

The Evolution of CANA and the Role of the Regional Media in  
the Caribbean Single Market

A Public Lecture to mark the  
30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Caribbean News Agency

By

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The title of this lecture is long: "The Evolution of CANA and the Role of the Regional Media in the Caribbean Single Market".

Therefore, in a paraphrase of the words used by radio broadcasters to encourage their audiences not to tune out, let me ask you to sit back, relax and endure: I will not be short!

It is right that the occasion marking the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Caribbean News Agency (CANA) should be linked to the creation of the Caribbean Single Market.

For, CANA's formation was a direct result of the recognition by regional leaders in the late 1960s that regional institutions and regional integration would not succeed without more "regional thinking and awareness" and their declared belief that the mass media "provided inadequate coverage for regional events and policies".<sup>1</sup>

And, here, I should explain that by "the Caribbean", I mean those countries that came to be members first of the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) and then the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM).

By the end of June this year, twelve of the member states of CARICOM hope to have established a Single Market with a Single Economy to follow by 2008.

The decision to join a Single Market is a far-reaching one.

It has consequences for all the people of the region who will be ceding local autonomy over some of their economic affairs to a process of regional decision-making that will be binding in law and enforceable by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ).

For the most part, the decision to establish the Single Market, like others to form CARIFTA and then CARICOM, has been taken by governments almost on the assumption that because they have concluded that these developments are in the region's interest, the people should conclude so too.

There was no referendum in CARICOM States when CARIFTA was formed and none when CARIFTA was deepened into CARICOM. Similarly, there has been no referendum asking the people of the Caribbean whether or not they favour the CSME.

Despite this absence of direct consultation with the people, CARICOM leaders have not mounted information and education programmes designed to explain these developments to the population of the Caribbean Community.

As the Guyanese diplomat and scholar, Lloyd Searwar, observed in a commentary written days before he died last month and published posthumously:

“Deliberate use of the communications media is of vital importance because CARICOM is a unique experiment in integration among non-contiguous territories, in which member States are divided from each other by the sea and in some instances by great distances” (as is the case with Belize and the Bahamas).<sup>ii</sup>

Later in this presentation, I will return to this point more fully, but let me now declare my own position.

Years of work as a broadcast journalist, a writer on Caribbean affairs, as a diplomat who negotiated for the Caribbean in the international community, and as a business executive in several Caribbean countries, have convinced me that a deeply integrated region is in the best interest of the Caribbean’s people.

But, I recognise that, throughout the region, there are those who have fears about the CSME that should be addressed.

Among those fears are: fear of the effect of migration on local identity; fear by some businesses of competition from other businesses in the Caribbean; fear of losing jobs to either better qualified or cheaper labour; and fear that national education, health and social welfare systems will be overburdened to the detriment of the local population.

These are all issues that need ventilation and discussion. They ought not to be swept under the carpet.

For, if major sections of Caribbean society are unconvinced or seriously opposed to the regional project of deeper economic integration, the pan-Caribbean machinery that has been so painstakingly constructed over the last four decades will be undermined and may disintegrate, leaving the individual states of the region less capable of bargaining effectively in the international community; less able to resist the domination of their economies by foreign-owned companies; and with less capacity to resist the dictation of more powerful countries and institutions.

In all this the regional media has a crucial role to play both in educating the Caribbean people about the ramifications of the integration process, and in giving them an outlet to express their views and to have their questions answered.

But, one wonders how widely available is revised Treaty of Chaguaramas that sets out the terms of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy? How easy is it to get a copy? Indeed, how many members of parliament have read it,

and how many journalists? Could they make an informed judgement should a referendum be held tomorrow?

It will be recalled that the West Indies Federation was dissolved in 1962 as a consequence of a referendum in Jamaica that caused Jamaica to withdraw.

After the referendum, the Premier of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Eric Williams notoriously declared: "One from ten leaves nought". And, that was that – barring the ill-fated efforts to salvage a smaller Federation by what are now the members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Barbados.

In the establishment of the Federation, the people of the Caribbean were not consulted directly. A federation was established around them and collapsed around them with no manifestation, except in Jamaica, of their will in the matter.

And, even in the Jamaica referendum, there was little information available to the people of the value – or lack of it – of a political union with other Caribbean states.

Louise Bennett, Jamaica's famous Poet and social commentator even then lamented the folly of the referendum result and the adverse effect it would have on the future of the Caribbean. She identified "fear" as the root cause of the Jamaican decision:

"Federation: a fearful meck we careful  
How we let you tru we gate.

Fearful bout de big confusion,  
Bout de final constitution,  
An Jamaica contribution.  
Beg yuh pardon Federation  
Fe de sudden separation

If we sufferin survive  
We acquaintance might revive.

Dear departed Federation  
Beg you dem other nation  
Who done quarrel and unite  
Pray fe po West Indies plight".

