

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
36th Annual Conference of the Barbados Union of Teachers
Almond Bay Conference Centre
Tuesday 6th April 2010

Mr. Master of Ceremonies, Hon. Ronald Jones Minister of Education and Human Resource Development, Feature Speaker, Dr. Jenifer Obidah, Director of The School Of Education University of The West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Mr. Laurie King Chief Education Officer [ag], Ms. Joy Gittens Deputy Education Officer [ag], specially invited guest, members, ladies and gentlemen, you have been welcomed to this the opening ceremony of the 36th Annual Conference of the Barbados Union of Teachers, I too want to add my greetings.

The past year has been a very exciting and yet challenging for the Union. We continued to represent our members and tried where ever possible to advance our professional development thrust. At this juncture, there are a number of issues which are confronting the teaching profession and which the union is having discussion with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development. I will highlight some here. As a member of National Advisory Commission on Education (NACE) the BUT was able to present the committee with empirical data relative to a number of issues which are relevant to education, it is this type of evidence which is needed to inform decisions.

Before I share those issues however I have to teach a history lesson. Five years ago I stood at this lectern and articulated the BUT's concerns relating to violence in schools. At that time the BUT called for the following,

- Security guards to be placed in all schools
- Parents to be held legally accountable for the unlawful acts of their children
- Counselors to be assigned to all primary schools
- A live-in facility for really difficult students
- The need for all the social institutions, the school, the home, the church and the community to work together

SECURITY

The issue of security remains a serious issue. The guard huts have been erected but the guards have not been allocated. In recent times schools have been the targets of breakings, fires and vandalism. Almost every weekend schools are broken into and the level of frustration among the members of staff continues to increase. The BUT is appealing to the Ministry of Defense and Security and the Ministry of Education to devise a strategy to combat this lawless behavior.

PARENTS

Since January 12, 2005 the BUT is on record as being ready to work with stakeholders to design a protocol that would relate to the following:

- a) Discipline procedures
- b) Visits to school by parents
- c) Grievance procedure for parents
- d) Appeal process for parents

Again the BUT states that parents should be held accountable for the unlawful acts of their children. We must take the bold step and identify those children who are responsible for the destruction of the school equipment and or furniture and enforce the Section of The Education Act which states that those parents must pay. It is NOT fair to make all parents pay for the action of a few children.

Again the BUT is inviting the Churches, Youth Groups, The revived NCPTA, The Government Agencies and any interested parties to dialogue and develop solutions on this issue before it is too late.

PRIMARY SCHOOL COUNCILLORS

Thanks to the Sandy Lane Trust and Youth Development Services I understand that the Ministry has assigned counselors to nineteen (19) primary schools. This is just a start and we look forward to all primary schools accessing such services.

LIVE IN FACILITY

I am sure that most of you would have heard the BUT calling for an institution where students who disrupt the school and offer violence to their teachers and peers can be educated. After agitating for the past five years an article which appeared in one of the daily newspapers is quoting the Minister of Education and Human Resource Development as stating that a facility will be established as early as September 2008. This is now 2010. While the BUT recognizes the present financial constraint; this facility must be made a reality at the earliest opportunity.

The current debate on the level of indiscipline in the schools and the wider society necessitates a collaborative and a decisive effort on the part of all stakeholders. If there is too much indecision, we will be sending mixed messages to the children and members of the wider society.

That was history. Now let's look at some additional issues that should also be put on the front burner.

- 1) Appointment of teachers
- 2) Public Service Act
- 3) training for members of Board of Management of secondary schools
- 4) Commonwealth Professional Fellowship

APPOINTMENT OF TEACHERS

During the year a number of teachers have been appointed in the primary system and the BUT has been in discussions with the Ministry of Education to start the process in the relation to the secondary system.

