

**THE PRESENT MOMENT AND CARIBBEAN FUTURE:  
THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS<sup>1</sup>**

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INTRODUCTION

I am truly honoured to have been invited to deliver the Third Patrick Emmanuel Memorial Lecture. The honour is special if only because it is in tribute to a dear friend and mentor.

Allow me just a moment to reflect on Patrick's death. In doing so, let me assure you that I do not intend to cause any pain or anguish to the many of you whom I know will have been dear friends of Patrick and least of all, to his widow and family. Throughout out Patrick's illness, we met many times, in many different places. There were moments when I watched helplessly, Patrick's pain and agony. To this day, I regret that I did not understand his tortured soul and tormented spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Professor Vaughan Lewis, also a close friend of Dr. Patrick Emmanuel, for his many insightful comments on this paper.

I count myself fortunate to have enjoyed his intellect. I worked with him to prepare several papers for the meetings of the Regional Constituent Assembly of the Windward Islands. We debated fiercely, argued frequently, but never failed to agree.

As a scholar, Pat Emmanuel's intellect roamed far and wide. His publications provide enough testimony. The Eastern Caribbean was at the centre of his academic world. He constantly pushed research activities in the Eastern Caribbean if only to remind the University of its responsibility to the islands of the Eastern Caribbean. On this issue, I believe that he would be sorely disappointed by the output from the University in recent years.

I have, at the invitation of my hosts, decided to confine my remarks to some of the problems confronting the Single Market and Economy (CSME) in these times. I will reflect upon these with an eye to the Eastern Caribbean, if only to honour Patrick's passion for these States.

I believe that the CSME is at a delicate juncture in its short history. Its foundations have been severely compromised and weakened, not only because of internal differences and competing visions among the Heads of Government but also, because the cohesiveness that is so vital to its viability has been shaken.

The evidence seems reasonably clear. There is a loss of momentum and direction in the CSME. Let us reflect briefly on the evidence before us.

## THE SETTING

Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, has drawn attention to the creeping apathy in the efforts to consolidate the CSME. He says that an apparent lack of interest by Jamaica is forestalling the creation of the CSME. Gonsalves contends that recent statements by Jamaica's Prime Minister, Bruce Golding, suggested that his administration was not ready to embrace a single economy at this time. "Jamaica appeared to be more focused on functional cooperation and matters of foreign policy and security coordination, given that CARICOM accounted for a meager four percent of its exports". [Nation News.com, October 10, 2008.]

Only eight days ago, the leading architect of the CSME, the former Prime Minister of Barbados, Owen Arthur, added his voice. He warned regional leaders that now is not the time to procrastinate on the creation of the CSME. He cautioned that "further delay would hamper territories from fully utilizing the recently signed Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)". [National News.com, Nov 19, 2008].

Another former Prime Minister, P J Patterson of Jamaica, has drawn attention to the creeping apathy in the implementation of the CSME. Patterson is reported to have told Tony Best that "the progress towards launching the single economy has stalled." According to Patterson:

"Certainly, in respect of the single economy, I don't detect that there has been any recent movement forward. In terms of the single market itself, I am not sure that the movers and shakers quite realize what are the possibilities which arise from the creation of the single market and I don't think they have been exploited

to any extent by the groups which would benefit from the existence of [a] single market.”[ Nation News. Com].

To add to the cynicism now gripping the region, has been the diplomatic and political fall out over the decision of CARICOM Governments to sign the EPA. The region witnessed opposition to the Agreement by one country, albeit belatedly, vacillation by another, vociferous condemnation by Civil Society across the region and an astonishing display of hostility to intellectuals and technocrats who opposed the EPA. A pained Havelock Brewster told a U.W.I. graduation audience at which he was the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate that:

“ We have had the spectacle of a Prime Minister, a graduate of this University, vilifying as mendicants those who hold other views, including a fellow Head of State, of editors of hitherto respected newspapers descending to the depths of personal abuse of dissenting individuals, impugning their loyalty, integrity and qualifications, including of professors who served this and other universities and international institutions with high distinction; mocking one of the most eminent Caribbean Statesmen, a long-serving Commonwealth Secretary General, a Chancellor of this University for many years, and of other Universities, the recipient of Honorary Doctorates from twenty-five Universities all over the world, as seeking the ‘glare of public visibility for persona, pernicious and morally elastic

purposes.’ And we have also seen the shameful dissemination of false information, and the withholding of information, by responsible officials of the European Commission.” [Address, ‘The View from the Rear View Mirror,’ on the occasion of the Presentation of Graduates Ceremony, UWI, Mona, Jamaica, Nov. 7, 2008.]

