

Executive Councils or Cabinets where elected ministers are in the majority; this means in practice that these three territories are close to self-government in internal affairs. For practical purposes their powers are limited only in respect of foreign affairs, defence and internal security. The Windward and Leeward Islands have not yet attained the same degree of self-government, partly because most of them are financially dependent on the United Kingdom, but even here a ministerial form of government has been introduced.

Economic development of the islands has been and will continue to be limited by their scattered geography and their small size. The economies of all the territories are mainly agricultural and depend on export crops of which sugar is the chief. Oil in Trinidad and bauxite in Jamaica are the only minerals of commercial significance. A growing industry is tourism, which so far has been developed mainly in Jamaica and Barbados. But it is on agriculture that the territories must mainly rely for increasing their capacity to support their people.

The economic difficulties of the islands are aggravated by the major problem of the West Indies—its expanding population. The islands are heavily overpopulated and the situation is not improving. The best solution would appear to lie in extensive industrial development but such opportunities are not to be found in the West Indies. Home markets are small, raw materials are few, labour costs are not so low nor special skills so high as generally to counterbalance these disadvantages. Closer co-operation is needed if their economic problems are to be solved.

Some Historical Notes on the Federation Idea

The idea of federating the British West Indies is not a new one. In 1922 it was discussed but rejected because of local opposition. During the economic strains of the 1930's the idea again appeared. A royal commission examined the question in 1938 and reported "that while local opinion has made a considerable advance in the direction of political unity . . . it is doubtful whether the time is yet ripe for the introduction of any large scheme of federation." Nevertheless, the commission recommended that a combination of the West Indian colonies into one political entity was the ideal towards which policy should be directed. In the meantime, attempts should be made to encourage regional thinking.

Undoubtedly the greatest single influence in developing a regional viewpoint among West Indians was the Second World War. Regional organizations such as the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, the Barbados Sugar Cane Breeding Station and the West Indies Development and Welfare Organization brought West Indians together on a regional basis to tackle their common problems and helped to lay the foundation for regional political action; but it was the demands of wartime cooperation in the Caribbean which did most to break down the isolationism bred by an island life. Communications were vastly improved, impressive military establishments were built at top speed, military and naval bases were leased to the United States, and in all these activities the West Indians participated. When the war ended and the pace of economic expansion slackened the time was ripe for another attempt to bring the territories closer together.

In 1945, the Secretary of State for the Colonies launched the idea of federation once again, stressing the United Kingdom Government's view that