

BARBADOS ADVOCATE

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PARTY PERIL

THE breach which has been widening in the Labour Party of Barbados for some time was nakedly exposed this week during the debate on the resolutions to increase salaries and pay leave passages to certain government servants.

On several occasions during meetings of the House since the Labour Party was elected to power with a majority of 3 over all other parties the government and the Leader of the House of Assembly have been criticised by members of the Labour Party in the House.

Criticism has even been carried to the extent of voting against the government during a division.

During the division this week criticism of the government was so severe that only seven members of the Labour Party voted with the government. Of these seven members four were members of the Executive Committee.

The government party would not have obtained a majority had the Electors' Association joined with the Congress Party and the two independent members for St. John in opposing the resolutions moved by the Leader of the House of Assembly. The episode reflects the unsatisfactory working of party government in a miniature assembly. Overlooking the unrepresentative character of the present House of Assembly by which voters in thinly populated St. Andrew and St. Joseph share equality in members for St. John, partly from the two St. Michael, the existence of more than two parties makes true party government impossible in a house of Assembly of 24.

The Barbados Labour Party with a majority of eight members and a total of sixteen is fortunately placed to carry out a government policy. Yet that policy is only being carried out against a background of constant attack and criticism from members of the Labour Party.

The real opposition to government policy in the Barbados House of Assembly is coming partly from the two independent members for St. John, partly from the two Congress members for St. Philip and partly from critics within the Labour Party.

The leader of the official opposition the leader that is of the Electors' Association supports the government on almost every major issue: and the remaining three members of the Electors' Association operate more as free lances than as members of a political party.

The working of the party system in the House of Assembly may not unfairly be likened to the sputtering along on seven cylinders of a party machine which ought to beat smoothly on sixteen. The names of Messrs. Cummins, Walcott, Cox, Smith, Bryan, and Holder are the names of those who may be described as the "loyalist" members of the Labour Party. On these six Mr. Adams can depend for absolute support of all measures approved by the party executive. Other members of the party do not show the same unwavering loyalty or do not support all government measures.

Messrs. Lewis and Barrow have on many occasions since last December expressed opinions sharply in conflict with those expressed by members of the Executive Committee in the House of Assembly.

Other members of the House have also not hesitated to criticise government spokesmen and records of divisions show that criticism has been followed by actual voting against the government.

During the division which followed Tuesday's debate on the resolutions to increase salaries and pay leave passages to certain government servants only the "loyalists" and the Leader of the opposition supported the government.

By refraining from voting against the government the "independent" members of the Labour Party showed awareness of party responsibility by not defeating the government (which represents the Barbados Labour Party). But their deliberate action in withholding support for their own party in a decision of major importance to the island's future is none the less serious because the government was spared defeat.

A party with sixteen of the 24 seats in a House of Assembly needs more than seven votes from its members on issues of major importance if it is to enjoy the reputation of possessing the confidence of its supporters.

The obtaining of less than half of the potential votes (although two of them were obtained from members representing the largest populated parish in the island) cannot be said to represent a triumph for the Barbados Labour Party. If Ministerial status is to become reality in Barbados greater party discipline and greater party loyalty will be necessary.

What happened this week in the House of Assembly cannot be overlooked or regarded with careless optimism. The party system was almost wrecked. If it goes what will replace it?

Our Common Heritage - 9

Samuel Jackman Prescod

By F. A. Hoyos

A Neglected Corner

Samuel Jackman Prescod lies buried in a neglected corner of St. Mary's Churchyard. The grave, that should be a shrine for all Barbadians who cherish freedom and justice, is overgrown with weeds, and the iron rails that enclose it seem to wear the rust of ages. The words on the little stone monument at its head can only be read by those who go down on their knees and peer closely at the letters. In short, there is nothing to show that the present generation gives any thought to the man who in his day was acclaimed by all classes as the saviour of his country. While a handsome statue at the entrance to the House of Assembly does honour to Conrad Reeves, his disciple, there is nothing to commemorate the master himself except the untended grave almost ingloriously hidden away in a corner of the churchyard at St. Mary's.

