names of Federation Park remained ‘Ozamandias-like’ to tell of ‘paradise lost’. Sir Stephen Luke was appointed by the British Government Commissioner for the Dissolution of the Federation. The Federal public service was mostly retired or returned, and the caretakers came down to a handful, among them a lawyer to tidy up the wreckage. I became the Legal Adviser to the Commissioner for the Dissolution of the Federation - a son fulfilling the last duties of interment to a fallen father. Among those duties was determining with Sir Stephen Luke, what we knew Sir Grantley wished, that the Federal archives would be lodged with the University in Barbados. I have some continuity with Sharon Taitt and Cheri-Ann Beckles.

As the 20th century dawned Walwyn Shepherd, writing in the *Journal of Comparative Legislation* (in 1900) about the West Indies: said: ' the islands are separated by miles of sea and to a close and more territorial political union it may be said “*opposuit natura*”. Well past the middle of the century and with the experience of the Federal Project behind him Philip Sherlock wrote to this effect in *Foreign Affairs*:

“Division is the heritage of the Caribbean. The separateness of the islands in the Archipelago that curves for 1000 miles from the tip of Florida to the mouth of the Orinoco is reflected in the fact that they have no common name. Each island shares with the others the same startling beauty of sun drenched mountains and peacock seas; each has the same sort of configuration resulting from the same techniques of production, the intensive cultivation of one crop, and slavery. Yet the keynote is contrast the dominant theme competition.”[

In my last speech in the Caribbean before going to the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1975, a speech I called ‘To Care for Caricom’ I said this:

A consequence of relative success over the last 10 years is a readiness to believe that unity is our natural state - one which will subsist despite ourselves. It is a dangerous falsehood. The history of colonialism and the geography of a scattered archipelago denies it validity. The natural state of the of our Caribbean is fragmentation; without constant effort, without unrelenting perseverance and discipline in suppressing instincts born of tradition and environment, it is to our natural state of disunity that we shall return..

Yet there is another side that is unifying; and it, too, is part of our natural state and our heritage. It is the unmistakable, unchanging fact of a West Indian identity. We see it in what Pierre Labat described lyrically almost 300 years ago as the rhythm of our bodies; it attaches to us ineluctably when we leave our island cloisters - and Guyana and Belize in this respect are islands too; we know it as we face a world beyond that knows us as West Indians first – and sometimes only. We know in our minds that in an ultimate sense we need each other for survival on any tolerable basis. And we know it more and more as the world turns around us and changes our prospects. We know that our oneness must overcome our separateness.

It was this growing awareness, made more acute by frustrations at home, that led progressive elements in the 1940s and 50s who recognised the need for constitutional reform as a precondition of economic improvement to reach together to Federation. In the Lecture that initiated this series, by Prof Woodville Marshall, that linkage between political change at home and federalism in the wider regional home was well brought out. I merely want to emphasise it here in the context of unfolding of the Federal Project.

Neither the Wood Report of 1921 nor that of the Closer Union Commission of 1932 had resulted in any substantial satisfaction of the demands for constitutional reform; as a result, West Indian leaders of the new labour movements struggled in an atmosphere of political frustration. Major Wood (later, Lord Halifax,) had reported in 1921 on “the absence of a popular demand of local opinion for Federation”. He was not wrong; but by 1948 the situation was wholly changed. The concept of Federation on a regional basis had become an element of progressive thinking and demand. We have to recall just how cramping the colonialist structures – and strictures – were.

By 1930, in the wake of the Wood Report, elected members had been introduced into the Councils of Trinidad, the Windward Islands, and Dominica; in no case, however, was there a majority of non-officials, and in all cases elected members were in a minority. Jamaica had not received the proposed increase in elected members, and although she enjoyed an unofficial majority in the Legislative Council, had to be content with an elected minority. Meanwhile, British Guiana had lost her Dutch legislative institutions and with them the elected majority which had existed in the Combined Court. In 1935, British Honduras and in 1936 the Leeward islands adopted elected minorities.

