

## ***‘Bottom Up’ Approach***

by

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***“As I reflect on all of this, I am becoming more and more convinced that, if we focus on fostering the further emergence of the Caribbean identity using a ‘bottom up’ approach, we are probably more likely to achieve the ultimate success of Caribbean unity than if we approach using a ‘top down’ approach”*** – Extract from last week’s column.

I would like to share some interesting responses to last week’s column as we continue the quest for a sustainable solution to the problem of mobilising the potential resources of the Caribbean and the Caribbean Diaspora for the benefit of our people.

1. “If each of us were to practise regional integration in our daily doings wherever the opportunity presented we might yet cut so convincing a spectacle that the politicians, themselves, might take notice”.
2. The pity is that too few have lived it (a true Caribbean experience). When it is a personal experience it works, but the insularity will leave it as an extremely slow process, if it can ever truly come about”.
3. “I am convinced that there are some matters pertaining to the psyche of Caribbean people that we continue to push under the carpet. The self-esteem and self-worth of many of our people is relatively low, and the dependency syndrome is real. We do not easily celebrate things Caribbean that are excellent, but still revere foreign 'stars'....The change the Caribbean needs is not only systemic, procedural and operational, but very critical psychological and behavioural change is necessary if we are to unleash the creative spirit and potential of the mass of our people.....One of the greatest things about the USA is the cultural orientation each American child undergoes which says, 'you are great and live in a great country'. Can we say this about the Caribbean?”
4. “Basil: Your points are well made. I add two other elements that complicate your equation. First, there are others who believe that the Caribbean identity must in fact be definitionally rooted in Africa. Second, there is the important cultural point: There are some fundamental differences between and among the islands that flow from geography, religion, language, attitudes toward violence, etc. - even food. Now I dismiss the first element easily. But I continue to reflect on the second and recognize that the cultural distinctions found among the islands will not disappear because of economic and political advantages that might flow from our being bound together. So it may make sense for us to do things together, to be collective in our aspirations. But that doesn't mean that a

Catholic, French-patois speaking St. Lucian will see the world like a Protestant English-patois speaking Bajan - all of this without even getting into the complexities of class”.

It has been reported that Roger Harper, as coach of the West Indies Cricket team, had this to say on his return to the Caribbean last week from the world cup. ‘One of the things that we have to get rid of is the insularity at all levels. Everyone wants the West Indies to win but they all want their own people to play...Until we get rid of that, until we start thinking as one, until we have common ideals and common goals and stop filling our territorial players with nonsense then we're not going to get anywhere because we are creating monsters...What people expect is that we breed children for 20 years and what has not been instilled in them in those 20 years, they expect them to come into a West Indies team and in two month's time, the management is to put it right and it is not going to happen’.

I find the above four responses to be very instructive and I am grateful for these contributions to the dialogue.

The Caricom Secretariat has set up the framework for regional identity and unity through the treaty that is the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. Now, I suggest that the ‘top down’ approach has to be implemented in parallel with a ‘bottom up’ approach where the people themselves inculcate a regional identity, enhance self-esteem and self-worth, practise regional integration in our daily doings, avoid the dependency syndrome, inspire creativity and innovation, carefully examine the benefits of the search for identity imbedded in African roots. There is no magic solution.

However, history has taught us that if we focus on the ‘up side’ potential of Caribbean integration and manage the ‘down side’ risks then success will be the order of the day. The ‘bottom up’ strategies which will drive this management challenge to achieve stated objectives include spiritual awareness, establishment of a symbol of regional unity, recognition of the uniqueness of the Caribbean and its people, delineating cultural icons and selectively shedding links with the past, increasing intra-regional travel, encouraging entrepreneurship, revolutionising the educational system at all levels, re-engineering financial and economic models to meet the needs of the community and continually assessing the benefits against the stated objectives.

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