



GOING THE DISTANCE

Reflections at 80 on Six Decades in the Trenches

RALPH HENRY

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**Dr. Ralph Henry celebrates his 80th Birthday, with this refreshing
reflection on his contributions to Caribbean Development as
Public Servant, Academic and Practitioner**

RALPH HENRY



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PROLOGUE

As I approach the milestone of my 80th birthday, I must first express my gratitude to God for the blessing of a remarkably long life. The number of my contemporaries who are still present in this world is diminishing rapidly. I vividly recall two encounters with former colleagues along the way, both of which sparked profound reflections.

On one occasion, a colleague who had been a student of mine during my early days as an academic inquired about my retirement from teaching. Although I hesitated to confirm it completely, as I was still engaged in some part-time lecturing, he took it upon himself to respond, proclaiming, "Old professors never truly retire. They merely lose their faculties!"

Hence, I find myself reiterating, as I have for several years now, that "I am retiring" ... in the present continuous tense.

During another encounter at the University of the West Indies Library, a colleague who hadn't seen me in a while greeted me with apparent delight. He remarked that he, like me, must be waiting to be summoned by the "Fellow." In the meantime, he found solace in spending time at the library, diligently working on projects that might be completed in whatever time the "Fellow" bestows. I suppose I am currently at that stage—preparing to write, reviewing my past works, and hoping that I retain undiminished my intellectual faculties, as I retire.

I consider myself fortunate to have pursued diverse yet interconnected careers and to have lived a rich and fulfilling life that now compels me to embark on the task of writing an autobiography. Such a venture is currently underway. Additionally, there is a pressing need to document my reflections, as well as provide some perspective on a future, acknowledging that, at the age of 80, I might not live long enough to witness it. It is my duty to shoulder this responsibility, emphasizing the word "live" in all its myriad meanings. I aspire to produce a book that draws upon my analyses and experiences, projecting into the future that which others may encounter, shape, or avert.

While old age has indeed been a blessing, I do not claim any special prescience.

CHILDHOOD AND TEENAGE YEARS

I was born in Arima to parents of humble beginnings, Vernon and Agnes Henry, nee Nanton. They were clearly ambitious and were the first blacks to own a haberdashery store in the town. Growing up in Arima in the late 1940s and early 1950s, I started to get a sense of the society, Arima itself, and the country. At that time, one's color and complexion counted for much in determining status, and I knew my place as a black boy. In some circles, I was referred to by the four-letter pejorative "*blak*".

I won a College Exhibition, gaining entry to secondary education, and started at Queen's Royal College (QRC) in 1956. There, I encountered a different social environment compared to my hometown. The College was welcoming of all - there were students of all races and complexions, ranging from individuals as dark as Darcus Howe (who later became renowned for his role in campaigning against racism in Britain) and me, to lily whites, including the sons of colonial officials and the white elite of Trinidad.

"High" complexion did not translate into any superiority in school performance, nor did it apply to participation in various sports offered by the school. At Speech Day every year, students of all descriptions won prizes, and when the Island Scholarship results were announced, students of all descriptions won scholarships to support their studies at universities abroad.

I got involved in drama and the Cadets, and played cricket and football, enjoying it all. Other activities on offer, such as lawn tennis and the Sea Scouts, were beyond my reach due to the cost of equipment and uniforms. I did not rise to prominence in any of the sports that I played. Indeed, my performance could not merit selection since there were so many others who were outstanding sportsmen.

This was a time when QRC produced young people who went on to represent the country in cricket, athletics, football, the arts, music, and drama. Mention of the names of my student contemporaries who became prominent in society supports my early impressions that the school allowed talent to be revealed and nurtured, regardless of one's class, color, or complexion. Among these contemporaries were Peter Minshall in Mas and Festival Arts, Deryck Murray in Cricket, Lincoln Phillips in Football, Wendell Mottley in Athletics, Shiva Naipaul in Literature, Ray Holman in Steelband Music, in addition to others who made their mark in Science, Law, Business, and other fields.

Just being at QRC instilled in me the possibility of becoming successful. Dr. Eric Williams, who became Chief Minister in 1956, was a black man, and his name was listed in the Assembly Hall as an alumnus and Island Scholarship winner. I could see Dr. Williams drive by the school at lunchtime, on his way home for lunch, and hear him on the radio speaking intelligently about the

society and the country. He was clearly a person of great importance, and he was a product of QRC.

QRC also gave me a sense of freedom - I could be myself and would be judged based on performance. Doing well at school meant you could overcome any negatives of blackness that were always present in wider society at the time. In doing so, I could ignore that I was seen as "*blak*".

I committed to doing well at school and generally did. I sat the Cambridge School Certificate - Senior Cambridge (SC) in 1959 and then the Higher School Certificate (HC) in 1961. Hard work produced excellent results. I contemplated sitting the HC again in 1962 in the hope of winning an Island Scholarship, but my mother would have none of that. As a single mother, she could no longer continue to support us five boys on her own. Being the eldest, it was time for me to seek employment and bring an income into the household.