Ms Bennett was keenly aware that in 1957 when the Federation was formed, the Treaty of Rome was signed by six European nations to create the European Economic Community.

She also recognised that those European nations had put centuries of war behind them and by 1962 – when the West Indies Federation was dissolved – the Europeans were strengthening their community even more.

Today, of course, the European Economic Community has advanced to a Single Market as the European Union, and its membership has increased from 6 to 25 with others knocking on the door.

The fear of federation of which Louise Bennett spoke was born of ignorance.

Writing in the publication, *Public Opinion*, in 1957 a young Jamaican journalist and trade unionist expressed doubt about the wisdom of Federation without a mass basis; he deplored the fact that the bulk of the people knew very little about the subject and were indifferent.

The journalist's name was Michael Manley. And, he proved to be right.

As 'The West Indian Economist' of the time put it:

"If the electorate did not grasp the real issue, it was because both (political) parties failed to put the important political concepts of federation and separatism before it".

Manley's remarks found embittered resonance five years later in June 1962 in the Barbados Parliament - one month after the formal dissolution of the Federation - when Premier Errol Barrow caustically declared:

"If they (the West Indian leaders) had done their job to educate the people of the West Indies in the exercise of a Federal Constitution, there would not be any need for my discourse this afternoon."<sup>iii</sup>

It is instructive to consider what role the media played in informing the West Indian people about Federation. Most West Indian journalists and broadcasters of the time were not allowed to function free of the dictates of the media owners, and in any event there was little respect for their profession.

Moreover, they were not an organised group, and for the most part they worked for media proprietors who, at best, were indifferent to a political union of the Caribbean, and, at worst, were hostile to the idea.

Further, the age of the cheap transistor radio had not yet arrived. Therefore, radio broadcasts did not reach the mass of the people to whom transmissions are so easily made today. And, of course, there was no television.

Equally no news agency existed to send information from one territory to another. Neighbouring territories learned of each other's news from special

BBC shortwave broadcasts, and the business community depended on the West India Committee Circular published in London.

In 1985, nine years into the operations of CANA as a regional news agency, another Barbadian Head of Government, Tom Adams, made an important observation.

He said:

“Perhaps if CANA and its services had existed at the time of the Federal experiment, the dissemination of news in the region from a regional source would have heightened our knowledge and consciousness of each other to the point of eliminating some of the prejudices and misunderstandings on which Federation eventually foundered”.<sup>iv</sup>

In the absence of reliable information, politicians in Jamaica played upon fear – fear that Jamaica would be swamped by the “small islanders”; fear that Jamaicans would be taxed to pay for the welfare of others.

As I said earlier, similar fears exist today throughout the member States of CARICOM over the implications of the Caribbean Single Market. And, similarly, the effort to educate the people has been woefully inadequate, except in Barbados where the effort, led by Prime Minister Arthur, has been courageous.

In any event, in 1962 the Federation was in ashes from which few would have thought that a Phoenix could rise.

Yet, miraculously, a Phoenix did rise, enlivened first by the bold action of the leaders of Antigua, Barbados and Guyana – Bird, Barrow and Burnham – to sign a Caribbean Free Trade Agreement in 1965 on the initiative of Errol Barrow whose idea it was, and then by the widening of the Agreement in 1968 to an Association comprising twelve member states.

Two acknowledged experts on the Caribbean, Anthony Payne and Paul Sutton, attribute the motivation for the establishment of the widened CARIFTA in 1968 to anxiety in the region about “the future prospects of their vital exports of primary products in the light of Britain’s application to join the European Economic Community and its possible abandonment of the policy of Commonwealth preferences”.<sup>v</sup>

Similarly, it has been argued that CARIFTA was deepened into CARICOM because of the external economic environment which made going it alone by the individual States extremely difficult.

More recently the necessity for the Caribbean Single Market has been justified by the loss of preferential markets in the EU for CARICOM bananas and sugar, and the introduction, through the World Trade Organisation

(WTO) of new trade rules that, so far, have taken little account of the vulnerability of small states.

As the Prime Minister of Barbados, Owen Arthur, put it in relation to the CSME:

“From without, the catalyst has been the inexorable march towards economic globalisation and trade liberalisation, and the realisation that our only hope for survival in this new reality is through the prior consolidation of our market space and our economic policies”.<sup>vi</sup>

But, even with these external pressures, none of these advances in economic integration was easily achieved.

There were – and there are today – vested interest groups who either pay lip service to regional integration or are hostile to it. These groups exist in political parties, the private sector and to some extent within the larger community.

In all cases, they fear that their positions of advantage or privilege in their domestic societies will be overturned. Therefore, they exert considerable effort to cajole governments either to back peddle on regional commitments or to abandon them altogether.

