

## RAIN SCIENCE



# REVEALING THE UNTOLD STORIES OF OUR SCIENTISTS

## PROFESSOR THE HON. GERALD LALOR, OM, OJ, CD – “A GIANT OF A MAN”

By Sylvia Adjoa Mitchell

*“Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, Will of God.” Romans 12:2*

*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? Luke 9: 24-5*



### PROFESSOR THE HON. GERALD LALOR, OM, OJ, CD BORN DEC. 15, 1930 – DIED AUGUST 23, 2021

I first met Prof Lalor as my next-door neighbour when I was only a teenager. He married Noelle Cameron and was a father of four. He was a quiet, disciplined, family man. I didn't know then how much of an impact he was making and how his endeavours would affect my career.

#### HIS EARLY DAYS

Gerald Lalor, a Jamaican born in St. Andrew, attended Kingston College on a scholarship, and then the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona where he studied chemistry, physics and mathematics. Soon after attaining his BSc degree (1953), Lalor began working at West Indies Chemical Works, the world's largest producer of logwood dyes, where he also researched for his master's thesis on haematoxylin and haematein. Before he left the company, he had become Chief Chemist. After a year's research at the University of Cambridge on a Leverhulme Colonial Scholarship, he moved to the University of London where he completed his doctorate in physical inorganic chemistry (in 1963). In order to preserve the logwood tree, which was now endangered due to the amount harvested for its dye, he had found a way to make synthetic haematoxylin.



**Gains Scholarship**  
Master Gerald Cecil Lalor, 9-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. G. N. Lalor of St. Andrew, who has been awarded a scholarship to Kingston College. He was a pupil of the Sutherland Preparatory School, Half Way Tree, of which Mrs. Z. M. Sutherland is headmistress. Young Lalor will enter his new school in January.

#### CHEMISTRY DAYS

Professor Gerald Lalor began his career at the UWI in 1960 as an Assistant Lecturer in Chemistry. He visited a number of Ivy League universities in the United States on a Carnegie Fellowship (1966). He subsequently became a Professor of Chemistry in 1969 and was the first West Indian head of the Department of Chemistry between 1969 to 1972.

#### MOVING UP THE RANKS TO LEAD UWI, MONA

Prof Lalor was promoted to Pro-Vice Chancellor in 1974 and was appointed Principal of the Mona Campus from 1991 until 1995. During this time, he established the Biotechnol-

ogy Centre and the Centre for Nuclear Sciences, initiated the computerisation of the campus, laid the foundations for UWIDITE and improved accessibility for the physically challenged.

#### UWIDITE

Professor Lalor introduced satellite technology to broadcast information remotely. This led to UWI Distance Teaching Experiment — later Enterprise — (UWIDITE) in 1982. UWIDITE lectures were broadcast from the main campus to centres in rural Jamaica and other Caribbean islands which were equipped to receive the signals. This was the beginning of UWI Open Campus which now broadcasts lectures to 16 different Caribbean nations (<https://www.open.uwi.edu/>).

#### ICENS

Prof Lalor was Director of the Centre of Nuclear Sciences (now known as the **International Centre for Environmental and Nuclear Science - ICENS**) since its establishment in 1983 until 2011, when he was 80 years old. During this time, he contributed to over 50 of the Centre's scientific publications. As Director, Professor Lalor acquired the use of a Slowpoke Nuclear Reactor for research; and led a research team that developed a geochemical map of elements in Jamaican soils, detected contaminated land; conducted chemical analysis for the mineral, food, environmental and construction industries; and provided important information for government planning agencies. ICENS has the only research nuclear reactor in the English-speaking Caribbean.

ICENS has done a lot of fine work. I'll share one and then let your inquisitive mind find the others on your own. ICENS discovered, reduced, treated and prevented lead poisoning in children in the Kintyre district, an area in St. Andrew, Jamaica where backyard smelting is prevalent. The yards of the lead-contaminated schools at Kintyre were cemented so that children could learn without getting lead poisoning. These studies led to island-wide research on the effects of lead smelting.



