

The Report of the West Indian Commission, Time for Action -
A critical appreciation

by *Havelock R. Brewster*¹

"For in much wisdom is much grief ..."

The Report of the latest West Indian Commission entitled Time for Action (chaired by Sir Shridath Ramphal) is so impressively massive (592 pages plus a summary of 176 pages) that I have chosen, for present purposes, to restrict this appreciation of its contents to a selected set of interrelated policy issues that seem to constitute the core of the Commission's strategy aimed at 'taking the people of the West Indies into the twenty-first century'. Thus, beginning with a few questions of methodology, this paper moves on to consider the issues of governance, development, the future of the Caribbean Community, external relations and institutional structures.

Methodology

The Commission, established as an independent body, was requested to report to CARICOM heads of Government on proposals for advancing the goals of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which established the Caribbean Community and Common Market. The Commission was expected to consult widely, to 'let all ideas contend', 'to let unity - and disunity - of all kinds be appraised', 'to stimulate a public forum on the future'. However, it may have exceeded what was expected of it, and the effort as a whole may have suffered as a result of its very ambitious scope and the relatively short time (about two years) allowed for its preparation. The Report is literally a source of wisdom on everything under the sun : from currency to culture; from science to human rights; from exports to cricket; from CARICOM to gender issues. Concern about its omniscience is perhaps most apparent in its disappointing treatment of development policy and the ambiguous relationship of that policy to the form of economic integration espoused.

The Commission's decision, standard practice as it may be, to present its Report in final form to the public in virtually a take-it-or-leave-it manner has pre-empted the possibility of referring preliminary drafts, with comments and suggestions, for further consideration by the Commission, without of course encroaching upon its independence.

¹The views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They do not represent those of UNCTAD, the organization to which he is affiliated.

For example, it might have been considered worthwhile for the Commission to reveal and evaluate the major alternatives put forward with respect to, for example, approaches to the future of the Caribbean Community, development policies, and forms of governance. As it is, we have little or nothing to go on as to what ideas are contending and by what processes the Commissioners themselves appraised the 'evidence' they heard and read in arriving at their final wisdom, including, in particular, what they viewed as a judicious mix of informed leadership and opinion of the 'masses'. We do know, however, by the proclamation of the Chairman, that the Commissioners were persons who are 'not constrained by ideology'. If that is literally true, it is a dubious quality for appraising evidence.

The Commission made a good effort to meet people (three dozens or more public meetings in the region, a few in the 'diaspora', and some 500 submissions received). Given its possibilities, it may be unfair to criticize it, as some have done, for not organizing 'consultation' in a serious manner. On the other hand, one does feel somewhat uneasy with the way the Commission presents that substantial but essentially limited effort as interaction with the 'masses', at times indeed implicitly represented as eliciting superior popular wisdom to that accessible to governments and political parties. The Commissioners seem to have conducted their affairs in the traditional 'commission' style of judges assessing 'evidence' and delivering verdicts. I am not sure then that it can truly be said that the Commission has stimulated a 'public forum on the future'.

Whatever might have been the further contributions to getting the best out of the Commission, there probably would have been an appeal for a more tidy and operational report. The last may be the most telling, for the Report contains literally hundreds of 'recommendations', particularly in various 'functional' areas, which regrettably resemble United Nations resolutions too closely. Most of these recommendations are unobjectionable; indeed, make good sense. But typically, they are expressed in terms of what should be 'adopted', 'initiated', 'reaffirmed', etc., especially by CARICOM governments, rather than in terms of specific operational mechanisms for translating ideas into action. One interesting exception to this style is the section on human resources development, where a specific proposal is made that a CARICOM Network for Educational Policy be established, with the University of the West Indies, in co-operation with the University of Guyana, serving as its secretariat. Had action been more the focus of the Report, as its title foreshadows, specific tasks and organizational arrangements might have been proposed, especially for non-governmental actors.