It is almost surreal, all of it.

Almost out of the blue, has come the announcement of an initiative to establish an Economic Union between Trinidad and Tobago and the OECS by 2011, followed by a political union between Trinidad and Tobago and interested member States of the OECS by 2013. Prime Minister Gonsalves, miffed by the stand of the Golding Government in Jamaica, has justified the initiative by asking rhetorically:

“What do you do, do you wait for the slowest in the integration movement or those who wish to go further and deepen the integration processes?’ [Nation News.com, Oct. 30, 2008].

Meanwhile, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States is pressing ahead with its plans to launch an Economic Union by 2009. A recent event to mark the launching of the initiative in the Derek Walcott Square in Castries, Saint Lucia attracted no more than twenty persons, if that number. Officials have lamented the seeming disinterest of citizens across the OECS. Are we beginning to see the symptoms of “integration fatigue”?

## IMPACT OF GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS

The fractures which now appear in CARICOM could not have occurred at a worst possible time. The region now has to grapple with a Global Financial Crisis, described by Paul Krugman, the Nobel Prize Winner, as “the scariest crisis since the 1930s.”

The reaction from the region has been bewildering. Early responses from Jamaica in the north to Surinam and Guyana in the south, suggest a region in denial. The lack of response has not gone unnoticed. As recently as November 23, 2008, David Jessop, the Executive Director of the Caribbean Council for Europe wrote:

“Slowly, ever so slowly the Caribbean is coming to recognize that it is far from immune from the global economic crisis. As developed and emerging markets accept that the world is headed for a severe recession with far from easy to predict consequences, governments in some but not all Caribbean nations are starting to realize they need to prepared their electorates for the shocks to come.

In the last week the people of Jamaica, Trinidad, St Lucia, St Kitts and Guyana have received the first indications from heads of government and ministers that all may not be well with the outlook for their economies and that there is a need to prepare for a possible rapid economic contraction.

Although belated recognition is welcome, just as important will be the need for well-explained, swift and most probably unpopular action before the full effects are felt.”

Desmond Brunton, a technocrat employed by the Caribbean Development Bank, recently analysed the impact of the Global Financial Crisis on regional economies. He advised that the consequences would be felt in the financial sector as well as the real economy.

In the financial sector, asset quality will deteriorate, liquidity will be tightened, trade credit lines withdrawn, external funding reduced. The contagion in the banking sector in the United States and Europe, he reasoned, could eventually infect the domestic banking sector of the region.

The situation in the real economy is likely to be even bleaker. Tourism receipts will decline; capital would be difficult to source and to raise; remittances would decline; foreign exchange reserves are likely to decline; exports will fall as a result of the contraction in world demand; lower commodity prices will be realized; balance of payment pressures will intensify.

All of this, Brunton says, will lead to increased pressure on the Current Account of Balance of Payments due to a contradiction in Foreign Direct Investment and remittances from abroad. Inevitably, there will be increased fiscal pressures exacerbated by reduced Government revenue. Unemployment will increase significantly across the region. Governments will experience difficulty in raising loans. Jessop reasons that the “private placings and bond issues that governments use to

finance shortfalls in recurrent expenditure would become more expensive, difficult or say even disappear.” [D. Jessop, Starbroek News, Ibid]

Of more immediate worry is the impact of the crisis on the tourism sector, now the mainstay of the economies of the Eastern Caribbean. While the focus has rightly been on the contraction of visitor arrivals, the loss of foreign exchange, a significant rise in unemployment and a decline of investment in the sector, there is a real and distinct possibility that some hotel plants may not survive the crisis intact. Indeed, regional banks that have extended loans to the sector, may well be compelled to make adjustments in their portfolios to forestall serious losses.

