

## CHAPTER 2

### INAUGURAL ADDRESS

by

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This symposium has been advertised as one which concerns itself with Employment Strategies and Programmes in an effort to find solutions to the problem of unemployment, particularly amongst the young people in the region.

At the outset let me say how very pleased I am that we are at last getting down to examinations of the real problems in our societies at the levels where discussion can be meaningful, rather than contenting ourselves with the rather sterile regurgitation of textbook knowledge imbibed from alien environments. So great has been the harm done by the relics of the Stockdale Pioneers, namely the Labour Departments and Social Workers, that unemployment has come to be regarded by civil servants of the region as a welfare disease, the incidence of which - like any other of a contagious or infectious nature - it is merely their duty to report in monthly or yearly statistics.

Similarly, Trade Unions of the region have not up to now, considered unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, as an area of their immediate concern. Trade Unions take up cudgels mainly on behalf of those who are employed and have been employed, rather than those who have never been employed; so that like the public officers, Trade Union officials tend to accept the levels of employment in various industries as a pre-ordained fact of life.

In my days under the Caribbean sun I have never heard of a strike called by a Trade Union because one of their members needed more assistance in his particular job and had unsuccessfully tried to persuade his employer to take on more people. The work somehow or other has never become too much for the worker, it is only the money which is not sufficient for the amount of work being done.

Neither have I heard of any demonstration in favour of a shift system in any factory or other place of employment. To the contrary I hear remonstrations ringing in my ears on the iniquities of shift systems - systems which can ensure better utilisation of expensive capital, increase productivity of

workers and machines, and immediately double or triple employment levels in the enterprises in which they may be introduced.

The young people of the region are up against two well entrenched and formidable elements in the society - the public services and the Trade Unions. They are both of them by definition and by inclination restrictive in their outlooks and are not likely in my generation - unless they receive considerable prodding from outside - to help much in the solution of the problem which you will discuss today.

Who then shall you turn to? My suggestion, Mr. Chairman and comrades, is that you must direct and focus your action programmes on the Governments of the region. The reason why I say this is that Governments have to be concerned with the total composite picture of the society. The narrow sectoral interests cannot be allowed to inhibit the attainment of the accepted objective of full employment in free societies. And by full I mean that every person over the age of fourteen who wishes a job must have a job; and by employment I mean not only being at work, but I mean that that person must be engaged upon some form of economic or social activity which he or she finds both economically rewarding and spiritually meaningful.

No work at all to a person who wishes to work can be socially degrading and destructive to the human personality.

If Governments wish to maintain domestic tranquillity, then creative and productive activity must be generated immediately in our region where average unemployment varies between 8% and 30% of the population of working age, but where youth unemployment is as high as 50% or 55% of those between the ages of 15 and 23 years who are genuinely looking for jobs.

From time to time I hear politicians and social welfare workers speak about youth camps. Now I do not wish to be misunderstood. I like the idea of the young people in the nation living and working together for some period of their lives, preferably immediately after leaving school. But it must be all the young people and not merely the unemployed and the disadvantaged youth.

The popular concept of the Youth Camp is that it should cater to these latter two groups only, so that you end up merely sweeping the problem of youth unemployment under the carpet for a short time and providing, like the Speenhamland system, a temporary form of outdoor relief for the unemployed young. It is the twentieth century extension of the poor law and provides no permanent answer to a problem which is surely one of the most pressing of our time.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps we in Governments are looking for the solution through the wrong end of the telescope. We are trying to create jobs for people rather than to educate people for creative activity.

An action programme must start somewhere early in our educational system. Perhaps we may have to start on the teachers or even further back; we may have to think of retraining our educators in the ministries before we can bring realism into the system itself. There are no overnight prescriptions which will make us feel better tomorrow morning.

It is a serious examination which all of us at all levels will have to undertake. My feeling is that here today we are starting at the right level. With the youth themselves to whom this is not a mere academic or rhetorical exercise.

You may carry on your discussions in the assurance that serious consideration will be given by me and by my colleagues to any proposals which you may put forward in our common quest to build the just society.