Governance

The Commission is at pains to point to the virtues of democracy and the excellence of post-independence West Indian States in this respect, with the exception of one then outstanding aberration, presumably Guyana (the country of the chair), although it is not named. But a perception of aberrations is also an opportunity for more fundamental

reconsideration of norms. It is true that in that country, fair and free elections were not held for 28 years. However, the Commission ignores the fact that our otherwise exemplary political behaviour also includes a so-called democracy, legally in power for almost as long, that has alienated a substantial racial minority of its population; another resulting in widespread and unspeakable acts of violence; several propping up immense inequality and social injustice; at least two dismissive of the rights of its aborigine population; and one (before it too became an aberration) ruled by a psychopath.

Instead, the Commission points to a number of functional shortcomings in these 'democracies', such as infrequency of parliamentary sittings, official corruption, political victimization, opaque government, inadequate access to information and so on. In addition, they see danger to these democracies lurking in the social discontent caused by structural adjustment programmes. They thus call for a CARICOM Charter of Civil Society in which the norms of good governance would be codified and which all member governments would be expected, as a matter of principle, to respect. Few could have any quarrel with attempts to ensure decent and correct behaviour. Whether charters can achieve this is another matter. The record of the various United Nations human rights charters does not leave too much to be proud of. Incidentally, since private enterprise, with the Commission's endorsement, would now become a more dominant feature of West Indian life, should we not equally give thought to a Charter of Ethical Principles for Private Enterprise? This is not such an aberration - one has actually been drafted by religious organizations for a new democratic South Africa. But charters are not enough.

Establishing 'normative moorings' for a leaking vessel is an ambivalent enterprise. Those moorings are surely desirable, but the vessel must also be made whole. The Commission regrettably failed to consider seriously ~~the~~ means by which more popular participatory 'transparent' forms of governance might be promoted; how decisions might be made more by informed consensus, rather than simple numerical majorities - a matter that the Commissioners know very well is a particularly intractable problem in two member States with racially divided populations. The Westminster model is flawed even at Westminster, by its own admission. In the West Indies, very small size and population make direct democracy a feasible proposition. We should try to use these advantages. Too long we have viewed them as disadvantages. Here, it is too facile to blame only the results of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes for social discontent and threats to democracy. Far from threats, this discontent might be an assertion of a more authentic democracy. Who made these decisions about the implementation of structural adjustment programmes? What was known about their likely impact, and on whom? Who were expected to be the beneficiaries? Who considered the results and the alternatives?

If we don't get the form of governance right, little else will be right - especially what we expect of development and how we get there, including our observance of the principles of civil society and socially responsible private enterprise. An intention as lofty as that of taking the people into the next century should certainly have put this concern high on the agenda.

Development policy

The remarks made above on democracy are especially pertinent to the Commission's treatment of development policy. It would have been of much value to learn something about West Indian people's perceptions of development, their aspirations in this respect and, indeed, how the Commissioners consider these should or should not be filtered through the medium of their superior information and world experience. This is hardly a theoretical matter because diverging perceptions and their consequences are already a stark reality in the region. For example, Barbadians must already be reflecting on the meaning and future implications of their having already (according to the United Nations Development Programme) reached the uppermost rank in human development with a score of 92/100, ahead not only of all developing countries but of several Western European countries. Is more of the same possible and desirable? And Guyanese might well wonder, looking to the future and to so-called developed countries, whether there may not be some inherent strengths in their apparent weaknesses. But the pattern of, and path to, development simply cannot be discussed independently of the form 'democracy' takes and 'unconstrained by ideology'.

Setting aside such fundamental considerations, which in the final analysis must inform any 'people-centred' development policy, there are pressing contemporary issues of West Indian development which, if the mandate as interpreted by the Commission is taken seriously, West Indian governments would probably have valued some guidance on as they make the transition to the Commission's promised land, for their own sake and because they are also inextricable from the Community process. What should be the regional approach to external debt? To international aid? To IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes? To privatization and how it should be organized? To foreign investment and transnational corporations? Could the role of government in economic development that is now fashionable and lauded by the Commission be as appropriate for Guyana, with a potential for large-scale primary-resource-based industries, as it might be for Antigua or Jamaica? Does very small size impose particular constraints on the respective roles of government and private enterprise?

