

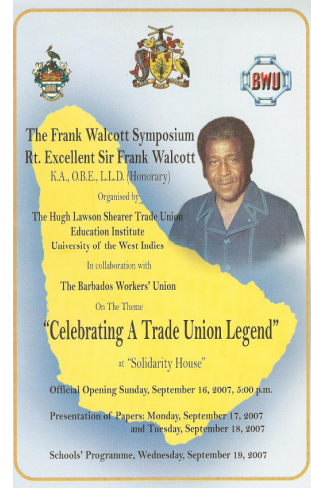


The Rt. Excellent Sir Frank Walcott Celebrating the Trade Union Legend

'Reflection Time' was (*The Nation's*) headline on September 18, 2007, one of Barbados' leading newspapers, as it featured the activities of the Sir Frank Walcott Symposium. The contributor to the newspaper noted that 'people from all walks of life came out in their numbers to hear topics ranging from Sir Frank's life as a trade unionist to his political stands, offered by professors including Prof. Hillary Beckles, Prof. Emeritus Rex Nettleford, and George Eaton.'

This fruitful and enriching event was organised by the Hugh Lawson Shearer Trade Union Education Institute (HLSTUEI), The University of the West Indies, and the Barbados Workers Union (BWU). The symposium is the brainchild of Ms. Marva Phillips, Staff Tutor, HLSTUEI. In her opening presentation, Ms. Phillips highlighted that The Sir Frank Walcott Symposium was the third in three symposia geared towards honouring the work of labour leaders in the Caribbean. The previous two recognised the contributions of the Right Honourable Michael Manley, and Jamaican heroes, Marcus Garvey and Sir Alexander Bustamante. This she asserted was a 'manifestation of the Institute's commitment to deepening the substance of its public education programme on the trade union movement's significant contributions to the development of Caribbean societies' [Phillips:2007].

The Sir Frank Walcott Symposium was characterised by many who attended and participated as an intellectual feast. Kudos to those persons who assisted in the planning and organising of the event, particularly, the staff of the BWU and the HLSTUEI, and a few colleagues whose cumulative support made this event a raving success □



Trade Union and Education

Education was an issue which Sir Frank, and the other men honoured thus far by the Institute, were passionate about. Ms. Phillips recounted a quote by Henry Peter Brougham, used by Sir Frank in one of his public addresses – 'Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave'.

Labour education and vocational training were particularly emphasized, as Sir Frank argued that Caribbean societies could not achieve the significant levels of development if workers and trade unionists were not properly educated. Education was viewed as essential, as it is through education that workers recognise and realise their total potential, and thus, received respect.

Michael Manley, as well, in his reflection on the Jamaican labour environment explored that it was necessary to implement extensive labour education programmes so that the best minds from local unions could be properly trained, as this would be the only way

to meet the continuous changes in the global labour environment.

The prominence these men gave to labour education is as important now, as it was then, with the current modality of private corporations and the new conditions of work globally, such as, the trans-nationalization of labour, the ascendancy of contract and immigrant labour, and precarious work. It was, therefore, imperative that labour colleges equip the labour force with knowledge of their basic rights of social justice and social equity, and more importantly, train trade unionists—the political voice of labour. □

Sir Frank Walcott's History

'From 1945 to 1991, Sir Frank, laboured in the interest of workers and during his stewardship, the Barbados Workers Union established its labour college, a testament to the importance he placed on training and education as an essential tool for effective worker representation. His concern for raising the living standards of workers also saw the development of the Mangrove Housing Project.. A highly respected trade unionist regionally and internationally,... his name was synonymous with fearless leadership and a commitment to the upliftment of the working class. Excerpt from the Official Opening of the Exhibition of Sir Frank's Life, September 16, 2007

On the penultimate day of the Symposium, Harold Hoyte, now Editor Emeritus of *The Nation*, summed up the character of Sir Frank in these glowing words: "patriotic; passionate; principled; genuine; outspoken; humorous; rambunctious; decent and right – The Right Excellent Frank Walcott... I salute your character, confidence, courage and commitment." □

Sir Frank was an avid reader. His love for knowledge, and his keen interest in national and international affairs made him a regular social commentator during his life time. It is in this capacity that his eloquence and skilful use of words were noted and commented on by many. Below are some of his insightful social and political expressions during his stewardship:

‘...Politics in the modern state is not a game to be played after normal working hours but is a continuous study of the complex situation facing a modern community. Politics is not a pastime for those who have failed in other walks of life and are seeking a new pathway to power and authority; politics must be a matter of objectives and faithful service. The objectives should be openly and clearly stated so that the public can understand what the politician is setting out to accomplish.’ **Frankly Speaking [1991:45]** .

