



ANTHONY NORMAN SABGA

Mr Chancellor

The man standing before this distinguished company has been designated Master Entrepreneur, and is Lord of the ANSA McAL group of companies, the most powerful business Empire in the land.

This capacious conglomerate rests on the successes of a past whose enduring principles and practices seem to belong to a world that believed in finding its own centre. But it is also a modern enterprise with the anticipation, reflexes and stretch in a centrifugal world to make and take the chance before it properly leaves the bat.

It came into being in 1986, Mr Chancellor when Mr Anthony Sabga's ANSA Group purchased 330 million stock units in the ailing Mc Eneaney Alstons Group. This audacious move was effected with uncommon seamliness and civility. It was done without depriving any shareholder of his interest. It brought job security to thousands.

Our postulant, Mr Chancellor is too alert to possibilities to be ever in the position of Alexander the Great who wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. Out of the contraction of the historic ANSA Fleming Merchant Bank of 1994 he brought forth in triumph the ANSA Merchant Bank. He is the influential creator and protector of the once-threatened Grand Bazaar, the largest shopping mall in the Caribbean. He is the engine that

transformed twenty-nine acres of swamp land at Westmoorings into a yielding estate called Regents Park. And he is the sergeant continuing his strides into the field of property development and installing another man-made monument in the shape of the Bayside Towers.

Mr Chancellor, these islands have been blessed by the special talents and the energies, the dreams and ambitions, of all the people who came. European and African. Indian, Chinese, and Portuguese Madeiran. Syrian-Lebanese and Jew. Barbadian, Grenadian, Vincentian and Venezuelan too. Early or late, voluntary or forced, legal or illegal, Mr Chancellor, each group has made its entry and stamped its arrival in its own way. In recognising the achievements of Mr Anthony Norman Sabga, we recognise the struggles to belong of the man, and the entrepreneurial contribution to economy and society of the community he comes out of.

Mr Chancellor, a seven- year- old boy came to Trinidad in 1930 without English, and without the proverbial two cents to clink in his pants pocket. All he knew about the tropics was the banana given to him by one of the stewards on the Colombie as it left the port of Marseilles.

Who could have thought that he would have such an impact on the economic and physical landscape of his adopted country? Who would have dared to imagine it except perhaps Anthony Sabga himself?

We must notice at once Mr Chancellor, the nourishment that came to Anthony Sabga from the fruitful meeting of the different communities out there in the world. Anthony Sabga moved in a public sphere that included Murli Kirpalani, Timothy Roodal and Soodeen. Contrary to some of today's fashionable rhetoric there were entrepreneurs of African origin he could also draw upon: "I was motivated by the counselling and advice of Black men of yesterday, like Hodgkinson, Waterman, J.T. Johnson and Cyril Duprey".

The Sabga family of Northern Syria in the Ottoman Empire started migrating to new beginnings in North and South America when their lands were confiscated towards the end of the 19th century. Even in those days, Mr Chancellor, Trinidad was a doorway into and out of South America, and in 1902 Anthony Sabga's great-uncle found the place and the

people hospitable and kindly. When he came back from a visit to Syria in 1927 he was accompanied by Norman Sabga, who would trade in cloth until by sheer determination and sacrifice he would be able to enter formally into commerce with his own haberdashery store at 73 Queen Street. By 1930 he was able to send for his wife and his family of three boys and three girls, including Anthony. Mr Chancellor, some fellers real lucky.

The success of Anthony Sabga is associated by Mr Sabga himself with a beloved father. Norman's qualities as a man and a provider for his family exist in the son's respectful memory as memory and mythological inspiration: "Although he was illiterate, he was my greatest mentor and his principles of honesty and integrity were not only admired by me but by the entire Syrian Lebanese community who referred to him as the patriarch of the community. I was perhaps made a man before my time; he made me feel independent." In due course he would purchase the very property where his father started his business at the corner of Queen and Henry Streets, and install the structure known today as ANSA House.

When Norman Sabga became ill and left for Mt Lebanon for a miracle cure in late 1937, the 14-year old Anthony with a second standard education from Nelson Street Boys RC School began to run the business that a dynastically inclined patriarch had named N. S. Sabga and Sons. Anthony walked from Alfredo Street into the town to save the trolley bus fare, and from La Paille Village to Curepe to save the six cents. He was keeping the family and paying off the business's massive debt of 1,500 dollars.