TEACHER/PUBLIC SERVANT

My work career began on May 2, 1962, a mere four months before Trinidad and Tobago achieved formal political independence. I needed to work to assemble the wherewithal to embark on tertiary education. I started as a teacher at Osmond High School, a private secondary school. After just one term there, I secured the position of Assistant Teacher at Hillview College. Teaching was the best opportunity for someone who had attained, as I did, the Higher School Certificate (HC) in Languages—French, Spanish, and Latin.

However, as the era of independence dawned upon us, it became evident to me that a degree in Economics held the promise of a more rewarding career than being a teacher of languages. Consequently, when the College of Arts and Science was established at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, I initially enrolled as an Evening Student and subsequently transitioned to full-time studies in 1964, pursuing a B.A. General degree in Economics and Sociology.

I can confidently assert that my ideological and philosophical perspectives were forged during those formative years at UWI. A deep concern for social and economic equity emerged from reading the development literature at the time. A critical assessment of the Castro Revolution in a book authored by Dudley Seers, Richard Jolly and others of the University of Sussex had shown the success and transformation achieved – illiteracy had been significantly reduced and essential

services were being made available to the masses of the Cuban citizenry.¹ I was also greatly inspired by the early efforts at Ujamaa in Tanzania.²

In contributing to a student publication at the University, at that time - *the Social Analyst* - I noted the prevalent discrimination in employment in Trinidad and Tobago at the time. This was exemplified by the "Royal Family", displayed on the front page spread of the Sunday paper, which confirmed that the only individual of African descent on the staff at the Royal Bank Building on Independence Square in Port of Spain, held the post of driver to the General Manager. In my piece in the Social Analyst, I mused about the adoption of a selection system based on universalistic rules. A socialist approach to production and distribution seemed more fitting for Trinidad and Tobago. In such an ideal system, individuals of any racial background—be it Afro-descendant, Indo-descendant, or White—would be evaluated solely on their education and competence for the job, eradicating the notion of inherent entitlement based on race.

A steadfast commitment to equity and the application of universalistic criteria became enduring principles in my life.

I did find fulfillment during my early stint in teaching. However, upon graduation, I set my sights on a position in the public service. Fortunately, I achieved that goal and secured a post as an Economist/Statistician in the Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education

One of the most significant projects I worked on during my time at the Ministry of Education was the Fifteen Year Educational Plan. It was during a brief course in Educational and Manpower Planning offered by the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University in 1969, and held at Makerere University in Uganda, that I gained a close-up understanding of the real developmental challenges faced by governments in so-called Third World countries, particularly in Africa. The primary question they grappled with was how to initiate the development process with meager resources in a subsistence economy.

Although the task in Trinidad and Tobago was not as arduous, I perceived my role as opening doors for an increasing number of students to access secondary education. While I had had the privilege of attending a prestigious secondary school—Queen's Royal College— I was well-aware of several individuals, no less capable, who did not have the opportunity that I had, yet had managed to make it to university and succeed, by dint of part-time programmes. There was a Trade Unionist from Tobago, a Security Guard at Texaco, also from Tobago, and another fellow

¹ Dudley Seers, Andres Bianchi, Richard Jolly, and Max Nolf, *Cuba, the Economic and Social Revolution* (United States: University of North Carolina Press, 1964).

² Alistair Boddy-Evans, "What Was Ujamaa and How Did It Affect Tanzania?" ThoughtCo, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-was-ujamaa-44589>.

Arimian who, despite leaving primary school with a School Leaving Certificate, had pursued night school and exhibited exceptional personal discipline, ultimately earning a Bachelor's Degree around the same time as I did.

My contribution to the Educational Plan involved ensuring an optimal and equitable geographic distribution of educational opportunities, considering the population distribution and the available resources at the time. This task was in perfect alignment with my philosophy of promoting social equity in a diverse society.

The award of a Commonwealth Scholarship from the Government of Canada afforded me the opportunity to pursue graduate studies at the University of Alberta, specializing in the Economics of Education and Manpower Planning, as it was then known. Upon returning to Trinidad and Tobago, in 1972, I resumed my service in the public sector, initially in the Ministry of Education. After just a few months, I was posted to the Ministry of Planning, where I became acquainted with the broader challenges faced by the country.

Ministry of Planning – Research and Academic Pursuits

The Government, particularly after the Black Power uprising of 1970, had become increasingly sensitive to the importance of distributional fairness, which was implicit in the Policy of promoting a People's Sector.

Access to recent census data in 1972 motivated me to replicate certain aspects of my PhD thesis, which explored the monetary returns for Technologists and Technicians in Alberta, Canada. I composed an academic paper on earnings and education in Trinidad and Tobago, which demonstrated the substantial benefits of completing education and attaining higher-level education and training.

Later, access to the Household Budgetary Survey of 1972 provided me with another opportunity to develop a paper on poverty and inequality. This publication, the first of its kind, aimed to assess poverty in the country. There had been previous work on inequality by Ahiram.³ However, my paper utilized the most up-to-date data to analyze inequality but also poverty. These papers were both published in the Central Statistical Office Research Papers collection.

Without consciously planning it, I had begun to follow an academic trajectory or career, which was not the norm in the Public Service, where the authoring of academic papers was limited to only a select few public servants, primarily top technocrats such as Permanent Secretaries.

³ AHIRAM, E. "Income Distribution in Jamaica, 1958." *Social and Economic Studies* 13, no. 3 (1964): 333–69.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27853796>.