When CARIFTA was widened from Agreement to Association in May 1968, only Trinidad and Tobago joined. Jamaica joined on June 26<sup>th</sup>.

Except for Antigua which was a founder-member, the countries that now comprise the OECS –the so-called LDC’s - laid a declaration of intent to join by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968.

The prerequisites to their joining was the creation of the Caribbean Development Bank from which they expected to get funds for their development, and special provisions to protect their manufacturing industries from competition and to maintain governments’ revenues from import duties.

Similarly when CARIFTA advanced to CARICOM in August 1973, only four countries – Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago – signed the Treaty.

The LDC’s – this time including Antigua - did not join until May 1974 after securing agreement for a number of things, one of them being the establishment of a Caribbean Investment Corporation to would provide equity capital for industrialisation projects in their islands.

I need hardly emphasise the similarity in the arguments today by members of the OECS who, last January, delayed entry to the Caribbean Single Market until the end of June by which time they expect to be in place: (a) agreement

on special treatment for certain of their products; and (b) a Regional Development Fund with sufficient resources to fund any disadvantages they might suffer from competition.

Here, I should sound a word of warning.

The Caribbean Investment Corporation, which was a condition of the LDC's joining CARICOM, collapsed for want of capital – regional governments simply could not sustain it.

In the present economic and financial circumstances of the so-called MDC's apart from oil-rich Trinidad and Tobago, it is difficult to see how they will be able to contribute any meaningful sums to the capital of the Regional Development Fund.

In the interest of the individual states of CARICOM and CARICOM as a whole, the members of the OECS should seriously consider not awaiting the capitalisation of the Fund as a condition for joining the Single Market.

The full capitalisation of the Fund may take some time – and will certainly require contributions from external donors. It should be an ongoing project undertaken by all CARICOM states working together.

In 1973, when the LDC's delayed joining CARICOM, Dr Eric Williams, in his usual impatient style, declared: "Who don't sign, don't sign, but I want to know where they are going to".<sup>vii</sup>

Were he alive today he might have said the same thing about the delay in joining the Single Market.

But as Jean Monet, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, observed: "People only accept change when they are faced with necessity; and only recognize necessity when a crisis is upon them".<sup>viii</sup>

Such a crisis is upon the region now.

The loss of preferential markets for bananas has left several CARICOM countries reeling; others will stagger over the next few years from the cut in prices for sugar paid by the EU; unemployment is increasing and with it the level of poverty in several societies; aid and investment in the region as a whole have reduced considerably since the decade of the 1980s; hurricanes have become more intense in the last 10 years and the level of their destruction more comprehensive; violent crime, spawned by an increase in drug trafficking and illegal guns, threatens the stability of the entire area; several CARICOM States are among the world's 20 most indebted nations.

And, the reality is that while a Regional Development Fund and special treatment for some products are legitimate expectations of the members of

the OECS, the costs of contending on their own with the external economic environment and the losses – including loss of autonomy – are far greater than the benefits that may accrue from the Fund and special treatment for certain products.

In any event, in 1967, it was in the milieu of a new search for Caribbean unity to cope with the challenges of external economic negotiations in some cases, and internal self-government in all cases, that a Conference of Caribbean Heads of Government was held in Barbados at which the question of information flow in the Caribbean was seriously considered.

News flow into and out of the region was controlled by two US companies, AP and UPI, the French company Agence France Press, and the British Reuters News Agency.

Caribbean countries, which lay side by side, were in the incongruous position of having to receive news of each other only after stories had been sent to London and edited.

Within Caribbean countries, the media was dominated by foreign owners, primarily the British companies, Rediffusion in radio and Thompson in the press. They showed no interest in pushing Reuters and AP to increase their regional coverage and were primarily concerned with keeping costs low.

But, the failed experiment of the West Indies Federation had demonstrated the importance of information to end ignorance, allay fears and promote understanding.

Further, efforts to advance CARIFTA from an Agreement between three countries to an Association of eleven were fully in play when that 1967 Heads of Government Conference was held.

Those efforts required the underpinning of considerably better information flow.

Thus, the Conference agreed that “an early survey be made to determine the requirements for meeting the present deficiencies in news about the Caribbean including the establishment of a Regional News Agency.”<sup>ix</sup>

The governments turned to UNESCO for help.

And, public tribute should be paid here to UNESCO which, over the past thirty years, has provided funds, or administered funds from others, without which CANA would not only have died; it may not have been born.

In the closing months of 1968 - the same year that saw the start of the wider Caribbean grouping in CARIFTA - a UNESCO study conducted by Roppa and Clarke found that a regional news agency was feasible.

Three experts were appointed by UNESCO to assist in the establishment of the agency. But, media administrators – particularly those from the foreign and privately-owned media resisted the idea of a news agency in which governments would share ownership.

