



GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS

ADDRESS BY

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TO

**THE 39TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
BARBADOS UNION OF TEACHERS**

AT

BWU SOLIDARITY HOUSE

ON

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*Improving the Professional Status of Teachers:
A Necessary Imperative....."*

Master of Ceremonies

Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

Parliamentary Secretary

Permanent Secretary

Chief Education Officer

President of the Barbados Union of Teachers

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to begin by thanking you for the privilege extended to me to address this distinguished assembly. I do not feel too much of a stranger in your midst, since my first job after leaving secondary school was that of a teacher. The elevating experiences of my all too limited time as a teacher remain vivid in my recollection. Those experiences are revived almost weekly whenever I meet, as invariably I will do, someone who claims to have benefitted from my instruction.

Of course, I remember also, with abiding gratitude, those teachers exposure to whose influence has moulded my own character and shaped, in fundamental ways my own life chances.

Now only you can know why you thought that I was the best person to address your 2013 Conference. Since I trust your judgment and instincts, I have to assume that you have had very good reasons for deciding to have me here.

I make that observation only because, like Shakespeare's Mark Anthony, *"I have to confess that I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth, Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech to stir men's blood! I only speak right on. I tell you that which you yourselves do know*".

Yet I could not resist the temptation to accept your kind invitation, since it provides a good opportunity to share my thoughts with you on the theme you have chosen for your Conference: **"Improving the Professional Status of Teachers: A Necessary Imperative"**.

We now live in a world, you see, where a sharp dividing line is drawn between what are called the productive sectors and what are called the social sectors of our national life. When we speak of the productive sectors we usually refer to areas like tourism, manufacturing and agriculture, and when we speak of the social sectors we tend to refer to education and health, among others.

Noteworthy about that classification is the fact that what are called productive sectors produce things – money and money's worth, while what we call social sectors in fact

produce the people who make all production possible. I have always held firmly to the view that education is the most critical and important productive sector in our economy and society since it produces, the people, the human resources upon which we all have to rely for economic and social development.

To be in the company of teachers, therefore, is to share the fellowship of a very important segment of our population. It is a privilege that I treasure.

I should like to congratulate the Barbados Union of Teachers (BUT) for the tremendous support it has given to its members over the years. Even the most cursory review of the history of the BUT would show how it has evolved from a state subordination to become one of the leading Teachers' organizations in Barbados. For when the Barbados Elementary School Teachers' Association was established in 1895, the rights, rewards, autonomy and status of teachers were disgracefully low.

Nevertheless the service offered by teachers was generally considered by their "clients" as the most effective way of escaping poverty and low status. By then Barbadians had become enthralled by the transforming powers of education. This contradiction of valuing the "product" more highly than we value the "producer", still poses a serious problem which needs to be resolved after 50 years of universal free public education and national development.

It took the disturbances of 1937 to bring to the attention of the colonial authorities the plight of Barbadian workers, including teachers. Following the exposure by the Moyne Commission of the conditions under which most Barbadians worked and lived, teaching was up-graded and incorporated into the civil service in 1944. By 1974, BUT became independent of the Civil Service Association, and a bargaining agent for a large number of our teachers. In this capacity it thereafter engaged in a succession of battles for the rights of teachers and, in so doing, was propelled on the journey towards full professionalization.

Professionalization is therefore a process. As societies develop, as knowledge increases, as the standard of living and the quality of life rise, an increasing number of occupations endeavour to make the full transition to a profession for a variety of reasons.

A careful study of what have traditionally been called the four established professions - the vocations of medicine, divinity, law and the military - shows that they have gone through this process over long periods of time. Indeed it is hard to believe that physicians and surgeons once had the same status as barbers. Based on the available "knowledge" all physicians and surgeons engaged in bloodletting as a means of releasing diseases through the discarded "bad" blood.

