



# WMO FEATURE

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## THE WORLD OF WEATHER AND WATER

Point Of View

### ELEVENTH CONGRESS WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

Interview with Mr. C. E. Berridge  
Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica with  
World Meteorological Organization

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THE WORLD OF WEATHER AND WATER

Point of View  
Eleventh Congress

Interview with Mr. C.E. Berridge,  
Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica with WMO  
and President of Regional Association IV

by Dr. Sylvia Moore  
Public Information and Press Officer (WMO)

Dr. Moore: Mr. Bert Berridge, is the Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica with WMO. Mr. Berridge you have a number of functions in the Caribbean. What are they?

Mr. Berridge: My substantive job is that of co-ordinating Director of the Caribbean Meteorological Organization which is a collection of 16 of the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean with headquarters located in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Moore: Let's go to the Commonwealth of Dominica. Along with other islands in the Eastern Caribbean, it has been frequently devastated by hurricanes. We can go back to hurricane "David" in 1979 which was 300 miles wide and swept the island with sustained winds of 145 miles an hour and gusts up to a 175 miles an hour. A famous novelist Phyllis Strand Allfrey wrote "that during six hours the shattering noises of gnarled fingers deliberately tearing out the roofing, burst overhead. Not a bird was heard. Lights, telephone, and radio stopped." Delia Winston reported that "the air had turned into a milky green swirl of mud, water, coconuts, and sheets of galvanised roof like flying razor blades." Another eyewitness recalls how relatives hid in a pit dug out on the family land, and watched from beneath the earth, their houses crumbling down and disintegrating into nothing.

This must have been a terrible experience, devastating for the vegetation, the physical infrastructure, trees stripped of bark, hills raked, roads pitted, electricity ruined, the economy ruined. It must be of great importance that meteorology serves communities such as these with early warning systems. What is the situation in the Caribbean?

Mr. Berridge: It is in fact one of our major concerns because we are visited from time to time by hurricanes. Perhaps not as frequently as some parts of the world with these devastating phenomena. A specific one of which you spoke, David in Dominica, was an extremely powerful hurricane. But from a meteorological point of view, they were warned. We gathered subsequently that not much was done as a result of the warning, which is not really the responsibility of the Meteorological Service. We are not trying to avoid blame. We have subsequently gone into areas of associating ourselves very closely with national warning disaster systems. It is a fact that hurricanes are matters of serious concern especially to small islands. They can ruin their economies for 10 years or more with only one major hurricane.

Dr. Moore: It takes a long time for trees to grow again. You mentioned two important points there: one is monitoring and the quality of the monitoring service. How good is the monitoring system in the Eastern Caribbean?

Mr. Berridge: I think we have a very good system. We have fairly well-trained people. We have radar, satellite and a good reporting system. Unfortunately, the telecommunication system breaks down during a hurricane, but that's after the damage has been done. And the fear we have is that, if there is a rapid repeat of another hurricane after that, then we are in serious trouble. We are trying to rectify that by a new approach to telecommunications.

Dr. Moore: What is that new approach?

Mr. Berridge: Rather than have the existing system which is connected to each island, and which depends very much on each link, we want to go via satellite. It will be a stand-alone system. In the new system, we are attempting to put in, if one country is knocked out it does not put everybody else out.

Dr. Moore: The second point you made was that despite the early warning that was given by the Meteorological Services, people did not pay sufficient attention to that warning to be prepared for disaster. What can you do to improve the co-ordination?

Mr. Berridge: What we have done, is actively to co-ordinate the activities of the Hurricane Committee of our region with the disaster preparedness and prevention people. We keep updating the national disaster co-ordinators with some of the meteorological aspects of the warnings for example, how to interpret them and what to do about them.

Dr. Moore: Has that improved in the past ten years since those hurricanes?

Mr. Berridge: It has certainly taken a load off our minds. There is no point in having a good warning and nobody doing anything about it, because inevitably it all seems as if it was our fault. So we are very happy indeed that there are national co-ordinators put in place and that is why we try to bring them into our business everytime to ensure that even when there are changes, they are aware of what our hurricane warnings mean and what to do about them.

Dr. Moore: I was in the Commonwealth of Dominica some six years ago and I noticed that there was a very concerted effort to co-ordinate natural disaster preparedness in terms of education of young people, and at the same time even taking the problem further to areas such as diversifying the economy. Having an economy which is based on one crop such as bananas is really inadequate, if the whole banana crop is going to be wiped out by natural disasters. Do you see a relationship there between climatic studies and agriculture?