It should be noted that the only reason that the prospect of government participation in ownership arose was because the CARICOM media market was small and fragile, and it was anticipated that the media alone would not be able to finance the agency.

But, there was always the danger that government participation in ownership of the agency could lead to attempts to control or censor it, and this became the central concern of the administrators of the privately-owned media.

There followed six years of heated debate and discussion about how the agency should be established, with what ownership, and with what resources.

There was also debate about whether a Caribbean News Agency was necessary at all and whether Reuters should not continue to provide a news service to the region.

Not surprisingly, the 'pro-Reuters camp' was drawn from the foreign privately-owned media. But, the 'pro-CANA camp' – mainly government owned media, attracted the support of local privately-owned media as well.

While this debate was taking place from 1968 to 1974, Caribbean governments had advanced CARIFTA to CARICOM – the region was forging ahead with integration.

What is more, despite their small size and their relative newness to participation in international affairs as sovereign nations, the four CARICOM MDC's had taken the bold step of establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1972 in the face of what they knew would be the great displeasure of the United States.

Regional governments, then, were not only forging ahead with Caribbean integration, they were demonstrating a fortitude that must have caused those who long opposed CANA's formation to reflect on the wisdom of trying to hold back the tide of change.

During this time, the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) was formed in 1970 by the State-owned radio and television stations in the region. One of the objectives was to pool the resources of its members for the production of programmes of Caribbean interest.

Another of the CBU's purposes was to strengthen the bargaining capacity of the State-owned stations against the four Redifussion-owned stations which,

up to then, had been able to pool resources for their mutual benefit and out negotiate the individual State-owned stations for broadcast rights to event such as Test Match Cricket, and for advertising.

By 1976, the four Redifussion-owned stations in the region found it prudent to join the CBU.

Even though it began without a formal secretariat, the CBU made immediate strides in the effort to create awareness among Caribbean people of their shared history, their similarity in culture, their common problems and their potential for growing together.<sup>x</sup>

Two series of documentary programmes – beginning with reflections on the West Indies Federation and descriptions and analyses of each of the member States of CARIFTA were produced and broadcast throughout the region.

Simultaneously, with the series of documentaries, CBU stations also launched a weekend news programme which linked groups of countries in a simultaneous broadcast.

In the first of them, Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago were linked in a programme significantly entitled, 'Horizons'. For the purpose then was to try to cross the boundaries of the nation-state, and extend the horizons of people's knowledge to embrace the Caribbean.

Through much of this period, the German radio corporation, Deutsche Welle, operated Radio Antilles from Montserrat.

It transmitted on the medium-wave band with the help of the most powerful transmitters in the region covering most of the Eastern and Southern Caribbean with daily and simultaneous broadcasts.

It should be acknowledged that despite Radio Antilles foreign ownership, it made a significant contribution to pan-Caribbean broadcasting and, at one time, was highly regarded throughout the region for its independent news broadcasts which reached every territory in the Caribbean community. In large measure this was due to the talented Caribbean broadcasters who were given a relatively free hand as news editors and programmers.

All this contributed to a growing awareness of Caribbean peoples of each other; it stimulated their interest in one another; it began to create an understanding that beyond their national identity, there existed a basis for a common Caribbean personality.

By 1974, enough had changed to cause those who were resisting the creation of CANA to find it difficult to continue to justify their position.

Two other factors were also in play.

First, a multitude of regional non-governmental organisations in many fields were being formed as a host of professionals and others sought to broaden the scope and scale of their activities through Caribbean wide endeavours.

The torch of regionalism had been lit and had begun to burn brightly.

Second, in the early 1970s, the majority of developing nations introduced the notion of a New International Economic Order into global trade and investment negotiations.

The concept of a New World Information Order was quickly added to the discourse as developing countries protested the domination and management of global information flow by companies in the industrialised nations. By 1973 it was on the agenda of the non-aligned movement and of UNESCO.

The owners of the foreign media in the Caribbean were not ignorant of these developments, nor were they unmindful of the support that the arguments for change enjoyed in the region.

It became clear that they were kicking against the goad.

Thus, in August 1974, a meeting of the Caribbean Publishers and Broadcasters Association – the umbrella organisation of the media in the Caribbean - agreed to start CANA provided that governments did not form part of its ownership.

But, several governments had to agree to purchase CANA's service in order to make it viable.

The Agency was formed in 1975 with 15 shareholders, all of whom were located in the so-called More Developed Countries of CARICOM: Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Fifty-four per cent of the shares were held by privately-owned media and 46% held by government-owned media.

Of the 15 shareholders, 6 were foreign owned broadcast media; 5 were government-owned broadcast media; one was a government owned newspaper, and 3 were local privately-owned newspapers.

