

*St. Lucia is looking to the U.N. for aid—
will it look to Castro as well?*

Birth of an Island-Nation

BY JAMES M. READ

St. Lucia, one of the British West Indies and the most recent to achieve independence (February 22, 1979), provides a case study of a tiny island-state's prospects for development. It is also the prototype of a Caribbean nation in the throes of choosing whether to remain in the Western camp or to follow the way of Fidel Castro and his Grenadian ally, Maurice Bishop.

Arriving at Hewanorra Airport just a week after independence, I was struck by the ubiquitous signs proclaiming "One nation, one goal, harmony," "Freedom a state of richness," "Independence a new beginning," "Nationhood a new age." Such obviously government-inspired posters contrasted sharply with the more humorous and homespun slogans on buses, jitneys, and boats: "Time is Money," "Psalm 124," "God is Love." A year later only the latter slogans remain.

St. Lucia—mountainous, palm-studded, and some fourteen by twenty-seven miles in size—lies low in the chain of islands stretching from Cuba to Venezuela. Its population of 110,000 is mainly engaged in the cultivation of bananas. Tourism is the country's second largest industry, but even the largest of its seven first-class hotels has fewer than three hundred rooms. With a per capita annual income of \$450, St. Lucia easily qualifies for membership in the developing world.

Named by Columbus for the saint on whose day he first sighted the island in 1503 on his fourth voyage, St. Lucia was the site of many colonial battles, actually changing hands between the British and the French seventeen times before it became part of the British Empire in 1803.

During his first week in office I discussed with the first prime minister, John Compton, the status of the new nation. I said I was still not completely clear what independence meant, since St. Lucia had been an associated state within the British Commonwealth since 1967. Compton explained: "We now have control of two elements we previously lacked: defense and foreign affairs." Somewhat shocked, I asked: "How are you going to defend yourselves? Are you going to build up an army and a navy?" The answer: "We have other things to spend our money on, we don't need armed forces: No one is going to attack us."

A year later I returned to St. Lucia, after talking first with its new permanent delegate to the United Nations and familiarizing myself with the major foreign policy pronouncements of the foreign minister *cum* deputy prime minister, George Odlum.

Much had changed in the intervening year. Mr. Compton's United Worker's party had been badly defeated at the polls and the government was now in the hands of the Labour party, headed by Prime Minister Allan Louisy. Civic order had been badly disrupted by a wave of vandalism that followed a rally of Compton's party a fortnight after its defeat. But even more ominous for the future was an intraparty dispute between Prime Minister Louisy and the two-hatted George Odlum.

Odlum insists that when the new government took office in July, 1979, Louisy promised to step down from the premiership within six months, making way for Odlum. Louisy asserts he had told his fellow party leaders that he would not remain in the top office for the whole term of the government—five years, barring called elections—but would consult with his colleagues in six months or so. If they were dissatisfied with his regime, he would make way for others.

Mr. Odlum is, like Mr. Louisy, a British-educated lawyer, but unlike his rival he possesses a charismatic presence. The Labour party's parliamentary group wobbles on the issue; one swing vote separates the two candidates. The real decision-makers are the members of the party executive committee, which is 80 per cent for Louisy.

Many people, especially those in business or with more than average financial means, are suspicious of Odlum, convinced that he leans very much to the left and to Cuba. Barely a month after taking office the new foreign minister met with his opposite numbers from neighboring Grenada and Dominica to negotiate the "St. George's Declaration," agreeing in principle to cooperate in a number of regional matters. Since Grenada had recently had a revolution and was enjoying the open support of Castro, and Dominica had just overturned its government by strikes and parliamentary pressure, there could be little doubt about the leftist tilt of these three mini-states.

It is now an open secret that sixteen men from St. Lucia were being trained by Cubans in Grenada as "body guards," an arrangement worked out by Odlum

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without the knowledge of his chief. When I asked the prime minister whether, as rumored, Cubans were training St. Lucians on his island, he said he had no way of knowing, since they could be training in the heart of the island where the government has no means of penetrating.

