

## Of Politics and the Role of Citizens

COVID has forced a compaction of time and space, not in the physical sense, but in the sense of our social relations, our thinking and rapidly changing situation and its demand for our attention and action. .

Man is after all a creature of habit and the measures we are obliged to adhere to curb the spread of the virus and save our own lives and everyone else's are not our accustomed routine.

So, we react to the demand for change in our routines and our behaviour – individual, collective and societal – with effort which requires exertion and real work and we tire because of these exertions. Our language in its dynamic adjustment calls it COVID fatigue.

But, we dare not waver or become weary or that spiked corona little bit of genetic material and protein will defeat us, no matter how much we imagine our dominion over all things living or non-living.

It had been a bruising and energy-sapping couple of weeks absorbing the bad news of the galloping positive tests and active cases as at last the parallel health system was on the brink and the fatality count was unbelievably high.

On top of all that heavy news, we were bombarded by the tit-for-tat barrages of the blame game between the opposing sides of the political monopoly thinking this a perfect opportunity to elevate their one-upmanship game for the shoring up the support from their respective bases.

Their quest for what they each conceive as advantage, is just so draining at a time when the demand is for all who claim positions of leadership to do what is required in this crisis – LEAD.

So, I began my attempt at resuscitation of my willpower and energies in preparation for the next week of the battle. Music does it for me.

Beginning my weekend resuscitation of willpower, I took to the Friday night musical offerings on American Public Television. There it was on Firing Line the promo portended an interview and concert with a renowned cellist, Yo-Yo Ma.

In the midst of his virtuoso playing, he was asked about the decline of the phenomenon of the amateur musician, he only becoming a professional in mid-life despite being a child prodigy.

Responding, he pointed to recording and music industry as a big factor, leaving the vast majority of music lovers the comfortable to be listeners to the performances at leisure. No longer was participation in making the music something worth pursuing for its own purpose.

Then he said, *“It's like citizenship. Unless you are fully engaged, it is not my country. It is somebody else's country. You think the problems are so great, you leave it up to the experts and you are disconnected”*.

And it connected. It was as if he was speaking of our COVID situation and the response to it.

Follow the Science! We are guided by the experts. Accept information only from official sources – The are the daily admonishments we are exhorted to follow.

It is not new. Since the time of our Independence and for nearly 59 years we have been encouraged to believe that the issues politics and governance are so great that they are beyond

our simple comprehensions. Leave it up to the experts, the politicians and political parties, analysts and gurus.

And we have become disengaged and disconnected and trained to hang on to the words of our special breed – the politician at the next speech or declaration.

We are reduced, like the amateur musicians, to spectators at the next grand performance or consumers purchasing the next ticket or record, CD or DVD so we may watch and listen to the masters.

We are told you do not understand the complexity of the issues. You are not certified politicians like us.

Thus, we are reduced, at best, to being the foot soldiers pounding the pavements, going to the next rallies and denouncing truth and reality using fake profiles and distorted logic on social media, all for the benefit of the ‘special ones’ who are anointed to rule.

That is has led us to the point that we are denounced as ‘unpatriotic’ if we dare question what is being presented or demand that they leave out the politicking and provide us with clear guidance on how to overcome this unseen enemy.

This is the destination of one road that was offered us back in the 1955-62 period as ‘party politics’ and from 1962 as ‘responsible government’.

But, in 1962, there was another voice that dared to say there is another way, an alternative.

That voice was PEGASUS and its alternative plan for nation-building called Project Independence.

This organisation, taking the initiative to develop solutions to national development issues, an NGO contemporary terms, took on what a Government or Planning Ministry would largely be responsible for.

Developing the plan was an effort, conducted with the widest possible inclusion of the People of Trinidad and Tobago to develop their own plan and programme for the building of the nation in the spirit of the initiatives of Independence, unfettered by partisan politics and governmental officialdom

It was the first attempt by citizens to define for themselves the road to the future for the society with their own vision and in their own interest.

**Project Independence** spoke to the political responsibilities of each and every citizen and the need for their attention to and involvement in political affairs for the achievement of the National Purpose.

It said:

"the general public be no less aware of matters of political importance;

"awareness of and involvement in political matters is tantamount to a moral responsibility of every citizen who should seek to learn of the affairs of the Country and to

**express fearlessly but reasonably his views on public matters:"** (From the Text of Project Independence reproduced in **Pegasus and the Making of Project Independence**, Clyde Weatherhead, 2020, ISBN: 9798647268457).

COVID with its compaction of time and space also forces us to contemplate these matters of the future of our nation and our role in it.

Either we take up the challenge and prepare for doing things differently or we succumb to the comfort of the anti-conscious cocoon comfortable with the way we have done things.

Overcoming the crisis is immediate and urgent. Preparing for meeting future challenges is more down-the-road but equally on our plates for the day we defeat the pandemic.

It cannot be same ole, same ole.

We must define the really new normal and the role of each of us in it that we must shape beyond this moment.

*Clyde Weatherhead*

A Citizen Fighting for the  
Realisation of Trinbago.

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