



THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE CIRCULAR

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The West India Committee Circular



Table of Contents

Leading articles - 1
Notes of Interest - 3
The West India Committee report - 4
100 years ago - 5
From the Library - 6

Leading articles

Earthquakes

A series of earthquakes have struck the Caribbean in the last two months, with many of the worst effects being felt on the American island of Puerto Rico. Hundreds of tremors were felt on the island. An earthquake registering 5.8 on the Richter scale struck on Monday 6th January 2020 and destroyed a natural archway known as the Punta Ventana (Window Point), which was a popular tourist attraction. Whilst not the only naturally formed archway on Puerto Rico, it was perhaps the most famous, appearing in numerous videos and photographs promoting the island. The Mayor of Guayanilla, the municipality where Punta Ventana was located, was quoted as saying that the archway's destruction was a great loss for the town, one of the town's mottos being "*Guayanilla – The New Window on the Caribbean.*"

Another stronger quake, registering 6.4, struck the island the following day before dawn, causing damage to property and one death, when a collapsing wall fell on top of a 73 year old man at his home. The earthquake also

caused severe damage to some of the island's power plants and caused automatic protection systems to activate, resulting in the territory being without power and water supplies. Schools were also closed until they could be checked for structural damage, to ensure that they were safe for pupils to use.

Many aftershocks followed the quake, including one of magnitude 5.6 and many Puerto Ricans opted to sleep outside for fear of being caught indoors during another tremor which could have caused more buildings to collapse. The Governor declared an emergency and mobilised the territory's National Guard in order to respond. Many said that the damage caused by the earthquakes was worse than that suffered by the territory during 2018's Hurricane Maria, with the Police Chief pointing to the unpredictability of earthquakes, leaving authorities and the public with little time to prepare.

It is believed that the earthquake of 7th January 2020 is the most damaging to Puerto Rico since 1918 when a quake and the tsunami that it caused resulted in 116 deaths and an economic loss equal to twice the island's annual budget at the time. In 2020, the island could face economic losses of over US\$100 million. Another earthquake rating 6.4 on the Richter scale struck the island in 2014 but, as the epicentre was much further offshore than that in early January, the damage was minimal.

The US Federal Government also announced that it would release funding to aid in rebuilding, with the situation being recognised as a major disaster. Housing remains a major issue, with many people having been displaced and inadequate room at government shelters, with the Puerto Rican government meeting with banks to see what

repossessed homes are available for use. The National Guard have also established five tent cities, with mobile kitchens and showers. It is unclear how many people are in need of new housing, as many properties still need to be inspected to see if they are safe for human habitation following the disaster.

A further seismic shock, registering 5.0 on the Richter scale, struck Puerto Rico on 25th January. Another earthquake, magnitude 7.7, struck between Jamaica, Cuba and the Cayman Islands on 28th January, tremors from which were felt across the Caribbean (including Miami, Florida, where several office buildings were evacuated temporarily) and the central American Coast. The size of the quake and its location beneath the sea bed led to some concerns that there would be a tsunami and warnings were issued to that effect, but fortunately the wave never materialised. Damage from this quake appears to have been minimal, with a few reports of structural damage in the Cayman Islands, including damage to roads and the sewage system. At the time of writing, there are no known personal injuries resulting from this earthquake.

US-Cuba relations

American-Cuban relations are now claimed to be at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War. The Trump administration continues to impose new sanctions on Cuba, with the US State Department announcing that public charter flights from America to Cuba would be heavily restricted, with only a few let into Jose Marti International Airport, Havana. Public charter operators were given sixty days from this announcement to cease such operations. This builds on the American Government's previous ban on all regularly scheduled flights to Cuban cities, save Havana.

Although the American Government has stated that some public charter flights will still be permitted, it has yet to confirm how many. The Cuban Government responded by calling the American action a violation of human rights that will hinder the reunification of Cuban families. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, issued a statement saying that the ban was intended to *“further restrict the Cuban regime’s ability to obtain revenue, which it uses to finance its ongoing repression of the Cuban people and its unconscionable support for dictator Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela,”*

The Trump administration has sought to justify putting other sanctions in place because of Cuba's support for the Maduro administration in Venezuela and alleged human rights violations on the island. In June 2019, it had banned US citizens from travelling to Cuba by boat, including on cruise ships. Other restrictions are affecting everyday life on Cuba, with Union Cubapetroleo, the island's state oil company, warning that US sanctions in November led to many suppliers of liquid petroleum gas, commonly used as cooking gas, cancelling their sales to Cuba. Union Cubapetroleo has warned that there is not a sufficient supply held in its inventories to provide for the demand and that it thus will only be supplied to locations providing basic services, asking people to use gas efficiently. The Cuba government is looking for alternate sources of gas. There are also shortages of petrol and household goods.

