

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
39th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BARBADOS UNION OF
TEACHERS AT SOLIDARITY HOUSE ON
MONDAY 15th APRIL 2013.

Master of Ceremonies, Prime Minister of Barbados The Honourable Freundel Stuart, Permanent Secretaries – Sonja Welch and Cecile Humphrey, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Chief Education Officer, Deputy Chief Education Officers and other officer of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Pastor Lennox Boyce, President of The Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados (CTUSAB), President and General Secretary of the National Union of Public Workers (NUPW), President General and General Secretary of The Barbados Workers Union (BWU), President of The Barbados Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools (BAPPSS) , President of The Association of Principals of Public Primary Schools (APPSS) President and other members of The Barbados Nurses Association (BNA), President and other members of the Police, Prison Officers and Fire Service Associations, Trustees of the BUT, Principals (retired, current and designates), Past Presidents and other officers of the Barbados Union of Teachers, Stewards, Teachers, colleagues in education, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen good evening.

INTRODUCTION

This evening ceremony marks the official opening of the 39th Annual General Conference of the Barbados Union of Teachers under the theme “**Improving The Professional Status of Teachers:– A Necessary Imperative**”.

Master of ceremonies let me begin by saying what a privilege it has been over the last seven months to head this organisation and I personally want to give God thanks for bringing me thus

far. I never envisaged when I entered teaching in May 1987 that I would have reached this far. I did not even know there was a teachers' union.

I am therefore humbled this evening to be able to address this conference for the first time as President.

I also want to assure those who have traversed this path that I will be doing whatever it takes with God's help and without fear or favour to protect the interest of this union and consequently that of its membership.

Fortunately, since 1974 this union has been blessed with strong, decisive and visionary leadership. We have had the likes of John Cumberbatch, Marjorie Marshall (both now deceased), Minister Jones, Senator Husbands, Carl Springer, Undene Whittaker, Denis DePeiza, Victor Hutchinson and Karen Best all distinguished individuals who shaped this union.

Since our last Annual General Conference the union continued to experience many challenges and in the next few minutes I will highlight some of those challenges.

Indeed the country continued to grapple with the global economic recession and teachers as part of the public service felt the restraint in the economy and has not benefitted from a long overdue salary increase and has had to endure cuts in spending as well.

I want however, to shower praises on the profession for being professional despite the many hardships faced and I am sure that the Prime Minister this evening will assure all of us of his

government's continued commitment to teachers. Once a teacher, always a teacher and I am told he was a teacher.

Permit me at this juncture to depart a bit and place in the records this union's gratitude and appreciation to Sister Karen Best who for the first time in maybe thirty odd years will not be attending this conference and making a contribution from a teacher's perspective. The Barbados Union of Teachers wants to publicly salute her again for her sterling contribution to education at the local, regional and international levels. Best wishes from all of us to you madam as you continue our ordained role to transform educational institutions across the globe.

The theme chosen for this the 39th Annual General Conference "Improving the Professional Status of Teachers: A Necessary Imperative suggests that teaching is a profession. Some argue it is not but while the status is being questioned we know that it carries many of the major tenets of a profession.

Teachers provide a service that no other can provide and this message must be sent abroad. Teaching is an art and a special gift. Everyone cannot teach. Teaching requires **specialised skills** and **training** if it is to be done well.

The 39th Annual general Conference will be seeking over the next two days to discuss ways to improve the proficiency of those who impart the knowledge and skills. We will be calling for greater recognition of the teacher as a professional and will be the issues relating to propelling the educational system forward. We will be asking question about persons interested in the profession and how can they become trained, qualified and certified to practise the art. We shall be looking at improving standards in education as well.

Teachers are experts in their field of endeavour. A teacher performs the role of parent, social worker, magistrate, judge, lawyer, nurse, doctors and maid among others.

Parents often comment “I don’t know how you teachers do it, but I could never be a teacher”. Sadly we are not remunerated commensurate with our roles.

