

Pioneers in Nation-Building in a Caribbean Mini-State

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PIONEERS IN NATION-BUILDING IN A CARIBBEAN MINI-STATE BY

SIR RUPERT JOHN

WITH A NEW BIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD BY

KARL JOHN

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PREFACE

Pioneers in Nation-Building in a Caribbean Mini-State is an attempt to consider in one small volume the lives of twenty two Vincentians and the contributions they made during the earlier years of the twentieth century to the political, economic, social or cultural development of their native land. Many Vincentians, including a host of unsung heroes, have indeed struggled long and hard for some of the rights, privileges and opportunities we tend to take for granted. Their performances, characterized by perseverance, hard work and resourcefulness, hold stirring and priceless messages for the generation of today. It would be extremely unfortunate if the records were to be completely lost or if the trials and tribulations, the triumphs and successes of the outstanding figures of that period of our history were completely ignored, forgotten or treated with scant regard.

All of the people whose lives form the subject of this volume, were born in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This accounts for the omission of such people as F. W. Reeves, W. M. Lopey, W. C. Forde and others who, though born elsewhere, have made a tremendous contribution in one way or another, to the advancement of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Some readers may look in vain for the inclusion of the names of certain Vincentians they consider noteworthy. I should like them to bear in mind that the list is not exhaustive. Also, there are many ships that pass by in the night.

With one exception, all of those whose lives are sketched herein have already passed away. None

of them was born before the year 1836 and the majority were born in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some were of African descent, some of European, others again were of mixed origin and one was Indian. None of them was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Only one of them had the opportunity of receiving any formal secondary education and none of them ever pursued studies for a university degree.

Educational opportunities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are up to the present time (1979) still very limited. Equipment and accommodation leave much to be desired. Teachers are still poorly paid and generally untrained. Children are still subjected to conditions of overcrowding and to instruction, a great part of which is unrelated to their interest and environment. Bad as one may consider the situation to be today, it is small comfort to remind one's self that it was much worse at the turn of the century and v

up to thirty years ago. Secondary education was a luxury and university education was within the reach of none but the exceptionally fortunate who could afford to travel to Britain or Canada.

It was against this background that Administrator R. Popham Lobb, on 12 June 1919, submitted a memorandum on education for the consideration of the Governor-in-Chief and the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In the memorandum he stated that it could hardly be maintained that the educational facilities were adequate for the needs of the West Indies either at that time or in the future and that they would have to be extended and improved if the islands were to hold their own in the period of increased competition and higher standards of individual efficiency. He felt that with few exceptions, the teaching staff in the primary schools in the West Indies had themselves received no education, either in subjects or methods, other than that derived from the study of textbooks in their spare time. Arguing that a sound training, received in common with teachers from other colonies, would not only increase the value of their work but would do much to broaden their outlook and interest, Popham Lobb proposed the establishment in one of the West Indian islands of a central institution of higher education and teacher training.

He was convinced that there was immediate need for improvement in primary education and more especially for increased provision for secondary and higher education. Nothing, he said, had impressed him more in the course of his service to the West Indies than the widespread demand for greater opportunities for self-betterment. Accordingly, if education was recognized as the function of the State, its benefits should be brought, at the expense of the State, within the reach of every individual whose abilities enabled, and therefore entitled him to take advantage of them. The Governor-in-Chief did not share those views. In forwarding the Administrator's memorandum to the Secretary of State, he testily observed:

... The West Indian Islands are purely agricultural (with the exception of the minerals of Trinidad), why therefore should an endeavour be made to transform a population needed for the soil into educationalists? It may enlarge the sphere of the agitator; it is doubtful if it will supply a basis for further progress ...

Some of the difficulties that confronted our forefathers in this island were colossal. It is to the eternal credit of many of them that they were able to rise above the difficulties and improve the quality of their lives. One of the riddles of human nature, Alexander Solzhenitsyn said in a radio broadcast on 1 April 1976, is: "how it is that people who have been crushed by the sheer weight of slavery and cast to the bottom of the pit can nevertheless find strength in themselves to rise up and free themselves

– first in spirit and then in body ..." It is that spirit, dear reader, I trust you will find in these pages.

It is hoped that this volume will find a place in many homes sympathetic to the aspirations of struggling peoples. If it can inspire serious thought and reflection in the leadership in their

communities or if intellectuals to make a comprehensive study of the lives of any of the twenty two men of whom I have briefly written in these pages, then the effort will not have been in vain.