For the record, its interim board of directors comprised: Ken Gordon, Managing Director of the Trinidad Express Newspapers as Chairman; Bernard Bonsor, Regional Director of the Refiffusion radio stations; J C Proute, General Manager of the Jamaica Daily News; Gehrard Reiche, General Manager of Radio Antilles and Ron Sanders, General Manager of the Guyana Broadcasting Service.

On July 7<sup>th</sup> 1975 – then CARICOM Day - the interim Board of Directors brought the re-styled Reuters-CANA into existence and Reuters Caribbean Editor, Harry Mayers, was seconded with responsibility to the interim board for a six month transition period.<sup>xi</sup>

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1976 with only one change to its Board of Directors - Nicholas Mellersh of Rediffusion replacing Bernard Bonsor - CANA became operational serving 13 CARICOM countries including 27 media outlets – seven print and 20 broadcast media.

The only member of the media in the region to opt out of the CANA service was the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper whose principals at the time said they could not participate in an agency whose ownership included government-owned media.<sup>xii</sup>

Apart from the importance of, at last, putting in place a “Caribbean” news agency designed to “increase regional information flow between the countries of the Caribbean” and to make available news written from a Caribbean perspective, CANA linked together all CARICOM countries providing Belize and the Bahamas with Caribbean news for the first time.

It was central to the success of CANA that it should be independent and objective and that its news coverage should be free of interference.

I believe it is true to say that, throughout its existence the Caribbean News Agency, has been an independent and credible purveyor of news both in its original form and in its present merged operations with the CBU as the Caribbean Media Corporation.

This has not been an easy accomplishment. In its early days – and I suspect even now – some governments complained about its news coverage.

In this regard, CANA and CMC owe much to the cool head of CANA’s first general manager, Harry Mayers, who bore the brunt of government protests but managed to maintain the independence of the agency.

For his skill and courage in pioneering the foundation of independence on which CANA is built, Harry Mayers deserves the region’s acclamation.

You will recall that I said earlier that the formation of CANA languished in debate for seven years from 1967, when it was first proposed, to 1975 when agreement on its creation was finally reached.

During that time, remarkable and considerable advances were made in advancing regional integration.

Caribbean governments had moved rapidly from the shattered remains of the West Indies Federation to build a new regional foundation in CARIFTA on which they then constructed the edifice of CARICOM.

But, from 1975 to 1982, it was regional integration that stagnated while the media in the region mushroomed.

A row had developed in 1975 when, as Payne and Sutton record, Dr Eric Williams complained that the recent advances in Caribbean integration were being prejudiced in particular by the growing economic penetration of the region by "petro dollars".

He was particularly angered by a 1975 agreement under which Jamaica agreed to supply Venezuela with bauxite and alumina for a planned new aluminium smelter.

A year earlier, it had been proposed that a joint production programme would be undertaken by Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to build two CARICOM aluminium smelters.

As a consequence of the row, the CARICOM joint production scheme was cancelled and Dr Williams in his inimitable style declared: "One can only take so much, and I have had enough. To smelt or not to smelt, no big thing".<sup>xiii</sup>

No doubt, the echoes of this row are recognised in the recent "petro-Caribe" arrangements announced last year between Venezuela and some CARICOM countries for the supply of oil.

In any event, from 1976 to 1982, no CARICOM Heads of Government Conference could be held.

In 1980, Sir Henry Forde - then Foreign Minister of Barbados - became deeply concerned about the failure of CARICOM governments to implement regional decisions. He proposed the formation of a Group of Caribbean Experts to review CARICOM.

The Group was a forerunner to the West Indian Commission and, indeed, William Demas, Sir Shridath Ramphal, Sir Alister McIntyre, and Dr Vaughan Lewis served on both of them.

In 1981, they published their report entitled, "The Caribbean Community in the 1980s" in which they described the stagnant CARICOM scene in stark terms by saying:

"It is a reality that, as the supreme organ, CARICOM Heads of Government have met only three times since 1973, and not at all since March 1976. Of the twelve current Heads of Government of CARICOM countries, eight have never had the chance to meet with their fellow Heads of Government at a CARICOM Summit meeting. We do not believe that the Community can

altogether avoid impairment from so protracted a process of abstinence at the highest political level".<sup>xiv</sup>

And there was impairment.

The Experts concluded that there was "inadequate progress in production integration and coordination of foreign policies". No regional industrial programming had been achieved, and an attempt to reach agreement on the terms on which foreign investment could enter the region failed.<sup>xv</sup>

During this period, too, several CARICOM countries moved to separate independence: Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda and Belize.

In the context of all this, CARICOM did stagnate and the prospects for closer integration dimmed.

Paul Keens Douglas captured regional response to this dismal state of affairs in "Tell me again":

"Tell me again  
Bout de big island  
And de small island  
Bout de rich island  
And de poor island  
How all ah we is one  
And how Cari-com  
And Cari-gone  
Tell me again.