I note that persons in the primary system have performed in the roles of Informal Subject Coordinators for over 7 years. These persons have taken on the responsibility for various subject areas in order for the evaluation process to be piloted. The Union was informed that the approval has been given for these assignments to be completed

over a three year period since almost four years ago. The Early Childhood Coordinators positions have been advertised, interviews were held, persons were assigned, but to date no official correspondence has been received from The Personnel Administration Division formalising these appointments. In the meantime the Science Coordinators and the Arts Coordinators await their turn while performing the duty. The BUT is on record as pointing out the need to establish these post/assignment in order that the teacher evaluation process is not compromised or lead to the appeal progress being activated.

The BUT has been made aware of a pending development which may create chaos in the system at the start of the new academic year. For the past seventeen years the established compliment of teachers in the system stood at two thousand five hundred and sixty four [2564] with an additional two hundred and forty as temporary positions.

As a result of the following (5) policy decisions:

1. The expansion of the Nursery programme with additional nursery schools and nursery departments in existing primary schools
2. The creation of the post of Information Technology Coordinators
3. The policy decision to recruit specialist in Music, Visual Arts & Drama and Physical Education in the Primary Schools
4. The Accelerated Initial teacher training
5. The policy decision to recruit Special Needs Teachers

the compliment of temporary teachers has increased. What has not happened is the concomitant increase in the temporary or established teaching post. It is quite obvious that the same number of teachers employed before these policy decisions were taken would be inadequate to service the system. It therefore begs the question why a request was not made by the Ministry of Education to the Personnel Administration Division for

an increase in the compliment of teachers? At present there are approximately six hundred temporary teachers in the system. A simple mathematical calculation would reveal that this number is three hundred and sixty teachers above the approved two hundred and forty. Is the BUT to understand that these 360 teachers who are presently functioning and who are integral to the quality education of which we boast, are no longer needed? The BUT posits that the effect of this action would result in the following:

- Larger class sizes
- Multi-grade teaching
- Termination of teachers who have been in the system for five years or more.

The BUT states that teachers who have been recruited in the system cannot be penalized for the lack of action on the part of the Ministry of Education to request an increase in the compliment of teachers. The BUT understands that there is discussion relative to the payment of some of these teachers. The BUT states that these teachers must be paid and if they are not paid, the BUT will not sit idly by and allow the rights of these teachers to be eroded.

Additionally, the BUT is calling on the Personnel Administration Division to accelerated the appointment processes for Subject Coordinators, Teachers in the Secondary System, Senior Teachers, Deputy Principals and Principals.

Discussions have been ongoing for the past seventeen years relative to the establishment of a Teachers Service Commission, the BUT states that the time and

climate is conducive to the birth of this commission, the gestation period has been completed.

PUBLIC SERVICE ACT

Recruitment and Employment Code

The BUT is aware that a review was recently undertaken however Part 1V, Section 18, 19 and 20 still remains to be reviewed. The BUT notes from the first schedule that the candidates interviewed for positions are selected on a ranking order and that the priority list is valid for 2 years. This method of selection can only be used if ALL persons who applied are interviewed. A short list from the persons who have applied for the particular vacancy cannot serve as the basis for a ranking list. Additionally this method precludes persons who for whatever reason decide not to apply for the vacancy at the point in time but has intentions of applying for the next vacancy.

The BUT states that where internal short-term vacancies occur for a period in excess of 3 months, the ranking order should not be applied. For example, where a Principal, Senior Teacher, Head of Department etc. is granted a term's leave along with the adjoining vacation periods, this will be more than three months and if one sticks rigidly to the ranking order, persons would be moving from school to school. Flexibility should be used to allow a suitable person within the establishment to act in the position during the grant of the terms' leave.

One also has to be careful not to demotivate staff in any establishment by overlooking suitable candidates for permanent appointment and or short-term acting arrangements because of a ranking order which may have been established, on the basis of a previous interviewing process.

TRAINING FOR MEMBERS OF BOARD OF MANAGERMENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

During the past year the BUT has had to respond to several decisions made by some Board of Managements of Secondary schools. It would seem as though these Boards are not aware of the operation of the central government and the conditions under

which teachers work. What is very annoying to the BUT is that even though errors are pointed out to the Board they continue to act ultra vires. The BUT is again calling on the Minister of Education to provide the necessary training for these Board members.