Today, the normal practice is for those aspiring to professional status to consider the attributes of established professions and try to emulate them. Hence Ernest Greenwood in a 1957 article in the *"Social Work"* Journal at the University of California, Berkeley, listed the 5 attributes of a profession as:

- (i) A systematic body of knowledge for formal education, training and retraining.
- (ii) Professional authority and credibility.
- (iii) Regulation and control of its members' behaviour by issuing licences to practise, and by registering and deregistering members.
- (iv) A professional Code of Ethics
- (v) A culture of values, norms and symbols

Teaching in Barbados has made considerable progress along this continuum. For most of us, teaching is a profession by virtue of the importance of the service it dispenses to society. For me, since the teaching profession touches the lives of every citizen for a prolonged period of time, it is indeed **the Queen of all Professions**.

The National Advisory Commission on Education (NACE) in its 2009 Report entitled "Education in the New Century: Transforming Education for Sustainable Development" defined education as being

"at the very core of human potential. It fosters our ability to think, create, and solve problems. It encompasses a complementary mix of formal and informal learning that

develops skills and abilities essential to success in the knowledge economy. It enables us to envision and embrace the kinds of lives we want for ourselves and our children".

It then makes the case that

"Barbados has one of the most highly educated populations in the world. This could not have been achieved without a cadre of well-trained dedicated and committed professionals within the education system working to achieve this goal."

Today, Barbados can boast of having achieved the two Millennium Development Goals of access to universal primary school enrolment for all girls and boys (MDG 2); and the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary levels of education (MDG 3).

I should add also that in the 2012 UN Human Development Index, Barbados was ranked number 38 out of 186 countries of the world and classified as enjoying "very high human development". This was based on indices such as standard of education, life expectancy and per capita income. As such, in that index it is in the third place in the Americas after USA and Canada.

The question, therefore, that has to be asked is: **"What is missing from the professionalization formula to win the members of the Barbados Union of Teachers and other Teachers' Associations the status they deserve?"**

A closer study of the attributes identified by Ernest Greenwood would suggest that more work needs to be done in two areas, viz:

(a) Professional authority and credibility, and

(b) Regulation and control of its members'

behaviour by issuing licenses to practise, by registering and deregistering members.

With respect to (a), the literature on professionalization shows that a profession wins credibility by meeting the needs of its primary clients. If people continued to die in large numbers and doctors proved unable to diagnose the cause and find a cure, the credibility of their profession would be at stake. If citizens lost confidence in the courts and as a matter of course resorted to extra-judicial expedients to resolve differences, then the status of the legal profession would be called into serious question.

With the respect to (b) the conventional professions have certain commonalities that provide a level of comfort for their members and assure a minimum standard of quality service. Professions such as law, medicine, engineering, architecture, and the like emphasize the practitioner as the locus of quality control. These professions take responsibility for quality service through a set of regulatory measures and requirements that provide quality control.

Persons who wish to join these professions are required to pursue extended programmes of study in order to qualify for certification. New entrants to the profession are often required to undergo a period of internship for a specified period of time before becoming eligible for full membership of the profession. A licence to practise is granted on the attainment of full professional status which in some cases includes a written examination.

Teaching differs from the other recognized professions in distinct ways. First, because it is mainly a public sector occupation, the state is the major employer. Therefore, teachers in the main are public servants. In this context, they are subject to the same rules and regulations that govern other public servants. These are conventions that have little focus on the professional aspects of teaching. Secondly, some teachers can enter the field of teaching without being trained, with training being accessed as many as ten or twenty years later in some instances. Thirdly, there is no compulsory requirement in Barbados for teachers to participate in any continuous professional development as is the case with some other professionals such as doctors.

It stands to reason, therefore, that if teaching is to be brought into line with the established professions then there is need for a calculated focus on the quality of teachers and the quality of their teaching. Against this background, any attempt to **improve the professional status** of teachers in Barbados must be achieved through

the establishment of a mechanism for quality assurance and control with regard to the delivery of education.

This would involve the establishment of a body responsible for advancing the teaching profession, having in its mandate, regulation, professional development, adherence to a code of ethics, and effective teacher management information systems to ensure informed policies and practices.