The crisis meets Caribbean states at a particularly vulnerable period of their economic cycles. In a brilliant and piercing essay, “Economic Policy Options in the Twenty-first Century”, Owen Arthur in his earlier life, observed that:

“Our business cycles are not things to be commended to the fainthearted, reflecting random bouts of economic growth followed by declines sufficiently large to cancel the earlier economic gains. Typically, when the international economy has been growing, the Caribbean has generally recorded slower growth than almost every region, and when the world has experienced recession, our decline has been sharper than the average. The Caribbean has also been fond of playing an indigenous stroke, going into depression in

circumstances where robust growth is being realized in most of the other countries of the world.

This record of macro instability has generated the typical Caribbean economic syndrome – mass unemployment, fiscal difficulties, recurring external imbalances, and major distortions in resource allocation in favour of highly subsidized state enterprises or highly protected private firms, all leading to a tendency for the economies to lurch from crisis to crisis; perpetuating mass poverty and raising of the spectre of societal disintegration. Elsewhere, I have called attention to the fact that economic decay in some Caribbean economies has been so severe and corrosive as to set in train social and political disorder which, unchecked, will create a new Caribbean species of “failed society” among the family of nations.” [Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (editors), Contending with Destiny, Ian Randle Publishers, Jamaica, 2000, p.12 at p. 14.

All of this paints a depressing picture. The real problem is that there is very little room for regional Governments to manoeuvre. Normally, in times of depression, policymakers turn to Keynesian remedies. Governments borrow and jettison prudence. Regional governments can hardly respond by heavy borrowing to buy their way out of the crisis at hand. Nearly every Government has high and unsustainable Debt/GDP ratios.

Amazingly, the Heads of Government are yet to meet to prepare the people of the region to face the future that lies ahead.

This is a confusing and complex moment in our affairs, perhaps a subtle reminder to those who believe in the immutability of history and social phenomena.

#### REACTIONS OF A PATRICK EMMANUEL

How would Patrick Emmanuel, with the approach to the academic treatment of the subject of Caribbean regional integration, react to our present status and condition in the face of decision after decision taken by the political authorities in the last decade? Would he be surprised? To suggest an answer, we would need to look at Patrick's analytical approach to the social and political realities of the region in the academic work which he undertook over the years. But this would be a separate task in itself, not capable of being done in this lecture.

If we look at the sweep of Patrick's writing, we can perhaps perceive that his approach always involved identifying the essential trajectory or direction of any social situation or set of social events, and in doing so, drawing conclusions as to the probable outcome(s) of the processes involved, including the consequences of decisions taken by the political actors.

We see something of this, for example, in an analysis by Patrick of the trajectory of the Grenadian (PRG) revolution of 1979-83, in an extremely perceptive article prepared for the annual conference of the Caribbean Studies Association in May of 1982,

subsequently published in the Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs in 1983. The article, "Revolutionary Theory and Political Reality in the Eastern Caribbean", allowed the reader to understand that Patrick perceived that the revolution was not headed on a course that would ensure long-term stability, a somewhat gloomy perception in the face of the euphoria which accompanied it. He based his analyses, first, on years of study of the social realities underlying the functioning of the political institutions and practices of Caribbean states and the types of political decision-making that they could sustain at that historical period; and secondly, on a very strongly-felt view about the relationship between political action and political ethics or morality, involving, in particular, the need to observe political promises made, and the impossibility of bending the Caribbean people in directions which their historical experiences could not sustain. All this amounted to a somewhat gloomy stance.

If we fast forward then to our present situation, I believe that Patrick would have analysed what he thought were the trajectories of the economic and social/political realities of our present circumstances which, he would probably have felt, continue to induce these states in the direction of some form of regional integration. Recall that he had written extensively on this theme, and served on a small committee in the early 1970's, set up with the assistance of Trinidad and Tobago, to examine the prospects of political integration of the Windwards and Leewards. Indeed, he published as well, a prescient article on the issue of small size in 1974.

We can surmise on the basis of this, that Patrick would have been dissatisfied with the pace of regional integration in CARICOM as a whole, even as he watched the present efforts of OECS governments and others to seek to continue to come terms with the issue of small size and its relationship to what we, today, call the collective exercise of sovereignty. He would ask himself whether present world economic trends suggest a continuing need for regional integration in this area, or whether possibilities exist for single states to succeed in their economic development, even while others in their environment showed no such promise.

