

PAPER PRESENTED TO
THE STAFF OF VAUXHALL PRIMARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DAY
FRIDAY, 20TH OCTOBER 2006
SOUTHERN PALMS HOTEL

'Challenges to the Movement of Barbadian
Teachers under the Caribbean Single Market and
Economy.'

by

DENNIS DE PEIZA

General Secretary

Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations
of Barbados

This morning, I am honoured to have been invited to share with you on the occasion of Teachers' Professional Day. As you break from the formal classroom setting of desk and chairs, chalk and talk, bells and stress, to a more serene environment; you should set your mind at ease, at least for this one day, and focus intently on what the future holds for each one of you in the teaching profession.

This morning I will serve as your lead discussant, by putting forward some views on the subject of *'Challenges to the Movement of Barbadian Teachers Under the Caribbean Single Market and Economy'*.

At the start of this presentation, I believe that it is in order for me state upfront, that I lay no claim to being an expert on the subject. Interestingly enough, I had the opportunity on 26th October last year, to present a paper to a Breakfast Seminar hosted by the Barbados Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the Hilton Hotel on the subject of, *'The CSME and its Implications for Immigration Control'*.

On Wednesday this week, I had occasion to offer comments at the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Public Primary Schools Principals, on the theme: *'The Caribbean Single Market and Economy: Implications for Education'*.

My presentation to you this morning is designed to stimulate your thinking as it relates to the proposed free movement of teachers, to live and work in member states of the Caribbean Community. I am of the view that the so-called free movement of teachers across the region, as is enshrined under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, is not as free as is being advocated.

The word freedom connotes that one has a right to do something. My reading of the situation is that teachers do not have an exclusive right to move freely. I would prefer if it were said that teachers have a privilege. I contend that the extent to which this privilege is afforded, is determined by the dictates of governmental policy within the individual jurisdictions.

I know that many of you in this room, may be at a loss as to the grounds for my contention. In satisfying your curiosity, I refer to the statement made by the Rgt. Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of Dominica at the 27th Heads of Government Conference in St. Kitts/Nevis in July this year, which said, that mass movement will not be encouraged.

According to him, **“The movement of nurses and teachers across the region would not be done in a manner to disadvantage any country...”** This seems to me to be a loaded statement. The more conservative, however, would suggest that you should read between the lines.

Inasmuch as it seems reasonable that protective strategies should be identified to safeguard the human resources available to each island state, the idea of a free movement of Caribbean nationals, as promoted by the politicians, conveys to the average man that the possibility exists for him/her to move without reservation. This is really a myth; teachers therefore, should not have false hope that they can get up at will and move in pursuit of a career opportunity.

If this point is accepted, then what is the challenge to teachers who have a desire to move to other Caribbean islands to live and work? I say it requires that teachers undertake to upgrade their skills, in order that they may readily compete where the opportunities for employment exist.

Despite the fact that Barbadian teachers for the most part are well qualified, it must not be taken for granted that they have an edge in a highly competitive job market. It is important to recognize that as a direct result of the brain drain, a shortage of specialist teachers will manifest itself across the region. This means that those who have the required skills and competencies, will be in a better position to seize the opportunities when they present themselves.

It is also reasonable to assume that young teachers in the system would likely be the ones to move, and hence ought to be challenged to build on their education and professional foundations. It would seem that this follows logically, bearing in mind that CSME is said to promote the movement of teachers with high-level skills and qualifications.

If we are to be realistic about the movement of teachers under the CSME, I put it to you that Barbados may not suffer any major fallout in the short term as a consequence of any sudden movement. If we accept that movement should be for the purpose of improving the quality of life, then based on what we know about the development of some of our Caribbean islands, when compared to Barbados, it would seem that there is no basis for any fear of an exodus of Barbadian teachers. May I further suggest to you, that many of those in the service in this land, who

have years of experience, enjoy security of tenure and are bound by family commitments, are less likely to leave the shores of Barbados.

