



EULOGY FOR

SIR WILLIAM ARTHUR LEWIS

State Funeral, Cathedral Of The Immaculate Conception

~~Castries~~, St. Lucia

23rd June 1991

By

Vaughan A Lewis

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Given At The State Funeral For Sir William Arthur

by

Dr Vaughan A Lewis

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time"

William Arthur Lewis was born in St. Lucia in 1915, the son of two persons, George Ferdinand Lewis and Ida Lewis, who had immigrated to this country from Antigua. His mother and father were originally teachers, his father having taught after arriving in St. Lucia at various primary schools in this island, then at St. Mary's College, the sole secondary school of the island. He later joined the public Service and at the time of his death, when Arthur Lewis was seven years old, he was an official of the Customs Department of St. Lucia. This early circumstance meant that from very early ages, Arthur Lewis and his four brothers were, if we wish to use the fashionable jargon of today, members of a single-parent household. He was the fourth of five sons of his parents.

To be the child of recent immigrants and then to be left at an early age without a father, might have been deemed considerable strikes against Arthur Lewis. But whenever he wrote of his early life, he emphasized the tremendous fortitude, discipline and persistence of his mother in ensuring that her children received the best that could be afforded; and that they took the utmost advantage of the only available route to self-impelled progress - education. With a realism and sense of humour which those who knew him recognise as characteristic, he has observed in relation to his mother:

"As a youngster in school, I would hear other boys talking about the superiority of men over women. I used to think they must be crazy."

It is fashionable too, in our islands in these times, to decry the movement of people from one island to another and to denigrate the potential contributions of those who move in search of a better life. Clearly the life of Arthur Lewis, as well as of his family, can lend no credence to such assertions.

Having left school at 14 after completing the Cambridge School Certificate, he worked from a time in the Civil service, then returned to school to take the exams for the single Island Scholarship which at that time was only awarded periodically, rather than annually, as is the case today.

During the course of this week, Mr Winville King has given on the radio a detailed outline of his early life and of his basic achievements. So there is no need to repeat them here. What we can note is his rapid ascent up the academic ladder of the British University system as a result of the early recognition, by those in authority, of his exceptional talent as an economist, author and teacher. By the age of 33 he had acceded to the prestigious Stanley Jevons Professorship of Political Economy at the University of Manchester, having already been Reader in Colonial Economics at the London School of Economics. Having begun his University teaching career in 1938, he concluded it officially with his retirement in 1983, as James Madison Professor of Political Economy of the University of Princeton.

Between those two dates was a full, varied and exceptional professional life, perhaps the high point of which, in terms of the recognition of his work, was his sharing of the Nobel Prize for Economics with T. W. Schultz in 1979.

The England to which Arthur Lewis travelled in 1933 and in which he undertook his first degree was a country in partial economic recession, political ferment and intellectual excitement. This was a period, in retrospect leading to the second World War, in which British foreign policy was in much dispute. It was a period of much analysis as to the causes of the great depression. The capitalist system which seemed to be faltering was coming under constant attack from those who believed in alternative forms of political and economic organisation. The British Labour party, now a hothouse of intellectual ferment, was increasingly consolidating its strength once again. London too was becoming now a meeting place for a gathering number of colonial students and intellectuals analysing the effects of British imperialism, and drumming at it as they began to see the possibility for what later came to be called decolonisation.

Into this ferment Arthur Lewis, from all appearances, jumped with enthusiasm. In disciplinary terms he soon began to see the subject which he was studying, economics, not simply as an intellectual discipline to whose growth he should contribute. Rather he felt that he should approach it as involving an integral relationship between analysis and the search for practical solutions to existing problems, as a means of rendering policy advice. This brought the realisation that there might be other factors involved in the solution of economic problems than the purely economic. As he said, early on it was clear that he would become an

"... applied economist. This did not mean just that I should apply economics to industrial or other structural problems. It meant that I would approach a problem from its institutional background, recognising that the solution was as likely to be in the institutional setting as in the economic analysis".

Under the influence of senior academics, Arthur Lewis was to become, by the end of the Second World War, a recognised authority in the United Kingdom on the economics of industrial organisation. The subject was to become of much practical importance in the post war period, not only as Britain sought to revive its own industrial structure, but also because with the accession of the British Labour Party to power, the partial nationalisation of British industry induced a substantial discussion as to the principles on which industry was to be organised. Here Lewis' academic specialisation blended with his applied economics and problem-solving approach. It took him partially into the intellectual side of British politics as he became an active and recognised member of the Fabian Society, the leading Socialist research group loosely linked to the British Labour Party. It led to the publication of what came to be one of his better known works, The Principles of Economic Planning.