The Commission makes a detour around these issues with a reference to the contents of other reports. However, while there are valuable essays on these problems, no one would claim that a clear and reliable map of this terrain exists. Negotiating passage through it into the twenty-first century will not be as easily by passed. Most countries are presently struggling with these issues, some of which indeed cut across the very regional integration apparatus that the Commission recommends.

The main thrust of the Commission's proposals is that West Indian development should be export-propelled. To achieve this, we need to be internationally cost-competitive, and undertake the micro and macro efficiency measures that this requires. Of course we should understand this in a relative sense, because the West Indies is already more export-oriented than most places in the world. The proposition might thus have benefited from some differentiated treatment and evaluation of complementary

strategies. For example, while the prospect of increased export earnings is not to be neglected, it may well be feasible for Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago to place a good deal of emphasis on an endogenous strategy of reconstruction.

Attaining international competitiveness plays such a crucial role in the Commission's (new) export-led strategy that, unavoidably, one has to consider its realism in the specific context of the West Indies and the alternatives should we fall short. So far as the island States are concerned, historical, geographical and structural features may limit the extent to which international cost-competitiveness, in the traditional sense, can be attained. Wages are several times too high, labour productivity several times too low, exchange rates uncompetitive by a wide margin, dependence on costly imported materials and finance too high, and standard-of-living expectations too demanding. These are not features that can be cured simply by economic and technological policy. The West Indies cannot pretend to be Mexico or Guatemala or Malaysia or India or China. This matter needs a thorough and realistic examination. And the consideration of alternatives would do no harm.

For example, would it not make some sense to consider a strategy based on the supply not of cost-competitive exports but of specially differentiated relatively high-cost products and services? The Swiss experience may be of interest. It was summed up thus: '... driven by the relentless pressure of high wages and appreciating currency, Swiss firms have sought out the high-quality, differentiated segment of industries' (Porter, 1990). This strategy has worked in the past in some parts of the region, for example in high-income tourism and off-shore banking. We have the comparative advantages of the English language, climate and geography, time synchronization with, and proximity to, the eastern zone of the United States. Might these be possibilities - health, secondary education, vacation and retirement residences, especially for West Indian Americans, Canadians and Europeans, ecological and health/sports tourism, high-quality fabric and jewellery design and fashion-wear, quality printing, audio and video reproduction, concerts and conferences, international organizations? There is an enormous potential for new services in tourism (Poon, 1991). Alliances with service firms in other countries could make good sense. In all this, we should remember that while unemployment in the West Indies seems high in percentage terms, in absolute terms it is rather small and could be eliminated in the not too distant future. We need to reflect more carefully on the feasibility of the low cost, low domestic value-added (sweat-shop) approach to development, especially for the natural resource-scarce island States.

The future of the Caribbean Community

Basically, the proposition of the Commission, having taken account of what the people feel, is that 'the path of integration, rather than federation or closer political union, should be followed'. West Indian unity at the political level, they have found, remains for our people 'a sort of Holy Grail shining on the edge of a distance too far away to matter for the time being'. Thus they made the decision not to revisit that 'honourable episode' of Federation. Essentially, then, what they propose is the perfection

of the economic integration regime - i.e. the creation of a single market and economy and a common currency/monetary union. Extension and/or improvement of regional co-operation in a number of functional areas are/is also proposed. Pragmatic arrangements are outlined for multiple points of entry into, and widening circles of involvement with, the rest of the Caribbean, Latin America, the EC, NAFTA, the Commonwealth and the world in general. They leave space for those States, like those of the OECS, that aspire to quicker attainment of political unity.

In other words, nothing qualitatively new is offered. But there are some surprising assertions and contradictions. To begin with, the Commission's views as to what is political unity, what is economic integration, where a division between them is drawn, and what are their respective degrees of realism, leave much to be answered.

It may well be the case that political union could be conceived of in innovative ways that do not necessitate 'the amalgamation of power in one single centre', or even federalism. For example, I have proposed elsewhere (Brewster, 1992) a dynamic and divisible concept of statehood, sovereignty and nationality, constituted in, say, a West Indian Commonwealth and West Indian citizenship. In this approach, West Indian unity would be anchored and expressed through such 'political' forces as cultural-historical identity, kinship, security and defined rights, rather than through regional economic integration regimes whose feasibility and net benefits become increasingly questionable in the contemporary world of widening economic spaces and the globalization of economic activity, or through conventional notions of political (parliamentary/sovereignty) unity.