Unlike the medical and legal profession we are allowed to perform our roles sometimes without first being trained and this has its merits because it gives one an opportunity to determine if the calling is for them. The nature of our job does not allow for repairs. When a child is bounced, bruised or damaged in any way, particularly in the early years no amount of patching and poly-filler sometimes correct the damage.

I am therefore happy with governments’ initiative over the last two decades to place much emphasis on Early Childhood Education. We need as well to place our best teachers in that area if we are to build with the strongest and lasting foundations.

The Barbados Union of Teachers support private sector involvement in education and welcomes the increase in private day care and nurseries but calls upon the authorities to monitor what is being done at them. There are some challenges our nursery and reception teachers face with some of the children as they enter public schools.

We are also noticing that some parents are keeping children home until five years and then we have to play catch-up. This was a phenomenon of the 60s and 70s when we had the extended family. Modern day poverty now seems to be the cause.

Master of Ceremonies, ladies and gentlemen, I wish this evening to use this unique opportunity, provided to me at this 39th Annual General Conference in the presence of the Prime Minister and Minister of the Public Service, The Minister of Education and the Parliamentary Secretary in The Ministry of Education to share few concerns and thoughts.

In 1974 The Barbados Union of Teachers became an independent trade union and every since then has exercised its constitutional right as a registered trade union to bargain for and defend the rights of teachers and to secure conditions of service which allow them to function and to give the best possible professional service. It has also been an objective of this union to promote and advance the cause of social justice and the highest professional standards for and of its members. This year we have chosen an apt theme which speaks to the professionalization of the teaching service. We see it as a necessary imperative though not an easy feat to accomplish but, the race has to start if it is to end.

For this evening I thought it necessary to go to the archives and look back ten years at the themes and issues surrounding our annual conferences and I found the following themes:

2003 – Striving for a Healthier and Safer Environment in Public Schools. *Mr. Orlando Scott*

2004 - Quality Education – Improving Teachers Conditions of Service. *Ms. Michelle Bodden*

2005 - BUT- Linking With Stakeholders to Eradicate Violence in Schools. *Dr. Gladstone Best*

2006 – Quality Education – Providing Safe and Healthy Environments for All. *Mrs. Karen Best*

2007 - Access to Quality Education for the Good of All. *Mrs. Karen Best*

2008 - Quality Education in a Changing Global Environment. *Sir Keith Hunte*

2009 - Redefining Education in these Challenging Times. *The Hon. Ronald Jones*

2010 - Maintaining Quality Education through Continual Investment in Education. *Dr. Jennifer Obidah*

2011 - Recovery Begins With Teachers. *Dr. Ian Marshall*

2012 - Today's Vision for Education Ensures Tomorrow's Reality. *Mr. Desmond Browne*

A wonderful list of themes and some illustrious speakers but this evening we are much the same place we were in 2003 or further back.

This evening there is still that concern where some school environments are still not safe, healthy or conducive to proper instruction and learning, there is still violence (both physical and verbal) in schools - student on teacher and teacher on teacher, teacher on student, and parent on teacher much of which is not reported I am told.

There is some measure of disrespect for school uniforms. Look at how students are now dressing for school – short skirts, low waist trousers, brand name shoes and bags, adults promoting the wearing of school uniforms to enter fetes in Barbados. What else can we expect? I call this evening on government to establish standards by making it illegal for these uniforms to be worn by our teenagers and adults at such functions.