He would wonder why, if after decades of experience of a collective judicial system in the Eastern Caribbean, our wider CARICOM political leadership feels it so difficult to implement a CCJ for which they themselves have authorized the spending of large amounts of money in establishing. And he would wonder whether the image of indecision, in relation to this matter, provide a reasonable demonstration to the wider world of Caribbean seriousness, or whether the opposite might be more nearer the truth.

I suspect that Patrick would have linked this continuing indecision, inability and therefore instability, in persevering with decision-implementation so apparent in our Region at the present time, to what is now quite visible – a paralysis of political and judicial institutions at the national level, a paralysis in the sense of the inability to make effective decisions taken by these institutions over time. Witness, to take one example, the fact that in spite of the widely acknowledged superior talent at all levels of our

judiciary, and experiments of various kinds, including the use of external personnel, the crime situation in our Region continues to baffle decision-makers and the citizenry. And no doubt at the external level, Patrick would take the current dissonances among our political leadership on the Economic Partnership Agreement as confirming, at the level of our wider external relations, his analysis of the paralysis that he perceived at the domestic level.

If I am correct in this perception of what Patrick's views might have been, I would also be right in suggesting that his present views would be as gloomy as those prevailing at the time of his death, But in his usual spirited and activist way he would also be calling for more independent thinking on our contemporary social, political and legal problems; and for forthright pronouncements from academia on the results of such thinking, in spite of the possibility of displeasing the political directorate. For of this he was never fearful.

#### WHY THE STAGNATION?

But let me return to my main theme. I will not seek to restate, refine or recast the reasons for the institutional weaknesses and failures of CARICOM. There has already been much comment on these. My concern is rather more simple: Why the seeming stagnation?

I believe that the procrastination that has gripped CARICOM is explained, in large measure, by the following:

1. The changes of government across the region;
2. Lack of progress on the establishment of the CCJ;
3. Disagreement on the free movement of Labour within the Community;
4. The ambivalence of the OECS to the CSME;
5. Doubts over Jamaica's commitment to the CSME;
6. Renewed cynicism and suspicion at the prospect of a political union between the OECS and Trinidad and Tobago.

I will start with the impact of the recent changes in the Governments of the region.

#### IMPACT OF CHANGES IN GOVERNMENTS

Over the past two years, we have seen changes in governments in Saint Lucia, Jamaica, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, The Bahamas and the British Virgin Islands. Inevitably, new governments look inwards, as they seek to establish their domestic agenda.

In our past experience of CARICOM's functioning, it is a fact that few governments bother to embrace Opposition Parties in shaping domestic policy towards CARICOM. The consequence has been that most Opposition Parties have tended to come into office without having the benefit of exposure to the deliberations and decisions of the

Heads of Governments. The result is that on the assumption of office, most parties are unprepared to handle or advance CARICOM's agenda.

But there is a deeper problem that inheres in the political architecture of CARICOM. It is that the structure of the institution itself permits the continuing exclusion of Opposition Parties from the decision making process in CARICOM and apart from 'fits and starts', Heads of Governments have really exhibited no enthusiasm for their inclusion.

As long ago as 1997, in my maiden address to the Heads of Government to CARICOM, I drew attention to the need to embrace Opposition Parties in the governance of the region. I said then:

“For regional integration to become revitalized, we need to develop full consensus on the fundamental agenda that must be consistently advanced. Such a consensus can only emerge through broadening of the decision-making apparatus to include opposition parties in the region, and to involve the social partners not only out of diplomatic courtesy, but out of a profound commitment to dialogue in the search for common answers. The historical experience of earlier attempts to unify the Caribbean has taught us that the commitment to this process must be deep, it must be rooted in the aspirations of our people, and it must be

inclusive of the diversity of opinion and perspective that exists in the region. On the other hand, Opposition parties should not hold the regional co-operation process to ransom by refusing to support the regional agenda. We must protect the regional agenda from the ravages of partisan competition and warfare. For that reason, I have in the past urged that the CARICOM Secretary-General be empowered at the expense of the Community to brief, on an annual basis, all Opposition leaders in a collective forum on matters pertaining to the Community.

The inclusion of the opposition parties and the social partners (private sector, trade- unions, women, youth and NGO constituencies) will make this process, though initially more contentious, ultimately more secure and reflective of the real dreams of every man and woman in our Caribbean.”

