

Tribute to Jasper (Bobby) Scotland – His life and service

By HE Sir Rodney Williams

Jasper (Bobby) Alexander Scotland was a son of the soil who dedicated his life to public service both nationally and regionally.

Born on May 7, 1938 in Antigua to Canegata Robert Scotland and Victoria Scotland (née Grant), he attended the Greenbay Moravian School. He grew up on the All Saints Road in Ottos, where many of his friends resided. Bobby described his youthful “gang” as the “Regular Ottos Fellows” – Lester Bird, Vere Bird Jr, Jacob David, Eustie Mondesir, Beres DeFreitas and Peter Merchant. He would later add Milton Benjamin, Freddie Jarvis, Charlie Greer, George Pigott, George Richards, Reginald Peterson and Ickford (Coco) Warner to his list of close pals.

Bobby was the eldest boy, preceded by two sisters in a family of 10 siblings. His father was a carpenter and painter, and his mother was a housewife who ensured that he and his siblings received a solid education. He was awarded a scholarship to the Antigua Grammar School where he was, on average, two years younger than the students in his class. He completed his Higher School certificate (the equivalent of “A’ Levels) at 15 years old, and then worked as a Junior Clerk (afterwards promoted to Senior Clerk and Executive Officer) in the Antigua Civil Service. He gained valuable public sector experience in various departments, including the Peasant Development Office (PDO), the Administrator’s Office (Registry, Financial Secretary’s Office and Social Welfare Unit), and Holberton Hospital.

After receiving a scholarship to study Management, Accounting and Auditing in

Trinidad in 1960, he was appointed as Executive Secretary to the Antigua Industrial Development Board (IDB) in 1962 – with responsibility for managing the corn meal, cotton, ginning, cotton seed oil and arrowroot factories. Bobby said, “At that time, nearly one million pounds of cotton was being produced in Antigua.” He had earlier left the Ministry of Trade and Production, headed by Mr James Carrott, in order to assume office at IDB.

He was a keen sportsman. In a recent conversation, he reminisced: “My father took me to learn boxing. I was taught to box by Joe Mercier, the then Caribbean Heavyweight Boxing Champion. As youngsters, we indulged in outdoors small level cricket for fun – ‘Lilliputian’, as it was called. We binged on marbles, spun tops, and flew kites in season. We spent many blissful days on Side Hill Beach diving for conchs, chilibis (small crabs), cockles, and mussels – and occasionally shot birds with our catapults. I played football, lawn tennis and table tennis. In 1967, I took up golf – and although work schedules did not always permit frequent participation, I managed to maintain a respectable handicap. I also used to play second class cricket at King George V, and Turbut’s Saturday Cricket at the Recreation Ground. At times, I was being compared to Andy Roberts. I later played quite a lot of cricket in Canada on West Indian teams.” He exclaimed: “My teen exercise lasted me up to the day I passed 70, without having any pain”.

Bobby was also very instrumental in organising the first Carnival in Antigua. He said: “In 1957, Carnival was formally established – headed



by John “Ferdie” Shoul. Entertainment wise, it was a hit with the Antiguan public. I served on the publicity committee along with Louis Lockhart and Gerald Price, with responsibilities including the creation of the first Carnival magazine. It was all about helping to popularise Carnival and its events.”

Carnival was dear to his heart. Bobby continued: “In those days, the Carnival Committee would be meeting on “Shoul’s Gallery” until 2 o’clock in the morning – from February right down until August 2nd. And then maybe one or two after-Carnival meetings to wrap up. The following year, when I attended the general meeting of the Committee, somebody identified me as a young fellow who was studying accounting. They needed a Chairman of the Finance Committee – and so I was seconded to the Tourist Board, headed by Yvonne Maginley, as Chairman of the Carnival Committee. This was a voluntary role – and of course, one of the things I am proud of is that my financial report was distributed very promptly after Carnival”.

In 1963, he was granted a scholarship to Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, to

pursue a degree in Commerce. Upon graduation in 1967, he joined Clarkson and Gordon—a firm of public accountants in Toronto—and proceeded to certify as a Chartered Accountant via the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. He adds, “I was the only black person in the 200-strong accounting firm”.

“Two years later, the then Chief Minister of Antigua came to Toronto and advised me that the Financial Secretary (FS), an Englishman by the name of Mr Gibbs, was returning to London. He asked if I would venture back to Antigua to become the FS, and I readily agreed. My job in Canada was very interesting and well paid, but I just put everything aside and came back home right away. I came because I was resolute about helping my country, Antigua, to improve. I consequently served as Financial Secretary (the titular head of the then civil service) from 1970-1973”.

Bobby had a sincere love for country and did not become side-tracked by political bias. “I made it my business not to be too carried away by the politics of any situation. I saw myself as a professional, and throughout my whole civil service life then and subsequently, I have stuck to those guns.”

In 1971, he was one of approximately 100 voluntary workers who took to the fields to cut 160 tons of sugar cane. This action was undertaken in response to an appeal from the Ministry of Agriculture, with expectations for Antigua to meet the projected yield that had since been diminished due to a shortage of cane cutters. For Bobby Scotland, service to country was—at *all* levels—both a privilege and an honour.

By 1973, when Bobby

thought that his professionally planned progress was being stifled and he was “not getting enough done in a revolutionary enough fashion to shape the way in which Antigua was going in fiscal terms”, he was recruited by the CARICOM Secretariat in Georgetown, Guyana as Chief of Finance on the team of Finance and Administration.

