



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO CTUSAB'S MIDTERM DELEGATES' CONFERENCE – NUPW
AUDITORIUM, DALKEITH, THURSDAY, 26TH SEPTEMBER, 2013.**

H.E. The Hon. Robert Morris, C.H.B., G.C.M.

Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Dennis DePeiza General Secretary of CTUSAB, Mr. Cedric Murrell, President of CTUSAB, Senator, Dr. the Honourable Esther Byer-Suckoo, Minister of Labour, Social Security and Human Resource Development, Ms. Mary Anne Redman, 1st Vice-President of CTUSAB, other officers and members of CTUSAB, Head of the Private Sector Organisation, Mr. John Williams, Permanent Secretaries, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, delegates of the constituent bodies of the CTUSAB, members of the Press, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me express any gratitude for the invitation to address your conference whose theme is “Maintaining Unity and Solidarity”, which is most appropriate for the times facing us, and for accepting my decision to address a related theme: “Building an inclusive Barbados through Partnership”.

I start with a number of assumptions which underpin and buttress the message which I wish to deliver to a body of Barbadian patriots, at a time when the state of the nation looms large in the minds of all of us who believe that we

can be labelled as leaders in this our nation state. Unhesitatingly, I express the view that I would be likely to deliver a similar message to trade unionists meeting in conference in any other Caribbean country at this time.

My first assumption is that a leader can be considered as one who has a vision of the future, and has the skill and will to rally those he would wish to lead in pursuit of that vision. My second assumption is that we all agree that one of the most universal of all human characteristics is that of bonding together with those who are nearest and dearest to ourselves in order to provide security and protect our communal and joint interests. The third assumption is that we have reached the stage of our national development where because of the educational levels we have achieved we can move from mere polite conversations to robust conversations, grounded in intellectual rigour which has truth rather than pretence and appearances as its main aim. Finally, I assume that when we as trade unionists meet in conference, we do not speak disguised as “intellectuals”, who believe that somehow we await their views of how the workers should behave and operate, but we speak as leaders who have devoted our lives to the service of workers, and while we will accept the democratic right of all who wish to support, criticize or try to usurp our positions, we gain our authority from those we lead either by office holding, powers of persuasion or the influence we are able to assert.

Having said the above, it is my contention that industrial relations in the Caribbean has been guided by “a new norm” since the 1990’s, and that any person who is keen to lead in the face of this new norm has to acknowledge the

new realities, decide if they are suited to lead in these new realities and be courageous enough to make the required decisions.

The new norm was ushered in by a number of circumstances which came together in the 1990's: First of all, the World Bank's decision to support the role of trade unions in economic development, provided that they were able to adapt and conform to new realities, was a fundamental shift from the notion of classical economists who saw the union as an interference with business, and a monopoly which tended to cause economic dislocation and stagnation. For those of us who are students of history, this was a significant supportive platform for trade union leaders to grasp and take forward into the future.

After all, most of us were aware of the difficult 1970's and 1980's, where all over the world labour and capital seemed to have been so embroiled in industrial warfare that a scorched earth policy seems to have been the most treasured policy. For those who don't recall the situation to which I refer let us recall the British clash between Margaret Thatcher, the monetarists and the supply siders versus the radical miners leading to the winter of discontent and the eventual overturning of the British variant of socialism based on almost outright nationalism. You will recall also Regan's dismantling of the strike by the Air Traffic Controllers, and what it meant to public sector trade unionism. In the Caribbean the most poignant memory is that of the Radical/Revolutionary movement in Trinidad and Tobago versus the reformist programmes of the late Dr. Eric Williams, and the virtual Civil War in Trinidad leading to civil forces joining

with the military with the trade union in the lead under the George Weeks' brand of trade union leader.

By the time the World Bank made its pronouncements in 1995, the "new norm" had accommodated the reality of the fall of the former Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War, the birth of Fortress Europe, and the counter development of the North American Free Trade Area, and we in the Caribbean had moved from CARICOM to the CSME, in recognition of the new norm.

Even so, in the early 1990's, unionists recognized that there would be no more protection given to industries such as sugar and bananas, and in rapid time, both industries were thrown into significant decline, with the resulting negative impact on trade unions. In Barbados we are currently at the stage which decides whether we go the way of Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, or to the stage where Jamaica is at this time, with regard to sugar.