Ministry of Labour –The Political Element

In 1973, I was promoted to the position of Senior Planning Officer in the Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Cooperatives. In this role, I was immersed in the examination of wages and incomes, as well as the assessment of how the Industrial Court was addressing wage disparities between capital and labor in the country.

I suppose politics, with a small "p," may have influenced my approach to fulfilling my duties. My empathy for the underprivileged and the marginalized consistently guided my work. It was around this time, in 1973, that I joined the Tapia House Movement. Tapia was renowned as a left-of-center political movement. As a member of the Tapia House Movement, I occasionally contributed to its weekly publication under a pseudonym. Joining Tapia was a natural step for me, as I had been drawn to the ideas put forth by the New World Group during my final years as a student at UWI. James Millette and Lloyd Best were the guiding light until their split in 1969.

One of my responsibilities at the Ministry was to prepare documentation for the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It was imperative for the Ministry to keep its partners—the representatives of employers and labor—up to date on ILO Conventions and Recommendations and their potential impact on the workplace.

During this time, one of the issues under examination at the ILO in Geneva involved the oil industry. I believed that the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU) should be informed and, in addition to updating the Trinidad and Tobago Labour Congress, I sent them relevant correspondence. This was despite the OWTU not being affiliated with the Labour Congress, but rather with the Council of Progressive Trade Unions (CPTU), which had external ties to trade unions in the Communist/Socialist Bloc countries. I felt compelled, based on my political orientation, to ensure that the OWTU had access to information that could be beneficial for representing oil workers in the country.

However, I faced strong reprimand from higher-ranking officials in the Ministry for this action. The CPTU was viewed as anti-Government, and the government recognized only the Labor Congress, maintaining no official communication with the CPTU. It is possible that the top officials were aware of my sympathies toward Tapia. In fact, my then-wife, Gloria Henry, ran for the Arima Constituency in the 1976 Elections, but was unsuccessful.

My political orientation did not hinder me from carrying out my duties in the Ministry of Labour. On the contrary, I believe I went above and beyond the call of duty in various areas, including the reorganization of data to assist Labor Officers, who played a crucial role in mediating conflicts between labor and capital and in the mandated negotiations before unions could initiate strikes or employers could impose lockouts.

One area to which I dedicated a substantial amount of time was the promotion of cooperatives. In response to the 1970 Black Power Riots, the Government, under Eric Williams, emphasized the

development of a People's Sector, with cooperatives being regarded as a crucial component. The Cooperatives Societies Act was revised to enhance social equity within society. I was involved in collaborating with the Department of Cooperatives to promote cooperatives across the country. One of my responsibilities was visiting communities in remote areas to foster the spirit of cooperativism.

The Government appointed me as one of its representatives on the Board of the Federation of Consumer Cooperatives, which served as the bulk buying agency for a significant number of consumer cooperatives that emerged following the 1970 Black Power Revolution. Through this experience, I gained a first-hand understanding of the wiles of big businesses in the distribution system. I gained insight into the dominance of oligopolies in certain sectors, particularly in the importation of goods, including essential items.

Reflecting on it now, I found great satisfaction in working with groups that represented the lower income brackets and the most socially disadvantaged individuals within society. I aligned myself fully with public policy which focused on the economic upliftment of the lower socio-economic groups in the society.

National Training Board

After much deliberation, I took up the post of Director of Research at the National Training Board (NTB), which was established in 1976. I was initially reluctant to leave the post of Senior Planning Officer at the Ministry of Labour, as I believed the new position would take me away from developing expertise in economic analysis and socio-economic policy implementation. However, upon assuming the position, I realized that a major challenge confronting the country at the time, during its economic boom, was the overall skills deficiency—both in terms of the quantity of workers with formal training and the quality of the labor force.

Regrettably, the Executive Director, who had previously served as Principal of the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute, was hesitant to deviate from the formal education system's emphasis on education and training for individuals entering the labor market. With the construction of many Junior Secondary and Senior Comprehensive Schools underway, he viewed the National Training Board as primarily an inspectorate for Technical and Vocational Education. However, the research conducted within the unit for which I was responsible recognized a far more proactive role for the NTB in training and upgrading the skills of existing workers in the labor force.

Indeed, this group presented a significant potential client base which was much larger than the annual cohort of secondary school graduates entering the labor market. The existing workforce needed to be reached through short-term courses, with clear career pathways identified to help them achieve the highest level of on-the-job (OJT) preparation. Various occupations required specific skills that the NTB had the capacity to organize effectively.

NTB had a role in addressing quarry operations (including blasting rocks with explosives); reorienting taxi drivers in Tobago to serve as tour guides; training reef-boat operators in Tobago; educating boat operators in the Caroni Swamp for showcasing the Scarlet Ibis; and providing programmes for gantry crane operators involved in port operations upgrade. Additionally, the NTB's close collaboration with the Works Permit Committee, responsible for approving the hiring of foreign workers, could assist in identifying labor market demand amid growing shortages.

However, the Executive Director did not support this orientation of the NTB, resulting in ongoing disagreements and conflicts. My constant disagreements with the Executive Director eventually prompted me to explore opportunities outside of the public service. When a lecturer position became available in the Department of Economics at the University of the West Indies, I applied and was hired.