These new vestments, however, were but the trappings of representative government; the franchise was restricted to a mere fraction of the population. As late as 1938, the registered electorate of Trinidad was 6.6% of the colony's population, and the corresponding figure for Barbados in the same year was 3.3%. Moreover, a wide gap yawned between the electoral qualification and that for membership of the Council. In Trinidad, in 1938, the income qualification for membership of the Legislative Council was six times as high as the income qualification for registration as a voter; in Barbados the multiple was four.

Inevitably, the call for political reform grew louder and more insistent throughout the thirties. The economic depression brought to maturity the growing working class movement and the demand for economic justice was unceasing. The initiative in political agitation passed to these hands and the call for constitutional change dominated the political scene.

Agitation was concentrated in the individual colonies; but, the practical advantages of cooperation had been recognised, and the system of inter-colonial conferences had established a basis of functional association. Gradually the idea began to take root that the path to political progress lay through a federal union. As a political entity, it was argued, the colonies, through a coordination of their economic and political strengths, would be in a position to establish their economic stability and demand their political independence. Economic prosperity and political freedom would be the twin products of Federation. Certainly, Dominion status for a federal union held a safer promise of attainment than self-government for the individual colonies. The idea possessed obvious attractions and it is noticeable that throughout these years whenever the need for social and political reform was advanced, the claims of federalism were never far behind

The West Indian Conference of 1932 was the first demonstration of the new movement. In that year the Closer Union Commission had been appointed; and when it was revealed that its terms of reference did not embrace either the possibility of a West Indian Federation or the problem of internal constitutional reform, a number of grassroots West Indian politicians gathered at Roseau in Dominica with the avowed purpose of elaborating proposals for federation. The Conference was attended by representatives from Barbados, Trinidad, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and the Leeward Islands. They decided that it was 'desirable in the general interest' of those colonies that Federation should be effected, and they proceeded to design a

federal structure and draft the first indigenous Federal Constitution for the West Indies. Let the flowing oratory of Captain Ciprani of Trinidad, as he brought the Dominica Conference to a close, reflect the fervour of those early West Indians:

“And now as I pull the curtain down on the final stages of this important and far-reaching meeting, and watch the West Indies take on her mantle of nationhood and dip behind the horizon like some threatening storm cloud only to rise again on the dawn of a new day, I look forward and see in letters of fire emblazoned: "the West Indies must be West Indian", and through the dark and grim grey dawn me thinks I hear a whisper saying: "West Indians awake - awake West Indians: Victory, Freedom and Liberty are yours”.

The ‘whispers’ must have been too soft. The West Indian National League was formed at Roseau to carry on the work of the Conference, but as an organisation it never played a real part in later developments. Nevertheless political leaders of all the colonies kept the hopes of the Conference alive and maintained a certain identity of purpose. As the Royal Commission of 1938 reported:

“... it is evident that throughout the British West Indies contact is being maintained between those in each colony who are most interested in securing rapid political progress, and constitutional developments, such as a widening of the franchise, in any area may be found to reinforce the strength of the movement for Federation of the whole group”.

Contact had indeed been maintained. Some time earlier the West Indies and British Guiana Labour Congress had been established and in 1938 a Conference of the Congress attended by representatives from Barbados, Trinidad and British Guiana was held in British Guiana with the object of preparing a memorandum for submission to the Commission. An extensive programme of social reform was agreed upon and a comprehensive scheme for federating all the British West Indian colonies was prepared. Such was the progress that Federation had made since 1921.

The Royal Commission became aware of the development at an early stage in their enquiry and accordingly they put to most of the witnesses who appeared before them in a representative political capacity the question whether they favoured the idea of the closer union of the West Indian colonies. They reported: “almost every witness thus questioned was in

favour of closer union, but few of them were able or prepared to define the degree or nature of Federation which they conceived desirable" On the basis of their general impression, however, they doubted whether the time was yet ripe for the introduction of any large scheme of Federation. Local pride, an active insularity, and the scepticism of well-informed opinion based on it, made them doubt the 'readiness of West Indian opinion to accept Federation in principle'.