It is impossible to acknowledge all the help I have received in preparing this book. I must however thank Mrs. Peggy Hull, Private Secretary to the Premier, for her help with certain relevant documents from the Premier's office; Mr. Owen Cuffy, a former Clerk of the House of Assembly and Mr. Clement Noel, Acting Clerk of the House, for their willingness at all times to search for Minutes of the Legislative Council and forward them to me with the utmost dispatch; Mrs. Sylvia Bertrand and Mr. Trevor Peters, Registrar of the Supreme Court and Deputy Registrar respectively, and their staff, for their great kindness at all times in sending me old newspapers even though some of them were in their final stages of dissolution. Special thanks are due also to all those who lent photographs or supplied pieces of relevant information.

I should like to thank too all those who read parts of the manuscript and made useful and constructive suggestions. I should like to thank especially Mr. Samuel Commissiong, Mr. Bertram Richards, Mrs. Norma Keizer, Mr. Cameron King, my son Karl and my daughter Cecile (Mrs. Comp). Of course, none of them is responsible for any of the opinions I have expressed. The blemishes are all mine. I am grateful to my former secretary, Mrs. Cora Providence, for the willing and cheerful manner in which she typed and retyped various drafts of the manuscript.

Finally, I wish to thank most warmly Dr. Davidson Nicol, Under Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UNITAR for his excellent foreword and for the role he played in ensuring the publication of this volume.

minds of those who aspire to it can influence some young

Sir Rupert John St. Vincent, July 1979 vii

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FOREWORD

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) has always drawn attention to the strategy of decolonization within the United Nations since its inception. The United Nations Charter in Articles 1 (2) and 55 proclaims the principle of self-determination of peoples. In addition, Chapters 11 through 13 are devoted to the issues of dependent territories, the establishment of the Trusteeship system, and the creation of a supervisory body – the Trusteeship Council.

The adoption of Chapter 11 of the Charter entitled "Declaration Regarding Non-Self Governing Territories" served to focus the attention of the international community on territories still under colonial rule. By the terms of Article 73, Member States accepted "as a sacred trust" the "obligation to promote to the utmost" the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories as well as the series of commitments specified in the Article.

The United Nations General Assembly has maintained that the principles and proposals put forward for decolonization apply no less to small territories and islands in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic and Pacific regions.

This book, *Pioneers in Nation-Building in a Caribbean Mini-State*, is a most important contribution in recording the achievement of independence by St. Vincent and its reception into membership of the United Nations.

The history of the pioneers of nation-building in St. Vincent illustrates qualities present not only in

that nation and in the Caribbean but also in many as yet unknown individuals in distant countries who, with grave limitations in human and natural resources, tried to build viable nations out of small territories of former colonial empires.

UNITAR has carried out studies on small states and territories and hopes to continue its work in this field

Membership of the Committee on Micro-States of the Security Council in 1970-71 focused my own attention on this area of study. It was obvious from examining the evidence that, in international affairs, the quality of the individual could be of considerable importance regardless of the size of his or her country of origin.

Sir Rupert John was first an educationist and then an active and distinguished member of the English and Caribbean Bar and served successively as Magistrate and Attorney General of Grenada before joining the United Nations in 1962. His period as a member of the Division of Human Rights at the United Nations was marked by many important assignments including a mission to Nigeria in 1969. He was appointed Governor of his homeland, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, in 1970 at the request of the Government of that territory and received the distinction of a British knighthood in 1971 from Queen Elizabeth II as Head of the Commonwealth. He served for seven years as Governor before returning to private life again as a lawyer. He has since then been a Special Fellow and Consultant to UNITAR and to the United Nations as an international lawyer and as a specialist in Human Rights. He will soon publish a study on racism in our UNITAR series.

It is with pleasure that we sponsor the publication of *Pioneers in Nation-Building in a Caribbean Mini-State* and, in our particular involvement with youth, we have included an independent introduction to this book by one of our young interns who originates from the Caribbean region.

Davidson Nicol

Executive Director, UNITAR

Under-Secretary-General, United Nations

INTRODUCTION

During seven years of secondary school in St. Vincent I did not study Caribbean history. The possibility of having read Vincentian history, as in this book, was remote. When I was eventually offered the option of studying history, which by 1970 in my fourth form was Caribbean, I chose not to include it in my schedule. I was accustomed to history being a far-fetched notion and distant abstraction. Nevertheless, that laid the basis of my later thirst for African, Caribbean, general non-European and the pre-colonial history of our countries.

This book is then very important in view of the attainment of independence by St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and to the pioneer attempt by Sir Rupert John to document historical personalities of a mini-state in the Caribbean.

I witnessed the arrival of Sir Rupert in 1970 on the shores of St. Vincent in the pomp and style that was characteristic of British Governors appointed to the colony. He was welcomed with great pride as a son of the soil. Being then a student at the Girls' High School, I listened to an address he made to us while he was Governor of the Island. His emphasis was upon the existence of an international community of which we were a part.