By 1975, he was awarded a British Commonwealth Scholarship and took leave from Caricom to go to University of North Wales (United Kingdom) to pursue a Master of Science degree in Financial Economics. While at university in Wales, he was presented with the Adam Smith Economics Award for best student of the year. (Adam Smith was an 18th Century economist and philosopher who is regarded as the ‘Father of Modern Economics’.)

Bobby Scotland returned to Caricom in Guyana in 1978 and remained there as Director of Trade, Economics and Statistics until 1982. He joined the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) as Senior Manager of Economics, Chief of Corporate Policy and Planning and Deputy Director. He remained at CDB for 16 years until he retired and “came home”.

He was an avid reader, and has written short stories, poetry and plays – some of which were produced for local radio broadcast. In his earlier years, he was charitably involved in the Young Christian Workers, raising funds for hundreds of needy children across the island.

Reflection on the history of Antigua during his lifetime was also something that Bobby did often. He spoke about the locomotives and how they transported cartloads of sugar cane. He relayed stories of Christmas Day and Boxing Day in the 1940’s. “There were women

with trays of peppermint, and sugar baby, and sugar cake, and peanut candy, and ginger sticks, and chocolate sticks. Christmas was really for the children – and of course, if you got a little toy truck to push (maybe in later years, you got one that could be wound up), you’d better bet your life you’d have it for five years after! And maybe pass it on to a brother as well...”

His recollection of childhood days is a peaceful one. “I have pleasant memories of the Piddocks – Geoffrey and his brother – with whom I was friends in the early years. My father was their painter and carpenter, and we got along very well together. The same could be said of my other friends, Derek and Trevor Evelyn. Children of different shades, playing without prejudice.”

Bobby Scotland took extremely good care of his family. “Wherever I went, I had my family with me. Someone was remarking to me the other day how incredible it is that wherever I went to study or work, I took my young family. But I like to think I am a family man. It wasn’t easy – but I made sure that my family accompanied me. I recognise the importance of being an all-rounder – an accomplished professional; a family man.” He is survived by five children, eight grandchildren and one great granddaughter.

With a tinge of sentiment caressing his voice, he said: “I was lucky to find Mary Royer-Dublin, who I met in the ‘50s teaching at the Greenbay Primary School. The support—the push and the pull — that she gave me over the years [prior to her passing] was irreplaceable. It was just unbelievable. I couldn’t tell her that enough.”

In 2001, following his retirement from the Caribbean Development Bank in Barbados, Bobby served as a Direc-

tor of Antigua Commercial Bank (ACB) and its subsidiary, ACB Mortgage and Trust Co Ltd, where he was Vice Chairman from 2005 to 2008. He was also a Director representing ACB’s interests in the Jolly Beach Hotel and Jolly Harbour (BVI) Limited for two years, from 2006. He was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Antigua and Barbuda Development Bank from 2004, for approximately nine years. In his latter stages of his life, he undertook *pro bono* consultations for several private individuals and micro-companies in Antigua concerning financial aspects of their businesses to include accounting, mortgages and financial analysis.

Bobby understood the struggle that our country had endured over several generations. In his words, “I was aware of the efforts that VC Bird was making in the society, in terms of financing in particular, and that was very necessary because our people worked for so little”.

Just prior to his death, he remarked on the future of our great nation. “By and large, more or less, Antigua and Barbuda has come a very long way in terms of economic development. We are well poised to take off, but we have to remedy some of the deficiencies. We must focus on efficiency and productivity because there’s no such thing as a free lunch. In Economics, every benefit has its cost, and we disregard high cost at the risk of losing ball, bat and bat stick – everything – if we’re not careful. We also have to keep contact with, and learn as much as we can from, the outside world. But we cannot afford to be indifferent to the possibility of being overwhelmed by hoards and high numbers. So we need to increase our own skills – and get properly trained. All in all, it is necessary to keep good balance.

We cannot lose sight of our culture or relinquish hold on our job opportunities. We cannot assume pure altruism or philanthropy on the part of others. We must be watchful, prudent and skilful. It is imperative for us to be industrious, in its real sense.”

His parting words were: “Be proper. Recognise value. Understand that civilization brings with it, a huge amount of morality that we cannot afford to discard. We cannot just pick up all bad habits and spoil ourselves. Hundreds of societies have melted away due to atrophy. They’ve fallen out of line. They’re not moving forward in any way. We cannot allow ourselves to follow such a path.”

Jasper (Bobby) Scotland — my dear father-in-law — departed this life on August 11, 2022. After the death of his religiously devout wife, Mary, in January 2021 he became even more resolute in his belief in God and his devotion to prayer. He repeatedly reminded me that he was “not afraid to die” – that he had read his Bible, interpreted it, and understood the message; that he had done the best possible — under the circumstances — for his family, the country and the Caribbean; and that one of the important missions in life was the acceptance of and preparation for the hereafter.

He was indeed a gentleman, a scholar and great contributor to national and regional economic development. Two sayings come to mind when I recall the sterling contribution that he has made. Russell Conwell, an American Baptist Minister, once said that “*True greatness is often unrecognized.*” And author Mark Twain is known to have remarked, “*It is better to deserve honours and not have them, than to have them and not deserve them.*”

May his soul rest in eternal peace.