

Latin America

would permit them to join. The result is an English-speaking bloc within the Organization that is already significant and could in the near future approach parity with the Latinos. Some of these countries are barely specks on the map, but the Council of the OAS operates on a one-nation, one-vote basis.

The shift of power is spurred on by the willingness of the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Surinam (a former Dutch colony) to vote with the English speakers on most issues. They are bound by various ties beyond language — the Commonwealth, or the Caribbean, or their negritude — which have resulted in a *realpolitik* cohesion.

If all this adds up to a newtime religion, there is a prophet. He is Val T. McComie, a 62-year-old Barbadian diplomat who is presently the OAS's Assistant Secretary General. McComie is a tall man in pinstripes with a shock of white hair and a likable manner who is well-positioned to turn the Organization around. If the OAS has traditionally been stymied by the internecine disputes of its members, and rendered powerless by the "doctrine of non-intervention" that has protected some of the worst despots in history from their neighbours, then the rise of McComie may be a signal that a change is in the wind.

He became the second ranking officer in 1980 because the incumbent Secretary-General, Alejandro Orfila, found himself in difficulty in his bid for a second term, and McComie became a natural ally. The South and Central American countries had a plethora of candidates and solutions, but only McComie could deliver a solid bloc of votes. The Guatemalan who had held the Assistant's job simply didn't have the cards when Orfila and McComie began to deal.

But McComie's present position is not solely the result of a political manoeuvre. As the Ambassador from Barbados to the OAS, he quickly won the confidence and respect of the other ambassadors with his fluent Spanish and accommodating manner. He has good connections in both the United States and Venezuela, where he also served as ambassador. He is experienced in international affairs and is a quick learner.

Insiders expect McComie to be elected Secretary-General in the next scheduled election in 1984, or to accede to the post if Orfila resigns before then. And if he does get the top job, his tenure will be both a cause and a symptom of profound change. The paralysis that has inhibited the OAS — for instance, its bureaucratic inability even to discuss the question of El Salvador on a formal basis — would surely be quickly gone. McComie has behind him a solid group of backers on whom he can rely for votes when he needs them. With 18 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, there are already 14 other members or prospective members. And to the latter list, one may add St. Kitts and Nevas (UN members already), the Netherlands Antilles and the great behemoth of the North, Canada.

Q: What is the significance of the fact that you are the first individual from the Commonwealth to hold a top OAS position?

Mr. McComie: Well, the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean had not been members of the OAS prior to 1962 so that our presence here and the ability to make some impact on the other members of the Organization dates

only from then. When you recognize that in less than two decades you have a national of the English-speaking Commonwealth Caribbean who has been elected to the post of Assistant Secretary General then, one might say that "we have come a long way, baby". But I think that this honor that was paid to me is due to several factors. Latin America recognized to its relief that having the English-speaking Caribbean as members would not result in changing the character of the Organization. Such fears are related to the fact that perhaps as English-speaking member countries we might be dominated by the largest English-speaking member of the Organization, the U.S. I think they discovered to their relief that the Caribbean countries, in spite of their size, have actually performed with a degree of independence. We tended to bring a new element to the OAS which was our tradition of respect for the law, supremacy of the law, and the fact that we took the principles that underly the charter of the Organization very seriously. We approached our determinations on the principles of the Charter rather than because of some alignment we felt with any one country.

Q: The OAS is still largely thought of by outsiders as hispanic.

Mr. McComie: I would think that there is a great deal of substance in that affirmation. Sometimes we are aware of it in very small ways even with respect to the availability of documents in the English language. Most of the documents originate in Spanish, simply because the majority of the staff in the Secretariat is Latin American.

Q: Politically, is there significance to that? They were the original Charter members.

Mr. McComie: Yes, there is some significance in the sense that we, the countries from the English-speaking Caribbean, have shown a great degree of maturity in understanding that if we tried to flex our muscles too much in the Organization we might give rise to some incident. We were very much aware when we joined the Organization that our history, our culture, our language, one might even say our political traditions, made us distinct from Latin America. Yet we did not insist that we should be added as a separate element coming into the Organization. For about 15 years, we accepted their definition of us as being part of Latin America.

English language gaining on Spanish

Q: Some of your recent members are St. Lucia, Dominica, Antigua & Barbuda, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, and The Bahamas. Guyana and Belize are later possibilities if you make a Charter change. I see the traditional hispanic countries plus Brazil, adding up to something like 20 members and when I count up the others including the English-speaking Caribbean, Haiti and Surinam, which generally vote with the English-speaking countries, this new bloc is close to a majority, or at least a parity.

Mr. McComie: Again, there was this initial fear that somehow or other there would be a bloc of Commonwealth Caribbean countries that would, by exercising their votes in a monolithic way, be able to dominate the Organization; but again the proof of the pudding has been in the eating and experience has shown that the Caribbean countries do not necessarily vote as a bloc. We have also come to recog-