



Sir Allen Montgomery Lewis

MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, I present to you Sir Allen Montgomery Lewis, Knight Bachelor and Bachelor of Laws of London University, Queen's Counsel and distinguished lawyer, judge and arbiter, and lately Chief Justice of the West Indies Associated States.

It delights a regional University, Sir, to honour a man whose background is so comprehensively West Indian. Born in St. Lucia of Antiguan parents he married a Vincentian, and he himself has sat as judge in every West Indian territory from Jamaica to Guyana.

In an age of exhibited "activism" it is meet that the young should be invited to consider a solid record of profitable activity such as Allen Lewis's. For him everything began with an almost monastic self-discipline, regularly starting the hard day's work long hours before dawn; self-improvement was a fixed policy not to be altered. Being called to the local bar was quite enough to enable him to practise his chosen profession of Law, but this did not satisfy him; in days when a university degree was a rare distinction, he took in 1941 an external LL.B. degree of London. He later entered Middle Temple and was called to the English Bar in 1946. But self-improvement was a profitable activity for him not for mere self-increase but for the improvement of the quality of life around him, and this aspect of his record notably entitles him to the special honour we pay him today.

The early 1930s were not only years of international depression but a period of conspicuous poverty in these islands. In this period, besides stimulating the efforts of others in choral music and in sport, besides doing representative work for the Anglican Church of which he has always been a staunch member, Allen Lewis turned his attention principally to the plight of the poorest of his fellow countrymen and organised night classes for labourers at the Methodist School, aimed at improving their literacy. It was out of this beginning that, with the help of others, in 1933 came the St. Lucia Workers' Union, the first Trade Union in St. Lucia, with Allen Lewis soon as its Secretary. His personal efforts in educating the workers in those times of pinching penury displayed a remarkable foresight, slowly establishing the right of the untutored masses to universal adult suffrage, the fight for which still lay ahead. West Indian politics in those days were very much like donkey-racing: unprofessional, all right in the short-run but with no plan for the long-run, blinkered and completely individualistic. Wise were those few who, like Allen Lewis, saw the gross inadequacy of such an exercise for the advancement of the public interest. The few who, using the St. Lucia Workers' Union as a base, resolved to introduce party politics, are now household names in St. Lucia — J.M.D. Bousquet, George Charles, Vernon Cooper, Carl La Corbiniere and Allen Lewis; but it was Lewis that they chose as the first President of the first political party St. Lucia knew, the St. Lucia Labour Party. So here stands the mentor of crucial change in the politics of his homeland. When, in 1951, the St. Lucia Labour Party rode overwhelmingly to power on universal adult suffrage, that new charger that Lewis himself had groomed, donkey-racing was at an end.

But there is yet another monument raised up more strong than the political one. Any St. Lucian today can show you what is still popularly called the Workers Bank or Penny Bank. It is the St. Lucia Co-operative Bank, a solid building in the business centre of Castries: that Allen Lewis is today its Director and Legal Counsel is not so interesting as the fact that he was a founding member as far back as 1938, in those penurious and disturbed days when he and his small band taught the humble workers to be thrifty of their

hard earnings and provided for them the opportunity to bank as little as one penny at a time.

But the splendid imagination displayed and success achieved in his altruistic public service were indeed far exceeded by the grandeur of his professional record.

Behold a legal light in whom there is no guile. He served his clients with absolute good faith, never going into Court but with his cases fully prepared so that his former colleagues remember him still as a perfectionist and speak of him as one who evidently left behind a charismatic image unmatched at the bar to this day. This unflagging distinction marked him out for a seat on the Bench, and it is typical of his public-spiritedness that he left a thriving practice to give wider service for less monetary reward. He took silk in 1956 and in 1959 left practice to become a Judge of the Federal Supreme Court, and then in 1962 of the British Caribbean Court of Appeal. From 1967 he was Judge of the Court of Appeal of Jamaica. Then, as Acting Chief Justice of Jamaica, he left to become Chief Justice of the West Indies Associated States, which post he held until his retirement in 1972.

But, Vice-Chancellor, this chronology of high service, clearly a distinction in itself, is only a vista along which stand new pinnacles of Mr. Justice Lewis's achievements. First came the revision of the Laws of St. Lucia. It took him four years and the several volumes of the Revised Laws of St. Lucia, published in 1957, and the respectful satisfaction with which it is used by the profession today stand as a monument to the man's industry, authority and wisdom.

Secondly came the creation of Rules for The Supreme Court of the West Indies Associated States. When Chief Justice Lewis assumed office in 1967 he found that the rules of procedure in civil cases in the Supreme Court differed from state to state. Some used the English Supreme Court Rules of 1912, others those of 1940, some those prior to 1875 and at least one the French-Canadian Civil Procedure Code. Out of this chaos Chief Justice Lewis brought order by deciding there should be one code of rules for all the West Indies Associated States, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands. He and two colleagues then drafted and promulgated the West Indies Associated States Supreme Court Rules 1970. This substantial work, covering as it did the entire legal procedure, was long overdue and was received by Bench and Bar alike with ample satisfaction.

Thirdly he handed down many valuable judgements in what have thereby become leading cases in the practice of law in the West Indies; and both by example and precept he greatly minimised the law's delays that are so costly to the poor. In all this we see the quality of scholarship wedded to the principle of fair play for the litigant; for he, too, like the Man of Lawe who went to Canterbury, holds that "swich lawe as a man yeveth another wight He sholde hymselfen usen it, by right".

His contribution to the rule of Law in our West Indies has not been limited to skilful drafting, scholarly execution and considerateness, for as Chief Justice he has also firmly defended the independence of the judiciary in open court holding, on a memorable occasion that

"while the Supreme Court is an essential part of the structure of Government established by the constitution it is constitutionally independent of the executive and the legislature".

His act was like freshly cementing a well known cornerstone of public safety and making a display of it for public confidence.

All that has been said is without mentioning the exemplary excellence of his family life in which he has been well supported by his gracious lady; without mentioning his role as a bringer of harmony, often the sole arbiter in trade disputes in various territories of the West Indies; indeed without mentioning his long role in the educational development of his people and particularly his profound interest in the welfare and advancement of our own University; and also without highlighting his role as a dedicated West Indian federalist, pledging the full contribution of St. Lucia (as its sole representative at the 1948 Montego Bay Conference) to a Federation, and serving as the first President of the West Indies Senate in 1958-59

From family to federal principle, he has been a calm and firm leader and has set an example well worthy of emulation.

Now therefore in recognition of his long and distinguished contribution to our society, I request you, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, by the authority of the Senate and Council to confer upon Allen Montgomery Lewis, most truly learned in the Law, the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

26th November, 1974