Mr. Berridge: Certainly, in fact it is unfortunate that it is a characteristic of human beings that they have to be exposed to the threat and actually experience it to appreciate its significance. We have done some studies on how humans behave in reaction to warnings. And they're quite revealing. Communities which have experienced a disaster tend to react much better to the next warning. The more educated a group is, the less they react, because they wish to find out for themselves. They don't take people's word for granted. So while we do not wish to have a disaster every generation, it does not hurt to have a near miss. Certainly from our point of view it keeps people on their toes.

Dr. Moore: You remind me of something very interesting - the old "coup de main" custom in Dominica whereby everyone lends a helping hand. I have a quote from a man called Mr. Rayland St. Luce who was 80 years old and he described the hurricane of 1930. He said that "We had certain fellows going all about to help to bring people out of their houses. You know the houses went down flat. Flat. I myself and others you cannot do anything. Not run, nothing. The house is down, yes what have you got. Okay get ready we take it and we put it about two feet from the ground we go all the way helping others.... If I am to tell you although in our days we were good, but during that hurricane in 1979 was good, because they would be in on the house 9, 10, 11 o'clock in the night, night especially moonlight night when people come up here when they feel as if nothing has passed there. The young people like me I can't go there because it would be too fast for us". So it illustrates how people in those days really tried to help each other. But let's go back to diversifying the economy.

Mr. Berridge: I do not even claim to be an expert in economics, but clearly if you have a one crop banana economy, it does not need a hurricane to destroy it. A wind of 60 miles an hour will ruin a crop completely, so I hope that economists have taken this into account and have made proposals to modify the situation. But in any case, even if we did not have a disaster, why depend on a one crop economy?

Dr. Moore: I'm sure that the average citizen does not know that, even a wind of the kind you describe would be sufficient to ruin the crops.

What are the main problems of meteorology in the Caribbean?

Mr. Berridge: By and large we hear of the hurricanes. But other than that, from a meteorological point of view, we feel that meteorology is not given the attention it deserves because climate and weather are very fundamental and affect many areas. It determines the lifestyle of the community and a whole host of other things. But our main problem, of course, when we are talking about disaster would be how to deal more effectively with hurricanes, and from our point of view there are advances taking place all the time and we would wish to be part of that, with training programmes, to have our people able to deal with new research, with new techniques, equipment, and so on.

I would say one of the benefits of this regional co-ordinating group we have in the Caribbean Meteorological Organization is that collectively we can use our resources in a much more efficient way. And we do not need to duplicate everything on every island. We have assigned specific responsibilities to some islands.

Dr. Moore: In a microstate you cannot duplicate everything you are able to do in a larger state. How are the problems of the Caribbean in meteorology and hydrology reflected in the concerns of Congress and the World Meteorological Organization here in Geneva?

Mr. Berridge: We do have a very active interest in the sense that small and developing communities need WMO in a big way. If we did not have WMO we would create it. It is through WMO that we are better able to have dissemination of research, new activities and new facilities. They contribute significantly to our education and training programmes. It is through them we are able to attract voluntary contribution programmes. It is through them we are able to deal jointly with other donor agencies which are able to help these many small states. So as far as we are concerned WMO is a very fundamental part of all developing countries. You could notice the response WMO gets here in the Congress from developing countries.

Dr. Moore: What do you think the main trends of the future should be?

Mr. Berridge: The WMO objective vis-à-vis developing countries is to see if they can bridge the gap as the term is used. That is going to be a little difficult because it relates to the economies of the country. We are all expected to do our own part, but certainly they (WMO) can contribute in a very significant way, even with limited resources, to ensuring that the meteorological services can take that step forward which ordinarily they would not be able to do without such help.

Dr. Moore: And the main thrust for the future?

Mr. Berridge: As far as I am concerned the main thrust for the future is that we will have to play, and continue to play, a very active role in the Organization, and try to impress on WMO that it has to reciprocate in a very significant way toward developing countries' requirements.

Dr. Moore: And that reciprocity will be in terms of assistance with equipment, training manpower?

Mr. Berridge: Literature, documentation, education and training, seminars, a whole host of things.

Dr. Moore: The whole range of meteorology. Thank you very much indeed.

Mr. Berridge: You are welcome.