Yet Prescod's greatness rises triumphantly over the silence and shame of his neglected tomb. The visitor to St. Mary's is easily transported to the vibrant days when Prescod moved in his material world, controlling the men and events that the battle consumed. For closely is the hustings where he won his victories as the first coloured member of the House of Assembly. With our imagination's eye we watch the sturdy, upright figure striding among our ancestors, and winning their admiration with its strength and vitality. We see the bold and dauntless countenance that inspired his countrymen with love and fear, but never with contempt. We hear the burning oratory that used all the resources of invective, sarcasm and persuasion to further the cause of progress and reform. We see in him the first coloured man to stand before the people who bore his vast responsibilities with a courage that was a thing apart. And then we feel profoundly grateful that at a time of revolution Prescod was given the strength and wisdom to direct the whirlwind and control the storm.

His Early Life

Prescod was born an illegitimate child early in the nineteenth century. His family was a large one and had to battle with the conditions that faced the free coloured people at that time. He attended St. Mary's School and later was apprenticed to the joiner's trade, this being one of the highest forms of occupations a man of his class could reach. Early in his life Prescod was filled with a strong sense of the injustices suffered by his race. The condition of his fellow was galling to a man of his proud and sensitive spirit. The free coloured people had little opportunities for education. They were forbidden to walk on the pavements of the city and they could not give evidence in the law courts against a white man. They could not obtain employment beyond the mechanical trades and humble positions in the shops. They were frequently subjected to indignities, as Prescod himself was on the occasion when he was ejected from the Legislative Chamber where he had lingered, after completing a mental job in the hope of hearing the debates of the Assembly.

In addition, as one historian has written, the free coloured people "saw their brethren in bondage ruthlessly driven by the taskmaster's whip. They saw them beaten, maltreated and often murdered without the possibility of redress. Their daughters were the playthings of a white man's idle hours. They were flouted and refused the opportunities and privileges to which they felt themselves entitled." It was in this social climate that Prescod spent his early life and it is not surprising that, like his fellowmen, he acquired "a burning thirst for knowledge and a settled determination to throw off the yoke of the oppressor."

But Prescod entered his teens, things began to take a turn for the better. In 1818 the murder of a slave was established as a felony and the same year the Combermere charity school was started for coloured children. The new liberal spirit, that was beginning to show itself, was furthered by the great work Bishop Coleridge started in 1825 for the welfare of the Island.

The "Pestilent Demagogue"

Prescod realised that, if the liberal movement was to go forward, it had to receive the support of all men who were capable of giving any service. He gave up the joiner's trade and retired to live a life of study and contemplation. His purpose was to make up for the little education he had received as a youngster and he spent several years cultivating and developing his talents. For he had already decided what was to be the great mission of his life—to improve the condition of the free coloured people, to work for the freedom of the slaves and then to fight for their rights as free citizens.

His period of self-training completed, Prescod began the campaign of agitation that was to earn him such names as the "pestilent demagogue" and the "O'Connell of Barbados." The first fruits of his agitation was the admission of the free coloured people to the vote in 1831. It was a notable triumph and entitled him to be called the father of franchise reform in the Island.

When slavery was abolished on August 1, 1834, it was decided that the ex-slaves should continue to work as apprentices for the planters. Prescod strongly criticised this as a system for continuing slavery and his arguments won him the support of the Governor, Sir Lionel Smith. The Legislature was to regret in later years that it did not accept his wise counsel.

Prescod returned to the fray when the Police Act was passed. While supporting the Act, he bitterly criticised certain clauses that were offensive to coloured people, since they

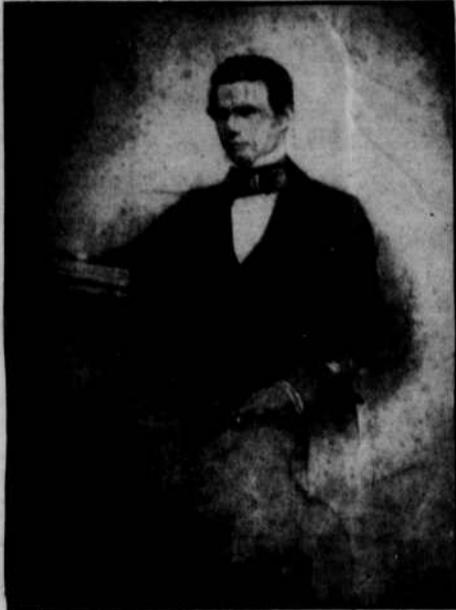
sought to maintain unjust distinction between persons of European and African extraction. Here he was successful for, while the House ignored his views at first, they were forced to accept them later when the Secretary of State gave his approval to the principle championed by Prescod.