Tell me again  
How I love you  
And you love me  
And how blood thicker than water  
And how we is brudder  
And we is sister  
And you won't cut me t'roat  
Cause we come on de same boat  
Tell me again."

CARICOM Heads of Government meetings resumed in 1982 and meetings were held every year thereafter, but they were almost perfunctory, with no great initiatives being taken and no exciting vision being espoused.

There were also further disagreements between governments, not least of those over the intervention in Grenada in 1983 by the United States with the support of some CARICOM countries.

Fortuitously, the international environment was relatively helpful to the region. The Soviet Union and Communism had not yet collapsed and the cold war rivalry with the US and other Western nations still existed.

In this milieu, aid and investment in the region from the US, the EU and Canada was relatively good, and the economies of the OECS countries in particular did fairly well.

During that period, 1982 to 1989, CANA continued to evolve through the dint of hard work of media professionals, but it was hamstrung by a lack of resources, and by high costs of telecommunications which made its product expensive to sell to media outlets in the region.

The shareholders of CANA were also CANA's main market, and they were facing higher costs and competition from new media within their local economies.

They could neither inject new capital into CANA nor countenance an increase in its rates.

CANA, therefore, bravely continued to provide a service but largely through the help of UNESCO and the West German Government.

In the meantime, CARICOM governments were failing to communicate effectively with the people of the region – a reality that was pointed out by both the Group of Caribbean Experts in 1981 and the West Indian Commission in 1992.

The Experts observed in 1981 that "progress has been made in co-operation in radio and television broadcasting and in the establishment of the Caribbean News Agency (CANA) which is functioning well in the provision of "hard" news on the countries of the region to each other".<sup>xvi</sup>

But, they went on to remark, "there is still, however, urgent need for more effective communication programmes for the people of the region to learn about each other and about the regional movement".<sup>xvii</sup>

Eleven years later, in 1992, the West Indian Commission told the region in their report, "Time for Action", that they could not "emphasise too strongly that Community is about communication".<sup>xviii</sup>

They said, "Without effective communication between the people and the countries of CARICOM, the reality of Community cannot be sustained".<sup>xix</sup>

Meanwhile, CANA continued to deliver a regional news service, but, the external help upon which it was reliant began to dry up.

Not surprisingly, external donors suggested in 1995 that the commercial operations of the CBU and CANA should be merged to make them more viable.

Acting on that proposal, the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC) was created in 1999 as a company jointly owned by CANA and the CBU and effectively continuing the news services that each had been doing separately.

There are few who would doubt that from 1976 the CBU and CANA separately, and then together as CMC, revolutionised how the peoples of the Caribbean saw each other and themselves. Without question, they aided the process of Caribbean integration and they contributed to the development of a common Caribbean consciousness.

But, as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was dawning, their fortunes were waning still further, particularly as new technology, such as the Internet, came on stream, and with it a multiplicity of sources for regional news.

Momentous changes were also occurring in the international order bringing great anxiety for the countries of CARICOM.

In 1991, Communism and the Soviet Union collapsed leaving the United States as the world's unrivalled super power, especially in the Caribbean. An immediate consequence was the steady reduction in aid to, and investment in, the region. Whatever strategic importance the area had for the West, vanished overnight.

In 1992, the European Economic Community created a Single market as the European Union forming a powerful market for trade and investment, and posing an immediate threat to the preferential market in Britain that CARICOM countries enjoyed for bananas, rum and sugar.

In 1994, the US, Canada and Mexico formed the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) whose immediate consequence for the Caribbean was to close down apparel and other manufacturing industries that could not compete with Mexican goods, produced by cheaper labour and now able to enter the US and Canadian markets duty-free.

In 1995, the World Trade Organisation was created dedicated to globalisation which included new trade rules, competition, and opening up of national markets regardless of how small and vulnerable they may be.

All this was on the cards when in 1989, a strong warning of impending calamity was sounded at a Conference of CARICOM Heads of Government in Grenada, by the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, A N R Robinson.

In a paper entitled: "The West Indies Beyond 1992", Mr Robinson cautioned that "against this background of historic change and historic appraisal, the

Caribbean could be in danger of becoming a backwater, separated from the main currents of human advance into the twenty-first century".<sup>xx</sup>

As a result of discussion of the paper, the Heads established the West Indian Commission whose report laid out a clear road map for the region into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Among the things the Commission took on board and developed in their report was the Grand Anse Declaration at the end of the 1989 Conference in which the CARICOM Heads declared:

"We are determined to work toward the establishment, in the shortest possible time, of a single market and economy for the Community".