Within the book, the categorization, Parts I, II, III, etc and the captions that accompany each, e.g. Part I – THE FIGHT AGAINST COLONIALISM AND PROMOTION OF THE CONCEPT OF SELF-RULE, add an important dimension to the contents of this book. Its dynamism is recognized in the range of those captions.

Generally, the book indicates that the writer has resolved the major contradictions that afflict the non-European of the colonized world.

This resolution of contradictions is amplified in the content by the author's analysis and deals with how best one can utilize existing resources to maximize effectively the national potential.

Sir Rupert refers to a mysterious "I" throughout but is not introduced. It would make interesting reading if he were to prepare his autobiography.

Ultimately, in a very good EPILOGUE, allowances are made for human limitations and possible dissension with any of the selected "pioneers in nation-building":

Yet, they were all men of like passions as we are... the lust of power burns more fiercely in the human breast than all other passions combined. So did it burn in the breasts of some of the men whose lives we have considered. He continued:

Let us not, however, fall into the error of interring along with their bones the good they accomplished while we forever revive the evil they did. They have passed into the history of our land and by their deeds and actions have shown us the road we may follow and the path we may shun

The strong reference to the human element in our society and that our lot is capable of being uplifted in real ways, if there is that vision and incentive, permeates the pages of the book. Its contents will be of great encouragement to all Caribbean people.

Hyacinth Charles UNITAR

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BIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD

[Editors' Note, 2009]: The inclusion of this Biographical Foreword in this republication of Sir Rupert John's book nearly thirteen years after his death attests to our conviction that his own contribution to nation building in his homeland and elsewhere deserves the telling of his own story. **SIR RUPERT GODFREY JOHN, KT**

Rupert Godfrey John was born in the village of Evesham in St. Vincent on 19th May 1916, the third child of Donnelly and Iona John (nee Glasgow).

Evesham is a little hamlet deep in the Mesopotamia Valley. Secluded even today, the village must have been considered to be rather inaccessible in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Getting to and from Evesham at that time was not easy. One approach was by travelling some two miles along a footpath which led from the Vigie Highway at Belmont, along Ayre Hill ridge, and down the very steep Ponsomby Hill. A less arduous but longer route was by way of the more developed but barely motorable road which wound inland from the La Croix junction on the Vigie Highway, but over which no public transport operated in those days. The family home 'Windsor' was itself situated in splendid isolation on a hill overlooking the village and surrounded by trees and cultivation.

Like many other villages in St Vincent, Evesham owed its existence to the operations of an agricultural estate - albeit a small one of 100 acres, owned at one time by the Porter family - incidentally, both father and son were known as D.K. Porter. The Porters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries owned at least two-thirds of the agricultural land and by 1896, twenty-two of the sugar estates on St Vincent. Evesham estate grew sugar cane which was processed into syrup there in a small 'works'. The long depression in the sugar industry which occurred between 1883 and 1897 forced many estate owners, including the Porters, to divest. These circumstances made it possible for John George Glasgow, a cooper, and Rupert John's maternal grandfather, to purchase Evesham estate. With the passage of time, the estate eventually became fragmented as portions were gradually sold off, occupied by squatters, or otherwise alienated. xiii

Like so many other Vincentian households, the one in which Rupert John was raised was very much a matrifocal one. Following the pattern established by thousands of Vincentian men before him, his father, Donnelly, was absent for extended periods seeking his fortune in other countries. An early spell in Guyana was followed by a long sojourn in the USA. The care and upbringing of the brood (Gwendolyn, Errey, Rupert, Eileen and Frank) were left to their mother. Strong Christian beliefs rooted in a fervent attachment to Methodism formed the bedrock on which that upbringing was based. Iona was the organist and general director of affairs of the village chapel, and the family home unselfishly extended hospitality and even accommodation to visiting ministers. This grounding in Methodism was a constant in the lives of the children, and Gwendolyn, Errey and Rupert all became Methodist local preachers in the fullness of time.

The young Rupert John received his early education at the Evesham Methodist School. The school's classes were then held in the Methodist chapel. Like other boys of that period, he cheerfully trudged the considerable distance back and forth between home and school, returning early enough from lunch for play in the school yard. His primary school education completed, he entered the St. Vincent Grammar School in September 1927 at the age of eleven. This transition entailed far greater domestic adjustment than it would have occasioned today. With no public transportation service available between Evesham and the capital, Kingstown, and with the distance between them too great to negotiate on foot on a daily basis, it meant having to board and lodge in Kingstown. Friday afternoons or early Saturday mornings would invariably find him on the road walking the seven miles back to Evesham where he spent most weekends, and on Sunday evenings or in the very early hours of Monday, reversing the journey.

