

# THE ARUBA TRADE AND INVESTMENT ASSOCIATION (ATIA)

by Jacob Gelt Dekker, 22 March 2006, Oranjestad, Aruba

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## Disclaimer:

I am not informed about the local situation of Aruba, so I speak in general and from a perspective of the Netherlands Antilles and Curacao. Jacob Gelt Dekker



## Treatise:

If corporate cultures of government and business are incompatible, irreconcilable differences will lead to separation and ultimately to divorce.

## Separation and divorce:

The corporate cultures of Fidel Castro's government and Cuba's business life were incompatible and irreconcilable. Today Cuba's business life no longer exists.

In Haiti the business world and Government were incompatible, resulting in today's chaos.

Grenada's government and the business community of the free markets were incompatible; a war erupted.

Hugo Chavez's corporate culture is incompatible with the free-market business culture of Venezuela. Lengthy strikes were the result. The groups have reconciled . . . for the moment.

In Cambodia, Pol Pot's regime in the 1970's was incompatible with business. The entire business community was wiped out. Three million people were decapitated.

Fast-forward three decades . . . under the Godett government of the Netherlands Antilles, 40 thousand people packed up and fled the country; most of them from Curacao, and most of them

going to the Netherlands. An additional 30 thousand went underground and live solely off crime today. Corporate investment came to a total standstill.

Corporate culture incompatibility is a very serious matter and disaster scenarios are unfolding right next door.

Corporate cultures:

The corporate culture of business is molded from what the business drives. Creation of wealth and the wellbeing of your community are what drive business in the free world, and here on Aruba. This is your common corporate culture. In addition you may have added your own cultures of a family business or membership in a larger corporation.

In the 19th century the entrepreneur-businessman's image was shaped by the British gentry of the industrial revolution; the gentleman remained a ruthless dandy at every possible expense, including the total exploitation of the workers and their children. Karl Marx and his followers have done everything to perpetuate that image of the ruthless bloodsucking exploiter.

Even when I grew up as a child in Europe, we had schoolbooks with association exercises: Entrepreneurship had to be associated with exploitation of labor forces

. That image is no longer true. The entrepreneur of today has invested most of his or her life in business through vast amounts of money, effort and time. They create wealth and well being within the community. At the same time they have the enormous responsibility of meeting their payroll each and every month.

You are here tonight attending this lecture not to make money, but because you care about your community. You are taking very seriously your task of creating wellbeing in your community. That is why you are here. That is why you participate in your schools, and churches. So, your corporate culture stands for both wealth creation and wellbeing.

There is no entity in your society today that carries more weight and more responsibility for wealth creation and the wellbeing of your entire community than you as a business community. You have invested your life 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In order to achieve the best results, businesses train and educate their workers constantly at great expense. Most carefully, you select and recruit the most qualified person for the challenging jobs of your ventures. You stimulate your staff by rewarding initiatives and risk-taking.

In the meantime, you will always be held accountable for all your deeds and actions; held accountable by your families, your financiers, your shareholders and by the tax inspector.

The corporate culture of government is quite different. Although, officially, they stand for the creation of wealth, wellbeing and well fare of the community, of the ten governments I have witnessed in the Netherlands Antilles, not one used those words in their programs.

Not one government consistently selected the most qualified persons for the jobs as ministers. Ministers and members of parliament got their jobs because it was their turn. Successively, ministers hired staff, not for what the candidates knew, but rather for whom they knew. Giving out government jobs and contracts was often a way to repay the party, family and friends, or even to repay personal favors.

As a result, we had ministers who could hardly read or write. We had criminals in government. About 30 of those shady characters were arrested and convicted, but many more were never even charged.

Ministers never reward initiative shown by their staff. They do not reward hard work and diligence. They go by the book or often simply do not go at all. They seem to care little or nothing about opportunities in the market. We have seen scores of ministers who only excelled in incompetence and corruption! Ministers were never held accountable for their spending. They do not seem to know what a balance sheet is, what a profit and loss statement is. They have never had to meet a monthly payroll responsibility like those in the business world.

What drives governments and politicians?

What drives government and politicians as a motivational power, is not clear and not transparent. Their meager salaries can hardly be the motivation for what they strive for. Studying Castro, Chavez and our own Godett, one can say that they are all driven by an insatiable lust for power. Lust for power! Once politicians have tasted power they seem to get addicted very quickly.

An elaborate system of checks and balances is supposed to keep the ministers in place, but in the Antilles it appears that the checks and balances do not function sufficiently.

The cause is the lawlessness of the Antilles.

A regular country needs hundreds of laws and regulations per years to keep up with our very complicated world. For instance, in the Netherlands, a quick calculation reveals that about 200 bills per years are passed at The Hague level; on provincial and city level another 200, and in Brussels, 200 more. So, roughly, a little country like the Netherlands needs about 500-600 laws per year to keep up. The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba do not even produce 10% of that. Consequently the Antilles has an enormous backlog of legislation.

The backlog is so enormous that, for instance last year, only the adoption of the entire Civil Code of the Netherlands gave some relief. Still, in the remaining void, it is in that area of lawlessness that politicians love to exercise their discretionary power. The flexing of that discretionary muscle is their power motive. It is what drives many of them.

Since there is no governing body of law, or even an advising body of jurisprudence, the client, the business world, is totally at the mercy of the discretionary powers of the politician. Clientalism is evitable. In this void of laws, there will not be a level playing field. In this void of laws, there will not be any transparent, regulated equal chances for all. In this void of laws, favoritism and privilege flourishes like a spreading weed. Such is the system today of Castro, Chavez and Godett.

In the discussions to join the European Union with an Ultra Peripheral Status, UPS, it has been argued by politicians that the Antilles would have to adopt 30,000 rules and laws. This, according to the politicians, is an absurdity. I consider that a devious misleading argument and false reasoning.

The 30,000 laws needed demonstrates our enormous backlog, demonstrates our lawlessness and puts the enormous power Antillean politicians exercise in that void of lawlessness with their discretionary powers.

Your business community has suffered from time to time from politicians who abuse their powers to intimidate you and to stop you from protesting. You should not allow this corporate rape to continue. I advise you to get organized and speak out, loud and clear; after all, you have invested your lives in this community.

Thank you.

Jacob Gelt Dekker