My previous contributions, such as having two articles accepted for publication in the CSO Research Papers, likely strengthened my candidacy compared to other applicants. Moreover, during the 1970s, I had served as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Economics, stepping in for Mr. Fitz Francis, who taught Public Finance and Caribbean Economy.

I commenced my role as a Lecturer in the academic year 1980-81, taking a Leave of Absence from the public service for a three-year period. Effectively, I retained my position as a public servant, with the option to return if I desired in 1983.

ACADEMIC LIFE

Department of Economics

My initial years as an academic marked the beginning of a very hectic existence. The courses I taught revolved around Public Finance, Economic Development, and Caribbean Economic Problems. Among them, the course on Caribbean Economic Problems attracted the largest number of students and was considered an accessible course. It was often chosen by students who were pursuing a broader Social Sciences Degree, such as Political Science or Sociology, and needed to fulfill a second-year Economics requirement but were not pursuing a BSc in Economics or an Economics specialization.

During my pursuit of a PhD in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, I had taken graduate courses in Public Finance, Labor Economics, and Development Economics along with courses in Educational Planning and the Economics of Education, which aligned well with my interests and was a perfect match for the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship I had obtained. Although I was enrolled in the Department of Educational Administration, my supervisor agreed

that I could take courses outside of the department that were relevant to my future career in Educational and Manpower Planning.

Consequently, I pursued several graduate courses in the Faculty of Economics, along with an introductory course in Computing Science. Initially, I had considered a career in Educational Planning and Manpower Planning upon returning to Trinidad and Tobago, but it turned out that the courses I had taken paved the way for my appointment as a Lecturer in Economics.

As a Lecturer, I endeavored to ensure that students grasped the fundamentals of all the courses I taught and could connect what they learned with the realities of Trinidad and Tobago, the wider Caribbean region, and developing countries in general. Whenever possible, I incorporated current information and issues, aiming for students to readily comprehend the concepts and theoretical frameworks they encountered while recognizing their immediate relevance. I encouraged students to engage in extensive reading, and many achieved the remarkable feat of going through the articles and books listed in my recommended readings.

I suspect that I may be remembered for conducting classes and tutorials on Friday afternoons and for scheduling mid-year exams in the week preceding the annual Carnival! My rationale was to synchronize the courses with the cultural rhythm of the country. Prior to Carnival, there was the Steelband competition known as *Panorama*, while Brass Bands held a *Brassorama*. In the courses I taught, we had an “Examorama” in the week leading up to Carnival. Just like *Panorama* and *Brassorama*, participants intensified their preparations as the event approached.

In the Economic Development course, students were tasked with collecting and analyzing data on a country outside of the Caribbean, enhancing their overall understanding of the world. While teaching courses over the years, I consistently updated the readings to include the most recent journal articles and books. One point I emphasized to students was that I considered my own courses as a means of measuring up to the competition in universities elsewhere in the world. Consequently, I was dedicated to being as competitive as my counterparts in Singapore or any other trailblazers in development performance; and I wanted students to leave my class with heads brimming with information and knowledge, on par with their peers in other parts of the world. In other words, they had to see themselves as individuals capable of competing effectively with the rest of the world.

Regarding updating the literature, I relied on journals such as *Social and Economic Studies*, published by the Institute of Economic Research (ISER), now the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), and *World Development*, for staying abreast of cutting-edge research and writing on development issues.

All the materials I had gathered were made available to my students through special collections at the UWI Library. Some resources were also kept in the office in the Department of Economics, and the administrative staff assisted in managing student borrowing. Notably, articles and

selected excerpts from recently published books were stored in "Henry's boxes" at the Library, accessible on short loan periods, typically two hours. These materials became a popular source of up-to-date information and were utilized by students in other courses taught by my colleagues. This arrangement proved particularly crucial during the late 1980s and early 1990s when reduced budgets prevented the University Library from investing in new publications. In fact, the Library subsequently discontinued its subscriptions to some journals that I considered significant.

As in any academic community, the Department had intellectual leaders such as Trevor Farrell, who became a close friend, and Eric St. Cyr, who had been an Economics lecturer since the 1960s and had taught me at the undergraduate level. The corridors of the Department and the rest of the Social Sciences Faculty were always vibrant spaces for engaging small-group discussions, which in themselves were highly instructive. I had friends at the Main Library, as well as Wendy Sealy at the Institute of International Relations, who kept me informed about their library acquisitions. Wendy Sealy eventually became a close colleague, and we collaborated on information issues and knowledge management.

Furthermore, we organized visits by distinguished scholars from the region and beyond. During my tenure as Head of Department, I invited William Darity, a distinguished Economic Historian from Duke University, to spend a week with the Department. Lloyd Best, a former member of the Department who had become involved in domestic politics, also spent a week with us. He delivered presentations to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as staff. Interestingly, despite Lloyd Best's significant contributions, the higher-ups in the University's administration refused to provide the recommended honorarium for him. The rejection was based on the authorities at the time deeming Lloyd Best to be a "publicist" rather than an economist. It is important to note that Lloyd Best was one of the most distinguished Caribbean economists in the second half of the 20th century.