Having advocated caution, the Commissioners were both more hopeful and more positive in their recommendations as to future developments. Their concluding remarks on the subject were important..;

“Nevertheless a combination into one political entity of all the British possessions in the Caribbean area is an ideal to which, in our opinion, policy should be directed. With that in view, an attempt should be made to overcome local prejudice against Federation, both by the exposition of its theoretical advantages and by testing these in practice, as soon as a suitable opportunity presents itself, through the amalgamation of some of the smaller units”.

A Windward - Leeward union was duly proposed in 1947 but there was opposition from Montserrat in the Leewards and Grenada in the Windwards. In any event, before the pilot scheme could go any further it was overtaken by the major enterprise itself.

The war years drew the West Indian colonies much closer together. United, in a common cause, they achieved a new identity of purpose and of action that went a long way towards destroying the psychological barriers which Major Wood in 1921 had found so obstructive to 'federating an archipelago.'. These developments give added vitality to the federal movement. The ramparts of separatism and prejudice had been breached; contact produced understanding; association revealed how unfounded were many fears. A West Indian consciousness had developed to the point where West Indian nationalism had been born. On the other side the inadequacies of ad hoc expedients born of necessity had been painfully demonstrated and a recognition of the need for federation now replaced in many minds an appreciation of the advantages of cooperation

But if the experience of the war years reinforced one aspect of the case for Federation it weakened it in another. Political frustration had enhanced the attractions of Federation. Now for the first time since the 1860s the West Indian colonies really began to advance politically. 'Representative' government, which was the goal of the twenties, was now firmly established.

‘Responsible’ government which even in the thirties must have appeared largely unattainable was by the fifties within the grasp of Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana. In all but Trinidad reform of the legislature was virtually complete: universal adult suffrage prevailed in all the colonies.

The reforms were long overdue and, having come at last, everything changed. Federation, in particular, which possessed an appeal as a possible alternative to improbable local self-government, began to be suspect for that very reason. Much emphasis, therefore, was laid in the post war period on the need for a guarantee that Federation would not in any way prejudice political advance in the individual colonies. It was a sentiment evident in many of the speeches at the Montego Bay Conference. The destiny of the West Indies was now moving into West Indian hands.

Montego Bay itself was preceded by a meeting of the Caribbean Labour Congress which was really a meeting of leading West Indian political parties (other than Bustamante’s Jamaica Labour Party which was in office in Jamaica) asserting, as it were, their right to be heard, and heard in support, at the very outset of the federal process. The names of those present tell their own story Grantley Adams, VC Bird, Robert Bradshaw, Hubert Critchlow, Albert Gomes, T.A.Marryshow, and Norman Manley himself among many others. ‘knitting together’ as Rex Nettleford put it, ‘the ideas of federation nationhood and self-government.’

The larger political gains of Federation still mattered. Manley, who led the Jamaica delegation, put the issue thus:

“I put first, and I put above all other things, the desire to see in the future a West Indian nation standing shoulder to shoulder with all other nations of the world. Is that a large ambition? I say it is the smallest ambition that responsible people can utter in the face of history. I say that we in the West Indies can prove one great thing to the world - and that is that a people none of whom are native to these territories, all of whom have for one reason or another been torn from their countries and brought here, partly willingly, partly by compulsion or distress in their own homelands, that we with our many strands, from Africa, from India, from China, from an assorted variety of European territories -- we are capable of welding the power of that diversity into a united nation”.

But he added - importantly:

“... if we federate, we must federate as self-governing units and voluntarily surrender some of the power which each has over his own to the common whole. I reject totally any sort of mismatch between colonial rule and Federation, and I would predict for such a marriage such an abortion as politics have never seen; and I say that a federated West Indies cannot aim at any smaller immediate objective than Dominion status. I cannot imagine what we should be federating about if it is not to achieve the beginning of nationhood.