Lewis in a sense, by the end of the war, and certainly by 1950 had, then, become a recognised "British academic" a foremost authority among the rising generation of post-war economists.

But Lewis was of course a West Indian. And as a West Indian, part of the gathering core of intellectuals and political activists seeking a way out of colonialism and beginning to think about the possibilities for and constraints on the economic development of the colonies. George Padmore, Eric Williams and others were in England. Pan Africanism as a mechanism towards African independence was in the air. Lewis was fully a part of the debates. But Lewis was first and foremost two things: a West Indian and a researcher looking for practical ways out of problems, rather than a political activist. So he started with the West Indies. Let us hear his own description.

"My interest in the subject (of economic development) was an offshoot of my anti-imperialism. I can remember my father taking me to a meeting of the local Marcus Garvey association when I was seven years old. So it is not surprising that the first thing I ever published was a Fabian Society pamphlet, called Labour in the West Indies, which gave an account of the emergence of the trade union movement in the 1920's and 30's and, more especially of the violent confrontations between the unions and the government in the 30's. This was not a propaganda pamphlet. It was based on newspaper research and on conversations with some of the union leaders."

But during the war, Britain needed all hands on deck. Lewis like other leading economists, lent his services to the British public service. And it was during the course of this, he recalls, that he realised that the British were losing the stomach for the maintenance of the colonial system. It was time now to look at the possibilities of a post-colonial era. Thus Lewis, in a sense, came to the study of the economics of development. This coincided with two things: the first the necessity to

tutor colonial students both at the LSE and at the University of Manchester, in economics; and to teach that economics in a way that related to the problems which those students, many of whom were civil servants, would be faced with at home. He was beginning to have to teach the economics of development.

Secondly, Lewis had towards the end of the war begun to lecture on questions relating to the causes of the great depression, the place of international trade in the relations between nations, and consequently, of the forces that engendered or inhibited international trade.

Thus began a lifelong interest in international economic history which, as is easy to see, would coincide with the question of what were the causes of economic growth and development.

So here are the various strands of that varied but, in a sense, integrated academic career, and career as a policy adviser coming together: interest in economic organisation and economic planning in industrial countries; interest in economic development of the soon-to-be ex-colonial countries; interest in the world economic and trading system as dominated by the industrial countries but also, in a global context in which the colonies as producers of primary commodities (agricultural and mineral) became fully integrated into that world trading system and therefore affected by it; and interest in economic planning and economic organisation, now in ex-colonial countries.

This diversity of interests, yet integrated interest, is reflected in his major publications: Economic Survey 1919-1939 on world trade and the depression published in 1949; The Principles of Economic Planning, 1950; The Theory of Economic Growth, his magnum opus, 1955; Development Planning, in a sense his summation of his theoretical work and practical experiences, 1966, Growth and Fluctuations 1879-1939, published in 1978, again on world trade; and in between these, in 1954, his famous article "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour," in which he fused his understanding of economic history with analysis of the forms of economic organisation of the colonial economies, to produce a sweeping model for future economic development in what today we call the Third World.

But as Lewis made his reputation in this way, and as he became involved in the practice of economic development as Economic Adviser to Kwame Nkrumah, now Prime Minister of Ghana, and as Deputy Managing Director of the U.N. Special Fund in the second half of the 1950's, his own home and region remained a central consideration for him.

In the 1950's universal suffrage had come to the West Indies. The possibilities for self-government were opening. Lewis was, in England, becoming familiar with some of the West Indian students who were developing an interest in political careers.

He was examining American policy with West Indians partly in the context of the establishment of the Caribbean Commission in Puerto Rico and of the experiment in industrialisation that was beginning to be implemented in Puerto Rico by the party led by Munoz Marin. Eric Williams was at the Caribbean Commission. Lewis was keeping a keen eye on the rise of the Labour movement and its involvement in new political directions for the West Indies. Developments in St. Lucia since the end of the war and into the early fifties he would have been well kept abreast of, since two of his brothers, Allen and Victor, were becoming well involved in politics and the labour movement there.