In dealing with the CSME, the Commission" declared their belief that the CSME is "the right and necessary path for CARICOM" and they pointed out that "it will involve intra regional cooperation in production, including production integration – that is, the use of resources on a regional basis to produce goods and services not only for the Common Market but also for regional markets".<sup>xxi</sup>

But eleven years would pass before a new external impetus propelled regional leaders to make good on their commitment to the Single Market.

The changes in the international order had begun to be felt in myriad ways, not least by the marginalisation of the United Nations, the rise of unilateralist policies by powerful nations and groups such as the OECD; a significant decrease in aid and investment, and the march of the industrialised nations to the drum of globalization.

So, at their meeting in Jamaica in July 2003, CARICOM Heads of Government declared in the Rose Hall Declaration that they had "agreed to accelerate the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, and in that context to promote macro-economic convergence, the unification of capital and financial markets, and the early unrestricted movement of people within CARICOM".<sup>xxii</sup>

Despite this commitment, many governments in the region were tardy in educating their communities about the implications and opportunities of the Single Market, and the passage of the necessary legislation through their parliaments was delayed.

The target date for the inauguration of the Single Market twice slipped by until Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Surinam brought it into being in January this year.

Now there is the prospect that by the end of June six others will join.

The Single Market is not a magic wand that will automatically generate economic prosperity, but it will create opportunities for businesses throughout the region. And, where those opportunities are grasped by efficient firms with sound management, more and better jobs will be created.

Further, it will be a good training ground for competition in which businesses face up to new international trade rules and prepare themselves both to keep a share of their own markets, and learn how to penetrate foreign ones.

Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of St Vincent and the Grenadines has described the CSME as "a great cause".

He said: "Great causes cannot be won by doubtful men and women. There is a tendency for narrow rationalists, chauvinists or misguided political troubadours of yester year to be pessimistic about CSME's possibilities and strengths. But, the simple fact is that it is the only show on the regional economic road which engenders hope".<sup>xxiii</sup>

The Prime Minister's statement serves to re-enforce the necessity for CARICOM governments to equip the CARICOM Secretariat with the resources to mount an effective education and communication programme throughout the Community about the CSME, recognising that the primary responsibility for doing so rests with them, and that utilization of the media is only one element in such a programme.

What then is the role of the regional media - and in particular CMC, CANA's successor with the CBU as a regional news agency - in this "great cause"?

The member States of CARICOM are now so intertwined that regional issues are also national issues. And, if the media in the region have a duty to reflect national issues, to analyse them and explain them, then they have an equal responsibility to do the same thing with regional issues.

It was ignorance that led to a "no" vote in the referendum on the West Indies Federation. But, at the time, the media in the region was largely foreign owned, there was no television, no cheap transistor radio and no regional news service.

The media scene is completely different today. The media is almost entirely in the hands of local ownership, and almost all the people of the region have access to radio, television and newspapers.

There is every reason for the media to analyse and explain the Single Market critically and constructively, without reducing its role to public relations.

And the regional media has shown time and again that they can cooperate in the interest of vital Caribbean causes.

Just last week - on May 10<sup>th</sup> - thirty television and radio stations in 20 Caribbean countries showed their readiness to work together to contend with a huge issue that plagues individual nations and the region collectively – HIV/AIDS.

Together with the Kaiser Family Foundation, these stations have established the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership to extend the reach and effectiveness of HIV/Aid messaging.

The broadcast media deserve the region's appreciation for this initiative.

But, cooperation is no longer enough.

For while there is no Caribbean radio or television network delivering simultaneous broadcasts to the Caribbean people, CNN and Fox News from the United States and the BBC from the United Kingdom are doing so, providing information that in no way reflects the lives of Caribbean people.

On any day, Caribbean audiences know more about events in the US and Britain, than they know about events in Kingstown, Georgetown or Bridgetown.

Yet, you will recall the earlier observation I had made about the beneficial effect on Caribbean awareness of Radio Antilles which provided a daily pan-Caribbean service heard in almost every country of the region simultaneously.

If CMC could broaden its activities beyond news delivery to include a radio station that serves the entire region daily, such a station would be an important and valuable addition to the use of communication as an integrating factor in the Caribbean community.

Better still if there were also a pan-Caribbean television station.

CMC is now experimenting with delivering a Caribbean news channel through Cable Television operators to the Diaspora in the United States and elsewhere.

The channel features regional news, sports, current affairs, soap operas, and other programmes drawn from CMC's own productions, the libraries of stations within the region, and local production houses.

The channel has been seen on Cable Television here in Barbados as part of the experiment over the last few weeks, to the enjoyment of many.

As a news service only, CMC may not be sustainable today.

The age of the Internet, mobile phones and text messaging, provides access to regional news from a variety of sources.

However, if CMC – or a re-branded CANA – were to build on its already established reputation for independent and reliable news coverage, and added to its operations a pan-Caribbean radio and television station, it would both fill a need in the region and build a path to sustainable growth.

