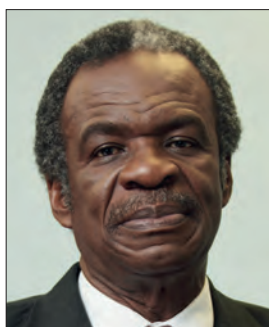


TOBAGO AT FIFTY

APPRECIATING THE PAST, CHARTING THE FUTURE



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Chief Secretary,
Tobago House of Assembly

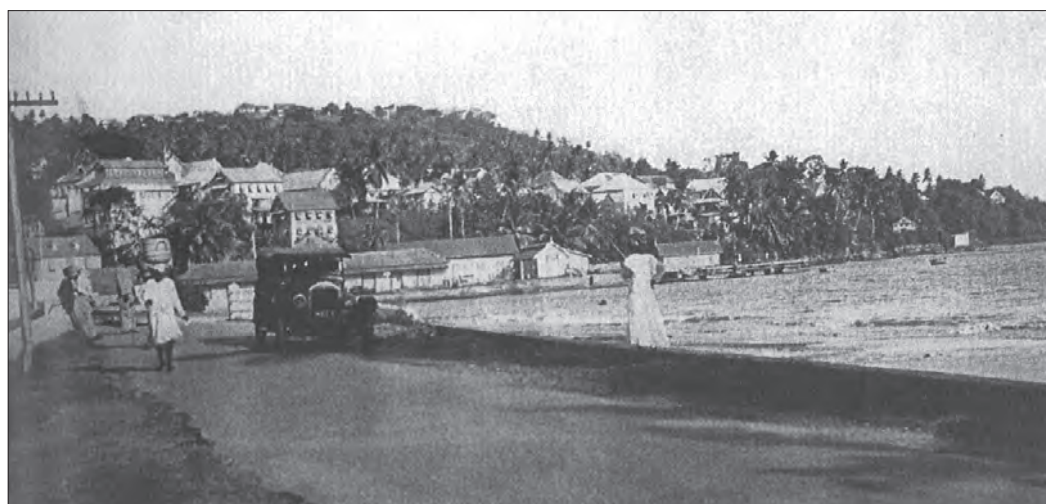
Tobago joins the rest of the country in the celebration of the golden anniversary of the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. As we celebrate, we must reflect on those last 50 years, taking pride in the development experienced and the challenges surmounted. We must savour and be motivated by the achievements of our national stalwarts in so many spheres of endeavour, and we must appreciate the relative good fortune that we have enjoyed in comparison to many other developing countries of the region and the world.

However, as we celebrate, we must also be mindful of the mistakes made and repeated, of the opportunities created and lost, and of the pettiness and the prejudice nurtured and disseminated.

So we must celebrate but, as we mark this anniversary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, we must simultaneously be aware that it is the mindset, the posture, and the contribution of each individual which would have been the major factors determining our rate of development in our journey over the past 50 years. And these selfsame qualities will continue to be the major factors in shaping our progress in ensuing decades.

This is why the special role of Tobago and Tobagonians in the Independence story cannot be ignored. Tobago enjoyed significant autonomy in its relationship with Great Britain almost 250 years ago. By 1768, the island had created its first bicameral legislature, which could be considered as the first incarnation of the present Tobago House of Assembly. It is therefore extremely significant that one of the dominant themes on the island over the last 50 years has been the quest for increased autonomy as Tobagonians assert their right to determine their own destiny. We, as Tobagonians, owe it to our history, and to all those who would have been involved in the struggle, to remain steadfast in our quest for internal self-government. We must not be bribed or bullied into accepting anything less than what we deserve and what our predecessors envisaged for the island and its people. Tobagonians must review the lessons of the past and recognise that there are some issues which demand that they abandon political, religious, sectoral and other affiliations and play their role as “true Tobagonians.”

The people of this island have every reason to be proud of their contribution to the



A view of downtown Scarborough, now known as Carrington Street. This area has become a main hub for commercial, banking and import/export activity

nation's development over the years. Former President, Prime Minister and Tobago House of Assembly Chairman Arthur N.R. Robinson; late Commissioners of Police Eustace Bernard and Hilton Guy, former Heads of the Public Service, Dodridge Alleyne and Reginald Dumas; cultural icon Dr J.D. Elder; former Governor of the Central Bank Victor E. Bruce; educator Lionel P. Mitchell; entertainers Calypso Rose, Lord Nelson and Shadow; footballer Dwight Yorke and athletes of recent vintage, Kelly-Ann Baptiste, Lalonde Gordon, Renny Quow, Semoy Hackett and Joseanne Lucas – these are just some of the high-profile Tobagonians who have made significant contributions in building the nation and enhancing its regional and internal stature.

Tobagonians have also blended their unique qualities into the national mix and have contributed to the fascinating mosaic that identifies this country as one of the most intriguing national entities in the region. We need to introspect and determine if we have retained those qualities of devotion to duty, pride in performance, loyalty to family and community, confidence in self and belief in God that enabled our fore-parents to cope with their particular environment. These are the qualities which engendered respect, even admiration throughout the country. If we lose these Tobago values, the Tobago spirit, we do a disservice, not only to ourselves, but to a country which needs committed, self-reliant, focused and confident men and women if it is going to realise its full potential over the next 50 years.

Tobago's potential for significant contribution to the national economy must also remain a priority. The Tobago House of Assembly is committed to the development and diversification of the tourism sector, while ensuring that our pristine environment is maintained. The issues of environmental degradation, and climate change will continue to challenge us. Battling such global problems requires concerted action, not

only by the Assembly, the Central Government and regional and international entities, but by all residents of, and visitors to, Tobago.

The diversification of the Tobago economy will continue under this administration. More Tobagonians have to return to the land and Tobagonians must be prepared and outfitted to derive more benefit from the sea. The availability of energy resources in the waters surrounding Tobago must improve our negotiating position on the national stage but, more importantly, the potential for the use of natural gas could within the next two decades provide the catalyst to develop and market Tobago as a genuine green island.

We will continue to celebrate but we must also continue to reflect. We have come a long way since 1962 but we have a long and challenging journey ahead. Yet it is a journey which is also exciting and full of opportunity. Let us be strengthened, encouraged and informed by the lessons of the past five decades so that, as an island, a country and a people, we will be even better prepared to contribute to the development of the sovereign democratic state of Trinidad and Tobago. Happy anniversary and may God bless our nation. ■

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Tobago: the road may be long but the future's bright



Photograph: Stephen Broadbridge