Common currency/monetary union

Furthermore, there may be good reasons for believing that a common currency/monetary union is far more 'political' and sovereignty-monolithic than anything provided for under Federation or conceivable as 'political unity' at the present time. The amalgamation of parliaments would be a formality compared with what monetary union would substantively entail. Far from being simply an instrument of economic integration, it is in reality a high and close form of political unity. The Commission's Report fails to bring out the dimensions and implications of a common currency/monetary union among the economically rather diverse countries of the West Indies. The Commission says that in consultations throughout the region, the question of a common Caribbean currency arose 'insistently', but there is no evidence that the people who met with it were sufficiently informed to take a well-considered view, if any at all.

The objective conditions do not provide a compelling rationale for monetary union, as most would agree. Intra-regional transactions, expressed in domestic value-added terms, are not much more than 8 per cent of the total gross value of the region's trade.

Capital and labour mobility are even less significant. On average, 60 per cent of GNP, and a higher percentage in some member States, is earned from exports to external currency areas, principally the US. The region's production structures are almost completely unlinked. There is a wide and growing divergence among the region's economies (at one extreme, Barbados's per capita GNP is 15 times that of Guyana). By contrast, in the European Community, where monetary union proposals are becoming more questionable, there is a far higher degree of convergence among economies, with 60 per cent of EC trade being intra-Community and less than 9 per cent of its GDP derived from non-European sources.

The justification given for West Indian monetary union lies in the more dynamic advantages of cementing, hastening and deepening regional integration, the stability which it can bring to exchange rates, inflation and the balance of payments, lowering the cost of exchange transactions, greater convenience and regional symbolism.

However, the Commission calls for greater export-orientation. This would mean that the relative importance of intra-regional transactions, already very small, should decline even further. Thus, it is to be wondered whether monetary union can be seriously justified in terms of existing and potential intra-regional trade. Perhaps more interesting is the argument that monetary union could promote the extra-regional exports of the individual West Indian States. That too is a dubious proposition. The economic structures, resources and export possibilities of Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and the East Caribbean States (ECS)/Barbados are quite different, and there would be good reason for thinking that divergences in exchange rates, money supply, commercial lending, interest rates, wage rates, fiscal policies, external borrowing, and trade protectionist policies would probably need to be a continuing feature of their national economic policies for some time to come.

In the document on this issue, prepared by the regional Central Banks (Hilaire et al., 1991), reference is made to the West African Monetary Union and the East Caribbean Monetary Authority as models of single-currency arrangements that could be emulated by CARICOM. In both cases, the arrangements have promoted a high level of discipline and stability in economic management. But they have also raised questions about the trade-off with the need for discretionary management of economic growth policies, particularly differences in this respect among individual member States.

In the case of the CFA franc, the World Bank has held the view that its stability vis-à-vis the French franc, resulting in its overvaluation by as much as 50 per cent, has had a negative impact on the competitiveness of exports and attractiveness to investors. Subordination of the different economic policy requirements of individual member States to the collective maintenance of the value of the CFA franc has created fissiparous strains within the region, as exemplified by the positions taken by Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon. One official went so far as to say: 'I believe the CFA franc has always been

a profit exportation zone; a zone in which those who earn money in the morning, export in the evening'.

In the case of the EC dollar, it is apparent that stability has not served some member States as well as it may have served Antigua and St. Lucia. It cannot be assumed that, in the East Caribbean States, the strains of monetary union will not become more pronounced, especially if further divergences should take place as a result of less advantageous conditions in the European Community and elsewhere for the primary commodity exports in which some of them specialize. Although they may not abandon the arrangement, these strains may be expressed in inter-island discord, exacerbated if the stronger are unwilling to compensate the weaker adequately by capital flows. Even in the case of Barbados, which too has enjoyed long-term currency stability, the apparent diminishing competitiveness of its tourist industry has given rise to discussions about the need for some devaluation. A similar question has also been raised about Trinidad and Tobago's falling competitiveness. Stability evidently is not *ipso facto* a mark of good economic management. Furthermore, neither in the EC dollar area nor the CFA franc zone can it be said that monetary union has had a perceptible effect on regional economic integration.

