INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by mentioning two constraints which I have in dealing with this topic: both concerning the concept of the ‘National Environment’. One is the difficulty of drawing discrete boundary lines between the ‘national’ and international or external environments, since the two shade into each other and there is an inter-relationship of influence and even, to some extent, of impact. And there are circumstances in which politics and administration in the small Caribbean states are affected by this inter-relationship.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES

Let me illustrate: Caribbean peoples are over-exposed via easy physical access and communications media (the latter magnified geometrically by satellite technology) to a dominant life-style of affluent Western societies and to values which involve repeated emphasis on the material benefits and other ‘desirable’ goals of so-called ‘modernisation’. These factors, accompanied by expanding populations and increasing urbanisation, have contributed towards the creation of patterns of conspicuous consumption among middle and upper income levels and greater aspirations for goods, services
and social facilities on the part of entire populations in the region.

Populations growing increasingly more sophisticated, sensitised and politicised are exerting cumulative pressures on governments for action, not only to accelerate the rate of economic growth, but to ensure social justice which is seen in terms of the achievement of a more equitable distribution of income and resources in societies, especially Jamaica's, traditionally beset by highly skewed patterns of income distribution and chronically high unemployment levels; and the gulf between the 'haves and have nots' has evidently been widening.¹

There is a wide gap between burgeoning aspirations for improved living standards and the tenuous resource capacity of economies, now including that of Trinidad and Tobago. This imposes severe constraints on the capability of governments to plan realistically for social and economic development, thus further intensifying social tensions. These problems have been aggravated during the past decade by internationally generated influences: inflationary trends, deterioration in the terms of trade, debt problems and so on.

These factors, then, suggest ingredients for social and political instability. Moreover, depletion of foreign exchange reserves and the associated crises in the balance of payments position of some states have led them to resort for succour to international aid agencies (both bi- and multilateral) especially from the US, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). What is of particular relevance to the subjects of peace, development and security, are the consequences of the conditionalities imposed, especially in the terms of IMF assistance. The direct impact of such conditionalities on public administration and domestic public policy is in the cutting back of social and economic programmes, for example education and health, and the laying off of public sector staff.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS REGION

The second source of difficulty springs from the danger of generalising about the Commonwealth Caribbean nation states in spite of the recognition of the commonality of the region and of the similarities in a number of features (including some major political and administrative characteristics) among the constituent countries.

We need to bear in mind that the region consists not only of a large number of island-states, but of two continental countries — the largest of the group, in area — and also the relativity of size in