Far forward to the more recent examples of what is happening in the new norm: the earlier Asian crisis of the 1990's; and the world crisis of the period 2007 to current, when we are all aware that when we come out of this deep recession, it may take sometime to reach the stage where we went in.

Can any of us leaders imagine that there can be any concept as business as usual in our country? Is there room for complacency among our leadership elites? I say not. I venture to say that the vulnerability of all our Caribbean Countries must be the most pressing issue on our thoughts – Jamaica, and the

IMF after forty years must give us pause to reflect on how the trade union movement is in that country today. We reflect on the model that has shifted to accommodate a national centre of sorts in the JTURCD, and the fact that they have reached a national agreement on Productivity with the help of our Barbados National Productivity Council. Jamaica, with its extreme variant of Political unionism has moved away significantly from the past to accommodate the realities of the new norm. As I recall the present, the other Caribbean Countries in an IMF programme include Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, and now Grenada is poised to enter such a programme.

Do not let us underestimate the gravity of our local situation, and do not let us deteriorate into political grandstanding over where we are. In the “new norm” Barbados and Barbadians together will have to fight to redeem our future, our legacy to our children and those not yet born.

We made courageous attempts in the early 1990’s to face up to the ‘new norm’, but did we hold steadfastly between then and now as leaders of the labour movement to operate within the concept of the what the new norm requires? I suggest we ask ourselves the following questions:

- 1) Have we as trade union leaders committed ourselves to maintaining the integrity of the trade union national centre?
- 2) Have we as trade union leaders ensured that the Social Partnership has continued to function in the interest of Barbados as a whole?

- 3) Have we as trade union leaders adapted our structures, policies and programmes to reflect the international move from dependency to self-esteem and independence?
- 4) Have we pursued social dialogue, partnership and nation building that is required?
- 5) Have we as trade union leaders placed the national interest before any institutional organizational or personal interest?
- 6) Have we in the Ministries in which we worked, or the Divisions or the Departments – or in the Statutory Corporations committed ourselves to the pursuit of productivity and efficiency?
- 7) Have we in the business firms where we work joined with management in exploring ways of making our businesses more efficient and effective?
- 8) How many performance management systems, productivity agreements, attendance policies have we negotiated.
- 9) How have we been able to persuade our members that we have to move from a position of entitlement to one of empowerment, which may require serious mental adjustment.

Apart from the above questions, you may wish to consider the extent to which the concepts of HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT have become the core drivers of trade unions as institutions of nation building.

Clearly trade unions and their leaders must put at the centre of their work the underlying principles and philosophical groundings of trade unions and industrial relations, and to try to be faithful to these. What has been the original 'focus' of the trade union? There has been anti-colonialism; improved wages and conditions of employment, with related improvement in life chances and material success; there has been participation in national decision making; as well as contributing to wealth creation; Our instruments of action have included collective bargaining; grievance handling and industrial action.

I suggest that the focus which has been at the micro level, will continue to some extent, but that the shift to the macro-level will not move back from where it is currently. The future of industrial relations in Barbados will maintain itself at the macro-level, and thus there is good reason to maintain the consolidation which started in the 1990's.

SOCIAL CAPITAL refers to the amount of groups which are developed in our country, and the range and quality of these groups. This concept, has much to do with the 'new norm'. Social capital builds trust. When we trust each other we are more willing and motivated to work with each other.

That trust allows us to have robust but difficult conversations with each other without having to fracture our relationships and our institutions. The creation of a multiplicity of groupings, allows the talent pool of our country to be used in diverse ways. Building an inclusive Barbados is part of the 'new norm' that is required. Trade Union leaders, like all other national leaders are bound by

the requirements of the times to focus on inclusiveness, rather than on divisiveness in the way forward; on empowerment, rather than on entitlement; and most important of all on developing positive attitudes and mind sets among our followers – the young staff members we recruit to succeed us; the shop stewards who will be feeling the full effects of the ‘new norm’ – we have a responsibility to mentor, counsel and guide them to prepare for a future which is already upon them.

Brother and Sisters, comrades and friends, I urge you not to allow short term differences, ideology or personalities, egotism or egoism to block the path to a recognition that the old adage, “united we stand; divided we fall”, is very real, and let us put our effort best to rebuild at the earliest, the platform which was established in the early 1990’s. We do ourselves a great injustice if we cannot find a way back to where we were through the process of collaboration and compromise, as I suspect that competition, accommodation or avoidance cannot bring a solution. Who will mediate the breach?

I leave you with that thought, and I thank you for your patient hearing.