

■ With the PNM victory Trinidad is now in a position to introduce needed social reforms

Significance of the PNM Victory in Trinidad

By George Padmore

THE sweeping victory of the Left-wing People's National Movement in the Trinidad general election which has just taken place under the new constitution is one of the most significant events in West Indian politics in recent years. It will not only contribute towards the constitutional advancement of that colony along clearly defined party lines. It will also help to bring into being a socialist house of representatives and cabinet when the first general elections take place under the proposed federal system early in 1958.

Although Trinidad is the richest and most industrialized Caribbean colony, thanks to its oil and asphalt

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resources, which supplement the sugar production which predominates West Indian economy, the island has up till now been the most politically backward. As a result, Trinidad has been a retarding element in the formation of an All-Caribbean Federation of progressive political movements committed to a socialist pattern of society. With the complete defeat of the local conservatives, masquerading under the highfaluting title of the Party of Political Progress Groups, led by Albert Gomes, C.M.G., the former minister of trade and commerce, as well as the so-called People's Democratic Movement, a Hindu communalist organization which is opposed to federation, the P.N.M. government will be able to introduce urgent social and economic reforms. It will throw its full weight behind Norman Manley's People National Party Government of Jamaica and Grantley Adams' Labor Government of Bar-



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DR. ERIC WILLIAMS

bados in securing a socialist majority in the West Indian Federal Government.

The credit for this remarkable change in the political climate Trinidad is due in large measure to Dr. Eric Williams, the party leader, and his able and better-known lieutenant, Learie Constantine, the famous international cricketer, both of whom were elected to the Legislative Council.

It was a hard-fought contest. For the Roman Catholic hierarchy, which is the most powerful religious body in the island, campaigned openly against the P.N.M., since the party advocates birth control and state control of education.

The initiative in forming the P.N.M. was taken by Dr. Williams only eight months ago, after he had severed connections with the Caribbean Research Council, of which he was deputy chairman and editor of

the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission publications. Prior to joining the staff of the Council in 1944, Dr. Williams held the position of assistant professor of social and political science under Dr. Ralph Bunche at Howard University in the United States.

Dr. Williams was born in Trinidad in 1911, the son of a Negro civil servant. He won the Island Classical Scholarship in 1931 and went up to Oxford in the following year. After a brilliant academic career, he achieved a double first in the honor school of modern history and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for his thesis on the "Economic Aspect of the Abolition of the British West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery." His book *Capitalism and Slavery* (North Carolina University Press), which is considered the standard work on the subject, brought him in 1940 a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship for advanced studies on social and economic conditions throughout the Caribbean area.

Although the Trinidad constitution is not as advanced as that of Jamaica or Barbados, it goes beyond the previous one. Its limitations are due largely to the opposition to a more liberal constitution which came from the leaders of the Party of Political Progress Groups, the spokesmen for Trinidad vested interests. Under the old constitution, introduced by the Labor Government in 1950, the Legislative Council consisted of a Speaker appointed by the Governor, three ex-officio members—the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney General and the Financial Secretary—five members nominated by the Gover-

nor, and eighteen members, elected by universal adult suffrage. The Executive Council, the chief instrument of government, was composed of the Governor as chairman, the three ex-officio members of the legislature, five elected and one nominated members. The Governor assigned to the elected members the portfolios of education and social services; labor, industry and commerce; agriculture and lands; communications and works; health and local government. No provision was made for the office of Chief Minister, but Albert Gomes, officially the minister of labor, industry and commerce, assumed the role of Chief Minister *de facto*.

Under the present constitution, the Speaker will be elected from either within or outside the Assembly. Representative membership has been increased from eighteen to twenty-four, but the principle of nominating five members has been retained. By this device the Governor will be able to appoint to the Council conservatives and other reactionaries who have been rejected by the people at the polls. In addition, the Colonial Secretary and the Attorney General remain members of the Legislative Council, while the duties of the Financial Secretary will be assumed by a minister. On the executive side, the Governor will continue to preside. Apart from the Colonial Secretary and Attorney General, there will be eight other members selected

from among the majority party in the Legislative Council, including the Chief Minister.

As leader of the majority party, Dr. Williams will have to provide eight ministers from his small band of thirteen, which will be cutting his political cloth very close, unless he is able to form a coalition with one of the smaller opposition groups. These are the Home Rule Party, headed by the erratic and flamboyant trade unionist, Uriah "Buzz" Butler, which has three seats, or the even smaller right-wing Labor Party, which won two seats.

The largest opposition party is the Hindu Democratic Movement, which, unlike Dr. Jagan's P.P.P. in British Guiana, is openly reactionary and racialist.

Whatever arrangement Dr. Williams makes with opposition groups in order to consolidate his position in the legislature, his Government is committed to a program of higher wages, social security, better housing, more and better schools, new industries and full employment, as well as full support for West Indian Federation and Dominion status within five years.

Against the kind of colonial economy existing in the West Indies, the People's National Movement has a formidable task ahead and deserves the full support and backing of the British labor and trade union movements, and of all anti-imperialists and anti-colonialists in Britain.