The patriarch returned in 1939, retired from buying and selling, and concentrated for the next 23 years on being patriarch, grandfather, moral support and unfailing source of saving advice: "Whatever you do, try and keep 20% for a rainy day or when you are sick." He would forever couple the imperative to save with the need to cultivate a sustainable domestic economy. And he would never fall into the trap of equating the dizzy flow of capital with the tangible realisation of actual earnings.

Anthony Sabga was now in charge. He was embarked upon a more thorough schooling in commerce than any institution could ever supply. He was writing his epic. His way in the world would not be comfortable. He would bear the slings

and arrows of outrageous fortune. He would suffer the whips and scorns of time and his competitors' contumely.

He opened his own business, Standard Distributors, in 1945. "I can walk in the street and I can see opportunities." The cries of the butchers calling customers at the end of the day to buy the rest of the meat before it spoiled inspired him to develop hire purchase arrangements that would make the impossible three hundred dollar Bosch refrigerator available to the ordinary citizen at \$2.50 per week. Standards was on its way. It was a business breakthrough, and the beginning of a change in lifestyle for the whole society. He himself was already being guided by the perception that a retail business could be more readily passed on to family than could the business of being a commission agent.

The next stage in the Sabga epic, Mr Chancellor, was the move into manufacturing, and it was as socially profound as the marriage of hire purchase to the refrigerator. In 1965, he performed the unlikely feat of yoking the leading appliance distributors into a manufacturing consortium to produce refrigerators, television sets, radiograms, cookers, and air conditioners under licensing arrangements with famous brand companies overseas. The success of ANSA Industries was a major contributor to the thickening of an economic field still dominated, I am afraid, by mere commission agents and distributors of foreign products.

I doubt very much Mr Chancellor that there has ever been a successful man who has not made enemies and aroused jealousies: and those directly involved in economic transactions are likely at some stage to have given cause. On this occasion we introduce the grating sound and maintain the peace by summoning the words of former Senator Michael Mansoor: "I would be giving a totally wrong impression if I led you to believe that Tony Sabga is an easy accommodating diplomat who would suffer fools easily or placidly, accept mediocrity or skulduggery or nonsense with resignation. All of us who know him know that the concomitant of the lion's bravery is his roar - a roar which can send shivers down the spines of some, though it may be a clarion call to excellence for others."

Mr Chancellor, Anthony Sabga is a devoted family man and philanthropist. He has been married to his wife Minerva for 50 years and has a view whose disappearing from the world may

well be connected with the break-up of family life and the alienation of children: "I am blessed with a wife who was never a career woman or a competitor but someone happy to be the best wife and the best mother in the world."

We are talking, Mr Chancellor, about a man who is so focused on the work that is his joy that he has little time or need for much else. But home and family are the rest of the world for him: " I have never ever thought of leaving my office after work with a view to going to a club for a drink or for recreation, my first thought after work is of going home, my greatest comfort and recreation is going back to my wife and my home".

Ever mindful of his debt to the society which welcomed and rewarded his endeavours, he has increasingly made a point of giving back some of what he has got. While the list of groups and organisations who have been benefiting for years is too long to declare at this time, I mention only the largesse of the ANSA McAL Foundation, and I have to note his generosity to the University: the ANSA McAL Psychological Research Centre, the Institute of Business, and the ANSA McAL/UWI Students Training programme that began with second year students in the Faculties of Natural Science and Engineering and is poised to expand into other Faculties.

In the last ten years, Mr Chancellor, we have seen the modus operandi of Mr Sabga, the entrepreneurship he has been elaborating since the 1930's become the buzzword of politicians and Ministers of Finance who submit to globalisation without Mr Sabga's understanding of the crucial role of domestic savings and sustainable domestic production. If we should ever wish to diversify tertiary education and recognise the difference between Training and Education Mr Chancellor, and if it should come to pass that we opt to create a degree-awarding tertiary institution devoted to Business and to the cultivation of appropriate entrepreneurship, I can think of no person more qualified to be its patron or to join you in the rank of Chancellor than Mr Sabga.

Mr Chancellor, I request you by the authority of Senate and Council, to admit Anthony Norman Sabga to the degree of Doctor of Laws honoris causa.