A common currency would probably impose a discipline that has been lacking in some CARICOM member States, especially with respect to exchange rates, inflation, interest rates, money supply and fiscal balances. However, to move from conspicuous indiscipline to complete rigidity may not be an advisable proposition, especially where differences in economic structures and wide and growing divergences inevitably impose a need for a degree of national policy discretion.

The answer to the dual requirement of discipline and discretion might be sought in a three-stage approach. In the first stage, procedures and mechanisms could be defined within which the use of agreed objective criteria in fixing parities (against the US dollar), and changes in the alignment of West Indian currencies would be progressively assured. Within this approach, it would also be easy to devise financial instruments for reducing transaction costs and expressing the symbols of unity in visible forms, such as a Caribbean Unit of Account (Worrell, 1992). If the experience is positive and merits further development, the second stage could be to devise an exchange rate mechanism, providing for variations within progressively narrowed limits of the parities of West Indian exchange rates. This stage would in time indicate the feasibility of the final stage of creating a common currency/monetary union. The EC, it might be noted, is presently at the second stage but even this, notwithstanding the high degree of convergence among these countries and the importance of intra-Community trade, has produced such strains that some countries have opted out of the arrangement.

The Commission envisages a variable-speed approach to the creation of a common currency, beginning with those that have maintained fixed parities against the US dollar

for 36 consecutive months. Presumably, the ECS, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago would be expected to lead the way. Ironically, for the reasons given above, this is precisely where the trouble may begin. All CARICOM countries, however, would at once 'reiterate their intention to establish a common currency'. Whether or not the Commission's recommendations can be eventually implemented, commitment now to a principle that cannot be realized in the targeted or foreseeable future itself raises a serious problem, as has been amply demonstrated with respect to a number of other accepted CARICOM instruments, particularly the Rules of Origin and the Common External Tariff (CET). It creates an atmosphere of unfulfilled promise which degenerates into demoralization, inter-State recriminations and negative spill-over effects on other co-operative activities. But have CARICOM heads of State committed themselves to establishing a common currency, as the Commission claims? I do not read the Grand Anse Declaration or the Kingston Declaration in quite such clear-cut language. It is even questionable, as will be raised below, whether the CARICOM principal organs are empowered so to do.

Single market and economy

The Commission's proposals require basically the creation of a Free Trade and Common External Tariff Area as the foundations of a single CARICOM market and economy. CARICOM governments have long been committed to, and have partially implemented, these regimes. The Commission would have them perfected with the least delay.

So far as regional free trade is concerned, there could be nothing inherently objectionable in it. But some States apparently have had difficulty in completing the regime because devaluations, particularly in competing member countries, have made some of their products vulnerable, while other member States may not have found the means to accommodate the government revenue losses that would be entailed. The issue now is really one of practical judgement and tactics - the trade-off between the cost and benefits of imperfection in the regime. It seems that far too much time, effort and resources have been invested in the marginal gains of a perfect free trade regime (more so now with intra-regional trade slated for a relative decline).

The Common External Tariff, however, is questionable in principle as an objective. For a number of reasons such as the country and product derogations that are necessary and changes in them over time, variable changes in exchange rates, differences in local value added, transport costs and trade commitments under structural adjustment programmes, and so on, it would be impossible to achieve an external tariff that is of comprehensive trade coverage, confers common effective protection on the region as a whole, and is efficient in terms of resource allocation.

What is perhaps more important is that even if a CET could be perfectly implemented - as the intended 10 to 20 per cent differential in nominal tariff rates - there is little reason to believe that it could offer a critical or decisive advantage in locating productive activities in the CARICOM region. In the context of that objective, a tariff differential is relatively insignificant compared with the more substantial human, financial, natural resource, infrastructural, macroeconomic and market-size requirements of international competitive advantage. The Commission's recommendations on this point need to be examined more carefully as a matter of economic practice, rather than of economic theory.