I have never wavered from this position. Indeed, I have become even more convinced of its necessity. Indeed, during the period that I served as Lead Prime Minister for Justice and Governance, Heads were able to meet with Opposition Leaders on at least two separate occasions to discuss matters of mutual interest, including the efforts to establish the CCJ. However, it does seem that there is now an inclination to return to the era of involvement by ‘diplomatic courtesy.’

## A DAMNING INDICTMENT

Perhaps the most damning indictment of CARICOM is its inability to reach consensus and implement its decisions. There is no more glaring example of this than the decision to establish the Caribbean Court of Justice.

To date, only two member States, Guyana and Barbados, have acceded to the appellate jurisdiction of the Court. A vital opportunity to build confidence has been lost.

I continue to applaud and admire Barbados for its support for the CCJ. Ironically, here is an island which is often accused of being wedded to its colonial past and yet it had the courage to complete its constitutional journey in judicial matters to self realization.

To be sure, the explanations for the lack of will are complex. They range from constitutional challenges in some States, to economic considerations in others, to political opportunism and finally, the sociological and psychological conditioning of our societies.

For my part, I remain troubled and yes, puzzled by the fact that countries which were once at the forefront of the decolonization process and anxious to claim their sovereignty can now, despite their assertions of independence, find undisguised comfort in retaining the Privy Council. If, perchance you feel I am exaggerating, then

read, for example, the speeches by Jamaican Parliamentarians during a debate on a Resolution supporting the establishment of the CCJ. [See Delano Franklyn (ed), *We Want Justice – Jamaica and the Caribbean Court of Justice*, Ian Randle Publishers, Jamaica, 2005].

But let me not, of course, lose sight of my major point. Caribbean citizens need to be persuaded and convinced that Caribbean leaders have the political will to implement agreed institutional arrangements. We have missed opportunity after opportunity. Establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice is one such missed opportunity.

#### ANXIETIES ON LABOUR ISSUES

It is time too, to calm the anxieties over the movement of labour in the community. This issue, if it remains unresolved, has the greatest potential to undermine the efforts to establish the single market. It nurses fear, arouses deep seated animosities and brings out unwarranted xenophobia.

The initiative to allow the movement of labour was compromised from the outset. For one thing, some States were never faithful to the agreed legislation governing the movement of skilled nationals. It is for that reason that an audit of existing legislation and administrative practices should be carried out.

Every single government fears an avalanche of migrants from Haiti. The Governments of Antigua and Barbados harbor deep-seated reservations about unrestricted movement of other Caribbean nationals, to their States. The reservations are quietly supported by citizens and officials of those States.

Only recently, Prime Minister David Thompson created a storm when he told an awards ceremony of the Guyanese Manufacturers' Association that "the Barbadian doctrine 'ever so welcome, wait for a call', should be taken as the guide to how Barbados will manage the integration process." [Nation News.com, Nov 2, 2008.] What Prime Minister Thompson meant is still the subject of interpretation.

The truth is, the Heads of Governments are reluctant to face the issues squarely and arrive at firm decisions. During my tenure as a Head of Government, I heard the quiet anxieties, the concerns and the seeming hesitancy to confront the issues because Heads did not wish to face criticism from colleagues and media. A few did not want to be perceived as the 'odd man' out.

It may well be as former Prime Minister Patterson suggests, that in "those countries where there had been an influx of people [Governments] needed to have some breathing time to cope with the social adjustments that were necessary." [Nation News.com].

## AMBIVALENCE OF OECS

Perhaps the greatest threat to the future viability of the CSME, is the ambivalence of the OECS towards CARICOM and the CSME. OECS States continue to be unwilling suitors to the marriage.

In part, the attitude of the OECS States is explained by the success of the OECS itself. The Organization has endured, widening and deepening functional cooperation in a number of areas. Unquestionably, the arrangements governing monetary policy and the administration of justice have worked exceedingly well.

Across the OECS, it is not uncommon to hear the view that there is nothing to be gained from the CSME. In some measure, this is driven by real fear – but in my view a misplaced fear - that OECS producers and retailers would eventually be marginalized and overwhelmed by their better capitalized CARICOM competitors.

Of course, the issue is far more complex than my remarks suggest. The fear of which I speak is historical, socio-political and even geo-political. Full treatment must await another occasion.