I commend the Principal of Graydon Sealy for being the man on the burning deck on the issue of uniforms. He must be supported by the Ministry of Education and other principals though. Discipline in schools or lack thereof is under serious threat, when you walk into most of our schools one wonders if it is market day. Children are roaming the corridors, filling up the outer offices of Principals, excessively loud and boisterous. Schools are no longer it appears, to be places of serious academic learning. I am told that at some secondary schools children are plying the trade. Children are coming to school on a high. Emerging from homes where the concentration levels are unacceptable. I fear for this country and the next generation.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Principals, teachers and school staffs are still working in sub-standard conditions. The Union(s) fought for and got The Louis Lynch School closed due to serious health concerns at that institution. I noticed over the last week that the use of that school plant is receiving much attention in the press again, but there are others like Louis Lynch. There are many issues at The Lester Vaughn School, some geological, some structural and others environmental so whilst teachers there continue to teach and students learn there is a high degree of fear and discomfort.

CLASSROOM SIZE

In visiting schools I have noticed that there are a number of schools where two classes are sharing one room. This untenable situation does lend itself to effective teaching as the noise level can be unbearable. Our nation's classrooms are no longer friendly to teachers or students. Teachers need space where they can set up their learning centres and smaller classes they are to effectively reach their charges.

Children are now becoming parents and not handling it well. The result is that a large percentage of our students are entering school with a lack of strong parental support and are terrorising schools from early. Basic social graces are non-existent today. One expects teachers to manage as many as thirty or thirty-five different personalities in one small room with very limited resources and no support from the parents who we need to see but at the same time they complain about us getting too much holiday. Many schools are overcrowded with as many as forty students in a room with two classes backing each other – an untenable situation while others are crying out for students to fill them.

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CARE

With Barbados becoming developed we no longer have the village life with the extended family and so we find a lot of parents now leaving home at 6:30 a.m. with their children and bringing children as early as 7 O'clock, no teachers around and leaving them. They then pick them up as late as 6 and 7 in the evening after they finish work. This can't be fair to the children or the teachers.

The government through the Ministry of Education and/or Social Services need to provide before and after school care facilities for these children or institute full zoning where you attend the school nearest to you. It cannot be left up to the initiative of PTAs and concerned parents to institute it as there are too many legal issues at stake.

SECURITY

The Union spoke to security in 2003 and 2006 at its conferences. This evening students and teachers safety is still under threat by inadequate and inefficient security guards at schools. There are reports of schools being deemed war zones in Barbados today. Are we serious about education?

This evening, The Barbados Union of Teachers is calling for improved security at all schools with increased police presence at and around schools. Random searches of school's compounds in high risk area must be instituted particularly at the secondary and post secondary (SJPP and BCC).

CLERK/TYPISTS

Where are the clerk/typists in schools? In my visits to schools over the last year I have come across some without the services of clerk/typists and others, very large schools included, sharing

a clerk/typist with two other schools. What makes matters worse is that the Ministry now sends all communication via the technology and expects teachers/schools to respond via technology.

It therefore means that teachers are being called upon to compromise their teaching with tonnes of clerical work. I ask again, Sir, are we really serious about education the largest spender of government finances?

VANDALISM

The issue of vandalism of schools by the lawless and even by students continues to be a major concern. Schools are being broken into, cash taken and teachers drawers ransacked. Some of this takes place at nights, why? Because there are schools without watchmen and without able bodied watchmen on the other hand. Where is the long promised surveillance system for schools or was this just cheap old talk?

Master of ceremonies, ladies and gentlemen there seems to be an increase in school fires too and we have seen in the last year or two. The latest being Government Hill Nursery.

ALMA PARRIS

All is not well at Alma Parris. The Barbados Union of Teachers under Karen Best started dialogue with the Ministry of Education over two years at Alma Parris Secondary School. About a year ago an oversight committee was set up to give advice the Minister of Education. We have just come out of an inquiry into the affairs at the Alexandra Secondary School and it is looking like we will be going into one at Alma Parris School shortly if there is no serious intervention. The BUT has been sharing information with and impressing upon the Ministry for nearly two years of the need to take action down St. Peter. This Union is a very responsible one but faces tremendous obstacles with stakeholders sometimes.

