

New Waves in the Caribbean

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There was a time when the Caribbean area loomed large on the American foreign policy scene. The Monroe Doctrine, the Cuban war, canal concerns, dollar-diplomacy—these issues occupied not only the time of diplomats but the attention of press and public as well. Yet now, ten years after the Cuban missile confrontation, seven after the Dominican Republic fiasco, Americans treat the Caribbean with monumental indifference. Rather than an area of great political concern, it has become merely a resort for winter holidays.

But profound changes are under way in the Caribbean precisely in those islands known only for their tourist appeal. New forces in the British West Indies, traditionally the safe and stable members of the regional community, are transforming once sleepy tropical isles into fully conscious members of the Third World. One such force is the movement toward West Indian integration.

The most prescient West Indians have long realized that the countries of their area—Jamaica, Guiana, Trinidad-Tobago, and the many smaller islands of the British Caribbean—could not successfully develop alone. Thus, when Britain finally agreed to West Indian independence, it came not for each separate colony but for a newly formed Federation of the West Indies. Inaugurated in 1958 and including Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and the seven islands in the Windward and Leeward groups, the Federation lasted four short years. Despite the influence of West Indian federalists, it was soon found that insular feelings—"islandism" if you will—far outweighed the spirit of unity.

From the beginning the smaller, poorer territories of the Leewards and Windwards distrusted the larger and richer members of the Federation, fearing

that they would fall under the uncaring control of their bigger partners. At the same time, Jamaica, Trinidad and, to some extent, Barbados dreaded the prospect of being saddled with the support of the less advanced islands to the detriment of their own progress. The result was a weak federation that satisfied no one. As Amitai Etzioni has pointed out, of the basic forces required for successful unification, the Federation of the West Indies lacked all three. The federal government possessed no coercive power to enforce its decisions. It carried little economic weight, since the Constitution denied it important taxing powers and failed even to establish effective free trade among Federation partners. And finally, the Federation could call on none of the essential "identitive assets," those cultural and national symbols that bind people together. The distances between islands, exacerbated by poor transportation and communication facilities, bred separation and suspicion. Rather than cooperating, the individual colonies had historically competed against each other for imperial favor, international markets and metropolitan aid. The result was that islanders thought of themselves as St. Lucians, Grenadians or Jamaicans, but not West Indians.

Jamaica pulled out of the Federation first in favor of her own independence, and Trinidad-Tobago soon followed suit. Through three years of fruitless negotiations politicians attempted to rebuild a federation of the Little Eight (Barbados and the Windward and Leeward Islands), but talks foundered on the continuing jealousy and distrust among island leaders. The decision of Barbados to declare independence in 1966 smashed what little hope remained for a small federation.

With Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad out on their own (Guiana, then British Guiana, had never wished to join the Federation), the British and the small islands resorted to the expedient of the Associated State. Under their novel constitution all the islands

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in the Windward and Leeward chains, with the exception of Montserrat, which retains colonial status, enjoy most of the trappings of sovereignty and exercise full domestic self-government, but London retains responsibility for their foreign affairs and defense. The result is that the resources of a combined population of 600,000 must provide for seven national governments.

What many viewed as the final absurdity in this process of fragmentation was tiny Anguilla's 1967 declaration of independence from the Associated State of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. The unilateral action by the leaders of this dry hulk of coral which barely supports its 4,500 inhabitants encouraged others to assert their "island rights," and Antigua soon faced threats of secession by Barbuda, as did Grenada from its dependency on Carriacou. No matter what the justification for the Anguilla "revolution"—and this writer is one of those who sympathize with the Anguillians—the vision of political atomization that it conjured shocked even many of those who had helped bury the Federation.

With the Anguilla rebellion as a catalyst and spurred on by the growing awareness that even the "larger" countries (the biggest, Jamaica, has a population of two million) suffer from insufficient domestic markets and limited resources, the British Caribbean has, since 1967, taken unexpected and far-reaching steps toward integration. A new optimism has replaced the despair that followed in the wake of the Federation disaster.

The first big break came in economics in 1968 with the establishment of the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA). Joined by all the Leewards, Windwards, Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, Belize and Guiana, the agreement aimed to create a larger domestic market for regional products by gradually eliminating all local tariff barriers. At the same time, an agricultural protocol was signed to encourage food production and thus reduce the high import bill for home and tourist consumption; committees were established to study ways of locating industry in the less developed countries, namely the Windward and Leeward Islands.

Since CARIFTA began, efforts have continued to "deepen" the arrangements, and the Commonwealth Caribbean Regional Secretariat, headed by Trinidadian economist William Demas, has shown real leadership in this area. Though efforts to encourage regional food production and locate industries in the less developed territories have not yet proven very successful, CARIFTA has aided regional trade and paved the way for further economic cooperation.

