Alister McIntyre

The Caribbean and the Wider World: Commentaries on My Life and Career. London: I.B. Taurus, 2016. xvii + 270 pp. (Cloth US\$ 55.00)

Sir Alister McIntyre has enjoyed an extraordinary career in leadership positions at the United Nations and the Caribbean Community Secretariat and as a faculty member and vice chancellor of the University of the West Indies (UWI). He has also served since the 1960s as a globe-trotting advisor to governments and international commissions on institutional structures and policy initiatives to manage the shifting currents of the international system. His memoir provides a range of insights into the evolution of his career, and simultaneously offers a bird's-eye view of critical initiatives that emerged around the restructuring of the rules and processes governing the global political economy since the 1960s.

McIntyre was particularly focused on the efforts of Caribbean countries to adjust to those changes and to protect their interests in an international system increasingly dominated by the major alliance systems in the Cold War. His book illuminates the enormous challenges confronting representatives of "Third World" countries as they sought to create opportunities—individually and collectively—to improve their status and economic prospects after achieving political independence. At the end of his career he returned to UWI where he served as vice-chancellor during a difficult period that included the rehabilitation of the Mona campus after it was damaged by a major hurricane. Further, the university was struggling with limited support from some of the regional governments due to weakening regional cooperation and the limited intellectual and political vision of many leaders in the region.

The book provides a useful overview of the evolution of the Commonwealth Caribbean since the Great Depression of the 1930s and the transition of the region from colonial status to independence. The story of McIntyre's childhood in Grenada (his limited access to education, and shifts in the economic circumstances of his family, from some affluence to more tenuous circumstances) provides a prism for exploring the impact of the economic dislocation of the era for these societies. Among other consequences for British Caribbean colonies, the Depression shattered the legitimacy of British colonial rule. Riots and disturbances in the 1930s triggered a search for a new dispensation by way of colonial reform, internal self-government within a federal structure for these territories, and, ultimately, political independence in the 1960s and 1970s for many of the British colonies.

McIntyre's educational odyssey in Grenada led to his being awarded a scholarship to Oxford University through the intervention of the resident British colonial administrator, who was impressed by his intellectual talent. After dis-

tinguished performance there as an undergraduate, he embarked on graduate study and was subsequently appointed to the UWI faculty. His later career was boosted by the professional contacts he made at Oxford and with other West Indian and Commonwealth colleagues from Africa and Asia while he was a student in Britain. In effect, Britain provided a space for the development of professional and intellectual networks among the colonial intelligentsia studying at its universities who were entrusted with the challenge and responsibility of shaping the future as the founding generation of the new states emerging across the international system.

McIntyre portrays his appointment as a junior faculty member at UWI in 1960 as an opening to help improve the quality and rigor of the curriculum. However, it is apparent that debates over the curriculum at its early stages were part of a larger debate in the West Indian territories about the role of the university in the future of the region—an issue that has yet to be resolved, and one that has defined several phases in McIntyre's role in the Caribbean as faculty member, as policy-maker and advisor to governments, and as vice-chancellor for the university.

It might have been useful for McIntyre to provide a nuanced analysis of the origins and persistence of this divide between UWI and the governments of the region. The university—as an agent of transformation in Caribbean life and in its role of providing the skill base necessary to maintain the viability of these countries—has presided over a region whose reputation for intellectual excellence has been called into question. McIntyre's closing paragraph (p. 258) speaks directly to the issue:

I reflect that in the first three decades of independence, representatives of the Caribbean serving at the international level were regularly pursued by those from other developing countries to ascertain our views on international development issues and the strategies that could be pursued. My impression is that our countries have lost ground in this regard.

As the university goes, so goes the region.

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