Minister/PS act now.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

In August last year the Barbados Union of Teachers concluded about three years of negotiations with the Ministry of Education in the first instance and then the Ministry of the Civil Service on a collective bargaining document but cannot today say to members that we have negotiated the following on your behalf. Truly, I feel frustrated with the nonchalant approach to very serious matters by two critical Ministries.

This collective bargaining document would be the first such agreement brokered by the union in its nearly forty years of existence. It is intended to provide to set out the parameters for issues relating to remuneration, security of tenure, conditions of service, dispute resolution and in general the obligations of the union and its members, the Ministry of Education and the ministry of the Civil Service.

It speaks to the Health and Safety at Work Bill 2007 and the need for the provision of safe and hazard free conditions for teachers, the several types of leave accorded to teachers including proposals for paternity leave for male teachers and election leave for any teacher who wishes to contest general elections in Barbados. It speaks to evaluation of teachers and school administrators and how it is to be done in accordance with the Amended Education Act, Transfers and re-assignment in the teaching service and appointment/assignment to senior teaching and administrative posts among other very critical matters.

The Barbados Union of Teachers in February wrote the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Civil Service for an update and has not been granted the courtesy of a reply to date. Are we really serious about the profession?

TEACHERS' SERVICE COMMISSION

For over thirty years we were promised a Teachers Services Commission – the preliminary work has long been done I am told but successive governments have not had the tenacity to debate in parliament with a view to establish. The call is being made this evening to accept the recommendation made by NACE to establish it.

I say return to the track, place it (the legislation) under starters order and let the race begin. Delink us from the regular civil service, bring registration, increase and regulate pay. Create a grade of Master Teacher - one in each school in the initial stage and increase as the system demand. There are currently limited opportunities for upward mobility in the system.

TEACHER TRAINING

Master of Ceremonies our lone teacher training college has just celebrated 50 years. Teachers are now being trained in Associate Degree in Teaching, A Diploma in Education and a Certificate in Educational Management and Administration. Every single one of these programme students are complaining for. We have had occasion to represent students who had serious issues with the programmes at Erdiston and this evening a call is being made once again for the powers that be to look into these complaints. Is there a need for Erdiston College to refocus and what can be done to improve on its delivery?

With a cohort of 50 teachers being trained every year in the Cert Ed. the time is ripe for the creation of posts at the management level for those being trained. A call for deputy principals in primary schools and a second deputy Principal in the secondary to deal with the myriad of disciplinary issues is therefore being made this evening.

At the Primary level we were promised subject coordinators in Early Childhood, Science and Language Arts and to date cannot get them established. A few are in place but those who are acting in the post need to be appointed to the post. These positions were to be phased in over a three year period ten years ago. Are we really serious about the profession?

APPOINTMENTS AND TRANSFERS

We have a teaching service with a complement of 2564 posts and a system which have been functioning with relative effectiveness with over three thousand. The Barbados Union of Teachers is again calling for the increase in the number of established posts and with justification. We are saying again start the process.

We have not had any major appointments since 2007 and there are vacancies in the system for teachers.

Why are teachers treated the way they are when it comes to receiving their just due? Why should teachers complete professional training or work continuously for more than three years and have to wait sometime five and six years to be appointed.

We want this administration to move the profession to the next level and make it mandatory for persons entering the system to spend at least one year probation before accessing teacher training to certify them to practice. If at the end of their professional training they are successful they should be appointed forthwith to the system as is the case with other professions.

There is a secondary school where I am told recommendations were made over five years and appointments not made whilst at others the recommendations are made and appointments follow like clockwork. The playing field has to be levelled. This brings to the question of how we select some of these school Boards.

Recently, there was much public outcry over the follow-up action to the now famous Commission of Inquiry into the Alexandra School. The Barbados Union of Teachers did not go before the inquiry but some of our members did. As a result of them being at Alexandra they had to be part of the transferring of teachers from and to Alexandra.