Development Perspectives

While there is much in Economics that can be taught from a value-neutral perspective, I admit to bias in the way I taught. I believed that my role as a lecturer was to help students recognize their own responsibility to their surroundings and to contribute to the transformation of the Caribbean.

The Caribbean region, often dismissed internationally as ex-colonies founded on the enslavement of forcibly transplanted Africans, saw the addition of indentured workers from India in the case of Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago after Emancipation. Furthermore, various other immigrant groups arrived, all contributing to the creation of classic plural societies. For me, development in these countries and the wider Caribbean meant achieving equitable participation for all. These nations needed to promote equality of opportunity, with the State intervening, where feasible, in addressing inequalities in outcomes, to the extent that it could. This abiding principle was no doubt deeply ingrained in my thinking and lectures.

Arthur Lewis is reported to have said that an excellent method of becoming steeped in a subject area is to teach it. I found this to be true when teaching the course on the Caribbean Economy, delving into the region's economic history from the era of slavery onward. While most of the academic community at St. Augustine cannot be characterized as being steeped in radical socialist or communist ideology, as the Mona Campus could, we tended to lean toward the left of the political spectrum. Consequently, we were often critical of what seemed to be the stance of the Government in Port of Spain.

However, I refused to follow the pattern of bashing Lewis's seminal policy piece on the "Industrialization of the British West Indies." My own memories of what the East-West Corridor looked like in the late 1940s, when I was around five years old, accompanying my parents on visits from Arima to Port of Spain, corroborated Lewis' observations on Trinidad in the late 1940s. He had argued that Trinidad was more advanced than most other countries and had the potential to succeed in implementing the programme he proposed to attract foreign capital, from which locals would learn the tricks of the trade. I couldn't agree with the caricature of Lewis as merely promoting "industrialization by invitation."

To me, Lewis was a true radical, considering the context of late 1940s Trinidad and Tobago and his proposal for 'industrialization' within the framework of the "British West Indies." I found merit in Lloyd Best's Plantation Model, particularly its emphasis on maximizing the use of local resources, as the Maroons did with ackee. But even the Plantation School recognized that there was a need, and there would always be a need to export, given the 'salt-fish bias' in consumption, which required countries to rely on some level imports.

I held reservations about C.Y. Thomas's dismissal, in *Dependence and Transformation*, of the East Asian countries' pursuit of foreign capital by leveraging their available cheap labor.⁴ I characterized their approach as Jujitsu and "Asian acrobatics." These countries allowed foreign capital to come in, benefiting from the exploitation of their cheap labor, while simultaneously leveraging that relationship to rapidly develop local capacity in science and technology. They quickly began producing their own products for export to foreign markets.

Trevor Farrell had become known for his thesis by then of "riding the technological wave," which involved monitoring the frontiers of knowledge in science and technology to identify opportunities for economic advancement in the Caribbean. He advocated for utilizing our national and regional science and technology infrastructure. He was equally trenchant in his criticism of Lewis, as were radicals like Thomas and the Mona School.

From my own viewpoint, there were many similarities between Lewis and Farrell himself. In fact, Lewis's *Theory of Economic Growth*, particularly his chapters on Knowledge and Institutions,

⁴ Thomas, Clive Y. "Dependence and Transformation: The Economics of the Transition to Socialism." (1977).

presaged the work of the Technology School in the late 1970s and 1980s.⁵ I argued that Farrell was simply Lewis Mk 2. Of course, Farrell rejected that characterization of his work.

In all of this, I found that my own ideas on the development challenge were being refined, leading me to delve deeply into the significance of human capital. I boldly suggested that human capital should be the primary focus of planners in the development of most Caribbean countries, given that the physical endowments might be equated to rocks – *The Economics of Rocks*. This perspective allowed me to synthesize the work being done by my colleagues at the time, and across the ideological divide.

Outward Looking Approach

When I assumed responsibility for the Graduate Programme in the Department of Economics in the late 1980s, one of my earliest initiatives was to formalize language exposure as part of the curriculum. For MSc students, this typically meant learning Spanish since the Caribbean islands are surrounded by the Spanish-speaking countries in South and Central America. For students from Africa, it was anticipated that they would be exposed to French, given the significant number of Francophone countries on the continent.

I developed, in collaboration with two colleagues from the Department of Language and Linguistics, Dr. Sylvia Moodie and Dr. Lancelot Cowie, a year-long language course for second-year students in the two-year MSc programme. Both Dr. Moodie and Dr. Cowie were highly proficient in Spanish, almost at the level of native speakers. As part of the programme arrangements were made for students to visit Spanish-speaking countries to interact with personnel from key institutions, including economics departments at universities. It was expected that by that point, the students would have achieved reasonable proficiency in the language. I led visits of staff and students to Venezuela and Cuba as part of these initiatives.

Another aspect of our outward-looking approach was the establishment of the Latin American Desk. With my office serving as the official meeting point, the Desk consisted of Dr. Anthony Gonzales from the Institute of International Relations, Dr. Gary Garcia from the Faculty of Agriculture, Dr. Lancelot Cowie, and myself. The purpose of the Desk was to serve as a focal point for briefing and debriefing colleagues who visited Latin America or had connections with the region. This nucleus was later expanded by Dr. Cowie to create the Office of Latin American Affairs at the Institute of International Relations.

