

Commonwealth Arts Organisation

# Nettleford gets top post

Professor Rex Nettleford, Director of Extra Mural Studies at the University of the West Indies and chairman of the Institute of Jamaica, was unanimously elected chairman of the newly formed Commonwealth Arts Organisation, in London recently.

The new Pan-Commonwealth organization is established to encourage, foster and facilitate the development of the arts within and between the nations of the Commonwealth.

The formation of the organization took place at a conference of the Commonwealth Arts Committee which was the two-year old preparatory committee set up after the Commonwealth Arts Festival which took place simultaneously with the Commonwealth Games in 1978 in Edmonton, Alberta Canada.

Some 90 delegates representing the vast majority of members of the Commonwealth met to discuss the objectives and structure of the new organisation with the blessing of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Observers came from UNESCO, Commonwealth Organisations dealing with subject related to the arts, Minority Arts Advisory Service in England, the Holland Festival and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

In his keynote address to the Conference Professor Nettleford stressed the central role of arts and culture to national development and outlined the Jamaican and Commonwealth Caribbean experience, particularly the Jamaican, over the past 25 years.

He spoke of the need for the relationship in the Commonwealth to change from one based on the principle of domination to one based on the principles of co-operation and mutual respect rooted in a belief in human dignity.

He spoke out against the colonial inheritance of a cultural hierarchy in which things European are placed at the apex while things from elsewhere are relegated to a denigrated base and he emphasised the intrinsic value of the cultural products of all the different communities which make up the Commonwealth.

He called for a sense of renewal which he said was needed for both those who once dominated and those who were dominated and pointed to the tremendous importance of practical programmes to mobilise the creative spirit towards building new and socially just nations as well as a new world order based on better understanding and trust.

He urged the new Commonwealth Arts Organisation to pledge itself to the building of a New Cultural Order in which the products of the creative imagination will find their proper place and purpose in human existence.

After prolonged applause the gathering broke up into enthusiastic discussion about the candidacy of the speaker from

Jamaica for the prestigious chairmanship. He later received it by acclamation.

His deputy chairmen are Sir David Hunt, chairman of the Commonwealth Film and Television Institute and Charles

Philips, executive secretary of the Art Council of Ghana.

The executive committee comprise representatives from the five regions of the Commonwealth — Africa (West, East and Southern), Canada and the Caribbean, Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong) Europe (United Kingdom, Malta, Cyprus) and Oceania (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand).

Frank Pilgrim, the Guyanese playwright and journalist who is now in charge of the Culture desk at CARICOM was elected by the Caribbean delegations to represent the region.

The Jamaica Daily News, January 30, 1980, p. 5.