

REMARKS BY SIR K DWIGHT VENNER
AT THE
8TH SIR ARTHUR LEWIS MEMORIAL LECTURE
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HELD IN THE ECCB AUDITORIUM

We meet for this the 8th Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture at a time which can only be described in the language of today as extremely challenging.

The geopolitics of the war on terrorism threatens to reverse or at least hold up the momentum to the movement of commodities, services and people across national boundaries. The increase in regulatory regimes can even be seen to be more politically inspired because of the need to monitor the flows of money which could finance terrorist activity, as well as to prevent a recurrence of such corporate scandals as those surrounding Enron and WorldCom.

Our patron saint, Sir Arthur Lewis might not have envisaged such conditions, but his approach to them would have been the same – meticulously methodological, utilising his knowledge of general and economic history, pragmatic and, humanistic. He would, as always, have considered the impact on his region, the Caribbean.

Above all, he would have assured us that there was always a human solution based on a long view of history and the human spirit.

Such men are surely needed now, not only in the Caribbean, but in the international community. It is interesting to note a marked difference between this and other epochs of crisis, that is, the marked absence of great leaders. Or rather, to be very careful, as central bankers ought to be, the ostensible and apparent lack of great leaders.

This in itself is very intriguing in an age which is also ostensibly and apparently so open and transparent. Let me refer to two very significant examples which have had such an outstanding impact on the world.

The first was the framing of the American Constitution in 1776. The assembling of such an array of great men has not recurred in American history since that auspicious occasion, described as the decision of Philadelphia. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, who was not physically there but whose spirit was, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Adams, et al.

The other was the period from 1944 onward with the second world war coming to an end. Great politician statesmen such as Churchill, Roosevelt, and Truman; soldier statesmen – Eisenhower, DeGaulle, Marshall, and John Maynard Keynes, scholar, policy maker and man of affairs.

We in the Caribbean have also had our purple patches on the way to adult suffrage, and independence – Williams, Manley, Bustamante, Adams, Bird, Bradshaw, Barrow.

Inspiring this process first from London and then in the Caribbean and providing the intellectual platform for social, political and economic change, was Sir William Arthur Lewis. His major contributions intellectually were in such articles as “Labour in the British West Indies” and “The Industrialization of the British West Indies”. At the end of the failed federal experiment, he wrote “The Agony of the Eight”, cataloging the plight of the smaller islands.

This last trail inspired the creation of the two fundamental arrangements which have kept the smallest islands in the Caribbean afloat, namely:

The Treaty of Basseterre, creating the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States in 1981, and

The Agreement establishing the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank in 1983.

We also see the influence of Lewis as inspirational leader through his work as Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, and President of the Caribbean Development Bank. He was the first of the illustrious scholar policy makers in the region and provided the bridge between the founding fathers of the region and such luminaries as Shridath (Sonny) Ramphal, William Demas, Alister McIntyre, Arthur Brown. They were followed by intellectual giants like, Lloyd Best, Rex Nettleford, George Beckford, Clive Thomas and Walter Rodney.

Lewis was also the first Nobel Laureate from the Caribbean and he was followed by two other Caribbean men of letters; his countryman Derek Walcott and V. S. Naipaul.

Leadership in this modern era is, and probably should be, more diffused throughout our societies at the levels of the community, business, trade unions, schools and educational institutions. This is

not to dispute the special place of democratically elected officials in liberal democratic societies. It is simply to assert that responsibility must be shouldered by all members of society, and that being elected does not shift this responsibility in a disproportionate way to the detriment of the body politic as a whole.

Lewis was very clear on this question, as he stated unequivocally that in the final analysis our future lay in our own hands, both as communities and as individuals.

We are very pleased to have with us to deliver the 8th Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture, a distinguished scholar, policy maker, Professor Alan Blinder, a former colleague of Sir Arthur at Princeton University.

Professor Blinder is the Gordon S. Rentschler Memorial Professor of Economics and Director of the Center for Economic Policy Studies at Princeton University. He served as Vice Chairman of the Federal Reserve System under Alan Greenspan from June 1994 to January 1996. He also served on President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers from January 1993 to June 1994.

Professor Blinder's wide and varied experiences in the public and private sectors are especially appropriate for us at this critical period in our economic history. This is a period when our policy makers at both the political and technocratic levels are facing challenges both domestically and internationally which are, to say the least, unlike anything we have had to face in our past experiences.

Professor Blinder's resume, which you have, cannot begin to give you the full range of his influence both in the United States and internationally. His text book, "Principals and Policy", co-authored with Arthur Lewis's close personal friend and colleague, William Baumol, has influenced millions of students around the world including the Caribbean where it is a standard text at the University of the West Indies.

His lectures on Central Banking are a classic in the field and provide much inspiration and guidance to us in this institution.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I ask Professor Alan Blinder to deliver the 8th Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture.