With the completion of the Moyne Commission report on the West Indian social and economic situation, the British government was evolving an economic policy for the Caribbean as it was for other colonies. Partially in disagreement with this, and especially their line of policy for Jamaica, Lewis published Industrial Development in the Caribbean in 1949. This article has become well-known among students in the West Indies. It spoke to the mode of economic development of Puerto Rico, the significance of foreign investment for development, the implications of the model for the English-speaking Caribbean. It came to be called by the new generation of West Indian economists in the 1960's Lewis' thesis of "industrialisation by invitation", and came in for much critical analysis and criticism by them.

This criticism of course could not be divorced from their perception that by the second half of the 1950's, Lewis was in close consultation on policy with Norman Manley, whose PMP had come to power in Jamaica in 1955, and Eric Williams whose PNM had been elected in Trinidad in 1956. It led in the academic sphere in the West Indies, in my judgement at any rate, to an overemphasis on this limited part of Lewis' work and an under-emphasis on his analysis of the motive forces of economic growth; his advice that development was more than economic, his study of the determinants of international trade and of its effects on Third World countries economic growth. Too little attention, in the West Indies and among West Indian academics came to be given to the fact that, his major work, The Theory of Economic Growth, had chapters entitled, "The Will to Economise", "Economic Institutions", "Knowledge" "The Application of New Ideas", and "Government", as he sought to locate the necessary non-economic, social, sociological and attitudinal components in economic growth and development.

But we must pause here: To notice that Arthur Lewis who had gone to England at age 18, had in the midst of all this activity, ceased, shall we say in the social sense, to be a lone individual. In 1947 he married Gladys Jacobs, a Grenadian one of whose parents also came from Antigua. His allusions to her in various places suggest that she has been in all these years his strategic helpmate, in my own mind his chief organiser, as he moved from country to country, continent to continent, institution to institution. Her life long devotion to him, along with her strong-willed desire to ensure that things always went,

always go, right, must have reinforced in Arthur Lewis his earlier conviction that those who believe in the superiority of men over women must indeed be crazy. They had two daughters, Elizabeth and Barbara who are with us today; and in the midst of this, Gladys found time to develop and pursue a career as a sculptor whose works are now exhibited.

In the second half of the 1960's discussions about federation for the West Indies were increasing, and the idea that this could become a reality was gathering force. Arthur Lewis' convictions on this matter were well known and the actual onset of federation, in 1958, tantalised him into returning fully to the region, in 1959, first as Principal of the University College and as Vice Chancellor of the fully autonomous University. He stayed for four years - to 1963: bitter-sweet years which saw the failure of the Federation and then the failure of activities, in which he was intensely engaged, to form an Eastern Caribbean Federation. His pamphlet The Agony of the Eight well records his sentiments and indeed his emotions on this issue. But those who seek to pursue this course for the West Indies would also serve themselves well in reading John Mordecai's The Federal Negotiations. Both men, servants of the federal experience of that time, cooperated to distill the appropriate lessons from the era.

But 1959 - 1963 had its positive side. He oversaw the expansion of the University from a single to a multi-campus institution widening its doors, not without opposition, to large numbers of West Indian people. He wrote, for us, some important works on the relationship between education and economic development and structure.

Arthur Lewis returned in 1963 to full time academic life as Professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University. There he remained until his retirement in 1983. As indicated by some of the publications which I have noted, his output of academic work continued to flourish. He wrote too on the influence of politics and race on economic development. Increasingly he was the recipient of many honours and honorary degrees from institutions appreciative of his contributions. He was made Knight Bachelor in 1963, was a leading member of all the important academic societies of the Western World, and became President of the American Economic Association in 1983. He was widely honoured by the Third World's academic institutions and governments.

He returned on a full time basis once again to the West Indies as President of the Caribbean Development Bank on its establishment. That a country like St. Lucia his, birth place, should now be such an extensive recipient of funds granted by or through the CDB is, in no small measure, due to the credibility which his tenure of office gave to that institution. That our own Community College is named after him, lends immense prestige to it and to us, and without a doubt facilitates our search for the means of its development.

Arthur Lewis was an active man, in the intellectual and practical senses. He was a humane man, a man of wit, a man who believed that things, including the conduct of government should be done correctly, regardless of the criticism which so doing entailed.

" Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time,"

Arthur Lewis was one such great man - an intellectual colossus who put it all to the service of his people.

We, his people - of his family, his country and this region will bask with pride in his reflected glory.



Vaughan A Lewis
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