While the Barbados Union of Teachers recognises the Ministry's right to transfers its employees, teachers and Principals included we are calling on the ministry to honour its commitment to consult with the stakeholders and to give adequate notice to the transferees except very special emergency circumstances. We have agreed to one term for Principals and six weeks for teachers.

What happened last December should never be repeated where there were misfits in the transfer solution and resulting illnesses brought upon persons. The Union calls upon the Ministry to honour the agreement and give due notice.

If we are indeed a profession and a noble one then treat us so.

STUDY LEAVE:

Year after year this union is faced with teachers who are studying at tertiary level institutions and in particular the University of the West Indies being denied their full benefits of short term study leave. To the best of my knowledge and I have seen it where Public Officers who qualify, that is working in excess of one year, are entitled to and shall therefore be granted a maximum of 10 days study leave per semester or 20 per year if requested. The Union needs to know, maybe not tonight, but certainly by the time exams are about to start in a few weeks what is the policy in the public service of Barbados. There is only one public service in Barbados and the same rules

govern all public officers. Why is it that teachers are being denied their legitimate expectation and being offered/granted by Principals only the examination day and the day before.

The union has written to the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Management on the matter and has gotten no response, so I am assuming that I now have to write to the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation to get an answer.

The Barbados Union of Teachers will advise its members according to the regulations and what has been custom and practice and shall not deviate from that.

TEACHER EVALUATION

Where are we this evening with Teacher Evaluation? Is the Teacher Evaluation Unit still in operation? Does it function? The Barbados Union of Teachers is tonight calling for a total revamping of the Teacher Evaluation process. I observed and have been informed of cases where misguided Principals are abusing the process and using it incorrectly to report on Temporary Teachers. This practice needs to stop. The Ministry of Education has not had the necessary institutional capacity to effectively put into force the law. Principals at some schools are making a mockery of the process and not deliberately so but because they are asked to implement the law without the knowledge in some cases, resources and requisite training.

Last night I was pleased to attend the opening ceremony of the Principals Leadership Institute being held this week at the University of the West Indies for the thirty odd recently appointed Principals and I was pleased to hear of the component of the training. The BUT congratulates all those who receive their instruments and now eagerly looks forward to the interviewing and subsequent appointment of Senior Teachers and Subject Coordinators.

Like EDUTECH we have trained persons who were about to retire and have not trained anyone in Teacher Evaluation in about five years. So what do we have a flawed Teacher Evaluation Process. No standards.

This union can say that it had a very significant role to play in the formulation of the Teacher Evaluation Document (thanks to former President Karen Best) and therefore would love to see it in operation. Real money wasted.

Let us get the unit functioning again, let us put the required personnel in place, let us move the process forward, develop a module at Erdiston Teachers College to facilitate training every single graduate of that institution in the process.

NON-PAYMENT AND LATE PAYMENT OF SALARIES

Recently we have been getting a lot of calls from teachers who were not paid for months sometimes, some teachers being supposedly overpaid and some underpaid. Let us try to alleviate these issues as teachers become frustrated when the mortgage companies and creditors are on their backs. It does not help the situation either when unprofessional behaviour is exhibited from the Ministry either.

I will leave the Education Officers for another time but suffice it to say be more sympathetic and humane when dealing with my colleagues. Stop the terrorism. Let us endeavour to confront the challenges as partners in education.

Master of ceremonies, Prime Minister, Ladies and gentlemen it is not easy. But we have to start and start somewhere and with much alacrity. Let us spend the education budget with prudence and maximise the benefits of universally free public education.

Ladies and gentlemen I brought back to the table issues we have been grappling with for a long time. We need now to find real solutions to these issues if we are to move the education system forward and bring this nation back to the prominent position it once held in the region.

The Barbados Union of Teachers stands ready to join hand in hand its sister union the BSTU in charting a new vision for education in Barbados.

Let us pool our resources and move forward as one united body in the interest of education.

May God bless each and every one of you.

I thank you.