In 1970 the Caribbean Development Bank began operations. Capitalized by Caribbean countries, the United Kingdom and Canada, and aided by the World Bank, the CDB can make low-cost development loans to member countries and their citizens.

The policy in the initial years gives special attention to the needs of the less developed countries (which in this case includes not only CARIFTA members but the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands, the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands), and under the leadership of W. Arthur Lewis the Bank promises to play a significant role in aiding the smaller states of the region. The very existence of the CDB manifests a new willingness on the part of the more developed countries to help their poorer partners.

Just five months ago, in the boldest development yet, the limited CARIFTA agreement was transformed into a full-fledged Caribbean Community and Common Market. Trinidad-Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica and Guiana are the founding members of the new organization called CARICOM. Belize, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis, Grenada and Dominica have pledged to enter the Community May 1, 1974. Only Antigua and Montserrat in the Leeward Islands have chosen to hang back, for reasons too complex to explore here.

The first specific CARICOM agreements indicate the significance of this new departure. The arrangements include: a common external tariff, a double-taxation agreement, harmonization of fiscal incentives (tax breaks) for outside investors, commitment to rationalization of Caribbean agriculture and location of industries in the smaller territories, and agreement to form one united front in negotiations begun this fall with the European Common Market. Taken altogether, these steps have created an impressive new basis for wider Caribbean cooperation.

As progress in West Indian economic cooperation continues apace, new intellectual and cultural ties have also begun spanning the distances from island to island. The primary impetus is the burgeoning movement for Black Power or, more appropriately, Caribbean solidarity. On the one hand are those who emphasize the political and economic components of the campaign, especially the young radical economists at the University of the West Indies. Just as they help lay the theoretical groundwork for the increased economic integration, so they are producing more and more of the philosophical justification for such cooperation. The goal is the economic and political independence of the West Indies, the elimination of external control of their society, the growth of the Caribbean as a self-conscious and self-reliant part of the Third World. The method is strength through unity.

On the other hand are the writers and artists who stress the common heritage of the region, the shared history of oppression and bravery and the very real grounds for pride in a wonderfully rich culture. One of the most exciting demonstrations of this side of the movement came at Carifesta, the first Caribbean arts festival held in Georgetown, Guiana, in September, 1972. It was not necessary for all the partici-

pants to be black, for they were all Caribbean. Nor was all the culture from Africa, for Caribbean influences include not only the African, but the Indian, Dutch, British, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The amalgam was uniquely West Indian, a beautiful mixture of backgrounds only now blooming into a heterogeneous whole.

Though strides toward economic cooperation continue and a new sense of regional cultural unity is slowly evolving, the old insular politics persist as well and at times threaten to impede the steady growth of West Indian integration. Each island leader still enjoys his own little fiefdom, and few show much readiness to relinquish their petty positions of power for the larger goal. In fact, the political tendency recently on the smaller islands is to take the final plunge out of association with Britain and into complete independence. Mr. Pindling of the Bahamas set the tone with his belligerent push for a clean break with the United Kingdom. Now Grenada intends to drop her associated status, and Antigua's premier has indicated similar intentions. The alleged benefits and glories of sovereignty are seductive indeed, and, as has happened so often in the Third World, independence is offered as a false solution to the real problems of economics and society.

The historic mistrust between islands still distorts interstate relations. The smaller islands complain with some justification that so far CARIFTA has aided the more developed countries without pro-

viding any simultaneous help to their own economies. The bigger territories still and too often treat the smaller with indifference or disdain. As witness the comment of a former Jamaican cabinet minister when asked if he had visited any of the Associated States on a recent trip through the Caribbean: "Of course not. One doesn't visit those places, one merely flies over them."

Given all this, chances for meaningful political union for the West Indies seem remote. Efforts in 1971 toward a federation among the seven Associated States and Guiana were torpedoed by the premiers of St. Lucia and Grenada. Premier LeBlanc of Dominica was so disgusted that he has since declared his refusal to join in any other such moves that include the two culprits.

Yet it is doubtful that the centrifugal forces of island politics can long stay the logic of Caribbean integration. The next generation of leaders will have been nurtured on more radical doctrines of Caribbean identity. The progress coming out of existing economic cooperation will create new demands for development, demands that the region can try to meet only through joint action. No West Indian debates the necessity of regional cooperation any longer. It remains to be seen how far, how fast and how effectively the British Caribbean can establish the attitudes and institutions of real unity. With the pressures of international trade and domestic population growth, there isn't much time left.