



Remarks at the  
**Retirement Function for Permanent Secretaries**

BY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST  
AND MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**The Honourable**  
**Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan**

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2014 | 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.  
Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre  
Lady Young Road, St. Ann's, Port of Spain

## SALUTATIONS

- Head of the Public Service, Mr. Reynold Cooper, and his lovely wife, Mrs. Cooper
- Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Public Administration, Ms. Gillian McIntyre
- Our Honourees for this evening – Retired Permanent Secretaries who have served in the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
- Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries currently serving in the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
- Specially invited guests
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen...

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***"The Civil Service must always have the right to appoint the best man for the job, regardless of sex."***

That quote comes from one of many enjoyable episodes of the BBC comedy sensation "Yes, Minister!" which ran during the late 1980s. You may remember the show...

Nigel Hawthorne played the acerbic Permanent Secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby, who sought to thwart the legislative efforts of The Right Honourable Jim Hacker MP, played by Paul Eddington.

Those of your familiar with the show would have seen that in almost every episode, Sir Humphrey and his Permanent Secretary colleagues are, at various turns, sardonic and jaded, as well as cynical, haughty and conspiratorial.

I share these images with you only to underscore a crucial point: the people we are honouring this evening could not have been anything like Sir Humphrey and have left such a powerful and wonderful legacy in our own public service here in Trinidad and Tobago.

And to emphasise my sincerity in that statement, allow me another dip into the pool of fantastic quips on "Yes, Minister!"...

***"Sometimes one is forced to consider the possibility that affairs are being conducted in a manner which, all things being considered and making all possible allowances is, not to put too fine a point on it, perhaps not entirely straightforward."***

That sentence translates into: "You're lying!"

But let me assure you, I most certainly am not, when I say how honoured I am to be here this evening, as we celebrate the careers of these fine and upstanding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. These men and women gave their lives to the service of their country; even giving

their blood, sweat and tears to ensure the Public Service continued be a strong custodian of the national good.

In many ways your generation of public servants was perhaps the most important, since you bridged the period between the first post-Independence stalwarts, to the present Permanent Secretaries. You started under the tutelage of that group that took up the mantle from the British and carried it forward, laying the foundation for a national public service, setting the Gold Standard as we say, and passing it on, with your value added to your successors sitting here.

The value that you added is immense since there were new challenges your generation of leaders faced. Technology was one of them. Someone once asked:

***“If technology is the answer, what is the question?”***

It is a question you had to answer. You had to deal with myriad anxious situations, 1990 being one of them in the same way that 1970 required a response from your predecessors. You had to deal with a citizenry that increasingly demanded value for money; a changing political climate; more militant unions; a troubled and troubling labour environment; and a more educated group of public servants wanting to reach the top without spending too much time in the middle.

There is no question you have earned your retirement and stored up enough goodwill from all of us here, as well as from a nation that has profited from your time at the crease. In cricket, they say that spending time in the middle is what prepares you for the big Tests. Retirement is a test since few people want to give up what they have, to go quietly and passively into the unknown, and give up the benefits and opportunities; the lives they have earned. I know that the harder you work, the harder it is to retire, and everyone here has been a very hard worker. You turned night into day for your employer, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and all the citizens of our country.

While considering what would be the best advice to share with you – a group of people who lived, breathed, sweated, slept and dreamt work – I found a comment by George Washington, soldier, planter and President of the United States. I believe the sentiment expressed is most apropos. People on the outside, who see Permanent Secretaries as people behind big desks in big offices, have no idea of how hard you work. But President Washington was a worker and he observed:

***“Every day the increasing weight of years admonishes me more and more, that the shade of retirement is as necessary to me as it will be welcome.”***

Remember, embarking on retirement means you are going through a rite of passage and entering an entirely new – but no less productive – phase of your life.

You are facing what just might be the best years of your lives. According to a recent study by Andrew Oswald, an economist at Warwick University, people over 60 express the highest levels of satisfaction in their lives so far — as long as they are in good health. So I encourage you to face the coming years with excitement and anticipation; and ensure you take good care of yourselves and especially your health and wellbeing.

I have heard it said that:

***“The trouble with retirement is that you never get a day off...”***

I am not sure what the tokens of appreciation are, but in a lot of places, as one wit noted, when people retire and time is no longer a matter of urgent importance, their colleagues generally present them with a watch. Another said that a gold watch is the most appropriate gift for retirement, as its recipients have given up so many of their golden hours in a lifetime of service. However, the best quote on retirement I have heard is:

***“Retire from work, but not from life.”***

Allow me to repeat it:

***“Retire from work, but not from life.”***

Each of us is unique. Each of us is different. Each of us has a different set or combination of values from everyone else. Retirement itself is different from the daily routine that you followed or developed during your lives as public servants.