‘Twenty- five years ago it was unthinkable for any progressive element in the Caribbean not to be associated with the trade union movement, or for it to raise a voice in condemnation of the trade union. Today we are witnessing a new trend among the first generation, so to speak, of the sons and daughters of the pioneer trade unionists in the Caribbean. Some of the sons and daughters of the working class are in the forefront of the battle to forestall the progressive growth of the socialist cause and some of them have the effrontery today to speak in derision about socialism and social justice. This blatant hypocrisy is nothing short of blasphemy by those who are enjoying the fruits that their fathers and mothers toiled so hard to foster.’ **Frankly Speaking [1991:72]**

‘We do not have any misgivings about what politics means. Politics means everything to a community. Our education is politics, our health service is politics, our economic life is politics, our water is politics, our roads – everything that goes to make a conventional society is governed by the political machinery of our country. It is therefore stupid for anyone to believe that one can isolate oneself from the mainstream of political life in one’s country... Politics therefore is not a game; it is very serious business, the business of the total society. It is imperative therefore for workers and their organisations to be in the front line of politics if their interests are to be protected. Workers cannot afford the luxury of sitting back and allowing their vital

interests to be controlled by well wishers – persons who have never identified themselves with their problems or have never shown a willingness to put forward measures to remedy them’. **Frankly Speaking [1991:43 - 44]**

‘The trade union in a modern society cannot ignore the realities of our time and withdraw from participating in national issues, and allow those people without any commitment to workers, to preside over their destinies’. **Frankly Speaking [1991:42]**

There is so much more to say about Sir Frank Walcott, all of which could not be captured in the few days of this symposium. So too, these few pages of the newsletter could not adequately speak to the full spirit of this man. □

Trade Unions and Wellness/ HIV

Sir Frank is noted for his understanding and advocacy of numerous issues that concern workers. In his weekly newsletter “Union Speaks” Sir Frank notes that ‘Trade unions, as the collective agencies of the workers, have to act as catalysts in every aspect of national life.. Workers are concerned about social, economic, political and cultural life, trade unions, therefore, cannot truly represent workers if they isolate or withdraw themselves from the mainstream of national life’. **Frankly Speaking [1991:42]**

It is on this note that we commend the following unions, UAWU, MONASA, and WIGUT for being an active participants in the University of the West Indies launch of its Sexual Safety Initiative, and promotion of the campuses’ HIV/AIDS and Sexual Harassment Policy. This initiative is one of the University’s many strategies to promote holistic wellness among staff and students.

The HISTUEI beseeches trade unions to get onboard this trend of wellness in organisations, and to advocate for the implementation of wellness strategies, on a wide-scale, in Jamaican organisations. Ms. Sandra Shirley, President of First Global Financial Services Ltd, in her presentation at the launch, underscored the importance of organisations adopting such strategies, as research has show that total wellness in the organisation leads to a more productive workforce. There is a correlation between

wellness, productivity and profitability. She cited data from published research that found that companies receive as much as US\$3 - US\$6 returns on every US\$1 spent on wellness programmes, and that IBM workers who exercise one to two times per week were found to be 15% better at time management.

HIV/AIDS is a lifestyle disease that employers and workers have to be particularly aware of. This is because the Caribbean has the fastest growing number of cases. In Jamaica, in particularly, those who are most affected are in the productive years of their working lives. It is important that trade unions commit themselves to join the efforts to fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Certainly, for fear that HIV/AIDS in Jamaica and the Caribbean becomes a pandemic, and restructures our population pyramids to one that is large at the bottom and top but narrow in the middle. Trade unions need to become watchful, and to ensure that organisations adopt HIV policies in the workplace, and that these policies further translate into actions. □



Trade Unions and Sustainable Development

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It is imperative for trade unions to become involved in all aspects of national development which also includes advocating for better environmental practices in workplaces. It is particularly key for issues such as Occupational Health and Safety. The ILO encourages environmental issues to be integrated into general trade union policies. □