If we review the conditions of service under which teachers are employed in Barbados, a point which I will develop later, it would seem reasonable to me that local teachers would hardly consider moving to jurisdictions, where less than favourable conditions of service are being offered. I will extend this point to include the provision of basic health care services. The question that we must ask ourselves is: will teachers migrate if they are not guaranteed access to basic health care services?

Traditionally, Barbadian teachers have migrated to far away lands (North America and England), where the grass is supposed to be greener. If there is any immediate concern which ought to occupy the minds of Barbadian teachers, it would be the movement of other Caribbean nationals seeking opportunities to work in the local educational system.

If we closely examine current trends, there is ample evidence to support the claim that there are many of our counterparts from across the region who are already employed in this island's Public Primary and Secondary Schools. It really does not take a scientific formula to work out that the terms and conditions are far better here.

I am not for one moment suggesting that Barbadian teachers should not move across the region, but I am suggesting that if significant movement were to occur, it

would have to be incentive-driven. In like manner, there is every good reason to believe that the movement into Barbados would be high on the agenda of many, if only for the very reason to which I have just alluded.

Having reviewed some empirical evidence, my findings are that Barbados is not listed amongst those Caribbean territories recording a high incidence movement of its working population. According to a United Nations Report, 2005, from the 'Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean: **“Over the last fifty years, the Caribbean with a present population of approximately 37 million (UN 2003) has lost five million people. Countries experiencing the greatest losses over the decades are Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica and St. Lucia.”**

Let me go further and state that that the same UN Report, cited that **3% of the Caribbean population can be considered as migrants, with the majority coming mainly from the OECS states, with the exception of Anguilla, but also from Jamaica, Guyana, Haiti and Suriname; where there are deteriorating economic and social conditions, high employment among young people, and where there is little hope of improvement in the foreseeable future.**

Based on the information that I have just outlined, it seems to me that Barbadian teachers face a more formidable challenge, as they contemplate movement across the region. However, those who choose to move, ought to commit to the development of the human resource in the region. This, I submit is a hard ask, since improving one's financial position plays a major part in the decision that is

made but the bottom line is, that it remains a matter of personal choice. Added to this, there is valuable experience to be gained from living and working outside of Barbados.

The fact is, that there are opportunities for teachers to move into the states of the OECS, where the need has been identified for the building of a skilled labour force. Already, the private sector in the OECS has cited a shortage of skilled labour as the number one constraint to improving competitiveness. Teachers who possess specialist skills in areas such as mechanics, accounting and technology are in demand.

It is at this juncture that I return to the subject of the controlled movement of teachers as professionals. To start with, the removal of the need to acquire a 'Work Permit' was perceived to be the removal of an inhibitor to the free movement of professional and skilled persons. It seems only cosmetic that a Skills Certificate, known as Recognition of Caribbean Community Skill Qualification, replaces the work permit, as a necessary requirement for those who are deemed eligible to move and work.

A genuine concern then, is whether the process of acquisition is cumbersome and will defeat the intended purpose of facilitating the easier movement of skilled and professional workers.

Let's look at what is involved in the process:

- 1. collection of a application form from the Ministry responsible for issuing the certificate;**
- 2. presentation of a valid form of identification;**
- 3. providing documents supporting qualifications in the approved category;**
- 4. providing documents showing job experience in the respective category;**
- 5. presentation of birth certificates of accompanying dependents;**
- 6. presentation of the marriage certificate of your spouse, if he/she is the only one accompanying you.**

When one looks at the basis for these entry requirements and what persons are required to do to complete the registration process, one begins to wonder if perhaps this might have been a consideration of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda in not signing off on the Instrument.

One would have thought that having acquired the requisite approved training as a teacher, and being in possession of a valid identification of one's status as a Caribbean national, that the teacher could access work any where in the region. It is amazing that movement is facilitated across the 52 states of the USA where hundreds of millions reside, and in a region of less than 15 million, the movement of teachers is severely constrained.

I think that this policy does more to ensure that Barbadian teachers remain at home; thus putting a dampening effect on the brain drain. Surely it would not be

worth the effort to complete this process for seeking employment in other Caribbean States, where salaries and conditions of service are unattractive.