In all journeys, departure is the toughest step to take. However, as bittersweet things might be, the time has now come to move to a different set of challenges, the most important of which is how to use the time and space you have now, to do all the things you wanted to do and for which you never had the time. In other words, and to acknowledge the appropriateness of tonight’s theme, you have to explore new beginnings.

The one thing to beware of is going into retirement without a plan and a set of options, activities, ideas and even dreams of what you are going to do during your retirement, or on what you are going to spend your hard-earned time. As a famous comedian once quipped:

***“In retirement, every day is Boss Day and every day is Employee Appreciation Day...”***

Here is some valuable advice I came across. The writer urges:

***“Planning to retire? Before you do, find your hidden passion. Do the thing that you have always wanted to do...”***

As long as it is socially acceptable, that is a good idea. But as critic and commentator for The New Yorker magazine, Alexander Woollcott warns, as you get older everything either is illegal, immoral or fattening. The fattening part is the hardest to fight against, especially when chocolate is so irresistible.

Some of you might still be struggling with the transition, even missing the daily adrenaline rush of conquering administrative or political challenges; wielding tremendous power and enjoying the prestige that comes with being a top official in the civil service. I encourage you to remember, however, that retirement is an opportunity to experience all those things, but in another way and in other fora and circumstances.

Retirement gives you the chance to really be the best you can be, not as an official, not as a boss, but as a human being with many layers, depths and dimensions... And many, many other ways to expand and extend your horizons, and strengthen your contribution to the development of your community, your neighbourhood and your country – Trinidad and Tobago...

The institutional memory you possess is an invaluable treasure. A few of your predecessors have continued to share their experience and expertise with those of us still toiling in the service of our nation. Perhaps you may want to consider a similar path. And I was very pleased to hear PS Cooper outline this evening the development of APEX.

You have given so much to your country, and you still have so much more to give, because life does not end at 60. You have come to a crossroads, and regardless of the decision you make and the direction you take, anyone entering your lives at this stage of your existence truly will be blessed by all you have to offer.

While you can retire from the public service, you cannot retire your experiences... Or perhaps I should say, you should not retire your experiences. You cannot retire the wisdom you gained over more than six decades of life: living and working, creating and responding, instructing and learning. You cannot, and you should not. You need to continue applying that wisdom and those experiences to the people you love and the things you value. The mentorship that you made part of your work life should not end at the office door on your way out. There are many people out there who need mentors, exemplars and role models.

You know, two years ago when I was at this function at the Hyatt, I noticed certain former permanent secretaries attended. And I noticed again this evening several of those same former permanent secretaries who had retired from the Service so many years ago, and I must point out a few of them: Rupert Mendes; John Andrews; Dr. Noble Johnson; Kathleen Boswell Innis; Patrick Alleyne; Vicky Carrington; Jennifer Sampson; Dr. Vincent Moore; Irma Brown and Davindra Duggal.

I want to thank each and every one of you for being here at this forum this evening. You have taken the time out of your busy schedule, and why? Because you want to demonstrate to

your successors your commitment to this forum and the Public Service... Indeed, it is commendable that you have taken that time to continue to be with the successors of this great organisation, the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago, and to continue to lend your wisdom. I say that for the “new beginners” here this evening; that you would follow in these same footsteps. Like I said, life does not end at 60. Your role is going to be different: one of mentorship and guidance, and more strategic. Imagine all the things you observed while you were permanent secretaries; that you did not have time to treat with because you had to be involved in the day-to-day operations. From here on, you have an opportunity to serve at a strategic level. I say this not only if you come back within the Service, but in terms of your communities and neighbourhoods in our beloved Trinidad and Tobago.

Some of you might be nervous about or even put off by your first venture into a new beginning. Don't be discouraged. Don't give up.

Let me share a quote with you, from an article in Forbes Magazine titled “Life After Retirement – What Do I Do Now?”

***The average person has roughly 20 years of life remaining after retirement – time enough to write a masterpiece, run a marathon, or mentor hundreds of youth. There's even time to do nothing, discover the beauty of grandkids, or rekindle the romance of a long relationship. Tomorrow can be the beginning of new adventures, new joys, and greater successes – how you spend it is up to you.***

Are you ready for that new beginning? Are you ready? ARE YOU READY?

On that note, let me wish you all the very best in all your future endeavours, as you begin a brand new adventure of new beginnings...

May God continue to bless each and every one of you...

May God continue to bless our Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago...

And may God bless our beloved nation, Trinidad and Tobago...

I THANK YOU...

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