At the Grammar School, Rupert John was a diligent student. He was successful at obtaining an internal scholarship and so eased the burden of financing his secondary education borne by his family. He excelled in the classics and passed without difficulty the requisite external examinations set by Cambridge University. Although tall for his age and extremely fit from his exertions on the road, he did not seem to have had a talent for athletics and competitive games. But in the context of extra curricular activities, he more than made up for this by participating eagerly in school debates and in the activities of the boy scouts.

On leaving the Grammar School, Rupert John like so many of his contemporaries, found employment in the Civil Service - starting out as a clerk in the Treasury department. A group photograph taken of civil servants of that era shows him in the company of many of his colleagues and school contemporaries who like him went on to make sterling contributions to the development and civic progress of St Vincent and the Grenadines. Particularly noteworthy are: his lifelong friend Frank Williams, who was very instrumental in the success achieved by the banana industry in the Windward Islands in its heyday; Frank's brother Henry, who rose to the highest ranks of the colonial civil service (serving in both St Vincent and Grenada), qualified as a lawyer, and eventually acted as Governor General of St Vincent and the Grenadines; Noel Venner, the first Treasurer of the Caribbean Development Bank; and the incomparable Sir Fred Phillips, an outstanding administrator, author and legal luminary and who served as Assistant Administrator of

Grenada and later as Governor of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla. It is indeed amazing in the context of our history how many of St Vincent and the Grenadines' icons of today emerged during that period.

From the outset, the field of education held foremost interest for Rupert John as he began to think seriously about his career prospects. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, he quickly switched gears and took up a position as an assistant teacher at the Georgetown Government School where the head teacher at the time was the highly respected C.W. Prescod. During his stay in Georgetown he got married. His wife was Hepsy Norris, a trained teacher and graduate of the Rawle Institute teacher-training college in Barbados, and niece of his head master. Not long after however, no doubt in search of greater stimulation and to satisfy a life-long curiosity about life in other places, he applied for, and got a job as, assistant master at the St Kitts/Nevis Grammar School. He enjoyed his stay in St Kitts and formed many enduring friendships there. But after just two years in the post, he readily grasped the opportunity to teach at a similar level in his homeland. With the St Kitts experience under his belt, he returned to St. Vincent to serve as an undergraduate master at his alma mater, teaching English, Latin and History.

As a teacher, Rupert John's favourite subject was English and he particularly enjoyed teaching English Language. He was an unforgiving grammarian as attested to by his students who included Sir James Mitchell and Dr Cecil Cyrus. At the same time, he was always willing to gratuitously help his students with extra lessons. Fully involved in the school's extra-curricular activities, he also took charge of the Scout Troup and the Debating Society, in both of which he had maintained an ardent interest. xv

Rupert John's keen interest in education clearly emerges in this book. In his Preface he places the notable achievements of the book's subjects in the context of a prevailing culture in which colonial policy strongly militated against the establishment and maintenance of adequate educational facilities, training and instruction designed to improve the minds of citizens and equip them for greater participation in the management of their affairs. Efforts at educational reform by relatively more progressive colonial officials were firmly resisted, and the author quotes the prickly Windward Islands Administrator of St Vincent for the adoption of a more enlightened approach:

response by the then Governor-in-Chief of the to a recommendation made in 1919 by the

"... the West Indian Islands are purely agricultural...why therefore should an endeavour be made to transform a population needed for the soil into educationalists?"

The author cites this quotation with reference to his own observation that only one of the twenty-two individuals featured in his book had received a secondary education, and that none possessed a university degree.

When the colonial official articulated his understanding of official policy on education in Britain's Caribbean colonies quoted above, Rupert John would have been on the verge of entering primary school. That policy had in fact undergone little revision by the time he had graduated from the St Vincent Grammar School. Those of his own generation were constrained to regard the attainment of a tertiary education as a dream with little hope of fulfilment. Many of his contemporaries went to extraordinary lengths in pursuit of that dream. Some migrated to Aruba and Curacao to seek employment in the oil refineries there with the aim of earning and saving enough to eventually finance an education in Britain or Canada. Others joined branches of the military in Britain and Canada hoping to eventually access programmes transition of demobilized servicemen back education and training. A few, many of them employed as teachers and therefore more capable of subjecting themselves to the discipline of unsupervised study, elected to travel the route of external examinations then offered principally by London University. Rupert John, together with colleagues in the teaching fraternity like Henry Williams and Cooper Jacobs (who eventually

qualified as a medical doctor and practiced in designed to into civilian facilitate the life through

Britain), pursued that path. He enrolled as an overseas student of London University and successfully read for a BA degree. In today's world, where information technology has made distance learning a practical and convenient proposition, it is understandably difficult to fully comprehend the discipline, sacrifice and frustrations involved in embarking on such an enterprise without a computer, access to the internet and a reliable and affordable international telephone service.