On the whole, a single CARICOM market and economy, including resource complementation and linkage, are unlikely to provide decisive competitive advantages in the changing international environment of widening economic spaces like NAFTA, the EC, APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation) and global corporations (perhaps too a renovated GATT). Such CARICOM regimes as the Free Trade Area, the CET, the Rules of Origin, the Harmonized Scheme of Fiscal Incentives, and the Industrial Programming Scheme would be of much lesser value in promoting development than that of attaining the requirements for wider world economic integration. Indeed, some like the World Bank (1990) feel that these regimes have already imposed net costs on the region. It is a curious contradiction in the Commission's Report that it leans heavily towards an outward orientation of the Caribbean's economic future while clinging to traditional perceptions and costly instruments of regional economic integration. This should not, however, be interpreted to mean that I oppose genuinely first-best West Indian collaborative ventures of which there are many possibilities.

External Relations

The Commission's point of departure is the need recognized in the Treaty Establishing the Caribbean Community (1973) to shape "a common front in relation to the external world", especially in recognition of the small size and openness of West Indian States. They accept that dependency as an economic constraint, being a continuing feature of these States, 'foreign policy should substantially be devoted to both seeking to enlarge the small space for independent action and making continuous adjustments to external circumstances over whose dynamism we have little control'.

The opportunities for pursuing collective negotiations and policies are demonstrated in a number of instances : with respect to international trade and financial organizations (GATT, IMF World Bank), the US (CBI, EAI, NAFTA), the EC and Canada. They recommend widening circles of integration, with CARICOM as the inner core, extending to the wider Caribbean and Central and South America. An interesting new proposal is made to establish an Association of Caribbean States (ACS), grouping together the States of the wider Caribbean Basin for purposes of promoting a wide area of functional co-operation. These are complemented by such other entry points into the wider world

as the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, the Commonwealth and the Organization of American States.

While these are all reasonable views as a point of departure, they are less prescient than might have been expected at the point of arrival of a forum on the future. The Commission does not seem to face up fully to the need for an external relations strategy that identifies the possible dangers to the West Indies in the decade or two ahead, and tries to shape a positive approach to them. Such an approach would need to create space to preserve our survival as a distinct people and to develop our creative potential in a new world order essentially driven by power, race and identity. The Commission tends rather to adopt a (collective) re-active approach to a more or less linear extrapolation of current affairs.

In such an interpretation, for example, the relationship of the West Indies with Britain, the EEC and our Asia-Pacific partners in the ACP Group is an enduring feature; the Commonwealth and Canada continue to embrace us preferentially; strategic salience confers leverage in our negotiations with the US and NAFTA; Latin American countries are more allies than antagonists; other countries of the Caribbean Basin have benign interest in association with CARICOM; the grouping of developing countries is a meaningful alliance for us; Africa and India remain totally invisible; so are Japan, China and Germany; the West Indian diaspora continue to see themselves as such. All of this can be challenged as we peer into the next century, and ought to be included in any debate in which all ideas are contending.

For example, it is conceivable to view the West Indies of the future as a place of marginal, if somewhat exotic, interest; racially, culturally, and emotionally adrift; an historical curiosity; economically insecure and isolated. A people who have no real kinship with Latin Americans or North Americans, Africans or Asians. A culture creolized into something recognizable only by themselves. A land remembered principally for memories of a few days 'down the way where the nights are gay'.

More concretely, should we not include within the parameters of the future an EC transformed into an European Union and indeed eventually into a Greater-Europe alliance, with Britain increasingly on the periphery of European political and economic influence; in which the ACP-EEC alliance becomes more dispensable, or at least in which the Caribbean is progressively displaced, perhaps in favour of a stronger European hemispheric special relationship with Africa. Should we not contemplate a situation in which a stronger US-Latin American economic and geo-political relationship marginalizes the interest of both in the West Indies; in which actions by the one or the other, or both together - in such issues as military security, renegade regimes, terrorism, narcotic trafficking, migrants and refugees, natural disasters, disposal of toxic materials and other environmental problems, Law of the Sea, fishing, mining, shipping and other uses of the Caribbean Sea, energy, disease, air-space, telecommunications, currencies, rights of

industrial and residential establishment - expose the naked, extreme vulnerability of the West Indies?

