

Political Structure Of The West Indies Federation

The political structure of the West Indian Federation has caused many a headache and in the present Inter-Governmental Conference it should be one of the most important issues.

Now what is the present political structure of the West Indian Federation?

First there is a Governor-General, in theory appointed by the British political party which is then in power; in this case by the British Conservative Party. We all know that Lord Hailes, the Conservative Party Whip, was appointed the first Governor-General of the West Indies.

In redrafting the Federal Constitution provision should now be made for a West Indian Governor-General.

Secondly, there is a Council of State, which consists of fourteen members. Like our own Executive Council it is the chief instrument of policy for the Federation and began by advising the Governor-General in the exercise of his functions.

The Council of State now consists of the Prime Minister and ten other Ministers. Three official Civil Service members of the Federal Establishment, whose offices are not specified in the Federal Constitution, are nominated by the Governor-General to take part in the discussions of the Council at meetings but they may not vote.

The Council of State now has Cabinet status, where the Prime Minister sits as Chairman.

Ministers

The ten Ministers of the Council of State are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the West Indian Prime Minister, seven of them from the House of Representatives, and not less than three from the Senate.

The Prime Minister is formally elected by the House of Representatives and thereafter officially appointed by the Governor-General. In reality, the Prime Minister is decided upon by the political party in power, whose leader is generally the leader of the Government. But in this special West Indian case Mr. Norman Manley, the leader of the majority party in the Federal Legislature, stood down to give his Deputy, Sir Grantley Adams of Barbados the chance of becoming the first Prime Minister of the West Indies.

The Council of State may also be called "The Federal Executive."

The conduct of relations with foreign countries is at present exclusively the function of the West Indian Federal Parliament through the Prime Minister in the Executive. The W.I. Federal territories, in matters subject to their jurisdiction, may conclude treaties with foreign countries but these shall require the approval of the Federal Executive.

Senate

Thirdly, there is the Senate of the Federal Parliament, which consists of nineteen members, referred to as Senators, who are appointed by the Governor-General. Two Senators are appointed from each territory, except Montserrat, which made a special request for one Senator, because of its poor condition.

At present in the appointment of Senators the Governor-General acts in his discretion after consultation with the Governor of the particular territories. This discretionary power should now be taken away and the Governor-General should now consult the Prime Minister instead of the Governor.

Senators may not be members of the Legislative or Executive Council, or Cabinet of any individual territory.

At the beginning of its life period the Senate elects a President and a Vice President. A money bill shall not be introduced in the Senate and the Senate will have no power over the passage of a money bill, whether the Senate agrees with the purpose of the bill or not.

The Senate may, however, like the British House of Lords, delay a Bill, other than a money Bill, for one year.

Not less than three members of the Senate will be appointed to the Council of State by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Montserrat, because of its very

poor circumstances, has made a special request for one representative only in the Senate and one in the House of Representatives.

Fourthly, there is the House of Representatives, which is the main Legislative chamber of the Federation. The House is organised to represent the W.I. citizens directly and this is one of the distinctive features of a Federation—namely that the adult citizens all vote for their representatives and, therefore, in large measure, control them.

The representation varies with the growth of the population and each West Indian territory should be represented as proportionately as possible.

Elected House

The House of Representatives consists now of 45 members. They are as follows:—

Jamaica	— 17
Trinidad & Tobago	— 10
Barbados	— 5
St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla	— 2
Montserrat	— 1
Dominica	— 2
St. Vincent	— 2
St. Lucia	— 2
Grenada	— 2

Montserrat will also elect an alternate member, who will sit and vote in the House of Representatives in the absence, for certain specific reasons, of the substantive member for this territory. There have been recent amendments to this representation, giving Jamaica 31 out of 64 seats.

In the first Federal elections on March 23, 1958, Trinidad had single member constituencies, Jamaica had parish and county constituencies, Montserrat was also a single member constituency because of its one member.

A speaker may be elected from among the members of the House. No member of the Federal House may be or remain a member of the Legislature or Executive Council of any unit territory.

The House of Representatives at present has a life term of five years, but it may be dissolved now at any time by the Governor-General. This power of the Governor-General should now pass to the Prime Minister of the West Indies.

Judiciary

A Federal Judiciary shall be set up with Courts in the various West Indian territories. Ordinary jurisdiction will be exercised by this Judicial Court in the case of appeals.

In accordance with a National Law, a Federal Supreme Court was set up in 1958 for the entire West Indian Federation primarily "to interpret the Constitution."

The Supreme Court will see to it that the Federal Government does not overstep the boundaries which are prescribed for it in the Federal constitution.

The West Indian Federation did not begin with Dominion Status, a cause of much of our troubles, but full independence and independent membership of the British Commonwealth seems to be the chief aim of the present working committees.

The Federal Government, in contrast to the Unit Governments, will be something like our arrangement in Jamaica where there is a central Government, which meets at George William Gordon House, Duke Street in Kingston, as against the Parish Councils, which meet in the main town of each parish.

The main difference is that the Unit Governments will have considerably more power than the Parish Councils do at present in the various parishes.

This is how it is done in such great federations as Canada, Australia, and the United States of America.—(By Roy E. Johnston, B.A., Dip. Ed.)

FEDERATION: CONFERENCES