Under my watch, the Department also sought to institutionalize an outreach facility. As the University of the West Indies, it was important for us to be fully engaged with the challenges faced by the member states on the ground. We introduced a short "summer" course and invited Governments from the region to send their middle and senior officials from Ministries of

⁵ Lewis, W. Arthur. "The Theory of Economic Growth." (1955).

Planning, Finance, and other ministries involved in economic or socio-economic development. The objective was to bridge the gap between theory and practice, with department lecturers adapting their specialization to assist these public officials in treating rigorously with the issues that they faced in their respective countries.

OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY

Reflecting on my career, I can confidently say that I spent a significant amount of time outside the confines of the academy, even while being within it, and in various capacities.

Abilene Wild Cats Athletic Club

As I entered the labor market after leaving school, I joined a football club and became a founding member of the Abilene Wild Cats Athletic Club in Arima. I also served as an official of the club at some point. This club has produced more athletes representing the country in national teams than any other club in its sixty-year history. I owe a debt of gratitude to our first coach, Cliff Bertrand, who taught me the essence of long-distance running. Under his charge, I learned about "going the distance" in athletics and how it applies to life in general.

Teaching Common Entrance

Through my involvement with the African Association of Trinidad and Tobago, established by Isaac McLeod and his wife, Janice Patricia McLeod, in the 1980s, I volunteered to teach lower-income primary school students preparing for the Common Entrance Examination, which served as the pathway to secondary school. The students came primarily from the nearby communities of Barataria and Morvant.

When the African Association had to relinquish this facility and couldn't find an alternative location in the area, I connected with the Emancipation Support Committee (ESC), another organization dedicated to supporting young people in marginalized urban communities. The ESC initiated its efforts in Laventille and Belmont, and I became involved in teaching at the Common Entrance level at St. Barb's Primary School.

The significance of this volunteer work became evident to me when a male student, in one of these classes, asked me if people from Laventille could attend university. In response, I invited a former student of mine who was pursuing a MSc in International Relations to visit the class on the following Saturday. She lived in Laventille and had attended St. Barb's Primary School. The last I heard about that student from Laventille, he had become a commercial pilot, flying with Emirates airline. His three sisters had all earned university degrees, and one of them is a Medical Doctor.

During a visit to the Trinidad and Tobago Mission in Geneva, I was delighted to meet a past student of the “Jumbie Bridge” class who had become a Foreign Service Officer with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

I also encouraged three of my past students at UWI St. Augustine to join me in this volunteer work in marginalized communities. Lou Barclay, Juliette Melville, and her sister Cecila Melville all contributed their time to this endeavor and found it rewarding. We devoted a lot of time to developing a positive self-concept among students, alongside addressing their academic needs. Mentoring became a vital component in addressing the challenges faced by these communities.

Today, poor educational delivery and lack of community development continue to be problems in many communities along the East-West Corridor of Trinidad, and the country is paying a high price for it, with a large number of at-risk youth.

Picton Progressive Youth Group

Sometime in the mid to late 1980s, I became involved in the formation of a youth group in the rough community of Picton, in Laventille. A friend from my trade union days in the Public Service Trade Union invited me to speak with her sons and their friends in Picton, and I saw the potential for a youth group to be established in the community.

With the enthusiasm of the young individuals and my guidance, we established the Picton Progressive Youth Group. One of our initial initiatives was to encourage as many young persons as possible to enroll in the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Program (YTEPP), which provided training for young people. The first chairman of the group pursued a joinery course through YTEPP and later found employment in the Ministry of Works. He has since become the Grievance Officer for his union – indeed his leadership potential was evident from an early age.

Many members enrolled in YTEPP, and we also encouraged some persons to join Adult Education classes offered at nearby schools during the afternoons. However, I was shocked to learn that the boys and young adults from Picton were reluctant to attend Adult Education at Success Laventille School, which was less than two miles away from the village. There were already emerging garrison communities in Laventille, and most neighboring areas were being considered no-go areas for residents in contiguous areas.

Imhotep Foundation

In the 1990s, the choir leader at Trinity Cathedral became involved in teaching the fundamentals of music education to a group of young people in an inner-city community. This group had formed a small steel band, and a social worker in my community invited me to work with her in guiding these youths toward personal development. As a result, we established the Imhotep Foundation, named after Imhotep, a renowned sage and architect in ancient Egypt.

The foundation aimed to build the capacity of these young individuals while nurturing their interest in music. Over its existence, the foundation successfully facilitated placements for some of them in certificate and diploma programs at the Creative Arts Centre of the University of the West Indies. Most of these individuals lacked the formal qualifications for entry, but through the foundation's support, some pursued careers in entertainment, while others met the matriculation requirements and went on to pursue full degree programs at the university.

Head of Joint Negotiation Team of Public Sector Unions (JNT) in 1981

When I became a university lecturer in 1980, I maintained my position as the Director of Research at the National Training Board and remained technically a public servant. As a result, I continued to be involved with the Public Services Association (PSA), the largest public service union at the time.