Alexander Bustamante was later at the Montego Bay Conference to assert with characteristic bluntness:

“Before I shall even advise the people of this country that they should have Federation, I want to be told -- and not just by word -- I want documents to the effect that the same-day Federation comes the same-day self-government comes”.

The Secretary of State was quick to reassure the Montego Bay Conference on this latter point; but even so the Conference insisted on placing its position on record in terms of a resolution which recorded the view

“...that an increasing measure of responsibility should be extended to the several units of the British Caribbean territories whose political development must be pursued as an aim in itself without prejudice and in no way subordinate to progress towards Federation”.

The truth is that a race had begun which no one could have foreseen even ten years earlier between independence on an island basis and West Indian nationhood fulfilled through an independent West Indian Federation. It was a race Federation was to lose. For a time being, however, even at Montego Bay, there were few who imagined that independence was achievable at the level of the individual islands; and most of the Eastern Caribbean islands would be among them. For them, Federation was acquiring a justification of its own. Norman Manley could state the federal aspiration in terms wholly compatible with Jamaica's national political goals and he did so in words characteristically elegant and penetrating - words that were to inspire a generation: those words you know ‘How to create a larger field for ambition’; but there were fewer qualifications for the Eastern Caribbean – for Barbados, the Leewards and the Windwards, and even for Trinidad.

And Manley said something else on that occasion that was as pertinent to the Federal Project - and was fatal in its unfolding:

“The vested interest of ambition in power is the most dangerous of all the vested interests. It is in the history of every Federation that there have always been found men who were unwilling to give up any local rule of power for the creation of a larger centre of power itself, and I think we should warn ourselves of the danger and -- dare I say? -- that we should search our own breasts to discover if there lurks underneath the rationalisations that may be paraded for public consumption that malady which would be, and may yet prove to be, the greatest obstacle to our common ambitions” .

Gordon Lewis was to write in coruscating terms ten years later in *‘The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (p.372)

“It was the supreme irony of Mr Manley's public career that he himself after 1958 should have provided the leading example of that temper. For his decision not to enter federal politics not only brought him the loss, almost overnight, of the veneration and respect that he had enjoyed in all the West Indies, but drove him with relentless logic into a path of ultimate desertion of the federal idea. He was thereby trapped in a situation in which he became, in the style of high Greek tragedy, the author of his own misfortune ... The great federationist would fight the Napoleons of Notting Hill. But he would not fight the Confederate rebels of Jamaica.”

That may have been a harsh judgement; he did fight them in his way - his democratic way; but was he right to put at risk the fortunes of the entire region in his struggle to prevail within Jamaica? It may be answered: ‘But, 1 from 10 leaves 9, not 0. Perhaps these are questions for the Panel that will discuss next week ‘Why Federation Failed?’

Norman Manley had told his granddaughter that night of the lost referendum that everyone had lost. But, given Jamaica's primary goal of self-government Jamaica's loss, even in Manley's reckoning, was only partial,; within 70 days of the date on which the Federation was to have become the independent nation of the West Indies Jamaica – on 6 August 1962 - itself became independent; and Trinidad & Tobago the same month. It is worth reflecting on this reality and how the Federal Project became entrapped in Jamaica’s domestic politics. NIIAI PP. 3-0-34]

I turn now to the substantive issues that were more openly disputatious and provided the fodder for the political firestorm.

From the earliest days, indeed, from the very beginning of the indigenous Federal movement there had been a consistent and almost unchallenged acceptance of the Australian precedent in the drafting of West Indian federal constitutions. The influence of Australian forms was evident in the first timid and tentative federal steps taken in the draft constitution which emerged from the West Indian Conference held in Dominica in 1932 - that Conference at which Capt Cipriani of Trinidad played so vital a role and with such characteristic enthusiasm and conviction. Again the Australian Constitution was consciously adopted as a model for the draft Federal Constitution prepared as a result of the meeting of the West Indies and British Guiana Labour Congress held in British Guiana during 1938; a draft which was later submitted by that body, now renamed the Caribbean Labour Congress, to the Royal Commission in the following year. The same is true of course, of the revised version of this draft which was presented by the Caribbean Labour Congress to the Montego Bay conference in 1948. Indeed, it is significant to recall a passage from the speech of one of the Barbados representatives at Montego Bay when introducing the draft constitution in which he acknowledged the value and appropriateness of the Australian precedent...

