



The World Today

Four questions for Regional Integration IV- Supranationality and Symbols of Integration

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This week, I conclude my series on Regional Integration by looking at questions three and four of my argument. Let us proceed with question three: **What are the limitations of an integration project which attempts to achieve its objectives mainly through the inter-governmental mode of cooperation?**

Every single decision taken by the Heads of Government has to be implemented by means of national laws or some form of executive or administrative action. For example the process of amending the Treaty of Chaguaramas to provide a legal framework for the CSME took around 10 years to complete. Each of nine Protocols of Amendment had to be negotiated, agreed among 12 governments, signed by the Heads, and ratified by national Parliaments. Then they had to be incorporated into the Revised Treaty and this had to be given provisional application and then final application. Even then this only provides a legal framework; the implementation requires a whole series of actions to be undertaken by member states. Some 70-odd action elements have been identified, with just over one-half of these had been carried out by member states by 2005.

The glass may be half-full, but nearly 20 years after the Grand Anse Declaration, it is also half-empty. I am pretty sure in my own mind that the target date of 2015 cannot be met using the current methods. As Brewster pointed out the EU faced the same dilemma in the 1970s and 1980s and only solved the problem by adopting limited supranationality in the form of the Single European Act and the establishment of Community Law that binds all member states. The proposed changes in the form of a Single CARICOM Act would give teeth to CARICOM decisions by making them legal binding in member states in certain defined areas.

Unfortunately the issue has been confused in the public mind and in the governments with the issue of the appointment of CARICOM Commissioners. To my mind it would be a waste of time and money to have Commissioners in the absence of a legal basis for the implementation of CARICOM decisions within member states that does not rely on actions by national governments and legislatures. That is the essence of supranationality.

The fourth question is: **what are the limitations of an integration process that is undertaken primarily in response to pressure from outside?**

The pressure comes from globalisation and the formation of regional blocs like the EU, NAFTA, and Mercosur; and the preference of these countries and groupings to negotiate trade agreements with the region as a whole rather than with 12 or 14 small and insignificant entities. There is an evident parallel with the defunct WI Federation, where a lot of the pressure came from the British government anxious to shed its colonial responsibilities.

Integration has become a matter of economics, more correctly of business, and a matter for ministers, officials and businessmen. Popular involvement is missing. The late Lloyd Best used to say that the main problem with CARICOM is the absence of regional politics. To put it another way, we are trying to build regional integration on the basis of national and insular politics. This is practically a contradiction in terms.

The one symbol of sporting integration we have, WI Cricket, is in a complete shambles. It has fallen prey to insular rivalry, the rampant commercialism that accompanies globalisation, greed and unbelievable managerial incompetence. It is about to fall into the hands of a foreign businessman virtually by default. This is not industrialisation by invitation, but perhaps recolonisation by invitation.

WI Cricket is well on the way to becoming another example of regional disintegration. It needs to be fixed, not by changing the Captain or the Team or the Chairman or the Board, but by a complete overhaul of governance to give the WI public ownership of the team and to make its management publicly accountable; accompanied by a comprehensive grass roots bottom up long-term, development programme for young cricketers; as more and more people are advocating. It may already be too late; we may have one last window of opportunity in the form of the Patterson Committee and the Hunte Chairmanship. But I am not all optimistic.

The other alleged institutional force for integration, University of the West Indies, has become a loose confederation of semi-autonomous national entities struggling to survive in the face of foreign competition and globalised education. In the 1960s it was the wellspring and nucleus of a

kind of regional political movement in the form of the new World Group and the Black Power movement, but all of that has stopped.

The UWI needs to retake its rightful role as a dynamic leader of the integration movement, providing intellectual, educational, moral and political leadership as the one institution that is uniquely positioned to put the region first before and above the insular. The Vice Chancellor cannot do this by himself.

What is needed is a regional spirit, a regional consciousness and a regional commitment that permeates the very pores of the University community; a regional intellectual culture. There are UWI students of economics who know who is Adam Smith or Paul Samuelson but who have never heard of Alister McIntyre, Lloyd Best or George Beckford. This kind of ignorance would have been unthinkable a generation ago. Is this progress? What is the point of having a regional university if it is merely going to mimic the latest intellectual fads in the metropole?

To come back to the political deficit, CARICOM tried with the Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians in the 1990s but it never had any real function or power and it is no longer in existence.

To address this deficit why don't we propose a system of directly elected delegates to some sort of regional assembly that has some clearly defined political function? They do not have to be elected on a party political basis in fact, it would be better for it not to be so. Instead they can represent sectors of the community or interest groups; a kind of regional Senate so to speak. It is important for such a body to have some real responsibility within the system of governance of the Community other than one that is merely consultative. For example, it could scrutinise the budget of the CARICOM secretariat or it could monitor the progress of the implementation of the Charter of Civil Society, the CSME, the Single Development Vision and regional development plan.

Another thing that needs to happen is the establishment and further strengthening of the network of regional civil society organizations including business, labour, environmental organizations, NGOs and the like. Curiously, with the possible exception of business, these do not seem to be as strong as they were, say, 10 years or so ago, when the Regional Economic Conference was held.

Until we have the emergence of a genuine regional public, a regional media, regional peoples-based organisations and genuine regional public opinion then the integration movement will continue to have a fragile foundation and will probably be politically unsustainable.

There is a lot more that I could talk about regarding integration. There is the matter of the wide and growing income disparities within the Community and the economic, the social and political difficulties these pose for the integration movement, and how these will be handled. There is the matter of cooperation with the wider Caribbean: with Cuba, the DR, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. Any one of these countries except PR has a population and/or GDP which is comparable to, or greater than, the whole of Caricom put together. Yet we behave as if we are doing them a favour to deal with them, or treat them as source of handouts to take the place of the Americans and the Europeans. Havelock Brewster calls this the 'begging bowl' syndrome and he is challenging us to get over it.

We seem to alternate between an inflated sense of our own importance in international affairs on the one hand, and a debilitating sense our own impotence to influence the world around us that is largely self-imposed on the other hand. I cannot for the life of me understand why CARICOM countries are setting up separate missions in Beijing, Havana and all over Africa instead of joint missions; or have been unable to agree on a united regional policy towards cooperation with Venezuela, or to fully implement the CARICOM-Cuba trade and cooperation agreement that was signed over five years ago.

My answers to the four questions have argued that economic integration should go beyond reliance on market mechanisms to development integration, that integration in the broader sense should go beyond the economic to address quality of life issues; and that the methods should go beyond inter-governmentalism to incorporate elements of supra-nationality and of popular political involvement.

This is the final article in this series. The first three parts were published on Sunday, October 28th, Sunday November 11th and Sunday December 2nd 2007^h respectively.