#### THE BIOTECHNOLOGY CENTRE

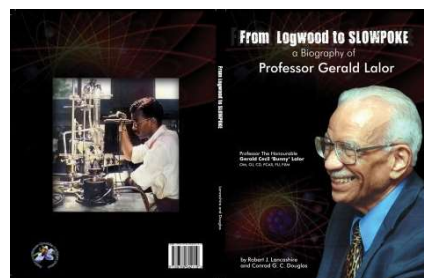
We knew Prof Lalor most intimately when, with a grant from the European Communities, he established The Biotechnology Centre in 1989. Then he worked hard with its first director, Prof. Ahmad, to get the Centre known and supported. I joined the staff in 1999 so without Prof Lalor's effort, I'm not sure where I would be. The Centre has maintained a high standard of training and research facilities and has graduated many persons, including myself, with M Phil and/or Ph D degrees in Biotechnology, carrying out its mandate to teach and train in order to encourage biotechnology-based enterprises. We are still expanding as a MSc in Biotechnology is now being offered, amongst many other activities.

#### OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

Professor Lalor also spearheaded the implementation of programmes for persons with disabilities including the deaf students and supported the development of microcomputer applications. He has also served on regional and international committees focused on Science, Metrication, and Education, as well as Jamaica's Electoral Advisory Committee.

#### BOOK

Prof Lalor is the only Jamaican scientist I am aware of that has a whole book dedicated to his adventures - *From Logwood to Slowpoke: A Biography of Professor Gerald*



Lalor. It is authored by two colleagues.

#### NATIONAL HONOURS

Prof Lalor used his position to make big differences to the science landscape in Jamaica. He did not migrate, he stood and fought. I listened to him on many occasions bemoaning the slow pace of science development in Jamaica. He felt it deeply, passionately, and he worked hard to speed it up. His efforts bore fruit and he was duly recognized for them. In 1980, the Government of Jamaica conferred the national honour, Order of Distinction, Commander Class (CD), on Professor Lalor for his work in science and technology. Other awards he received include Order of Jamaica (1990), National Medal for Science and Technology (2003), Order of Merit (2019). Several other awards have also been given to him.

#### A FEW RESPONSES TO HIS PASSING

Minister of Science, Energy and Technology, Hon. Daryl Vaz - "Jamaica owes a debt of gratitude to Professor Lalor for his exemplary leadership and indelible contribution to science, technology, innovation and academia. He will be greatly missed."

Prime Minister Andrew Holness - "Professor Lalor was an astute scientist and educator. He was a visionary in the scientific community who did pioneering work...We've lost a patriot with a wealth of knowledge. He was truly a giant in his field, and we are indeed, the poorer for his passing...May his soul rest in peace and light perpetual shine on him."

Professor Charles Grant, Director of ICENS - "Professor Lalor was a true visionary, a son of the soil and a builder of institutions..."

#### LALOR QUOTE

Professor Lalor advised students, "If you are interested in how things work and why they work, and how people behave, any of these things, I don't think there can be any career that can be more fascinating than science...but it's not easy."

#### FINAL WORD

Prof Lalor decided to impact Jamaica and he has. Through his research, his leadership and the establishment of many new initiatives (and buildings to house them) at UWI Mona – UWIDITE (1982), ICENS (1984) and The Biotechnology Centre (1989), he has ensured his name will be mentioned whenever science is discussed in Jamaica. I do not know in whom this great scientist believed but the Lord has given me a word of warning to aspiring and practising scientists - work on your legacy but do it under the guidance and protection of God's leading and instruction. You do not want to be remembered on earth and lose out on eternity.

#### REFERENCES

*From Logwood to Slowpoke: A Biography of Professor Gerald Lalor*, by RJ Lancashire and CG Douglas, Guaiacum Officinale Chronicles Publishers Limited, ISBN: 978-976-96421-1-9, 2019

<http://icons.niherst.gov.tt/icon/gerald-lalor-c12/>  
<https://jis.gov.jm/media/JA-Inventors-Innov-22-12-15.pdf>  
[https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/the-uwii-hails-prof-emeritus-lalor-as-brilliant-visionary\\_229610](https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/the-uwii-hails-prof-emeritus-lalor-as-brilliant-visionary_229610)  
<https://barbados.loopnews.com/content/uwii-mourns-passing-professor-gerald-lalor-1>

Dr. Sylvia Adjoa Mitchell, sylvia.mitchell@uwimona.edu.jm. Senior Lecturer, Medicinal Plant Research Group, The Biotechnology Centre, UWI, Mona