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Excerpts from a Speech to the conference of Officials of the Commonwealth Caribbean Territories, Guyana, 1967

INTEGRATE OR PERISH

Forbes Burnham

Perhaps I will be forgiven for reminding even this gathering that the Caribbean can no longer, like the proverbial ostrich, hide its head in our beautiful sandy beaches and ignore the trends and impelling forces of change in the world economic order. Either we weld ourselves into a regional grouping serving primarily Caribbean needs, or lacking a common positive policy, have our various territories and nations drawn hither and thither into, and by, other large groupings where the peculiar problems of the Caribbean are lost and where we become the objects of neo-colonialist exploitation, and achieve the pitiable status of international mendicants.

Hunger and poverty are not relieved by philosophical pratings, or academic outpourings.

No one can deny the need for action. It is that need which is itself the rationale and raison d'être of this conference. Today, we are where we were yesterday; precisely through our inability to concert and our incapacity to yield the form for the substance; precisely because we have failed to match words with action.

Our problems differ only in degree, not in kind. All our economies exhibit an unhealthy ratio of foreign trade to national economic activity. Less than 3 per cent of our total trade represents intra-Caribbean trade. The other 97 per cent of that total trade is dangerously concentrated on commodities and products controlled from outside the region, like sugar, bauxite, bananas, to take three of the biggest earners.

We all have the persistent menace of unemployment ranging from 10 per cent to 20 per cent. Emigration outlets outside of the Caribbean, in spite of high moral posturings, are closed to us. Ours is one of the highest birth rates in the world. The pressure is building up and unless we plan and act, the lid will soon be blown off the Caribbean society with dangerous and world-shaking results.

Ours is a common problem of capital deficiency, of shortages in the professional and technological fields and of the ineligibility of nationally important social projects for international finance. In some cases, over the past decade, in spite of a few flashes of hope and achievement, our economy in this region has been stagnating and in some quarters there have even been signs of slippage. Let us to our own selves be true. These are the facts. This is the naked truth. Either we integrate, or we perish, unwept, unhonoured.

A perfect solution to, or institution for, integration cannot be hoped for.

We cannot expect to start off with some ideal or perfect arrangement. Neither can we hope to be so prescient of the future as to be able to determine all the consequences and difficulties of integration. We can and must, of course, try to analyse and anticipate as best we can from available data, what the effects of integration may be and can be made to be, but it would be folly par excellence to wait for perfect foresight.

Complete integration will take some time and will involve a number of complex decisions at the highest levels but it cannot arise fullblown merely because decisive political agreements have been achieved. In practice, arrangements will have to proceed step by step and their success will be dependent upon the research and analyses of experts and officials like those present here this morning. And that is why it has

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been decided that this conference should be the precursor of the one of heads of governments in October, in Bridgetown.

Doctors Brewster and Thomas in their study have posited the need for a regional integration policy body to give continuous direction to the integration progress: I would add in the same way as the Central American Free Trade Area established the Central American Committee in 1952 only that we shall have to move with even greater despatch and speed. In our context Brewster and Thomas have designated the body as a regional commission. The name may or may not be acceptable to you and your governments but the name is unimportant. What is of vital importance is the institution, its terms of reference and scope of activity. There can be no doubt that it cannot function without a secretariat, that it must have access to or be responsible for an institute of applied research which can mobilize a wide range of professional skills - a sine qua non which has been referred to as 'the fourth and final factor in the process of integration'.

Heavy demands will be made on skills and expertise especially in the fields of development administration where at the individual territorial levels there is a shortage. Obviously, provision will have to be made for advanced training and applied development technology.

Finally, a key institution, perhaps around which all other supporting institutions should revolve, is a regional development bank. An important part of this conference's duty, therefore, will be to give consideration to the recommendations for the creation of a regional bank made by the U.N.D.P. team. In view of the unanimously strong support reported within the Commonwealth Caribbean, it is to be hoped that your deliberations will hasten the rapid implementation of the proposals for this institution.

One of the positive advantages of integration is that it enhances the international stature of the region: it increases its bargaining power vis-a-vis the world. There are those who prescribe O.A.S. status as a short-term solution to our problems - and I emphasise short-term: there are others who propose an involvement in the Latin American Common Market which is to be established in 1985 (I hope that these proponents are not suggesting that we wait that long to take action as between ourselves), but whatever arrangements may be come to, our ability to get proper and favourable terms will be dependent upon our acting as one group rather than a number of little specks in the Caribbean Sea. It is for you the technicians to analyze, evaluate and advise on the various propositions. It is for you to propose new formulae.

Guyanese in common with other West Indians expect from this conference action and tangible results. We take this question of integration seriously and do not look upon this conference as the occasion for an exercise in debating skills of which we have a surfeit in the Caribbean. As I have said before and in other places, Guyana is willing to place its not inconsiderable natural and other resources at the disposal of the region as a whole. Our hinterland is not a mere showcase for the passing admiration of curious anthropologists, archaeologists and tourists but a vast place to be peopled and developed. With whom better can we share our resources than with our neighbours, our brothers, our sisters? With whom do we already share a common historical experience?

(Late Forbes Burnham was former Executive President of Guyana).

- 1967 excerpt from speech delivered by former Prime Minister Forbes Burnham on the occasion of Guyana 's independence.

"Fellow Guyanese, friends, a year ago today Guyana shuffled off the coils of colonialism. A year ago Guyana became politically free and independent. She assumed the untrammelled right to make her own decisions on what ought to be done or ought not to be done within her border. Since then, hers has also been the right to decide what course she would take and to state her views and opinions positively in the flora of the world. As we celebrate the first anniversary of freedom, it is our duty to take account of what we have achieved or what we have failed to do, to note where we have done well and what we ought to have done better.

[Declaration of Sophia](#)

Address by the Leader of the People's National Congress, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, at a Special Party Congress to mark the 10th Anniversary of the P.N.C in Government.Venue: Plantation Sophia, Georgetown, Guyana.Date: 14th December, 1974

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