What could be the substance, techniques and artifacts of an affirmative West Indian foreign policy in the face of what seems to be almost ineluctable marginalization and insecurity? How should we prepare for a world in which the familiar historical, economic, geo-strategic, and migration foundations of our external relations are all visibly weakening? Should we, could we, take the initiative to promote new relationships with Europe, the US, Japan, that represent more specifically and coherently our own particular interests? For example, if that interest on our part is now more substantially in attracting foreign enterprises, promoting non-traditional exports of goods and services, reducing import cost, debt reduction and access to capital markets, neither the LOME Convention nor the EAI-NAFTA may be the models for the future. Nor would Japan be left outside such a framework of external relations.

Moreover, if, as implied above, external threats are more likely, prospectively, to originate from the US and Latin America, what countervailing forces, relationships and organizational forms can we foresee? In this respect, what, for example, should be our initiatives, stances and alliances in the United Nations, in the OAS, SELA, ECLAC, the NAM? Finally, we are ourselves the diaspora of West Africa and India. Have we all become so creolized that that counts for nothing in our external relations? These controversial questions are no less real for the reason that they are difficult to answer. The Commission might have been more helpful in these respects had they been posed in the first place.

Institutional Structures

The Commission's principal innovative recommendation is concerned with improving the implementation of CARICOM decisions. They propose a Council of Ministers and a CARICOM Commission. The Council would include ministers designated by each member State and assigned political responsibility for CARICOM affairs across the board. Their responsibility would thus be wider than that now falling to the Common Market Council. The Council of Ministers is expected to lighten the heavy agenda of the Conference of Heads of Government.

The CARICOM Commission would be composed of three members appointed by heads of Government plus ex officio the Secretary-General of CARICOM. The intended members, apparently, would be ex political leaders of prominent stature. The Commission would have an autonomous, automatic source of income (from customs revenues), and a small secretariat of its own. The task of the Commission would be to deepen and widen the process of integration. Specifically, the Commission's mandate is to ensure that CARICOM decisions are implemented in the member States and for this purpose it is to be 'appropriately empowered'

A Council of Ministers of the kind proposed is likely to make for confusion and conflict at the level of both the individual States and CARICOM. For while it would operate, in principle, under the delegated authority of heads of Government, it would find it difficult, in practice, to exercise its mandate in making collective decisions in specialized areas, outside the particular portfolios the ministers hold in their individual member States? As in the EC, this problem could be avoided by constituting as the Council of Ministers, ministers responsible for particular issues as and when they come up, such as trade, agriculture, education, foreign affairs. Thus, each such specialized ministerial meeting would be a session of the CARICOM Council of Ministers. This does not of course preclude other ministerial consultations being convened that are not sessions of the Council of Ministers or that are outside the Community framework altogether. The Conference of Heads of States under this arrangement would have a reduced agenda but, necessarily, they must take political responsibility for CARICOM affairs in general. It is not a good idea to delegate this authority.

The CARICOM Commission is not a very convincing idea. Despite the details provided, all aspects of this proposal are vague - the specific responsibilities of the Commission, their overlap with the responsibilities of the inter-governmental bodies of CARICOM and the tasks of the CARICOM Secretary-General, their logic as an implementation mechanism, the realism and feasibility of the Commissioners' powers to secure implementation at the national level; and the credibility of ex-political leaders or other prominent personalities being both acceptable to incumbent heads of State and able to exercise implementing power successfully at the national level. So far as I am aware, there is no precedent in any regional community for such an arrangement. The EC does, of course, have a Commission and Commissioners. The Commission corresponds to the CARICOM secretariat, while the Commissioners are, in effect if not in name, appointed Community quasi 'ministers' for defined areas of policy specifically delegated by national parliaments to the Community in the relevant Community treaties. This is altogether different from the proposal made by the West Indian Commission.