On the point of salaries, the movement of migrant workers into other jurisdictions is often said to depress wages and salaries. There are solid grounds for the argument that Barbadian teachers will not experience this, since there is zero possibility that the trade union movement in Barbados will allow the hands of the clock to be turned back, to deprive teachers of the salaries and conditions of service they now enjoy.

Taking a positive spin on this, it is conceivable that because of the high quality of teachers produced in Barbados, it might strengthen the case of the unions in arguing for better salaries and conditions of service. A case could be made for some form of incentive scheme to be developed, which would enhance the overall package offered to teachers.

Moreover, such a development could serve to attract more graduates coming out of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, into the profession. Added to this, it could contribute to developing a surplus of trained teachers whose services could be readily engaged both regionally and extra regionally.

Let me turn my attention briefly to a fundamental challenge that will confront Barbadian teachers who choose to work in states such as Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, and Suriname. This challenge relates to the language barrier that will result from the high number of non-English speaking immigrants who reside in

these states. It therefore means that despite attractive remuneration packages teachers would first have to upgrade their language skills and competencies.

There is an additional concern regarding the preparedness of Barbadian teachers to transition to work environments where there are mixed races and cultures, and where systems and practices are fundamentally different. These can pose significant challenges.

This brings me to the point of examining some of the reasons that drive the movement of teachers:

- 1. Inadequate remuneration and benefits**
- 2. Unfavourable working conditions**
- 3. Lack of management and leadership**
- 4. Insufficient training and development**
- 5. Insufficient career perspectives**
- 6. Underutilization of acquired skills**
- 7. Burn out due to an increase workload occasioned by resignations and high staff turn over**
- 8. Lack of recognition of the profession**
- 9. Job security/Security of tenure**

If I were to select three reasons which I believe would contribute to the movement of Barbadian teachers, topping the list would be: the lack of security of tenure, the lack of management and leadership, and the lack of recognition of the profession.

For some time now, the BUT and the BSTU have voiced their concern over the inordinate period of time it has taken to appoint teachers in the system. This has been a leading contributing factor to the frustration amongst teachers in the system, and could be a factor in spurring the movement of teachers across the region under the CSME. This is very possible, particularly so in instances where teachers are able to negotiate security of tenure in a contract of employment with their prospective employers.

As I indicated earlier, a couple days ago I had the opportunity to address the Association of Public Primary Schools Principals, at their Annual General Meeting, on the theme, *'The Caribbean Single Market and Economy: Implications for Education'*. I made the point then, that **it was my judgment that management, leadership and communication skills were woefully lacking amongst those who lead this island's public schools. It goes without further elaboration that this is a weakness to be addressed by Barbadian teachers who have an interest in becoming principals of schools, if they are to compete on the regional stage.**

In focusing on the subject of working conditions, it is reasonable to assume that the superior working conditions and salaries Barbadian teachers enjoy, would be sufficient to motivate them to stay at home. This should not be misconstrued to mean that there is not a need for better salaries to be paid to teachers.

Staying on the subject of salaries, permit me to compare the current salaries paid to teachers in Guyana with salaries paid to their Barbadian counterparts. **An individual with basic qualifications, in Barbados, earns approximately BDS\$1,500.00 monthly while a Principal in Guyana earns US \$300.00 (equivalent to BDS\$600.00),** the disparity is unbelievable.

If the movement of teachers across the region is to be encouraged, then it stands to reason that in addition to the harmonization of labour laws and the development of a single currency, attention has to be given to the payment of comparable salaries to teachers and other professionals. Notwithstanding the fact that the pace of development is not the same in all the island states, it however seems logical that if the idea of a single market and economy is to be achieved, there can be no alternative but to work towards developing a level playing field.

It is known that living standards across the region differ significantly. Be this as it may, there is an expectation that efforts would be directed at raising the living standards, which ought to serve as an inducement rather than a disincentive to the movement of teachers as professionals.