As in the case of other professions, this body would be internally driven with the educational practitioners being at the centre of the process. Such a body would establish and manage professional teaching standards that would facilitate and maintain excellence in the teaching profession, leading to improvement in the status of teaching.

I believe that just as other professions take responsibility for enhancing their credibility, the teaching profession must do the same.

We are now at a critical turning point in the history of Barbados. During the last decade of the 20th century we experienced a technological revolution that transformed the world. We now operate in a global marketplace that is highly interconnected and extremely competitive. What happens in one place can have an immediate effect elsewhere.

The financial crisis that started in the USA in 2008 has led to a devastating economic recession world-wide, especially in those markets on which Barbados' prosperity has depended. If we are to survive and prosper in the new world order we must equip our people to innovate and help to diversify our economy. We need the talents/intelligences of all Barbadians in order to do so.

The task before us now is to build a new economy better suited to the new global environment. We must now create a highly productive, green economy built on high value exports of goods and services, a dynamic Cultural Industry, Renewable Energy, E-commerce and E-Government, Agriculture, Tourism and International Business, all done with a spirit of entrepreneurship and high productivity.

Like during the first decade of nation building, we have to draw heavily on the only resources we have in abundance - our human resources. **Therefore a necessary imperative is to improve the professional status of teachers to ensure that the quality education we need is provided** for the effective development of our human resources potential.

Taking into account the attributes mentioned by Ernest Greenwood and earlier referred to, work still needs to be done also in the selection, development, promotion and regulation of members, development of a professional code of ethics, and a culture of values, norms and symbols. These have been the subjects of concern in most of your

deliberations as recorded in your annual reports. You have been asking some fundamental questions such as:

- (1) How much control does the profession have over those who enter it?
- (2) What has been put in place to prevent job-seekers from using teaching as a stepping stone to better paid employment, and failing to undergo training?
- (3) Are teachers encouraged and facilitated to train and retrain to keep abreast of new knowledge?
- (4) Who is responsible for the appointment of teachers?
- (5) Why does the confirmation of appointments take so long?
- (6) Why does promotion in the teaching profession require expert teachers to leave the classroom and become administrators?

I note with considerable interest that the NACE Report also addressed these questions in relation to "Teacher Professional Development".

If I may quote: "As Barbados evolves into a knowledge economy, teachers are responsible for the creation of every viable professional knowledge worker to facilitate the realisation of such a national development goal, yet, they who are the central creators of this society, are not considered professionals worthy of a regulatory body to

reflect their diverse needs and interests, their own professional standards codes of ethics and specific training programs”.

It does not surprise, therefore, that the Commission's recommendations included the establishment of a Teaching Service Commission to govern the teaching profession. The Report set out in some detail the possible, composition, responsibilities and functions of such a Commission.

I am pleased at the detailed diagnoses of and prognoses for the teaching profession in Barbados which are now available. All that is required now is the will of stakeholders to complete the final stages of professionalizing a service on which the well-being of our nation critically depends.

I have articulated a vision of a Barbados that is socially balanced, economically viable, environmentally sound, and characterized by good governance. I believe that relevant education, enriched by the ability to transfer skills to any challenge we encounter is essential for realizing this dream.

The establishment of the Teaching Service Commission was proposed by the Right Excellent Errol Barrow as early as 1974, the same year as the birth of the BUT as an independent trade union.

39 years later, an ineluctable responsibility devolves on the Union and other stakeholders to complete this maturation process for the full professionalization of a body of workers whose contribution to the development of Barbados lays just claim to both our profound gratitude and our continuing respect.

To the extent that the establishment of a Service Commission for teachers can accelerate the process of fuller professionalization, I give the assurance that the Government, working with all the relevant stakeholders, will do everything in its power to facilitate the achievement of that goal.

It remains only for me to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of the BUT to the advancement of the teaching profession in Barbados. By that contribution the BUT has accentuated the direct link between the teacher and national development.

I wish you successful and productive deliberations at this your 2013 Conference.

Thank you.