In the current situation, two tendencies have emerged. The first urges the OECS to look inwards and strengthen existing institutional arrangements. The efforts to establish an Economic Union among OECS States is reflective of that view. The second urges the

OECS to enter into strategic or bilateral arrangements, or relationships with specific member States of CARICOM. Two States have been identified, namely Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Two approaches to Barbados, one in 1996 and the other in 1998 never materialised. The approach to Trinidad and Tobago has, of course, been more recent.

The ambivalence in the OECS towards the CSME has deepened, largely as a result of the economic stresses experienced by some States. Few have understood the extraordinary transformation of the economies of the Windward Islands following the collapse of the banana industry. It is true that the islands received diplomatic support from the region, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but, by and large, they were compelled to make structural adjustments to their economies, virtually on their own.

The collapse of the banana industry has left in its wake huge parcels of land once devoted to the production and export of bananas. The same is true of Barbados, in respect of its once prosperous sugar plantations. It is right that we should ask: what alternatives in agriculture are available to these Islands? I believe that the solutions to this issue provide a unique opportunity to regional technocrats to engage Barbados and OECS states in the search for solutions. It is not at all clear, of course, that the CARICOM Secretariat has received an appropriate mandate in this regard and as long as this is so, it would appear that the technocrats will not be able to proceed with this task in any deliberate way.

## THE JAMAICAN ENIGMA

We noted earlier that the attitude and approach of the current Jamaican government have not helped to inspire confidence in the CSME. The issue is not solely economic, but historical and even ideological.

In the inaugural Michael Manley Memorial Lecture which I had the honour to deliver on January 27, 2003, I ended my presentation as follows:

“I say to the Jamaican people: it is time to exorcise from your political psyche the ghosts of the Federation. There can be no Caribbean integration- limited or otherwise, without Jamaica.” [Kenny D. Anthony, ‘Has the Moment Passed? Reflections on Caribbean Integration After Michael Manley.’, 2003, at p. 25].

This statement earned the rebuke of my comrades in the Peoples’ National Party. They denied that Jamaica was haunted by its past.

However, the history of Jamaica proves otherwise. The commitment of Jamaica to integration has always been a source of tension between the ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the Opposition, Peoples’ National Party (PNP). Nowhere was that tension more evident than in the debate over the accession of Jamaica to the appellate jurisdiction of the CCJ. Edward Seaga, the then Opposition Leader of the JLP, was devastating in his criticisms, contending that “there are no real convincing arguments for

the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice.” [D. Franklyn (ed), *We want Justice, Jamaica and the Caribbean Court of Justice*, Randle, 2005, at p. 19]. Seaga was blunt:

“From the reasons offered, we get the strong impression that what we are speaking of here, is not so much a matter of national sovereignty for Jamaica, but fulfilling the political destiny of an integrated Caribbean region.” [Ibid, p. 12.]

Then again:

“The Government of Jamaica does not have the credibility to convincingly deny that it is involved in the deception of moving undercover in a direction of political integration.” [Ibid, p 13.]

Echoes of these sentiments were heard in nearly every speech by the Opposition JLP in that memorable debate.

Part of the problem is that as Jamaica’s economic fortunes have declined so too has its ideological influence in the region waned. There was a time when Jamaica led the way for the Caribbean in matters of social and political consciousness. As I have said elsewhere:

“Whether it has been Paul Bogle’s slave rebellion in Morant Bay, or Garvey’s championship of black political consciousness, or Bob Marley’s music of wrenching pain and social renaissance, or Michael Manley’s doctrine of economic self-sufficiency, Jamaica’s history is replete with

examples, in which its revolutionary spirit has inspired events that have resonated for all of us in the region.

Undoubtedly, Jamaica has been the convex lens through which countries in the Caribbean could pinpoint, with near crystal clarity, the next stage of their own development. In this way, it may be rightfully said that the rest of the Caribbean has matured vicariously, through Jamaica. What special quality or drive, inherent to the Jamaican spirit, has transformed Jamaica into the touchstone of our Caribbean consciousness? If there is one defining or unifying thread which ties the seemingly disparate events of Jamaica's history together, it is the unyielding belief in the right of a people to self-determination. The history of Jamaica is essentially the history of a people striving to shape its own destiny and to claim its rightful place in the world – not as a pale, carbon copy version of larger, metropolitan societies, but as a genuine, unique and legitimate civilization, equal to that of any other.