STRENGTH FROM WEAKNESS

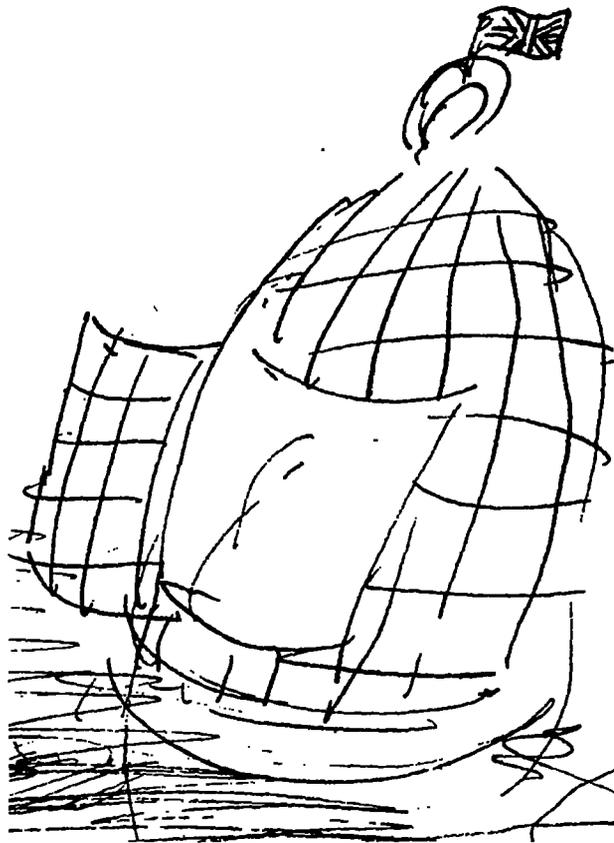
In my talk with Mr. Compton last year I had touched a sore point, asking "From which of the U.N. agencies do you expect to get the most help?" The answer was brief: "Not any of them." Compton charged that a poor, small country like St. Lucia could not afford U.N. aid, which comes in small doses, requiring an extraordinary amount of overhead and paperwork.

The new government of Mr. Louisy does not look at the U.N. with skepticism but, rather, with unalloyed optimism and "rising expectations." Dr. Barry Auguste, an experienced St. Lucian diplomat trained in Trinidad, was designated ambassador to the U.N. and the United States. Mr. Odlum, as foreign minister, arrived in New York in September and made a speech as St. Lucia became the 152nd member of the world body. He raised none of the controversial questions his predecessor had threatened to raise, promising to "continue to foster the spirit of good-neighborliness and international cooperation in a peaceful world for the benefit of the people of the international community."

From my talk with the new permanent delegate it was clear that St. Lucia would exploit every possible bilateral and multilateral means of obtaining assistance for its development. At the same time, the foreign minister made it clear that he appreciated the vulnerability of an island-state but that here, as in other respects, he intended to fashion a source of strength from a potential weakness. Odlum is a great believer in regional coalitions. Thus in searching for an answer to the energy problem, he told the General Assembly that "the solution must have foundations rooted in every regional arrangement." As a consequence he stressed the concern of his government for a successful conclusion of the Conference on the Law of the Sea.

U.S. assistance for development is not overlooked. The first prime minister had expressed enthusiastic appreciation for the fine work of the Rockefeller Foundation in fighting schistosomiasis, a debilitating disease caused by worms. The present minister of community development, John Odlum, brother of George Odlum, praised the contribution of the Peace Corps in providing 250 teachers over the previous twenty years. A grant of \$1.2 million from the U.S. Government for school building was given banner headlines last February by *The Voice*, St. Lucia's only newspaper.

While George Odlum pursues the goal of increased development assistance from the U.S., through the U.N., and wherever he can find it, he is not only feuding with his party chief, the prime minister, but fending off bitter attacks directed at him personally by the Workers' party. Mr. Compton has charged that the prime minister was babysitting at home while "his Deputy parades abroad like some sawdust Caesar, dressed like Idi Amin, to posture on the world stage while encouraging terrorism at home." In contrast to



Georges Dauphin

his own, nonmilitary regime, Compton predicts that his opponents will end up by calling in the army, "selected from their own Hoodlums or Odlums."

Actually, the present prime minister also assured me he saw no need for an army and that it would take a two-thirds vote of Parliament (seventeen members) and two-thirds of a popular referendum to raise one. Odlum, on the other hand, had helped draw up the St. George's Declaration, which stated: "The Governments are not opposed in principle to the establishment of a regional military force provided its operations will be limited to the countering of external aggression, including the threat of invasion of mercenaries."

It is certainly not unthinkable that George Odlum would lean toward Castro to achieve his aims. In the *Caribbean Business News* of February, 1980, Odlum is referred to as the "Cuba-oriented Deputy Prime Minister," and Tad Szulc makes the point in the *New York Times* of May 25: "Next to Castro, [Grenada prime minister] Bishop's closest ally is St. Lucia's Deputy Prime Minister George Odlum, that island's de facto ruler."

On the other hand, Freedom House, in its annual rating of *political* rights, currently puts St. Lucia in the second highest ["freest"] category—in the same class as Italy, Japan, and India. In addition, St. Lucia voted with the U.S. in the Security Council rather than with the USSR, Cuba, and Grenada on the Afghanistan issue. It is anyone's guess whether such a country, under present conditions, would be tempted to follow blindly Castro's lead. The charisma of George Odlum will take him far, but many of his fellow citizens are wary of his charms. **WV**