Implementation, however, has all too frequently been a real problem in CARICOM, and the Commission might have done well, before proposing remedies, to examine more closely why this has been so. A clue is given when they make a passing reference to consultation. But the matter may go beyond this. CARICOM has defined 'objectives' (Article 4 of the Treaty) which includes the 'establishment of a common market regime', 'the co-ordination of foreign policies' and 'functional co-operation' (which includes 'certain common services', *inter alia*). The first problem arises from the fact that these objectives are so broad and vague that they could mean virtually anything. Hence, it is not easy to define in any precise manner, notwithstanding Articles 8 and 12 of the Treaty, the scope and powers of the Community and of its principal organs - the Conference of Heads of Government and the Common Market Council. The second problem, which is probably a consequence of the first, is that there is no provision in the Treaty limiting the powers either of the Community or of its principal organs. It may be noted by

contrast - that the EC has precisely defined 'activities' and its powers and those of its institutions are expressly limited by Treaty provisions. Even with these precisions, the question of subsidiarity is now giving rise to serious strains.

The Treaty establishing CARICOM has been ratified by national Parliaments so that any actions taken by its principal organs may be said to be constitutional and democratic. (There is no institution to which a conflict over the scope of its competence can be referred). However, the exercise of powers under such ill-defined conditions is, in spirit, illegal and undemocratic.

For example, over the years a number of decisions have been made by the Community's principal organs - such as the level of the CET, the Rules of Origin, the Harmonized Fiscal Incentives Scheme, the industrial Programming Scheme, the CARICOM Enterprise Regime and the scheme for the movement of capital - under powers supposedly conferred on them by ratification of the Treaty and, in particular, by its 'Common Market' provisions. Now, this is being extended to the proposals for a single currency and monetary union.

Yet, it may equally be said that much of this is well beyond the spirit of the treaty. Evidently, national parliaments did not intend to confer such open-ended powers on the Community's principal organs under the provisions of the 'Common Market' when they ratified the treaty. Under these common market provisions virtually any act could be approved by the CARICOM's principal organs without reference to national parliaments - harmonized taxation, energy prices, wage-rates, and social security benefits, free movement of persons, and so on. The salience of this observation lies not simply in the constitutional anomaly, but in the possibility ~~that delinquency~~ in the implementation of Community decisions is a way of re-instating democratic procedures.

Thus, CARICOM decisions - which often originate as proposals by the CARICOM bureaucracy and are pushed through the principal organs - avoid being tabled in national parliaments for debate and ratification, even when it might be reasonable to believe that they go beyond the intention of the Treaty. It comes as a surprise that regional bureaucrats should complain about CARICOM 'lacking teeth' and that the Commission should ignore altogether the political requirements of implementation, even for such a far-reaching political proposal as a single currency and monetary union. The result is that responsible ministers have little or no exposure to public representatives, as distinct from bureaucratic, reactions, suggestions and modifications that might inform the realism of the stances they take in CARICOM, and the authority and vigour with which they and those responsible for execution might pursue implementation.

Concluding Remarks

This critique implies an extensive agenda for the continued life, if not of the West Indian Commission, of a Public Forum on West Indian Political, Social and Economic Futures. It suggests that it may be worthwhile to invest more in an on-going process of deepening, transparent consideration, debate and contention of ideas, as distinct from the one-shot preparation of a magnum opus. It would be good to leave space for dissent and the possibility of choice; for the mix of ideas, intuition and practicality by those who have the more awesome responsibility for action and thus a keener understanding of the wisdom of imperfection.

References

Brewster, H.R. (1992). The Future of CARICOM in a Changing International Environment, Geneva.

Hilaire, A.D.L., et. al. (1991), Options for Monetary Integration in the Caribbean, Central bank of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain.

Worrell, D. (1992), "A Caribbean Unit of Account", Working Papers, 1991, Central Bank of Barbados Bridgetown.

CARICOM (1973), The Treaty Establishing the Caribbean Community, Chaguaramas.

Porter, M.E. (1990). The Competitive Advantage of Nations, Macmillan, London.

Poon, A. (1991). Tourism as an Axial Product-Potential for Linkages and Development of Services, West Indian Commission, Bridgetown.