

Speak up, academics

BARBADOS' precarious economic circumstances necessitate that there be robust debate involving diverse viewpoints on the critical issues. We cannot depend only on the opinions of the Government's supporters and the architects of its economic policies since they would be looking at those issues through rose-coloured glasses.

This is why it is important for those with knowledge, expertise and understanding of the economic conditions to be prepared to speak publicly, if only for the benefit of the country.

That is why the Caribbean Economic Forum public discussion held last Thursday night at the Courtney Blackman Grande Salle was so important.

It was not the first time we had the benefit of this forum, but based on the public's participation, it is obvious people want to be better informed on the issues which have an impact on their lives.

It was interesting that a business executive in Jamaica who called into the programme made the very interesting point that Distinguished Visiting Fellow Dr Linda Tesar spoke in plain English, which meant that all who listened to the presentation could grasp immediately what was being said during the 90-minute forum.

Congratulations to the Central Bank of Barbados on this continuing initiative.

We need much more of this type of intervention, not only about the rising debt levels, but also on the

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plurality of issues with which Barbados must grapple over the next decade.

We have some of the best brains on the island that can present and defend their positions on the issues that matter. Misguidedly, some simply don't get involved in the debates. This is particularly true of some lecturers at the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies, too many of whom seem satisfied to stay within their academic cocoon.

This is a backward step we are witnessing today, given the muscular debates which emanated from The Hill during its halcyon days with the likes of Frank Alleyne, Wendell McClean, Neville Duncan, Ralph Gonsalves, Hilary Beckles and others who were prepared to show that they were the smart thinkers on the issues of the day. Michael Howard, Don Marshall and, in recent times, Jeremy Stephen, have continued in that time-honoured tradition.

Thankfully, the voice of the Barbados Economics Society has not fallen silent. But the public needs to hear from that wide intellectual talent pool, both at Cave Hill and in the private sector. We do not subscribe to the view that because it's scholarly, it's not relevant.

Those schooled in the issues which are important for the debate of public policy must not see such discussion and engagement as a distraction from their intellectual research, but understand they have a duty to help guide and expand public enlightenment.

It must be part of their give-back to society, which has provided golden opportunities for them. Failure to understand their role in society will have one outcome – they will marginalise themselves.