

# Ralph Romain and Change in Education

On May 23, 2021, Dr Ralph Romain passed on just before his 88th birthday. In his private life, he was mentor to many in Trinidad and Tobago and abroad. At a more general level, he exemplified how diet and exercise can contribute to long healthy life. He represented the country in athletics at the Masters' Level across the world and came away with prizes in many an event over the years.

In the public sphere, he was so much more than this. One of the youngest Permanent Secretaries in the 1960s in the young nation, he was fired by the idea that the future of the country was carried in the book bag of students.

Equipped with training at the graduate level at Cambridge University, Romain took on the challenge of creating an educational system designed to allow equal opportunity to quality education for all the children of the country.

The Education Act of 1966 and its early updates heralded a new dispensation. Curricula were to be modernized in keeping with the demands of a transforming economy and developing society, therefore needing to replace irrelevant relics of its colonial past.

Romain was the architect of the Fifteen Year Educational Plan 1968-1983. Its centre piece was to be Junior Secondary and a Senior Secondary System which was designed to apply across the board. The new schools were to offer a more appropriate curriculum with a wider



### Dr Ralph Henry

range of offerings than the traditional schools which were themselves to be equipped over time to provide the new curriculum as well.

ALL secondary school students were to be exposed to the same programme over a three year period and to sit the 14 Plus Examination. This was to determine the mix of subjects that they would pursue if gaining a place in whichever Senior School they would be enrolled.

The new programme at secondary level was to be supported with high quality facilities. Libraries in schools, equipment for the teaching of Home Economics, Industrial Arts and Technical Subjects, Audio-visual Rooms, Music Rooms, Integrated Science were to be universal in the system, and Agricultural Science in some schools. Some traditional academic subjects were retained like foreign languages - mainly Spanish, but not Latin.

In effect, the new system was going to provide a broader offering to students at the end of the day. Most importantly, it was expected that new subjects could lead to post-secondary and higher level studies just as the traditional academic programme.

It is most important to emphasise

that ALL students were to sit the 14+ Exam, which alone would determine their entry to next stage in the system, the Senior Schools with fourth and fifth forms.

The new Junior Secondary Schools would fulfill the objective of wide access by being geographically distributed in keeping with the distribution of the population and, through a shift system, cater to more than twice the number of children then entering publicly provided secondary education. Limited resources prevented the building out of as many places as needed.

However, the late 1960s into 1970 were a period of restiveness as it would be recalled. The Government faced major opposition to proposed changes to a more democratic and equitable system, and to the change in the widening of the secondary programme.

Indeed, the pressure was so intense and relentless that Romain became the first casualty in the attempt to placate the Denominational Boards. At that point in time, their schools were still dominant providers in the secondary sector.

Romain was removed to a non-descript position as Special Adviser with a desk somewhere else in the

Government Bureaucracy. This was the normal posting for top level officials who fell out of favour with the political directorate at the time.

There was another major casualty. The Ministry of Education recoiled from adopting a system wide shift to a Junior Secondary System and a Senior Secondary System.

This has meant that the new Junior Secondary Schools and the subsequent Senior Secondary schools were ill-starred from early. Few over the decades have been able to overcome the sense of being relegated to education of lower quality than what is available in the traditional schools.

Students at traditional schools never had to sit any 14+ Exam, and on entry the student was automatically guaranteed five years of secondary education.

The fact that students many students who got placed at the new Junior Secondary were no less bright than the twenty percent selected for entry by Denominational Schools was not known by the general public. Indeed, some of such students might actually have scored higher marks than many of the fortunate 20 percenters.

This unfortunate policy reversal has had a terrible result on the delivery of secondary education in the country that has persisted to this day, ultimately impacting on the preparation of the national labour force. There is also the psychological impact on many an individual student, their parents and even teachers in the system. That

casualty has remained with us for over four decades.

Romain, the other casualty, fared much better. He did not stay for long at the desk of Special Adviser. After a brief interlude lecturing at a US Tertiary Institution, he was to join the international public service through the World Bank and UNESCO, retiring finally from the former.

His role over the years was largely to promote the widening of educational opportunity in other countries. The World Bank itself was to take on board the human capital revolution which established that investment in human capital is a key factor in productivity growth and economic transformation.

In Trinidad and Tobago, Romain was able to achieve educational change in form in terms of wide access. However, the objective of equity, and therefore, of substance, is clearly still to be realized.

He might have enjoyed a good compensation package as an international public servant but he might have felt better rewarded if our country had not imposed a sense of innate mediocrity at best and failure at worst, in children at age 11 in their not being selected for one of the traditional academic schools. Other countries whose development we have come to admire have made no such mistake.

Romain, the international public servant, would have seen in his subsequent enough of such examples of what we could have achieved here under his watch.



A customer buys some oranges at a fruit stall in St James, Pot-of-Spain, yesterday. PICTURE ANISTO ALVES



TRINTOC (PENAL) CREDIT UNION CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LIMITED  
Established in 1954  
Clarke Road, Penal, Trinidad, West Indies

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the 67th Annual General Meeting of the Trintoc (Penal) Credit Union Co-operative Society Limited will be held virtually on:

Date: Saturday 26th June 2021  
Time: 2.00 pm  
Virtual Platform: Zoom Webinar

The main business of the meeting will be to:

- Receive the Minutes of the 66th Annual General Meeting
- Receive the reports for the Year 2020 as follows:
  - Board of Directors
  - Supervisory Committee
  - Credit Committee
  - Auditors
- Present the 2021 Budget
- Propose Resolutions
- Propose Bye-Law Amendments
- Elect Board and Committee Members
- Transact any other business.

**MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED TO PRE-REGISTER USING TPCU'S E-FORM**

<http://www.smartsheet.com/Forms/46587b8d6950451ea0c715b78e4384a57>  
PRE-REGISTRATION DEADLINE: Friday 18th June 2021.

**Please Note:** Pre-Registration is **COMPULSORY** for attendance to the virtual AGM.

Members who do not pre-register will not be able to access the meeting.

This is a Members' form, as such, ONLY Members will be allowed to attend the meeting.

For and on behalf of  
Trintoc (Penal) Credit Union  
Co-operative Society Limited

Claudette Green-Lewis  
Secretary