

REPRESENTATION: NEED TO RE-FOCUS

*"In days of old when men were bold
And paper was not yet invented
Men used to wipe their glass
With razor grass
And walk away quite contented".*

22 July 2003 - For better information of non-Caribbean people reading this by e-mail, this is cited from the calypso "SCHOOL DAYS" by the MIGHTY SPARROW. It is a manifestation of Sparrow's marketing prowess that the word "glass" is wholly inappropriate save for the fact that it rhymes with the word in the original limerick. He is sensitive enough not to offend the ear of the holy and the hypocrite that comprise a fair share of his market. It does not matter that the street language of their teenaged children is absolutely more vile than the words their parents deem to be offensive.

But this piece is not verily about Sparrow or calypso. It is cited for some parallel with another recent experience of my own.

A few years ago I employed a couple of men to assist me in an experiment, viz, the production of dasheen for export. Where and when I was "educated" had untold influence on my current conduct. At UWI in mid-Cold War, despite the Non-aligned movement, everybody took sides. From the defunct Human Relations school I learned things which I still practise. For example, the young food plants accidentally chopped by the cutlass of the unskillful gardener are more diplomatically described as cut by the unskillful cutlass of the good gardener.

And from the social psychologists I learned that those who assist you need be motivated. As part of that motivation I picked up the men in the morning and dropped them back on evenings to their home district which I will not name.

One morning one of the gentlemen asked me to wait a while for his companion who had gone "by the bay". So was I reminded of the untruths that we take for truths and granted. There are still massive signs of lack of human development in our midst, including lack of basic running water and adequate toilet facilities in our towns and villages, and especially in many homes.

So, paper has long been invented; men have become less bold and have graduated to something less sharp than razor grass. But some among us still live like in days of old.

What is the point of fighting to get into Parliament if, having gotten there, those elected cannot effectively address such a basic need prevalent among our people? I believe organizations such as WHO and PAHO would happily finance such a project.

From my own home, I look north towards the hills and see the grotesque avalanche of garbage being disposed there. Parliamentary representatives or City councilors cannot see it as I do: they do not have the view from my house. But, should any of them be reading this, he/she is

welcome to come home to share this ugly scene. I hereby volunteer to help provide the basic leadership necessary to resolve that simple matter.

Some weeks ago I was on my way when someone asked for a "drop" and I obliged, which I do often. He asked me to stop at the junction of the Castle Bruce and La Plaine roads. As I did so, about a dozen children quickly boarded my pick-up, deaf to my protests that I was not going as far as the Castle Bruce secondary school. And they scrambled in with attitude: that we need a lift, and if Satan drives by then is God send him!!

I soon learned that those poor children lived the daily lack of transportation ordeal, to and from La Plaine. Some had been known to get back home as late as 9:00 p.m.

It struck me forcibly: why are we going to Parliament if we do not demonstrate the willingness and effectiveness to resolve such simple matters? This is no rocket science! I also remembered Winston Bailey's (Mighty Shadow) assertion that his heart was no piece of cake: he asked God to take his conscience out.

It seems that the Lord adamantly refuses to participate in such enterprises. To live with my conscience, I drove the children to their school and arrived there after nine that morning.

At Mahaut, there are many villagers who, in good faith, bought land on the Beausejour Estate, but cannot, years later, obtain title to the lots they paid for. We know how useful such a title is, for example to secure a mortgage to extend the house, to secure a loan for education of the children, etc, etc...

The owners/inheritors of the Beausejour Estate may have a million reasons, all of them valid reasons, why they cannot resolve their disagreement or conflict. But, as reasonable people, they too should agree that those who are entitled to titles should not be made to suffer for decades while inheritors await their conflict resolution.

A "private bill" introduced in Parliament to cause the innocent to obtain their just titles should receive unanimous support in the House; and in the country at large.

A major problem facing our indigenous people is housing. The Carib "reserve" comprises thousands of acres of land, but no one has individual title. The concept of title is still palpably paramount: no financial institution today will lend a Carib a material sum of money, in the absence of cash collateral or title, to build, or to send his/her child to university. Parliament should resolve this.

Parliamentary representatives should re-focus, perhaps even re-define, what representation should be all about. Those who make representing people a career should address the above, among many other issues. Should they fail to grapple with such issues, or grapple them and fail, then they should not be surprised if their constituents respond:

"We are sick of your joke; we shall have none of your representation. You have become irrelevant."