Beginning to run out of challenges at the Grammar School and feeling the need to extend his horizons, Rupert John began in the midforties to explore possibilities for continuing his education and training. Still enthusiastic about the moulding of young minds, his thoughts quite naturally turned to academic qualifications in education. He resolved to obtain a Diploma in Education, won admission to London University for this purpose and completed the course there in the academic 1945/46 year. During his stay in England, he availed himself of the opportunity to attend a training course for scout leaders at the famous Gilwell Park Scout Camp close to Chingford, London, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

Back at the St. Vincent Grammar School, he soon began to feel the need for the independence which a professional career offered. Given his particular skill-set, law was an obvious choice. He started reading for the English Bar. In 1950, with some financial assistance from his mother's brother, George Glasgow (a successful estate owner in St Lucia), Rupert John proceeded on study leave to England to continue his legal studies. While in London, he was able to support himself and assist his young family at home by relying on work with which he was familiar and which he enjoyed, and he had many rewarding experiences teaching at such schools as Chelsea Secondary School and Willesden Technical College. Disciplined as always, he successfully completed the bar examinations within two years and was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn in 1952.

For university students from the colonies, Britain of the nineteen forties and fifties was an alluring place. Liberal and socialist ideals were very much in vogue and the atmosphere was heady with talk of independence for African and Caribbean colonies. Many students, like Seretse Khama (Botswana) and Forbes Burnham (Guyana) with whom Rupert John became acquainted, saw themselves as playing pivotal roles in the process. Quite naturally, he began to think of a possible role for himself in political developments in his homeland.

On his return to St Vincent in 1952, Rupert John resumed teaching at the St Vincent Grammar School but remained there only for the brief period required to satisfy his obligations to the administration. He then xvii

entered private law practice, sharing chambers on the ground floor of the Foresters' Court building in Kingstown with his brother-in-law Christopher Norris, another legal practitioner of recent vintage,

Escalating popular agitation by the masses in St. Vincent for an expanded role in their governance had been at last rewarded just one year earlier (1951) by constitutional reform. The new constitution had ushered in universal adult suffrage and with it an increase in the number of elected members in the Legislature from five to eight. Within five years, elected members would constitute the majority in the Executive Council and this would be followed, in 1956, by the introduction of embryonic ministerial government. The time was propitious for the assumption of leadership in the political process by professionals. By 1955, movement and in that year together with Robert Milton Cato helped to found the St Vincent Labour Party, and became its Deputy Leader. He was also one of the three successful candidates (the others were R.M. Cato and H.A. Davis) on the slate which the party fielded for the Kingstown Town Board elections held in December of that year. He served on the

Board with distinction for three years.

Rupert John soon discovered that he did not adapt well to the partisan virulence which rapidly came to characterise local party politics, nor was he adept at intra-party intrigues and manoeuvres. He grew increasingly uncomfortable within the party and before long broke ranks. He then had a brief flirtation with a political party which he co-founded with Herman Young (the Peoples Liberation Movement), but by the end of the nineteen fifties, had become completely disillusioned with the local political scene. Making a clean break with local politics, he accepted an appointment as Magistrate of the Eastern District in Grenada. In 1959, the family relocated to La Digue on the outskirts of Grenville, Grenada.

An historically more equitable distribution of land in Grenada had given rise there to the emergence of a rural middle-class which tended to be more financially secure, and perhaps consequently to exhibit more social and political sophistication than its counterparts in the other Windward Islands. The new magistrate found ready acceptance within the community around Grenville and soon gave proof of his willingness to make a meaningful contribution to community life. Soon after his arrival, he conceived the idea of a project aimed at inculcating and reinforcing in the minds of the citizens of the parish (St Andrews) an appreciation of those civic values and ideals required for worthy citizenship, successful community building and good neighbourliness. The idea was well

a tiny but growing

Rupert John was in a cadre of middle-class the vanguard of this received by influential persons within the parish, and in short order, a small but inclusive committee started meeting under his leadership to discuss moving the idea forward.

The culmination of these efforts was a programme which was called 'Citizenship Week'. On Sunday, 8th May 1960, activities commenced with church services throughout the parish, followed that afternoon by a parade and rally in Grenville which was addressed by J.M. Lloyd, the island's Administrator and by C.G.X. Henriques, the Chief Justice of the Windward and Leeward Islands. During the course of the week, lectures on varied but relevant topics, which ranged from economic and constitutional development through public health to juvenile delinquency, were given by prominent persons in various parts of the parish. Among the lecturers were Vincentian colonial civil servants Henry Williams and Noel Venner then posted to Grenada. An essay competition for elementary school children was also given prominence. Social events included a cricket match and a dance in Grenville. In the introduction to a publication entitled *Foundations of True Citizenship* which reproduced many of the lectures and which he edited, Rupert John offered this description of the programme:

"The 'Citizenship Week' was an effort undertaken by a small unofficial committee whose object was to endeavour by means of lectures, films, demonstrations and other means to drive home to the people of the parish the essentials of good citizenship, to stir up in them a lively spirit of patriotism and to urge upon them the necessity of accepting their duties and responsibilities as citizens of our nascent nation" In lauding the effort and congratulating its organiser Administrator Lloyd expressed the hope that:

"...this candle which is being lit today will shine not only in Grenville but throughout Grenada."

