

## WELCOME MR. SWINBURNE LESTRADE

*In early March 1989 someone created a scare that grapes from Chile imported into the USA would be contaminated with cyanide. On March 11, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) spotted three suspicious-looking grapes on the docks in Philadelphia, in a shipment that had just arrived from Chile. Two of the grapes had puncture marks E They were tested and found to contain low levels of cyanide.*

*The FDA impounded 2 million crates of fruit at ports across the country and warned consumers not to eat any fruit from Chile, which included most of the peaches, blueberries, blackberries, melons, green apples, pears, and plums that were on the market at the time.*

*The embargo severely damaged the Chilean economy. Over twenty thousand (20,000) Chilean workers lost their jobs, and the U.S. government was sued for US \$330 million as a result.*

*YEIt now appears that the Chilean Grape Scare of 1989 was a farce. The fruit producers claim that the suspect grapes were most likely contaminated E by the FDA itself.Φ*

*Because we are living in savage times, it is important to make the point: This is not a story invented by terrorist-enemies of the United States. It is documented by responsible American citizens who attempted to interview the FDA about that matter. The agency declined to be interviewed for that story, now written into and quoted from, the internet. Since the agency has never challenged it, nor used any of its massive resources to correct it, the only reasonable inference that can be drawn is that the story is accurate.*

*The image remains etched in my memory of the Chilean ambassador calling a YpressΦ conference somewhere in the USA. He surrounded himself with several crates of the supposedly offensive Chilean grapes. To demonstrate his conviction that the grapes were innocuous wholesome food, he opened some crates, and popped grapes at random into his mouth, and ate them.*

*His method must have been very convincing. The embargo was effectively lifted soon after.*

*In contrast, consider the relative ineffectiveness of Windward Islands envoys in our banana crisis. Over the last several years, the same USA and the WTO have degraded, disrupted and devastated the banana industry. Easily 20,000 farmers and their families lost their jobs; not to mention the damage done to the economy.*

*We should not expect a replica of the action of the Chilean ambassador; the perspective is different and the facts dissimilar. But it would not be asking too much should we expect a little visibility on the part of our diplomats in New York and Washington. Can it be that those we posted to Washington in past times lacked the stature of people who can possibly be visible?*

*The lesson relating to the Chilean ambassador should not be lost: that is, with some commitment and some imagination a lot can be attained. But imagination presumes the capacity to think.*

*Such capacity is not created merely by one's presence on a local political platform, where the speech is nonsensical at worst, and at best less than mediocre.*

*So welcome Mr. Swinburne Lestrade as ambassador to the OAS. Congratulations to his families, of orientation and of procreation. Criteria for his selection are a refreshing departure from the abysmal standards that seem to have become normative and even institutionalized. Such yardsticks for selection of any envoy are not only inappropriate. They are dysfunctional. They cost a lot and they bring us nothing.*

*Mr. Lestrade is a former island scholar with formidable credentials:*

- *Former Head of Economic Affairs - OECS*
- *Former staff member of CARICOM*
- *Former staff member of CAIC*
- *Former Deputy Director of ECLA*
- *Former Director-General, OECS*

*This critical background can provide the basis for us in the OECS, and conceivably even in the wider CARICOM, to make a case for further integration at the ambassadorial dimension. It would save resources if we set up one Washington embassy, say under his directorship, use his office sensibly and provide it with the necessary support.*

*Mr. Lestrade, I believe, by now will have defined his own vision of the job and set his own objectives and priorities. To that I am not privy. But I believe the following may comprise a few facets of his job.*

*He should be able to provide relevant economic and market intelligence to the region. For example, the U.S Congress approves certain grants or projects relating to the Caribbean. Our own consultants can apply. But they may hear about that only when U.S. and/or other foreign firms contact them and invite their assistance or participation in such projects.*

*He should be able to track legislation that impacts on our region; comment on the implications thereof, and feed us with appropriate data thereon.*

*From a more insular standpoint, perhaps he can seek and secure assistance for local projects that have some reasonable potential capacity to help Dominica take off on a path of sustained growth. Examples of such projects are housing; water; cosmetics, medications and food products based on bay leaf, bay oil and bay rum; eco-tourism; informatics; organic agriculture and related agri-business.*

*We cannot dismiss any potential funding source, but it appears that certain American politicians may be too pre-occupied seeking some trophy from the September 11th catastrophe to pay any attention to micro states. Mr. Lestrade may well have to look at Kuwait, and other OPEC countries, the EU, Taiwan and other traditional benefactors. And yes, consider non-traditional sources such as the Gates foundation(s). I believe there are  $\Psi$  persons  $\Phi$  who are willing to assist small states in their effort to take off.*

*But the work must be done. I wish Mr. Lestrade well. He may even be able to convince those who harmed our economy to make some meaningful, moral commitment to assist, given the current international environment.*

[Back to Moreau at Large](#)