

ADDRESS BY THE HON. FRANCIS PREVATT,
MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SEMINAR

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege to have been invited to address this distinguished gathering this morning, and to declare open the Commonwealth Caribbean Seminar on Youth Employment and Training. May I express the profound regret of the Right Honourable the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago at his inability to be present this morning to deliver the feature address. The Prime Minister's interest in the problems and development of youth is well known. I am request to convey his best wishes for the success of your deliberations and the hope that your labours will be meaningful and profitable.

This is the second such seminar organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat, and follows closely on a very successful conference held in Nairobi in November last. The Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago are, therefore, deeply appreciative of your choice of the host country for this first such Western Hemisphere meeting.

In extending a most cordial welcome to all delegates and observers, I am sure that friends from sister Commonwealth Caribbean countries will forgive me if I single out for special mention the delegates from Africa and Britain, countries with histories older than those of the Caribbean, but which are none-the-less plagued with problems arising from the restlessness of youth, similar to those encountered by our relatively young and under-developed countries.

To those of you who are visiting this country for the first time, may I express the hope that your conference agenda will permit you time to see something of our exciting island-nation and to enjoy its scenic beauty. I hope you will be able to meet and exchange experiences with the Trinidadian people and enjoy the warm affection and hospitality of our multi-racial society in a country where, as in the words of our National Anthem, "Every creed and race find an equal place". To those of you who have been here before, we accept your return as an appreciation of

the pleasant and rewarding stay you had previously, and we trust that this visit will be no less enjoyable.

The primary purpose of this seminar is to pool the experience and expertise of persons concerned with and engaged in youth work, and to distil from their wisdom ideas which will prove useful to policy makers. From this pooling of experiences and ideas it is expected that a blue-print will emerge for closer Commonwealth co-operation in the development of schemes for work amongst youth. It is comforting to note that your delegates are not representatives of their respective governments, charged with espousing and supporting the policies and principles of their sponsors, but persons selected for their own ability, experience and interest in youth work. I venture to suggest that your contributions will, therefore, be uninhibited and objective and will give us, the policy makers, food for thought on the contemporary problem of adequately providing for our young populations.

Within the past few years, youth has become a very controversial subject. Some people are genuinely terrified at the power of youth and resentful that they seek to change the old established order. But why should not the older give way to the new, provided that in doing so, something better is achieved? The advances in medical science over the past two to three decades have contributed to the tremendous population explosion experienced in several countries of the world, particularly in the developing countries, where it is not unusual to find over 50 per cent of the population under twenty five years of age. In our own country the ratio is even more disturbing, for nearly 50 per cent of our population is under twenty years.

But it is far more disturbing to note that scientific and technological developments in other fields have tended to reduce the dependence on manpower as a factor of production. Labour intensive methods of production are being replaced by capital intensive techniques; men are being replaced by machines. Yet with populations heavily weighing in favour of youth, Governments are forced to provide more school places, more social and recreational facilities, only to find that each succeeding year more skilled, highly trained and highly qualified youths are thrown on to the labour market to compete for fewer and fewer jobs. The youth of the Third World, born in era of hope, of great possibilities and ever increasing opportunity, encouraged to develop his skills and talents, suddenly finds that he has very little opportunity to contribute to the making and execution of plans for shaping his own or his country's future. Those actively engaged in so

doing are usually older people who have sometimes failed to keep abreast of the times or are unwilling to accept realities. The frustrated youth seeks outlets for his pent-up energies and emotions; he wants to catch the attention of those around him, to be counted when he rises and to be heard when he speaks. He is striving for a place in society through which he might fulfil his dreams and his ideals; but he soon finds that his efforts are in vain, that there is little room for him in legitimate and well-ordered activity. He turns to the dramatic, the theatrical; some young men engage in marches, street demonstrations and sit-ins; others turn to more extreme forms of showmanship - physical violence, street fighting and occupying buildings; others devise schemes and plots to overthrow the establishment, to rebel against society; some of the weak, unfortunately, fall prey to debauchery and drugs. These are merely manifestations of the enslaved seeking after survival; the young are revolting against authority and lack of opportunity.

It is pertinent to ask: what are we doing about these problems with which we claim to be so concerned? Your coming together from countries near and far to share your experience is ample testimony of our concern to find solutions to the problems of youth. The late President John F. Kennedy expressed the view: "If men have the talent to invent new machines that put men out of work, they have the talent to put those men back to work". It is no wonder, therefore, that the American nation has spent such vast fortunes in sending men into outer space and in landing men on the moon, nor that they are already preparing for the journey to outer planets. The vast resources of the sea bed are already opening up new vistas for some nations. Will these new-found resources and the yet unconquered areas provide the challenges and opportunities eagerly awaited by our restless youth? Will their fruits be shared by all nations or will they merely serve to widen the gap between the scientifically and technically advanced countries and the under-developed countries of the world? Will these new-found resources serve to put men back to work?

When solutions to the problems of youth are under discussion, certain questions must be borne in mind. How, for instance, do we harness the talent and skills of our youth in such a manner that we do not impose restraints on their dynamism and sense of creativity? How can we motivate them into making a contribution to their own and their country's future progress? What contribution should youth make to the political, social, cultural and economic development of their country, and what forums should be open to them? This obviously raises the very topical question

of the voting age and active participation in politics.

These are some of the thoughts which must commend themselves to you during your deliberations. All countries, rich and poor alike, owe it to their youth to train and organize them for service to and for their native land. We in the Caribbean have recently embarked on a new round of co-operation in economic integration, in the sure and certain knowledge that many of the problems of the region can only be solved by the united efforts of all our people. The proximity of our countries to each other, the similarity of our backgrounds, our close family ties and our common hopes and aspirations, impose upon us a responsibility to come to each other's assistance. We are pleased to share our joint experience with peoples from other regions. The emphases may differ, but I am certain that our basic problems are the same. The swiftness of modern communications has reduced, in terms of time, the size of the earth, and places our neighbour's problems right on our doorstep.

Your recommendations are to be considered at the next meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers to be held in Singapore in early 1971. It behoves you, therefore, to think globally, not only regionally, realizing as you no doubt do that the Commonwealth is spread over all continents.

I look forward to receiving a copy of the report of your deliberations. I am confident that with the talent here assembled, your discussions will be stimulating, impartial and objective, your recommendations constructive and practical.

It is with pleasure that I now declare open this Caribbean Seminar on Youth Employment and Training and wish you abundant success in your deliberations.

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