The pleasant sojourn in Grenville lasted for only two years. St Georges beckoned with an acting appointment to the post of Attorney General. Far more turmoil, though, attended his working experience in the capital. Tensions between Eric political leader of Grenada's administration were at their zenith. The new Attorney-General found himself at the centre of a fire storm occasioned by an official decision to Gairy, flamboyant and charismatic working classes and the colonial

investigate Gairy for fiscal corruption and what the colonial administration

investigative

colourfully

process was

characterised as "squandermania". The protracted. Gairy's supporters generally

remained loyal to him and officials like Rupert John whom they perceived as being antagonistic to the political leader, received threats and had to be provided with extra security. The colonial authorities, acting through the Administrator, eventually decided to remove Gairy's government from office. While on a visit to New York on a much needed vacation, Rupert John explored prospects for employment within the United Nations system and was offered a professional post in the Human Rights Division.

By mid-1962, the family had taken up residence in Parkway Village, a pleasant enclave in Queens, New York, in which most of the residents were UN personnel and from which the new UN staff member commuted to work at the United Nations Headquarters building in Manhattan. His eight year stint as a senior official in the Human Rights Division of the United Nations was for Rupert John an immensely satisfying and intellectually stimulating experience. Some of his assignments as an international civil servant enabled him to meet and interact with influential actors on the world stage and to visit countries not then familiar to many Caribbean travellers.

An important aspect of his work at the United Nations involved his duties as Secretary of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. But, most certainly, one of the highlights of his UN experience was an assignment in 1968 which took him on an extended visit to Nigeria during the civil war there. Although the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had been successful in preventing direct intervention in the civil war by the United Nations, the UN's various humanitarian organs had become increasingly concerned about the plight of affected civilians - particularly those in secessionist Biafra. The assignment to Nigeria was in response to Secretary-General U Thant's decision to dispatch a Personal Representative to monitor the situation there - and in particular, the distribution of food and medicine. Although his role as a member of the International Team of Observers involved some personal discomfort and risk, it presented him with an arresting dimension of human rights issues which he had, up until then, largely confronted from his desk. He got to know several of the principal protagonists of the civil war on a personal basis and the entire mission experience left a lasting impression on him. Meanwhile in St Vincent, plans were afoot for the introduction of a new "statehood" constitution. Under this arrangement, an elected xx

government would now be responsible for the country's internal affairs with Britain retaining control of foreign affairs and defence. To reflect this constitutionally advanced status, it was expected that a new Governor representing the Head of State (the British monarch) would in due course be appointed by the Queen on the advice of the country's Head of Government (to be styled Premier). The new constitution came into force on 27 October 1969.

By mid-1970, the St Vincent government began looking for a suitable person to replace the British governor who was scheduled to depart in October. Rupert John was approached. It was no doubt a signal honour, but it meant abandoning a work environment which he found challenging and stimulating, and a social life to which he had become accustomed and thoroughly enjoyed. After some hesitation, he accepted the offer to return home as St. Vincent's first native Governor.

According to *The Vincentian* newspaper of 31 December 1976, St. Vincent's first native Governor received tremendous ovation at his 'swearing in' on 20th October 1970. The newspaper went on to note that Premier Robert Milton Cato described his choice for the post as one of the great achievements of his political career.

The new Governor quickly settled into the routines of the office. He immediately set himself the goal of visiting every single school on the mainland of St. Vincent and in the Grenadines. The exercise was useful in updating his knowledge of developments in the country in which he had spent very little time over the past decade. But more importantly to him, it presented the opportunity to meet with young people, to offer motivation, guidance and counselling, and to persuade them of the value of education and training in improving their lot in life.

His keen interest in the development of young persons also found expression in his founding of the St. Vincent Children's Welfare Fund to assist in the battle against endemic gastroenteritis and malnutrition. He remained as chairman of the committee which managed its operations for the duration of his tenure as Governor. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme – which targeted the development of well-rounded young persons, also received his enthusiastic support.