But Prescod knew that he would get nowhere unless he could get a newspaper to ventilate his views. His opportunity came when the "New Times"—the first coloured newspaper in the colony's history—was started and he became its first editor. A year later he started the "Liberal", the radical journal he was to edit for twenty-five years.

In the Press, Prescod continued his task to the delight of his friends and the consternation of his enemies. He stood forth as the champion of the labouring population and waged unrelenting war against all who tried to bar their progress. Sir Evan Macgregor, although he understood the value of a man like Robert Bowcher Clarke, was quite disturbed by the bold and challenging methods of the first representative of the people. The "Liberal" had to fight unceasingly against its rivals, the "Globe",

the Assembly and Prescod now resolved to carry on the work of parliamentary reform. He instilled in his followers a love of representative institutions and taught them the great lesson that the salvation of the masses lay in admitting them to political partnership and training them in the business of self-government. He stressed the need for more efficient government especially in matters relating to finance. He emphasised the importance of having annual estimates of revenue and expenditure. He urged that private members should abandon the practice of introducing money bills. He sought to improve the relations between the House and the administration by advocating a scheme similar to the modern Executive Committee system.

But in all these proposals Prescod met with stout opposition. Such opposition was mainly due to ignorance but this did not make his task easier, for that ignorance was invincible. When it was first suggested, for instance, that an Executive Committee should be formed and that money grants should be initiated not by private members but on the recommendation of



SAMUEL JACKMAN PRESCOD

(From a picture in the House of Assembly) The "Mercury", the "Barbadian" and the "Globe" were the newspapers of the day. Prescod seemed to think that none of these was adequate for the purpose and even went to the length of suggesting that they should establish a journal that was really capable of grappling with the "Liberal". Prescod was bound to get into trouble and in due course he was prosecuted for criminal libel and imprisoned for eight days. In spite of all opposition, however, the "Liberal" continued to function at a time when an independent newspaper to advocate the cause of the emancipated classes was a prime necessity. Society was in a state of flux and Prescod's great service to his countrymen was that he provided free discussion of all topics relating to the labouring population. His opponents found it difficult to deal with him because he used weapons of the most formidable nature. He contrived to raise the literary merit of the "Liberal" to a standard that had never been reached by any other newspaper. His hard, trenchant logic went to the heart of every subject under discussion. His strong, vigorous style gave short shrift to the arguments of his opponents. Moreover, he made the "Liberal" conspicuous not only for its principles but for its high standard of news reporting. It is small wonder that the newspaper was eagerly read both in Barbados and other colonies of the West Indies.

The Responsible Statesman

The prosecution of the "Liberal" only had the effect of enhancing the prestige of its editor. In 1843 Prescod won a seat in the House of Assembly after an election that was a remarkable demonstration of his popularity. In the House he continued the battle he had waged in the Press. He showed himself a relentless foe of injustice and fought with all his powers to promote the welfare of the emancipated classes. But he soon convinced all who were open to reason that he was not the "pestilent demagogue" his opponents had made him out to be. For, in the give and take of the House, he showed his gift for constructive legislation and his capacity for leadership.

His Strength and Wisdom

It must not be imagined, however, that Prescod's work in the House failed to produce anything until after his death. His presence in the Assembly and his leadership of the Liberal Party had a salutary influence on the deliberation of the House. For Prescod fought tooth and nail against class legislation and saw to it that the welfare of the emancipated classes was protected in every measure that came up for consideration during the twenty years he was a member of the House.

When Prescod retired from the Assembly, he refused a seat in the Council but accepted the office of Judge of the Assistant Court of Appeal. He had staunchly supported Sir Robert Bowcher Clarke in his plea for such a tribunal and it was largely his guiding influence that enabled the Court to win the confidence of the masses. For on the Bench, as in the Press and in the House of Assembly, he proved himself an inflexible champion of justice.