Cuba has frequently blamed the US embargo for its economic woes, with the US responding that Cuba only has itself to blame for its troubles by clinging to a flawed economic model and by persecuting its own citizens. Cuba has also recently accused the US of attempting to cut off one of its main sources of foreign revenue, by encouraging the governments of several Latin

American companies to end medical support programmes, whereby Cuba provided medical services in exchange for monetary payments. The US government has argued that these programmes amounted to forced labour on part of the doctors and were also cover for spreading intelligence agents throughout the world.

Some have interpreted the Trump administration's actions towards Cuba as a way of dismantling former President Barack Obama's legacy, the latter famously loosening some of the economic and travel restrictions placed upon the Communist island in 2014, which led to the hope of eventually normalising relations between the two countries after many decades. The US trade embargo on Cuba remains the longest such measure in place, first beginning as a ban on weapon sales to the island in 1958, with other restrictions being added later following the Cuban Revolution. No other major economy has such restrictions on relations with Cuba and the UN has urged the USA to end the embargo, member states voting heavily in favour of such a motion annually for 28 years. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel stated this month that he does not believe that any concessions from the Cuban government would lead to any relief from US sanctions.

Notes of Interest

Concerns continue in the Cayman Islands over proposed developments to the port at George Town, Grand Cayman. A popular port for cruise ships, visitors are currently ferried ashore in small vessels. A new cruise terminal would allow ships to dock directly. Alterations to the port could cause significant damage to the local coral reefs, requiring up to 10 acres to be removed. The disruption may also affect Grand Cayman's excellent water quality by generating silt from the sea floor, possibly spreading north of the capital to Seven Mile Beach, Cayman's

premier bathing spot. There are also concerns that the silt would suffocate other corals, leading to further environmental damage. The Cayman Government continues to support the initiative, arguing that it will encourage more cruise ships to visit Cayman, thus leading to more jobs in the tourist industry. A referendum on the issue will be held soon, having originally been scheduled for December 2019 but delayed due to a judicial review.

Maroon Colonel Rodolph Pink has called on the Jamaican government to ratify the first treaty signed between the Maroons and the British in 1738. The treaties have formed the basis of relations between the Maroons and the Jamaican Government since they were first signed during the eighteenth century, promising the Maroons both freedom and land in perpetuity. Colonel Pink claims that the Maroons still do not have the autonomy promised to them by the treaty and that they are subject to infringement of their rights by the Jamaican security forces.

Stephen Kossoff of the UK's Department for International Development addressed a CARICOM Workshop on World Trade Organisation issues, assuring them that the UK would continue to trade with CARICOM in the future. The EU-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement will continue to govern trade relations between the UK and CARICOM after Brexit until the end of 2020, the expiry of the transition period. Mr. Kossoff said the UK was looking forward to signing a new UK-CARIFORUM agreement in the future and pledged to continue trade-related support to the Caribbean. The UK has contributed approximately £16 million to the Caribbean's Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund over the course of six years.

The islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique

have to deal with the environmental impact of *chlordecone*, a pesticide used between 1973 and 1993 on their banana crops. The World Health Organisation describes the substance as being potentially carcinogenic and a scientific study has linked it to higher rates of prostate cancer. Almost all adults on the islands have traces of the chemical in their bodies. Furthermore, many areas of agricultural land, all rivers and over a third of coastal waters have been polluted and could remain so for centuries, due to the slow speed at which *chlordecone* breaks down. Drinking water remains safe, thanks to filtration, although there are some concerns about produce grown on contaminated land; however, bananas are noted to be safe to consume.

There are concerns for the coral reef of the Turks & Caicos Islands. Stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD), is affecting the coral, causing it to die, thus threatening all the flora and fauna that depend on the reef's ecosystem. The disease has spread to various locations in the Caribbean, such as Jamaica, the Virgin Islands and Belize. The disease is susceptible to antibiotics, but the process is intensive and takes time to implement. The Turks & Caicos Government has yet to give its approval to such a programme.

Conservation efforts on the uninhabited island of Redonda, part of Antigua and Barbuda, are bearing fruit. The island is now clear of invasive species of goats and rats that were introduced by miners who worked on the island in the early twentieth century. Native plant life, previously consumed by the invasive species, has begun to flourish, and the numbers of indigenous fauna are recovering at an unexpectedly high rate. The pace of the restoration has been striking, with changes that the conservationists predicted would take years, occurring within the space of

months.