“We have, said Mr Grantley Adams (as he then was), in our consideration of the proposals for a federal system taken into consideration the federal systems that exist in the British Empire today, the state of the federal system of the United States and, especially when we drafted our constitution proposals, have reached the conclusion that a federal system based on the Australian model is more suited to the Caribbean area than any other”.

Australian Federal patterns were also implicit in the first resolution of the Montego Bay Conference in which the territories for the first time accepted the principle of a Federation in which each constituent unit would retain complete control over all matters except those specifically assigned to the federal government. Later, when the Standing Closer Association Committee embarked on its task of producing a draft Federal Constitution in pursuance of the Montego Bay resolution, it both recognised and respected this mandate. Montego Bay and ‘SCAC’ led directly to the structure of the Constitution of the Federation. Years later it was on the distribution of powers between the Federation and the constituent island States that the Federation would founder. That does not mean that the model was wrong.

In a strange way it means that it was right; for it is the model that contemplates a weak center.

The Federation came formally into existence on January 3, 1958. It was dissolved on 31 May 1962. In the four and a half years of its life almost all activity of significance in the Federation - in the Federal Parliament, in communications between the Federal Government and the Governments of the territories; in 'federal' discussions within the territories - centred on this issue of distribution of power between the centre and territories -- wrangles conducted essentially between politicians and between the public servants entrusted with the unenviable task of fulfilling their masters contradictory mandate.

What did the West Indian people think of all this? I can only offer a very personal view. I believe people throughout the Region were caught up in the excitement of this new venture. Many travelled the Caribbean for the first time on the Federal Palm and the Federal Maple, Canada's thoughtful gift to the Federation. It was a time of discovery of their Caribbean heritage – everywhere, including Jamaica, until their leaders started squabbling with nationalistic fervour. Save for issues like 'freedom of movement' – which it is interesting to recall was about 'small islanders' in Trinidad, the West Indian people were generally unimpressed by the antics of their political leaders – until, that is, it all became too real for comfort.

The big issues were essentially about the distribution of powers between the Federation and the Territories. The distribution which the 1958 Federal Constitution ordained provided for a weak central authority; weak in constitutional status vis a vis the British government; weak in functional authority vis a vis the constituent territories. Specifically, as regards the distribution of powers, the most important revenue sources were left with the Territories:- in particular, a federal income tax was prohibited during the first five years. For those years the Federation would be financed by a Mandatory Levy paid by the territories on an agreed basis. This was a complete reversal of a basic principle agreed on ever since Montego Bay, viz., that (as later outlined in the Report of the Fiscal Commission – the Caine report) -

‘any federal government must have its own direct source of finance, i.e., **it must not depend on contributions voted by the constituent territories** ... it is also essential for the purpose of raising loans, that the Federation should be able to do so on the security of assets

(revenues) which it raises itself and which are *under* its full control'[M 57]

This departure from basic federal principles was to be the 'Achilles heel' of the Federation. Only 18 subjects were assigned to the Federation's exclusive authority. They included such matters as defence, exchange control, migration and emigration, public services and the University College of the West Indies. The concurrent list, in which authority was shared, was much longer consisting of 39 specific subjects, including industrial development. Everything else was exclusively territorial. Provision was made however for a mandatory constitutional review within five years.