As Prescod continued to fight the good fight, the stature of the man became more and more apparent to his countrymen. Gradually his sphere of influence widened as men saw that he was prepared to denounce abuses and support reforms that interested all classes of the Island. Right to the end, he retained the allegiance of the masses and the Barbados Times was able to say at the time of his death in 1871 that "the great Tribune of the People" had not been induced to "swerve one jot or tittle from his allegiance to the cause of right and justice." Prescod's services as journalist, statesman and judge were

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NOBODY'S DIARY

Monday — I thought of filling today with the conversations I overheard in Bridgetown. Most of the speakers were women. But if I omitted the dirty words there wouldn't be anything left to print so I'll only tell you what the man said. He was talking about some sailors. It seems that some sailors went into a certain place and asked for beer. They didn't like the colour when it was brought nor did their tempers improve when they were told it was ginger beer. I wonder if the sociologists have ever made a study of the part that sailors play in the life of the community. I understand that people in Barbados are still living off the profits of the American navy which visited here in the thirties.

Tuesday — The more I keep my ears open the more convinced am I that it all boils down to women. Men just don't respect them. The other night I overheard a conversation (I could hardly not overhear it since it was shouted across a field) in which one man told a man why he had no hopes of getting anywhere with a certain female who happened to be passing by just at the moment. If men think of women like that what can you expect? Which reminds me of the man in the tug in Plymouth. He was a native of the West Indies and he saw another native of the West Indies standing up in the tug. But instead of getting up and offering his seat like most of us would if we had the chance, he whistled and invited the girl on his knees. There is nothing inhibited about the average West Indian but these playful traits are so often overlooked by the liberal old ladies of London without whose moral indignation the anti-imperialist agitators would have to seek some new hunting grounds.

Wednesday — Judging by the model making exhibits at the Museum the schools need instructions from the agricultural department. I'd like to see a school-teacher make a 2-acre unit pay at Seawell. You can't even make a 4-acre unit pay without water. Moral: never let your enthusiasm lead you up against the experts. You'll catch it every time.

Thursday — It was a lovely sight to see. The picks rose and fell sinusoidally up and down over across and the pieces of road flew in all directions leaving neat furrows behind them. It was a lovely sight to see but I was very depressed when I had to drive my tyres over the furrows three times in one day. I wonder when the Black Rock road will ever be complete. And that reminds me. Just beyond the road repairs before the first bend on your way to St. Stephen's young boys are becoming scooter minded, and here and there you can see a roller skater on the highways. Now it's no use having road safety campaigns if boys are going to be allowed on busy highways with scooters and roller skates. The other day I saw one come a cropper on this road. Mussolini may have had a lot of faults (he must have, being a man) but he knew the way to enforce discipline. Why in Italian cities you were not even allowed to walk both ways on the same pavement? You went up on and came down the other and you crossed the road just where you were told to cross. In Barbados you don't have pavements and people go up and down the roads, sit in them and behave just like the picks I saw near Paradise Beach Club and which started this torrent of words.

Friday — Today's hollow laugh was caused by the motorist whose back glass exhorted others to "Park near the Kerb." His back was sticking out obliquely across the road while he gossiped with his lady friend. No doubt he was telling her what a nice chap he was.

Saturday — I don't know what was going on across Constitution River the other night but there were lights of many colours hanging in the trees back of Queen's College. It was a jolly sight and quite eclipsed in brightness the flashing lights of the place of entertainment a bit further on. I'm all in favour of lights, if only in trees. The only thing I dislike about lights is their rarity in Barbados. As a result every street corner becomes a social centre and near Deacon's Road they cook under the only one you can see for hundreds of yards. But getting back to trees. The land which runs back of Queen's College and up behind the old railway station where the creche is, is over-run with weeds and butterflies. If this land were converted into a miniature Kew Gardens, might Bridgetown not rank higher than Roseau as possessing the finest park in the West Indies? Certainly the only sentiment which the land now inspires is one of shame. And houses are being built on it, they say. Remember the floods?

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