Prosecutors in the American Virgin Islands have launched legal action against the estate of the late convicted paedophile, Jeffery Epstein, in relation to what may be decades of abuse of minors in the territory. Epstein owned the islands of Little St. James and Great St. James, which the lawsuit hopes to confiscate from the estate, as well as hundreds of millions of dollars. The two islands are estimated to be worth \$86 million. The prosecutors argue that Epstein and his associates brought in several underage girls and abused them at his home on Little St. James.

The West India Committee Report

The West India Committee continues to advise the Home Office on the resolution of the Windrush Scandal. As part of this, the Committee is looking at establishing a new *Caribbean Chamber of Britain*, an overreaching body akin to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, to fill a much-needed role as a permanent representative body for the Caribbean community in the UK as, despite being one of the oldest and largest diasporas in Britain, it continues to face systemic challenges.

Lord Ashcroft, after nine years as President of the West India Committee's Trustees has retired. In the interim, Major David Rankin-Hunt has taken over as Acting President, whilst a new trustee is appointed to the Board. We would like to thank Lord Ashcroft for his many years of support and service to the Committee and the wider community.

Early this year, the Committee has welcomed the Royal British Legion back to the West India Committee Rooms to discuss the 75th anniversary year of the end of the Second World War and will be providing them with support in

their endeavours.

The Committee has been asked to deliver the annual City of London Guides' Melliuish Lecture. *The West Indian City: The history of the Caribbean and the Square Mile* will be delivered by West India Committee CEO Mrs Blondel Cluff CBE on 2nd March at the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry in the City of London.

The West India Committee has been awarded a grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for its project on *The West Indian Soldier*, in partnership with the National Army Museum. Over the next twenty-two months, the Committee and the Museum will work to reveal the hidden stories of the British Army in the West Indies and those West Indians who have served in the British Army over the last 500 years, building on our earlier Lottery-funded project, *The Caribbean's Great War*. This will involve digitising aspects of the West India Committee's Library and Archive, producing educational material, writing a comprehensive book on the subject and organising an exhibition to be held at the Museum in 2021. It is hoped that a travelling exhibition will also visit numerous locations around the UK and hopefully after the end of the project, will continue in the Caribbean.

The West India Committee will recruit a small number of volunteers to help research this exciting new project, and contribute to its outcomes. We ideally seek to recruit volunteers with a proven interest in history and a desire to work in the heritage sector.

The West India Committee has begun a new fundraising initiative to support its new program of work scheduled to take place during the next four years. To donate, please visit our website: <http://westindiacommittee.org/donate/> or send

a cheque to The West India Committee, Suite 53, 3 Whitehall Court SW1A 2EL. If you are a UK taxpayer and are happy for us to claim Giftaid on your donation, please print and complete the form at the end of the circular.

100 Years ago

The West India Committee launched its Endowment fund appeal, to raise a minimum of £20,000 to support itself. It was supported in this aim by newspapers in the Caribbean, who pointed to the good work done by the Committee in support of the region. Several companies and individuals in Britain donated to the fund, so that by the end of January 1920, it has raised over half of its aim.

The West India Committee wrote to the Board of Agriculture, calling attention to the needs of the British West Indies and British Guiana (Guyana) for large amounts of Sulphate of Ammonia, used as a fertiliser, for the 1919-1920 growing season. The Committee calculated that almost 12,000 tons would be required, 7,600 for Guyana and 3,600-4,000 tons for the West Indian islands.

At the end of November 1919, A Baby Welfare League was established in Barbados, following similar successful movements in British Guiana, Trinidad and St. Kitts. The organisation was intended to help reduce infant mortality rates which were, due to poor health provision, considerably higher than in Britain.

In December 1919, a series of riots took place in Trinidad and Tobago, growing out of a strike held by dockworkers in Port-of-Spain and months of growing resentment amongst the black population of the then colony. Amongst those with a grievance were the men formerly of the British West Indies Regiment, who had faced racial discrimination during their service.

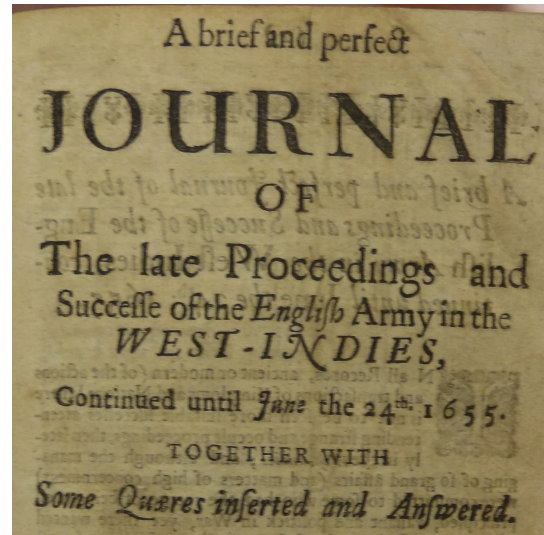
Concessions were made to the strikers, but not before the police in Tobago had fired into a crowd, injuring several and killing Nathaniel Williams, who they had identified as a 'ringleader'. The British military had sent H.M.S. Calcutta to provide support to the authorities.