In this way, Jamaica has inspired the rest of the countries of the Caribbean, to choose independence over dependence, and self-determination over subservience.”[*Kenny D.*

*Anthony, in D. Franklyn (ed) Ian Randle Publishers,2003,  
supra, pp. 281 – 282]*

I do not believe that the same can be said of Jamaica today.

The return of the Jamaica Labour Party to office has resurrected the fears, doubts and anxieties about Jamaica's commitment to the CSME. The situation has not been helped by the utterings of its Prime Minister, Bruce Golding, who, as we heard earlier, is not averse to making unflattering remarks about his colleagues.

It is my view that the ambivalence of Jamaica, its seeming lack of enthusiasm for the CSME, was a major factor, wisely or unwisely, which convinced some OECS leaders and indeed the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, that the CSME was moribund and there was no future for political integration among all regional States. The future lay elsewhere.

Let me, very quickly, confirm that I do not agree that the prospects for the CSME are necessarily bleak.

#### THE LATEST INITIATIVE

The announcement by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and the Prime Ministers of some OECS States that they intend to pursue a political union has raised

uncomfortable issues about the viability of the CSME. It has aroused its fair share of suspicion among non-participating States.

The announcement has been greeted with the usual cynicism and skepticism. This is understandable. After all, Caribbean peoples are accustomed to hearing about initiatives that have not moved beyond their announcements.

Curiously, one is yet to discern any overt displays of support for the initiative. The responses from some of the participatory Governments have been rather tepid. It has not gone unnoticed that Prime Minister Manning, the lead spokesperson for the initiative, faces stiff resistance to the idea from the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago.

Inevitably, the announcement has attracted suspicions about the motives of Trinidad and Tobago. Some ask: is it oil in the waters of the Caribbean? Others turn to a familiar geo-political issue and query: Does Trinidad and Tobago need integration to contain the ambitions and the influence of Venezuela in the Caribbean Basin?

There is, of course, another question, the answer to which remains at large. Who precisely is pushing this initiative, is it the OECS or is it Trinidad and Tobago?

An immediate concern has to do with the impact of the global financial crisis. It may well be that the participating states will recoil from the initiative, at least temporarily, as they seek to grapple with the financial crisis. The impact on Trinidad and Tobago will be

grave. In a recent address, Prime Minister Manning advised that “in terms of revenue projected in [the] present budget [Government] expects to fall short by six billion dollars for this financial year.” He warned that “things could get more challenging. It is clearly a very serious situation requiring immediate action.” [Express Newspaper, Nov 21, 2008.]

The global economic crisis will probably affect the economy of Trinidad and Tobago far more deeply than other regional economies for the simple reason that its economy is driven by energy exports. The prices of its major exports, oil and petroleum products, ammonia, methanol, urea and steel, have all fallen, in some cases, drastically. The changed economic circumstances and strong domestic social and political pressures in that regard, could well dampen the appetite of Prime Minister Manning for a political union and compel him to become inward looking as he responds to rising domestic political pressures and the economic challenges at his doorstep.

It is anyone’s guess what this initiative will yield.

## A REGION ADRIFT

I have argued that the present environment invites speculation that CARICOM is floundering, possibly adrift. Quite apart from the internal fractures, there is the challenge to re-define the external policy of CARICOM as a whole. If one were to ask the simple question, “what is the foreign policy of CARICOM?”, an answer would not be forthcoming.

It is true that it is notoriously difficult to secure common positions on foreign policy issues among CARICOM States. So called strategic interests dominate and vary. Accepting this does not mean that there cannot be a minimum definition of strategic interests of the Community as a whole.

There is an obvious mismatch between the foreign policy postures of CARICOM and its “economic and political interests”.

Over the years, CARICOM has given primacy to its relationship with the North Atlantic countries. The reasons are not difficult to fathom. The relationship has been fashioned by history, geo-political realities and most fundamentally, the preferential access to markets of North America and Europe. Add to this, “the access to aid and other concessional financial resources whose flow these societies have effectively influenced”. [Arthur, Ibid, at p.16]

Owen Arthur, from whom I just quoted, has pleaded for “a new dispensation” [Ibid, p.16] and “a new global focus” [Ibid, p.16]. He explains in telling language:

“The essential issue must now be the extent to which, and the means by which, our region – which has embedded the main aspects of its former special relationships deeply into its economic structure – should make the transition to a new dispensation, especially given the short period over which

the transition has to be made. But there is evidence of a determined resolve simply to maintain the status quo. It is of course always a dangerous thing to look a gift horse in the mouth. It has to be recognized properly however that trade preferences, even before the turn of the century, have become massively depreciated assets. The margin of protection offered to the Caribbean by Europe through the Lome Conventions has been eroded by the extension of equivalent preferences to other countries. In addition, the liberalization of trade under multilateral trade arrangements has, and will further strip such preferences of their residual worth, if there is any.”