During a period of competitive union politics, the Forwards group, to which I belonged, emerged with the most positions in the PSA internal elections. I was selected to be the main spokesperson and, with the assistance of Winston Rennie, developed the union's negotiating stance for discussions with the Government, represented by the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO).

The other five public sector unions took a collective decision to join with the PSA in the conduct of the negotiations. There was full agreement on the proposal that Rennie and I had developed. The other unions agreed that Inspector Peter John of the Police Association would join Rennie and me as the key spokesmen for the six unions in the negotiations and that I should head the triumvirate.

As part of our efforts, we engaged in extensive discussions and negotiations with the CPO and his team, receiving support from union members outside of the CPO's office. We also organized occasional disruptive industrial action known as "Operation Charlie," in which public servants stayed at home to demonstrate their support. Eventually, the government relented and granted a 59% salary increase across the board.

We argued that this increase was necessary since the previous agreement had been a four-year one, and during that period, the country experienced an economic boom in the mid to late 1970s, leading to a significant increase in prices. This left public servants with a rapidly shrinking relative income compared to other workers who had signed more regular three-year agreements.

After successfully securing the salary increase, we advocated for the authorities to establish a housing bond that could attract some of the funds to be received by the Public Servants. The programme would allowed public servants to save for their first homes, with the government providing incentives to encourage saving. However, what we considered a responsible position as trade unionists did not receive significant traction from the authorities, despite its potential benefits in mobilizing housing finance, which has remained a challenge for many.

National Productivity Council

In the mid to late 1980s, following my success in negotiating a 59% increase in wages for public servants, Prime Minister George Chambers appointed me as the Chairman of the National Productivity Council. The Council was established in response to the issue of low productivity in the country, and its tripartite structure included representatives from the government, the Labour Congress, and the Employers Consultative Association. While some trade unionists initially expressed skepticism, I was determined to improve productivity, particularly in the public service.

Believing that the public service could set an example, I urged my primary trade union, the Public Services Association, to organize a conference for public sector unions to discuss productivity-related matters and emphasize the importance of delivering quality services in the national interest.

Although the Council was not an implementing agency, it recognized the potential for achieving meaningful progress through advocacy, especially if its recommendations were made public. The Council called for the opening of supermarkets on Sundays and a review of opening hours in general. It also advocated for increased participation of women in the workforce by establishing workplace daycares in both the government and private sectors. Additionally, the Council recommended improvements in port operations, as inefficient port procedures directly impacted the cost of living. Unfortunately, disagreements with the Prime Minister ultimately led to my resignation from the Council. It was a challenging decision, as I was genuinely passionate about enhancing productivity and believed in the potential for positive change.

Minimum Wages Board

I served as Chairman of the Minimum Wages Board for two consecutive terms, starting during the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) period. Drawing from my work on poverty in Trinidad and Tobago and my background as a trade unionist, I brought a valuable perspective to the position. During my tenure, I advocated for the adoption of simple guidelines by the board. While we recognized that there could be varying minimum wages, we insisted that any minimum wage must be a living wage, lifting workers above the poverty line. However, it should not be set so high that it encroached upon the role of trade unions in negotiating wages and other employment conditions for workers on the lower end of the income scale. I successfully influenced the board to adopt this approach, which prioritized equity and fairness.

Cuttage Fabrics Limited

Within the NAR period, I also served as a member of the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), which handled the government's business activities, excluding the oil and gas industry. During this time, the IDC played a role in establishing Cuttage Fabrics Limited, a company where the IDC held the majority share and collaborated with a range of small producers as minority partners.

Cuttage Fabrics had the potential to play a vital role in the industry by engaging in bulk buying from abroad and organizing small producers to fulfill larger orders from international clients. It also aimed to enter international markets by establishing a presence abroad while leveraging domestic output. Being on the Board of Cuttage Fabrics was an enjoyable experience for me as I recognized the opportunity to empower small producers and break the control held by oligopolistic operators in the business. The model of industrial organization implemented in Cuttage Fabrics could have been replicated in other sectors to facilitate easier entry for SMEs. However, with a change of government in 1991, the arrangement involving the IDC and Cuttage Fabrics was abandoned to align with the new government's orientation.

Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

In 2011, I was appointed as the Chairman of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago by an Act of Parliament. Initially, the primary responsibilities involved securing staff and addressing legislative arrangements that would enable the opening of the telecommunications and related markets, ensuring service delivery to every corner of the country.

Given the nature of the telecommunications industry, which tends to be dominated by large players with monopolistic or oligopolistic arrangements, the regulator faced significant challenges in pricing regulations for service providers. Lack of transparency in operational costs and durations made it difficult to determine fair and reasonable prices for the public. Drawing from experiences worldwide, we were aware that corruption could sometimes infiltrate the telecommunications regulatory sphere.

During my tenure as Chairman, the board successfully recruited high-quality staff and swiftly implemented market liberalization measures by introducing new cellular and service providers. The auction method was utilized to select and license new providers, ensuring a transparent process free from corruption concerns.

Heritage and Stabilisation Fund

In 2013, I assumed the role of Chairman of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. This sovereign wealth fund operates under strict procedures outlined in the supporting legislation. The fund allocates funds for investment primarily in the North Atlantic Market and, to a lesser extent, in Europe, with engagements managed by the staff from the Central Bank.