Turning my attention to the conditions of service that Barbadian teachers enjoy, much can be said of those benefits enjoyed under the social security system. These include unemployment benefits, injury on the job and compensation for loss or damage of property in the execution of duty. Most importantly, teachers like other Barbadian workers enjoy the protection of progressive labour legislation. For example, there is the **Employment of Women (Maternity Leave Act, 1976), and of more recent vintage, the Safety and Health at Work Act, 2005.**

With reference to the Maternity Leave Act, the law provides that no employer can dismiss an employee or require an employee to resign because she is pregnant. Further, where an employee has been granted maternity leave under the Act, she shall, on resumption of work after such leave, be entitled to her seniority rights, reinstated in her former work or equivalent work, and shall not by reason of the fact that she went on maternity leave, be paid a smaller remuneration than she received before she went on maternity leave.

In contemplating moving to live and work in other jurisdictions in the region, the readiness of Barbadians to do so, would hardly be stimulated where there is the absence of provision for the harmonization of social security rights. It is to be expected that there would be concerns over the transfer of pension rights and entitlements.

The matter of harmonization emerges as a critical component to the success of the regional integration process under the CSME. Apart from recognizing the need to address the harmonization of social security rights, the Heads of Government must be cognizant that the harmonization of labour laws is a must, if full effect is to be given to the CSME. Certainly as it stands now, many of the territories in the region have not yet signed on to many important ILO Conventions.

One of the greatest challenges to Barbadian teachers as they look to move under the CSME, is that of **employment mobility**. It is obvious that in a saturated system, where there is little **room for promotional opportunities**, many

individuals are left to languish for an indefinite period of time. This in itself leads to the frustration that many teachers now experience.

The matter of **insularity** is an added frustration that has plagued the region. And the perception of Barbadian insularity in some quarters of the Caribbean community, will undoubtedly serve as a deterrent to the movement of Barbadian teachers in some islands. It is conceivable that this factor accounts for the traditional movement of Barbadian teachers further North, rather than into the OECS states, and to Trinidad and Tobago in the South. However, if this perception holds true, Barbadian teachers may be challenged not to pursue existing job opportunities in the OECS states.

Under CSME, it is to be expected that the principle of decent work will be observed. There is also the expectation that a commitment will be demonstrated to respect the rights of workers, and for the fair treatment of workers without regard for nationality, socio-economic background or race. It is reasonable to assume that Barbadian teachers who come out of an environment that promotes **fundamental rights and privileges, including the right to bargain collectively, to join a trade union of choice, to freely associate and to strike**, will not be encouraged to move where these are denied.

On the subject of union membership, this would hardly be a source of concern to Barbadian teachers, who move to work within the island states that form part of the CMSE (excluding Suriname), since teachers' trade unions in the member states are affiliated to the Caribbean Union of Teachers.

Finally, I turn my attention to the challenge imposed upon Barbadian teachers to maintain the dignity of the profession, in upholding the Code of Ethics as they move across the region under the CSME. I say this against the backdrop that no matter how well-intentioned there is always the possibility that persons living and working in a foreign environment, might be inclined to respond in less than favourable ways, when the pressures of that environment are imposed upon them. I don't think that there is a need for me to elaborate this point.

It seems more instructive for me to remind you of your professional obligations. I therefore refer you to **the Code of Ethics for Teachers, as reflected in the 1993 Hand Book for Teachers, produced by the Barbados Union of Teachers.**

“The professional teacher recognizes and is constantly aware of his/her role and responsibility in the delivery of education in his/her school. The quality of the teacher affects many; the student, parent, the professional colleague, the employer, the public, the educational institution and the professional organization that represents the teacher's interest.

There is also a further challenge for teachers on the move, to commit to the pursuits of excellence, and to observe the highest ideals and principles.

Irrespective of where the teacher works, there are **two tenets of the Code of Ethics that should not be compromised. These are:**

- **never to discriminate against pupils on the grounds of class, colour, status, religion or political belief; and**

- **to recognize that prime consideration and concern shall be for the interest welfare of students.**

I wish to thank you for your attention and hope that my presentation has lived up to your expectation.

You may access more information on the free movement of labour, by visiting the website: www.csmett.com