And again,

“The point is that the conventions which have bound us to the North Atlantic economy, like the preferences which have been at their core, have also been made depreciated development assets. It would therefore be a matter of the greatest hazard for a future relationship between the Caribbean and its North Atlantic partners to be forged without taking into account the need for new modalities of cooperation that can be more beneficial to Caribbean development. To rest a relationship with the North Atlantic economy on preferences would be to hope their incantations

can create what reality denies. Perhaps the lesson in all of this, waiting to be acted upon, is that the Caribbean can no longer, in this age of globalization, see the world as a strip of North Atlantic economies.” [Arthur, Ibid, at p.17]

Given the obvious shift of global power and influence, it is at once clear that CARICOM has to rethink its postures to China, India and crucially, the giant of South America, Brazil. This invites too, a comprehensive rethinking of CARICOM's relationship with Europe. It may well be that the signing of the EPA Agreement has narrowed our options, a point hammered by Brewster, but I think that there is a real question as to whether CARICOM States or CARICOM as an institution have engaged themselves in thinking through the implications of the now changed and changing Europe. I believe that there should be more deliberate diplomatic engagement by the region at two levels simultaneously - multilaterally with the European Union as a whole, and bilaterally, with specific countries within the European Union. With respect to the latter, a division of labour among CARICOM States in respect of particular European States may be an option.

I believe that the Heads of Government can no longer delay a review of CARICOM's external relationships and postures. Now, more than ever, definition is required because the world will never be the same after the major geopolitical changes that have been taking place over the last two decades and / or the current Global Economic Crisis which threatens us.

## THE WAY FORWARD

I can, I believe, after this rather simplistic overview of the stresses within CARICOM offer some suggestions to restore credibility to the process of reinvigorating the CSME. I will do so by a series of points.

First, the primacy of the CSME should be restored. A single unified vision must emerge to guide the region. It must be supported by a restatement of the commitment of the Heads of Government to the implementation of the Single Market and Economy. This is vital in the face of the economic crisis sweeping the world.

Secondly, Heads of Government need to convene in advance of the regular summit of the Heads in July 2009, to review the impact of the Global Economic Crisis on the economies of the region and to begin the process of preparing the people of the Community for the inevitable stresses and adjustments that lie ahead. As Wendell Motley recently reminded us, the current situation forces us to pool difficulties rather than to pool strengths. Be that as it may, it is only the resilience of the foundations laid by the regional community that can see the region through the difficulties described by some as of "historic proportions". As much as the Governments may not wish to do so, they may well have to engage Opposition Parties in shaping responses to the crisis.

Thirdly, renewed efforts must be made to persuade all Caribbean States to put in place mechanisms to promote and establish the Caribbean Court of Justice. This is a vital confidence building measure.

Fourthly, there must be urgent reconsideration of the place of CARICOM in the emerging world order, post the Global Economic Crisis. The Heads of Government need to devote time and attention on the foreign policy options facing the Community.

Fifthly, the perceived differences between the vision of OECS leaders and their counterparts must be narrowed. One step which would help this process is the establishment of a Regional Economic Task Force to undertake a study of OECS economies to determine what options are available to sustain their viability. This is crucial in the face of the collapse of the agricultural sector in St. Kitts, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and to a lesser extent, Grenada.

Sixthly, the issues which have emerged in respect of the movement of skilled nationals of member states need quick resolution. The initiative has brought real meaning to the people of the region but the signs of the emerging xenophobia need to be contained.

Seventh, serious fractures have emerged between the Heads of Government and Civil Society. It is necessary to restore the uneasy peace which existed until recently.

Eighth and finally, modalities have to be found to engage Opposition Parties and bring them into the mainstream of decision making in CARICOM.

I rest my case.

*November 27, 2008.*