These characteristics, this built-in weakness reflected the underlying geographic, demographic, economic and political realities of the Region. Agreement on Federation could only be reached on the basis of numerous compromises which satisfied no one entirely. The alternative would have been no Federation, and most of the Region's leaders, in 1957, were of the view that what was of overriding importance was to launch the Federation as soon as possible; they recognised already that federation would slip beyond their grasp the longer the delay. In 1956 Eric Williams asserted that 'any Federation is better than no Federation'; but once Federation began to function his was the loudest voice against 'this weak and anaemic Federation'. He was to go on through the life of the Federation to argue forcefully – and with outstanding technical analysis.-.against the financial straight-jacket that the Constitution imposed.

It found expression ultimately in the technically brilliant but politically incandescent *The Economics of Nationhood* - the nearest we came to argumentation of the quality of Hamilton in the Federalist Papers. In summation it called for:

“a tightly (knit) Unit Federation, adequately empowered at the Centre to shape and direct the future of the nation ... the Centre should have a far wider range of powers than it at present possesses ...The end objective was : 'Absolute and complete national independence for the Federation as early as 22 April 1960 [2years after the Federation began]....delay only increased the strength of the divisive forces'. It was contended that 'the politics and economics of the region demanded no less –that the history of the Federal movement in the West Indies had been inhibited by colonialist tenets' and had,

therefore, produced great confusion of objectives. "Clear and elevated perspectives" were now required. The current models ought to be the federations of Nigeria and Malaya rather than that of Central Africa where for example a Mandatory levy and limited powers at the Centre also stultified progress and endangered survival. [M 161]

Starting from this position *The Economics of Nationhood* presented a blueprint of Federation that collided head-on with Jamaica's philosophy, objectives and structure as John Mordecai noted in his excellent book; *The West Indies: the Federal Negotiations* - which, desperately needs to be reprinted: a message which I hope might come powerfully out of this Anniversary Series.

The Economics of Nationhood was Trinidad's response to Jamaica's proposals four month's earlier - embodied in the Jamaican Government's Ministry Paper No 18 (which became known as MP No18). Mordecai describes it thus:

"MP No18 identified the wide ideological gap between Jamaica and Trinidad, with Jamaica determined to denude the Federal Government of vital powers, present and prospective .. In simple language the document pronounced the motive which dominated all the Jamaican proposals, namely, to ensure that Federation would in no way injure or impede the development of Jamaica. The Constitution was unsatisfactory. It was not only colonial in character, but gave the Federal Government too large powers to interfere with the industrial development of the Units and their powers of taxation".

It threw down a challenge which *the Economics of Nationhood* took up. In the ensuing battle, Federation itself was to be the victim – but not before Jamaica had prepared the way for life after death.

In Ministry Paper No. 3 issued on 3 February 22, 1960 Jamaica set out the essential conflict in the following way. According to Trinidad; full control over the economy of the entire federal area should be vested in the Centre, on the Nigerian pattern - it being argued that only a powerful and centrally directed economic coordination and independence can meet the needs of the West Indies at this time. Jamaica, on the other hand, could only partake in a Federation commencing with the minimum of powers necessary to enable it to function as an independent political unit, providing for great flexibility - between the units and the centre, leaving it to the historical, political and

economic forces to shape its change and growth in the future - so that it could expand as convenience and necessity dictates.

The battle lines were clearly drawn – as early as two years after the decision to federate. They were not so unlike those faced by other federations and ways might have been found to pacify the warriors ; the Inter-Governmental Committees, through their sub-committees, ‘Alpha’ and ‘Orion’ were working away at the most critical issues and were making slow but steady progress; but the old issue of Federation as a means to an end – especially for Jamaica held the ultimate key - the primacy of ‘islandness’ over ‘regionalism’.

In 1948, and even in 1957, Federation’s driving force still was Dominion Status and Commonwealth membership for a federated West Indies - against an uncertain future as isolated Islands – even the bigger ones. By 1960, the real-politik had changed ; the political holy grail of independence was within grasp - even alone; certainly by the larger members. Federation might no longer be compelling. It was in that context that Norman Manley went alone to London in January 1960, for bilateral talks with the British Government. Ministry Paper No 3 was an official Jamaican account of that visit. The final crucial discussion which would decide the future of the Federation took place not among West Indian leaders but between Norman Manley and Iain McLoed – between Jamaica and the UK. The Federal Government was told of the visit in advance, but not of the full range of the discussions. John Mordecai describes this as ‘a momentous stage in the federal chronicle,’ and so it was.