His return to St. Vincent also gave Rupert John the opportunity to renew his interest in Freemasonry. He had become a Freemason during his stay in Grenada and he welcomed the opportunity to throw himself with great zeal and dedication into the affairs of Lodge St. George in his homeland. He held several offices over time and was Master in 1973-74. The Lodge benefitted greatly from his skills at research and writing through a document which he compiled that chronicled the Lodge's history from its inception in 1896 to 1984.

In an effort to make the new Associated Statehood Constitution understandable to the population at large, he found time to put together a useful little booklet in simple language entitled "St. Vincent and its Constitution".

Soon growing restless and feeling somewhat limited by the mainly ceremonial nature of many of the functions of the post, he put together a small unofficial committee tasked with identifying manageable initiatives, mainly in the area of national social development, for which he hoped to lend the prestige of his office in seeking to attract private sources of funding. He was dismayed when these efforts did not receive the enthusiastic support of the political directorate.

Struck by the destructive consequences of a sharply partisan political culture and the lack of a rational basis for the political animosity that was clearly ruining family and community life, the Governor tried to use his good offices to bring about some sort of rapprochement between the principal political protagonists at the time. These efforts were rebuffed.

Two years into his tenure as Governor, a constitutional crisis emerged which presented a formidable test of his integrity, diplomatic skills. The general elections of 1972 produced a problematic result. Each of the two major parties (The St. Vincent Labour Party (SVLP) and the Peoples Political Party (PPP)) had secured six seats from the total of thirteen constituencies. This positioned a single successful independent candidate, James (later Sir James) Mitchell, in the pivotal position of being able to determine the formation of a new government. Negotiations between stakeholders in the process were protracted. The resulting stalemate lasted for an uncomfortably long period and produced a virtual political and constitutional minefield for the Governor to navigate. When the dust finally settled, James Mitchell emerged as Premier (with additional responsibilities for Trade, Agriculture and Tourism) in a government in which Ebenezer Joshua, the leader of the PPP, became Minister of Finance.

Not surprisingly, the government which took office in 1972 soon began to show symptoms of

instability as tensions between the principals in the alliance surfaced and Ebenezer Joshua began to publicly voice his frustrations. Finally, a resolution of no confidence in the Government was introduced in the House of Assembly on 18th September 1974 and was supported by a majority of the elected members. The resulting general elections were held on 9th December 1974. The election campaign xxii

impartiality and had produced a featured an accommodation between the leadership of both major parties. Under this arrangement, the SVLP guaranteed victories for Ebenezer Joshua and his wife Ivy by declining to field candidates in the constituencies in which they contested. The election was won by the SVLP, and in the new government Mr Joshua was appointed Minister of Agriculture. The Governor, however, had great difficulty with acceding to the appointment of Mrs Joshua as Leader of the Opposition. He was of the view that in the spirit of the constitution it was logical that this post should go to James Mitchell who had won his seat, and was the lone *de facto* opposition member in the legislature. The Governor communicated his views to the Premier. He was dismayed when his advice was not accepted and the constitution amended to facilitate Mrs Joshua's appointment.

After some six years, the office of Governor for Sir Rupert John (he had been knighted in 1971) had lost much of its lustre and on 1st October 1976 he requested leave of the British Government to demit office. He left Government House for the last time on 31st December that year.

On his return to private life, Sir Rupert John was kept quite busy. He resumed a limited law practice and was for some time a consultant on public and industrial relations to the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) which owned and operated electricity generating plants in several Caribbean States. He was also appointed a Special Fellow and Consultant to the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and functioned as an advisor to the Caribbean Conference of Churches in its Bureau of Human Rights. For several years, he was a much sought-after lecturer and panellist on public affairs. Sir Rupert also found time to author this book, *Pioneers in Nation Building* (1978), and another entitled *Racial Discrimination and its Elimination* (1981) – both published under UNITAR auspices. As a labour of love, he researched and documented the history of the Methodist Church in St Vincent. The document was serialized in *The Vincentian* newspaper. Still preoccupied with devising initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of his fellow citizens, he used his considerable motivational and organizational skills to spearhead the launch of an organization which he named the Association of Senior Citizens of St Vincent and the Grenadines. ASCOVAG had as its main objective the promotion and defense of the interests of retired public and private sector employees and senior citizens in general. Sadly, Sir Rupert John eventually fell victim to Alzheimer's disease and his last years were spent in seclusion. Sir Rupert died on Christmas xxiii

Day 1996. He was predeceased by his wife Hepsy (1988) and one son Earl who had perished in a drowning accident in 1952. He is survived by his sons Karl, Bertram, Ronald and Dane and daughters Cecile and Yvette. *Karl John*

St. Vincent and the Grenadines May 2009

xxiv **PART I**

THE FIGHT AGAINST COLONIALISM AND PROMOTION OF THE CONCEPT OF SELF-RULE CHAPTER I

GEORGE AUGUSTUS McINTOSH

A patriot and fearless champion of the masses who laid the foundation for self-rule.