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is not the sole institution of the government that invests substantial funds abroad, other entities such as the National Insurance Board, First Citizens Bank, and National Energy Corporation also engage in foreign investments. As Chairman, I aimed to foster collaboration among these agencies, recognizing the potential for mutual learning in the national interest.

Given the considerable number of firms vying to manage the country's reserves, the Board organized short seminars where staff from the Central Bank and other institutions had the opportunity to question and evaluate service providers' knowledge of the international financial markets. These events aimed to enhance the knowledge base of our local professionals.

Additionally, while representing the Fund in international meetings, I had the opportunity to observe the operations of comparable organizations in Mexico. I was impressed by Mexico's approach, as they not only entrusted some of their wealth funds to external institutions but also developed their own organizations to engage directly in the money markets. This approach allowed them to rival North American and European organizations in terms of earnings from their invested funds. The Mexicans had effectively reduced the reliance on intermediaries and could directly access the market.

Overall, my role as Chairman of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund involved adhering to the stringent procedures of the sovereign wealth fund, promoting collaboration among government agencies, and seeking to enhance the knowledge base of local professionals in managing the country's reserves and investments.

CONSULTANT

Kairi Consultants Limited

In the 1980s, a group of friends and fellow lecturers at the University began taking on small consultancy projects for organizations, both regionally and internationally. This experience sparked the idea of forming a corporate entity that could offer our services to the Caribbean region. The economic challenges faced by Trinidad and Tobago, along with other countries, and the subsequent need to comply with the demands of the Washington Institutions, further motivated us to establish a corporate entity.

At that time, the IMF and World Bank required a range of studies, including poverty assessments, to be conducted as part of their assistance to countries like Trinidad and Tobago. Consulting firms from the North Atlantic sought out several of us on the university campus to conduct these studies. As a lecturer in Caribbean development, I was often approached to contribute my ideas on Trinidad and Tobago's development, which would then be incorporated into documents attributed to North Atlantic consulting firms. This struck me as reminiscent of the way raw materials from the plantation system, such as sugar and cocoa, were exported and processed in the metropole, where the real value-added occurred. Lloyd Best referred to this phenomenon as the *muscovado bias*.

In January 1990, we established Kairi Consultants Ltd as a response to the attempt to extend the plantation system to the exploitation of intellectual capital represented by the human resources of those who formed the initial board of Kairi. All of us were based at the UWI Campus in St. Augustine, and the founding members included Gwendoline Williams, Theodore Ferguson, Lloyd Rankine, Lawrence Wilson, Anthony Peter Gonzales, Carol Keller, and myself.

The name "Kairi" is believed to be the original name of Trinidad and may have been used by the First People in other parts of the Caribbean before Columbus arrived. We envisioned Kairi as a Caribbean firm, and in addition to the four members from Trinidad and Tobago, we had connections to Jamaica, Grenada, and Guyana. Kairi aimed to be a nucleus through which consultants from across the region could offer their services to governments and institutions within the Caribbean.

We were well aware of the large number of high-level professionals in the Caribbean Diaspora who were eager to join us in providing services to their home region. While Kairi as an organization might be small, we have a network that extends across the Caribbean and the Diaspora, largely concentrated in the North Atlantic.

The underlying philosophy that has been the bedrock of Kairi is the development of the people of the Global South, who have historically been exploited by Europeans and perceived as inferior. In my work, I constantly ask myself how I can equip clients to embark on a higher trajectory of development. How can we, as clients and consultants, astound a resurrected Columbus if he were to witness our progress in the Caribbean, achieving a level of development but defined by ourselves, descendants of slaves, indentured labourers and first peoples? This essential question guides our work at Kairi, whether we are operating in Punta Gorda in Belize, Kambalua in Suriname, Bouton in St. Lucia, Accompong in Jamaica, Dieppe Bay in St. Kitts, or any other location in the region where we have worked.

As we expanded our reach to work in Africa itself, we continued to ask ourselves the same question in places like Alexandra Township in South Africa, Francistown in Botswana, and Maseru in Lesotho. This motivating idea guided our recommendations for diamond polishing in Botswana, countering DeBeers' long-standing dominance in the diamond industry. DeBeers had decided in the 19th century that diamonds would be mined in Africa but not polished there. Kairi advised the authorities to establish their own diamond polishing operations following a study tour of polishing facilities in Belgium, Israel, and India.⁶

As a company, we continue on this road of supporting transformation, offering institutions solutions appropriate to their needs as we all face massive technological changes, an international economy that was globalizing and in more recent times, is withdrawing from the model that was previously pursued. The physical vulnerability of small island states what with the climate crisis

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/business-12782827>

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Going the Distance: Reflections at 80 on Six Decades in the Trenches

is compounded with social problems, in part attributable to the incorporation of the region in international narco-trafficking which has brought with increases in homicides and gun violence. While there is no silver bullet that can be offered, but we keep looking for solutions by engaging a side network of colleagues who are equally passionate about Caribbean Development.

In my own current engagement, I find much to align myself with in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and to the UN declared International Decade of African People. In both respects, there is much distance to cover in Trinidad and Tobago and in the Caribbean.

I commit to *going the distance* until circumstances dictate that I withdraw, or the “Fellow” summons me away from it all.

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