For Norman Manley the discussions sought to find out (in the words of Ministry Paper No 3) ‘ what would be the attitude of the British Government to a demand by Jamaica to be allowed to leave the Federation and to seek Dominion status on her own, in the event it did not prove possible to achieve an agreement in respect of the ...differences of opinion (in the Region) ..Manley's interpretation of the assurance he received was that, as he announced on his return to Jamaica,... “the way is open for Jamaica to secede if she wants to and no obstacle will be placed in her way by the British government’. That was the crucial message to the people of Jamaica and the Region; in Manley words -:

"I am able to report that we have succeeded in making our stand crystal clear to everybody. We have made it clear that we cannot and

will not remain in a Federation which had the right to take over all the economic controls of the area as soon as it becomes independent. ... we have given our unqualified pledge to make an honest and determined effort to reach agreement with the other units ... and it is only if we fail in that effort that we will feel compelled and entitled to part company ... if we cannot reach early agreement, Jamaica will leave the Federation and will seek independence on her own. This is fully understood. I am satisfied that Jamaica is free to follow that course, to go one way or the other, as may be best. And I am satisfied that Britain will not attempt to force Jamaica to remain in the Federation against her will".

Everything that followed took place against the backdrop of that assurance. Four months after the London visit, amid a heated political scene in Jamaica with Sir Alexander Bustamante announcing the JLP's 'irrevocable decision to oppose Federation; and that they would from now on do everything in their power to secure Jamaica's withdrawal, Manley and the PNP announced that 'a referendum on whether or the not Jamaica should remain in the Federation would be held as quickly as possible.' It was not to be that quickly.

One effect, however, was to completely sideline the Federal Prime Minister and his Government. They had become part of the problem and could not broker a solution. Conciliatory discussions did take place - but between Manley and Williams –notably in Antigua on 7-8 August 1960, and earlier with Iain McLeod on 7-19 June 1960 in Trinidad; but it was all too late. Much was done, too, in the federal negotiations to save the federation, including the work of the Inter-Governmental Committees, an Inter-Governmental Conference in Trinidad in May 1961, and the Lancaster House Conference on 31 May 1961. By the end, Manley had got most of what he wanted – but at a high price to the viability of the Federation.

Eighteen months after the crucial London visit, and a triumphal return from the Lancaster House Conference on June 16 Manley announced on the 3rd August 1961 that the referendum would be held on 19 September. In making the announcement, the Premier added that if the referendum were successful he himself would stand for election. "As simply as I can, and with a full heart, I must state that when the first election for a new West Indies comes, I shall offer myself as a candidate'. Of course, that election for 'a new West Indies' never came.

The story of the Federal Project is at once the story of the West Indies at its best and at its worst. In his Epilogue to John Mordecai's Book Sir Arthur Lewis lists 11 'if onlys' on the basis of which the Federation would have been saved; but then he asks the question: 'But how did these highly intelligent men, all devoted to Federation, come to make so many errors in so short a period? Perhaps, Mordecai had answered the question when he wrote, bemoaning the disregard of diplomacy:

“At all points the rough handling of the problems of this Federation is more extraordinary than the problems themselves”.

Sir Arthur's view in 1963 was that the case for a West Indian Federation is as strong as ever. Forty-five years later I wonder what he would say today when, as I have said in another context: 'the world financial system is in meltdown, the world economy is in structural decline, a new global economic order is in embryo and a world-wide economic tsunami threatens; when no single metaphor is adequate to describe the unfathomable changes now at hand' – and, of course, against the back-drop of our experience of a non-federal West Indies in the 46 years since 1 from 10 left 0.

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