COMMONWEALTH PROFESSIONAL FELLOWSHIP

During the period January to March I pursued a Commonwealth Professional Fellowship in London. This fellowship afforded me the opportunity to be exposed to the educational systems in Northern Ireland, Scotland and London with specific emphasis on School Inspection. In Barbados the Education Act speaks to School Inspection with the Chief Education Officer making the determination relative to the timing and the particular school. Additionally the inspection is in response to a need to investigate a problem at the school...this is a reactionary approach. In my recent training I have learnt that school inspection is based on a number of tenets which must be adhered to, these include:

- Self Evaluation Form
- The School Improvement Document which consist of the following
- The use of National Standards at the grade levels and the expected pupil outcomes.
- The use of and analysis of data relating to pupils performance
- The process of the Inspection

In my opinion this method of Inspection is much is clearly documented with the relevant standards.

One of the highlights of the fellowship was the opportunity to experience the Professional Development thrust which was being delivered in the Borough of Wandsworth. Principals and Teachers are provided with Professional Development training in all aspects of the curriculum and from what I saw this training is being transferred to the classroom with the result being mainly improved pupil performance. I

believe that we have the personnel who can deliver this type of training, what is needed is the vision.

For too long we have discussed the concept of the Master Teacher, in UK I met what they refer to as an Advanced Skills Teacher. These are teachers who have been recognized through external assessment as having excellent classroom practice, excellent inter-personal skills and the ability to inspire others. They are given additional payment and increased non-contact time in order to share their skills and experience with other teachers within their school and other schools. I think the time has come for us to start the process of identifying teachers who can be placed in this category and move to establish such a post, so that the skills of such teachers can be utilized in our system.

The knowledge gained over the last three months in the UK will surely be shared at a later forum. It is an experience I will forever treasure. The Commonwealth Professional Fellowship takes educators on a journey that is invaluable, I would like to see more educators in Barbados experience such learning.

Members of the BUT, Trustees, invited guests, members of the press, this leads me into a brief examination of the theme for the 36th Annual General Conference, Maintaining Quality Education Through Continual Investment in Education. Let me state that access and quality education is needed for the good of all. But it cannot be a reality if we do not invest in our teachers. This investment will ensure that the components of quality education are realized. Teachers are the key to the quality schooling and quality education we desire.

The BUT is cognizant of the fact that there is a worldwide recession and there must be cuts in various government departments. There must be continued investment in education as education has always been seen as the vehicle to empower the masses.

The Universal declaration of Human rights states that “everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.

Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”.

Public education is defined as being provided in a school system which is free and open to all children without discrimination, which is publicly funded and which is operated and evaluated in accordance with objectives and principals established through the democratic process. Such public education is a vital part of democracy, like a free independent press and free trade unions.

The BUT and stakeholders in education have a duty to take a stand against ideological lobbies of all kind that demean public education in order to promote the privatization and commercialization of education services.

The right to teach and the right to learn are closely related. Working conditions for teachers should be such as will best promote effective learning and enable teachers to concentrate on their professional tasks. The right to teach, to exercise the vocation of the education is dependent upon the teaching/learning environment. Effective education systems are those which create a good environment through conscious efforts to establish a culture of respect for the right of a teacher to carry out professional responsibilities.

Quality teaching should be fostered through measures that enables teachers to

- i) work with their students in open and safe situations,
- ii) access the resources needed to teach effectively,
- iii) interact with colleagues about professional issues,
- iv) grow as professionals with ongoing opportunities for developing,
- v) have access to research and
- vi) obviously receive a decent salary.

I hope that I have presented several issues relating to education that will be food for thought not only among members of the BUT but among all stakeholders in education

present here tonight. It is extremely important that there must be continual investment in education so that quality education can be maintained.

Master of Ceremonies