George Augustus McIntosh was born in Kingstown on 6 March 1886. He was the son of Donald McIntosh, who hailed from Scotland, and Charlotte Glasgow whose occupation on her son's birth certificate is given as that of a cook.

Charlotte Glasgow was an Anglican and she brought up her son in that faith. Young George McIntosh attended Church regularly and became an acolyte in the Cathedral. He also received his early education at an elementary school that was conducted under the auspices of the Anglican Church.

At the age of 17, George McIntosh entered the dispensary attached to what was then known as the Colonial Hospital to be trained as a pharmacist. His three years at the Colonial Hospital brought him into close contact with many of the island's disadvantaged people. He saw their poverty and their degradation. He agonized over their suffering as he saw them writhing in pain. Often, as he looked at some of them, he could be heard to mutter, "But for the grace of God, there go I."

He was enthusiastic about his work and pursued his studies with diligence. Consequently, having passed the qualifying examination before Drs. C.W. Branch, Cyprian Pike and Cyril H. Durrant, who comprised the St. Vincent Medical Board, he received his Druggist Assistant's Certificate on 1st May 1907.

Towards the end of 1908, McIntosh left St. Vincent for Grenada, where he worked for some time as a Druggist Assistant. His work was quite satisfactory. Accordingly, on 28 December 1909, he received a certificate under the hand of the Governor, enabling him to practice as a Chemist and Druggist in this island. His work gave him considerable satisfaction. He moved easily among all classes on the island. There was, particularly, excellent rapport between himself and the poorer classes of people. But Grenada was

not his home and his thoughts often turned to his return to St. Vincent. After a while, he actually packed his bags and returned to the land of his birth. There he opened his own pharmacy.

He now began to take a very keen interest in the political, economic and social affairs of his native land. Lack of popular representation on the Legislative Council, the low wages paid to labourers on the estates, poor housing and lack of proper medical care were some of the many issues that deeply concerned McIntosh at that time. It was not surprising, therefore, that he was one of the founder members of the St. Vincent Representative Government Association, inaugurated on 25 February 1919. The main purpose of this association, as has been stated elsewhere in these pages, was to bring about the adoption of the elective principle for the Legislative Council. The St. Vincent Association worked closely with similar associations in the other Caribbean territories. McIntosh held various offices in the St. Vincent Representative Government Association, including that of President. He and others associated with him witnessed the realization of their immediate objective in 1925 when three elected members took their seats in the Legislative Council, following the report of the Wood Commission which had visited St. Vincent in January 1922.

In 1923 McIntosh became a member of the Kingstown Board and remained a member for a considerable period of his life. He was Chairman for some ten terms.

On 21 October 1935, a riotous disturbance broke out in Kingstown and spread to a few other areas of the island. The underlying cause of the riots lay in the deplorable social and economic conditions that pervaded the lives of the poorer classes. The Legislative Council took note of these necessities. There was also a strong feeling that the administration was insensitive to the despair and the plight of the underprivileged.

For a long time George McIntosh had stood out as the champion of the cause of the poorer

classes. He had developed a deep interest in their condition ever since the days when he studied pharmacy at the Colonial Hospital. His own mother was one of the underprivileged. For years his drugstore was a sort of haven for the poor and wretched. He often gave them freely of his services and medicines. To them he was like a father. He was kind and sympathetic. As an officer of the Representative Government Association, he was deeply involved in the political issues of

The immediate cause was the attempt by increase the import duties on certain the day. Would it be surprising therefore that at a time of great bewilderment and despair these poor neglected people should turn to him?

The British officials on the island, perhaps not realizing the extent to which "even a worm would turn," apparently believed that McIntosh was the principal architect of the disturbance. gathered to support this belief. In his subsequent to the riots, His Honour the Administrator Arthur Francis Grimble stated that an eyewitness would be prepared to testify on oath that before the crowd broke into the Court yard on Monday, 21 October 1935, McIntosh had crossed the yard from the Court House to the iron railings and shouted to the people " ...refuse..... time has passed for asking favours you must take it, .take it, take it." *

Pioneers in Nation-Building in a Caribbean Mini-State by Sir Rupert John was written in 1979 in an attempt to consider in one small volume the lives of twenty two Vincentians and the contributions they made during the earlier years of the twentieth century to the political, economic, social or cultural development of their native land. This republication, thirty years later, should serve to remind the older generation, and to educate today's generation of Vincentians about the sterling contributions made by the persons profiled in this book.

A Biographical Foreword on Sir Rupert is included in this republication nearly thirteen years after his death which attests to our conviction that his own contribution to nation-building in his homeland and elsewhere deserves the telling of his own story.

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