Perhaps the time has come for the shareholders to consider floating CMC as a public company on the stock exchanges within CARICOM to give Caribbean companies and Caribbean people an opportunity to invest in it, while providing it with the finance it requires to launch a CARICOM wide radio and television network.

After all, the Single Market is about providing opportunities for Caribbean companies, professionals and others to take advantage of a larger economic space.

Many companies in the service and manufacturing sectors have already done so.

They have a vested interest in ensuring the success of the Single Market and its advancement to a Single Economy.

By investing in a public company that serves to promote the closer integration of the region through effective communication, they will be investing in the success of their own businesses.

Further, the ownership of a regional broadcast network, including news delivery, would be democratised to embrace not only its present media shareholders but the business community, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and many individuals in every country of the region.

Beyond these benefits, the network would be a valuable proposition to investors. For the potential to earn Caribbean-wide advertising revenues, and income from the sale of the television channel to Cable TV stations both within the Caribbean and externally is great.

My fear is that if this opportunity is not seized by the shareholders of CMC, a foreign company will take advantage of the rights of establishment being created by the WTO to fill the gap. Consequently, regional information flow may fall to the ownership of a foreign company whose purposes may not be consistent with the objectives of promoting a strong Caribbean personality and strong regional action.

Therefore, I call upon the present directors of CANA and the CBU – the shareholders of CMC – to take regional communications to a new level by exploring the feasibility of launching a public company that provides a pan-

CARICOM radio and television network, including news broadcasts and analysis, which reaches daily and simultaneously into the homes of our one CARICOM family.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we now live in a world that is increasingly indifferent to the problems and challenges that bedevil small Caribbean economies.

As Barbados' Prime Minister Owen Arthur put it "the one factor that is in our favour is our capacity to cope with crisis after crisis, and to go on and go on, even in the face of the grimmest adversity"<sup>xix</sup>.

We would enlarge that capacity to cope if we banded even closer together.

Over the last forty years, the regional media – the CBU, and CANA in particular – have helped to establish the oneness of the Caribbean people; now the media must help to show them what together they could achieve for themselves as a single Caribbean society in a single market and economy.

## Notes and references

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<sup>ii</sup> Lloyd Searwar, Editorial, *Stabroek News*, Guyana, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2006

<sup>iii</sup> Errol Barrow, Premier of Barbados, "Federation and the Democratic Way of Life: Statement to Parliament on 20 June 1962, introducing a resolution to approve the report of the Eastern Caribbean Federation Conference"; *Speeches by Errol Barrow*, Yussuff Haniff (Ed), Hansib, London, 1987

<sup>iv</sup> Op Cit, Note 1, p.

<sup>v</sup> Anthony Payne and Paul Sutton, *Charting Caribbean Development*, Macmillan, London, 2001, p. 178

<sup>vi</sup> Owen Arthur, Prime Minister of Barbados, "Commonwealth Small States and Free Trade: The Case of the Caribbean", Address at Meeting of the Royal Commonwealth Society, London, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

<sup>vii</sup> Cited by Sutton and Payne, Op Cit, Note vi, p.182

<sup>viii</sup> Cited in Desmond Dinan, "Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration", Second Edition, Palgrave, Hampshire, UK, 1999, p. 14

<sup>ix</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Ron Sanders, *Broadcasting in Guyana*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, pp. 51-54.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid, pp 49-50

<sup>xi</sup> "CANA gets operational July 7", *Guyana Graphic*, Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup> 1975.

<sup>xii</sup> "CANA service starts July 7", *The Daily Chronicle*, Guyana, Wednesday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

<sup>xiii</sup> See, Payne and Sutton, Op. Cit. Note vii, p.183

<sup>xiv</sup> "The Caribbean Community in the 1980s: Report by a Group of Caribbean Experts", Caribbean Community Secretariat, Guyana, 1981

<sup>xv</sup> For a full discussion of this, see "Dependency under Challenge: The Political Economy of the Commonwealth Caribbean", Payne and Sutton (Eds), Manchester University Press, 1984

<sup>xvi</sup> Op.Cit, Note xv.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xviii</sup> "Time for Action: Report of the West Indian Commission", The Press, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, 1992, See Chapter VIII, Communications and Sport, pp 308-326

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xx</sup> Cited in, "Time for Action", Op. Cit., Note xxiii, p.3,

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid, p.108

<sup>xxii</sup> The Rose Hall Declaration on 'Regional Governance and Integrated Development' adopted on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) at the twenty-fourth meeting of the conference of heads of government of Caricom, 2-5 July 2003, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Feature Address delivered by Dr Ralph E Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Insurance Association of the Caribbean in St Thomas, USVI, on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2004

<sup>xxiv</sup> Op Cit, Note vi.