The Food Controller temporarily reduced the sugar ration at the end of December 1919, claiming that this was to defeat concerted action by sugar producers to raise sugar prices. The West India Committee objected to this claim, which had led to vilification of West Indian sugar producers in the wider press, pointing to the decreasing amount of sugar produced throughout the empire for export, due to the neglect of the industry by several British Governments. The Food Controller apologised in January, saying that he had been in fact referring to other sugar producers and that West Indian and British Guianan Sugar Producers had in fact sold their entire crops at a mutually agreed, reasonable price.

In January 1920, the Circular looked back on fifteen years of the Antigua Sugar Factory and how it had proved very beneficial for the island, modernising the sugar process, allowing 1 ton of sugar to be produced from 9 tons of sugarcane, compared to the old boiling houses, which needed at least 15 tons of cane, and sometimes much more, to produce the same amount. It meant that compared to 3,000 tons of sugar produced per year, 10,000 tons were now produced. The factory had also provided work for many who had none before, thus helping to alleviate poverty on the island. The Circular stated that "In light of these facts our readers will, we think, agree that we are not saying too much when we state that the Antigua Sugar Factory has proved the salvation of Antigua".

From the Library

This quarter we look at one of the oldest items in the Library, *A brief and perfect journal of the late proceedings and success of the English army in the West-Indies*, published in 1655. Written by someone only identified as I.S., it professes to be an eyewitness account of the Western Design, one of the most interesting, yet least remembered events in English and Caribbean history.



During the Interregnum, following the execution of King Charles I, the dissolution of Parliament by Oliver Cromwell and his assumption of the position of Lord Protector, he turned his mind to challenging Spain, at that time arguably the greatest power in Europe, fuelled by the bounty of its colonies in the Americas. Thus an undertaking was conceived in utmost secrecy to send an army to the New World and capture the Spanish colonies. The name of the 'Western Design' emerged as it was suitably ambiguous to hide the military nature of the plan.

Under the command of Robert Venables and William Penn, the expedition left England in December 1654 and arrived in Barbados in early 1655, where they spent several months recruiting more men and making further

preparations. The decision was taken to attack the island of Hispaniola, in an attempt to recreate one of the great military victories of English war hero Sir Francis Drake eighty years previously.

The attack was a disaster, as the men, woefully under-trained and ill-equipped, had to march for three days through the jungle towards their target, the city of San Domingo, where they were ambushed by the Spanish, and saved only by the efforts of a regiment of sailors. Another attack, a few days later, also ended in failure and the English were forced to retreat with many casualties, both from combat and disease. Unwilling to return empty handed, they had to choose a new, easier target, namely the Spanish colony of Jamaica, which the English were able to conquer with ease, as it was poorly defended and the Spanish surrendered quickly.

The book is in many respects a masterpiece of Puritan religious propaganda, providing an insight into the fervour that gripped and motivated many in the Interregnum and the wider seventeenth century. It characterises the expedition as one of righteous Protestants carrying out a religious war against the heathen Catholic Spanish and argues why God should support England in its endeavours.

The author attempts to answer some of the questions that arose in the aftermath of the disastrous campaign, such as why did it fail to achieve its objectives of conquering large swathes of Spanish America, instead settling only for a secondary prize. The Army is described as being well prepared and fighting fit, despite later historians' assessments that they were badly equipped, woefully ill-trained and subject to some appalling tactical decisions.

Thus, in the author's eyes, the failure of the

army can only be attributed to the hand of God, tipped from favour to displeasure by the sinfulness of the English soldiers. The author describes the men as being more obsessed with plunder (a major attraction for anyone wanting to become a soldier in that day and age) rather than seeking "*to glorifie God in their actions*". The men who were recruited from England were described as robbers, vagabonds and runaway servants, whilst those who had been recruited in the West Indies were described as being the "*very scum of scums and meer dregs of corruption.*"

It was published shortly after the return of the Commanders of the expedition to England, leaving the bulk of the army in Jamaica where they suffered from disease and starvation, but ultimately became the first English colonists. For some more information on the Western Design, please read [*A brief history of the Cayman Islands*](#), an e-book produced by the West India Committee for the Government of the Cayman Islands.

THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE

The West India Committee is a UK registered charity that works to improve the welfare of the people of the Caribbean and the societies in which they live and work, both domestically and globally. Please complete this form by hand and post it to The West India Committee, Suite 53, 4 Whitehall Court, Westminster, London, SW1A 2EL.

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