

■ This article explains why Sierra Leonian politics have become a happy hunting ground for scalawags.

# Democratic Advance In Sierra Leone

By George Padmore

**T**HE forthcoming general elections in Sierra Leone, to be held under the new Constitution, will give a large measure of representation and provide for more autonomy in the administration of the country. It should also stimulate the emergence of a better type of politician dedicated to unselfish national service in the interest and welfare of the common people.

Although Sierra Leone is the oldest British settlement on the West African coast, it has been overtaken and surpassed by the Gold Coast and Nigeria in economic, political, and social advancement. Unfortunately, up to now, too many of the ablest young Sierra Leonians, who have had the advantage of education in Britain and America, have, on their

return home, isolated themselves from the people and failed to provide their communities with the constructive leadership which is so badly needed. Unlike the African intellectuals in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the educated elite in Sierra Leone have either turned their backs upon the people, sought safe and comfortable jobs in government service, or confined themselves to money-making in the learned professions. Consequently, there is a complete absence of disinterested leadership and direction in public life, and politics has become the happy hunting ground of scalawags.

The present constitutional advance should excite a greater interest in public affairs and provide the political environment for party politics to develop and crystallize around ideological programmes cutting across tribal and sectional interests. This is the most urgent need in all African colonies now trying to lay the foundations of parliamentary democ-

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GEORGE PADMORE, *who resides in London, England, is one of the world's foremost experts on African colonial problems. His most recent book is Pan-Africanism or Communism?*

racy. Until recent years, politics in Sierra Leone have centered around personalities, most of whom have been demagogues using their professional and social status to bamboozle the illiterate masses for their own personal aggrandizement. As long as the "rotten-borough" denied the common people their right to elect their representatives on the basis of universal adult suffrage, these charlatans and humbugs had a free run in public affairs. But from now on these opportunists will find it more and more difficult to exploit the situation, as they will have to justify their claims to office before the electorate.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

In order to appreciate the possibilities for the rapid growth of parliamentary democracy which the present constitutional reforms open up, it is necessary to review briefly the political evolution in Sierra Leone since the end of the second World War.

The territory, which is about the size of Ireland, has been administered, until recent years, as two distinct regions—(a) the *Colony*, with a population of about 130,000, of whom some 40,000 are Creoles, the descendants of liberated slaves from the Western World; and (b) the *Protectorate*, with a population of about two million, mostly indigenous tribes, such as the *Mende* and *Temne*.

Ever since 1863, Sierra Leone has had its own Legislative Council. It was the first British West African territory to which the Crown Colony

system of government was introduced. From that time, the legislature has undergone many changes. The last reform was introduced in 1951, when the membership of the Legislative Council was increased from 10 to 23 unofficial members and the official members reduced from 11 to 7. In the Colony area the representation was increased from 3 to 7 and at the same time the more populated area of the Protectorate was allotted 14 representatives—12 chosen by district councils and 2 by the Protectorate Assembly, a co-ordinating advisory body.

The present Legislative Council consists of the governor as president, an African vice-president; 7 ex-officio members; 7 members directly elected from constituencies within the Colony area; 14 indirectly elected from the Protectorate, and 2 unofficial members nominated by the governor to represent trading and commercial interests—making a total membership of 31, excluding the governor.

#### PROPOSED CONSTITUTION

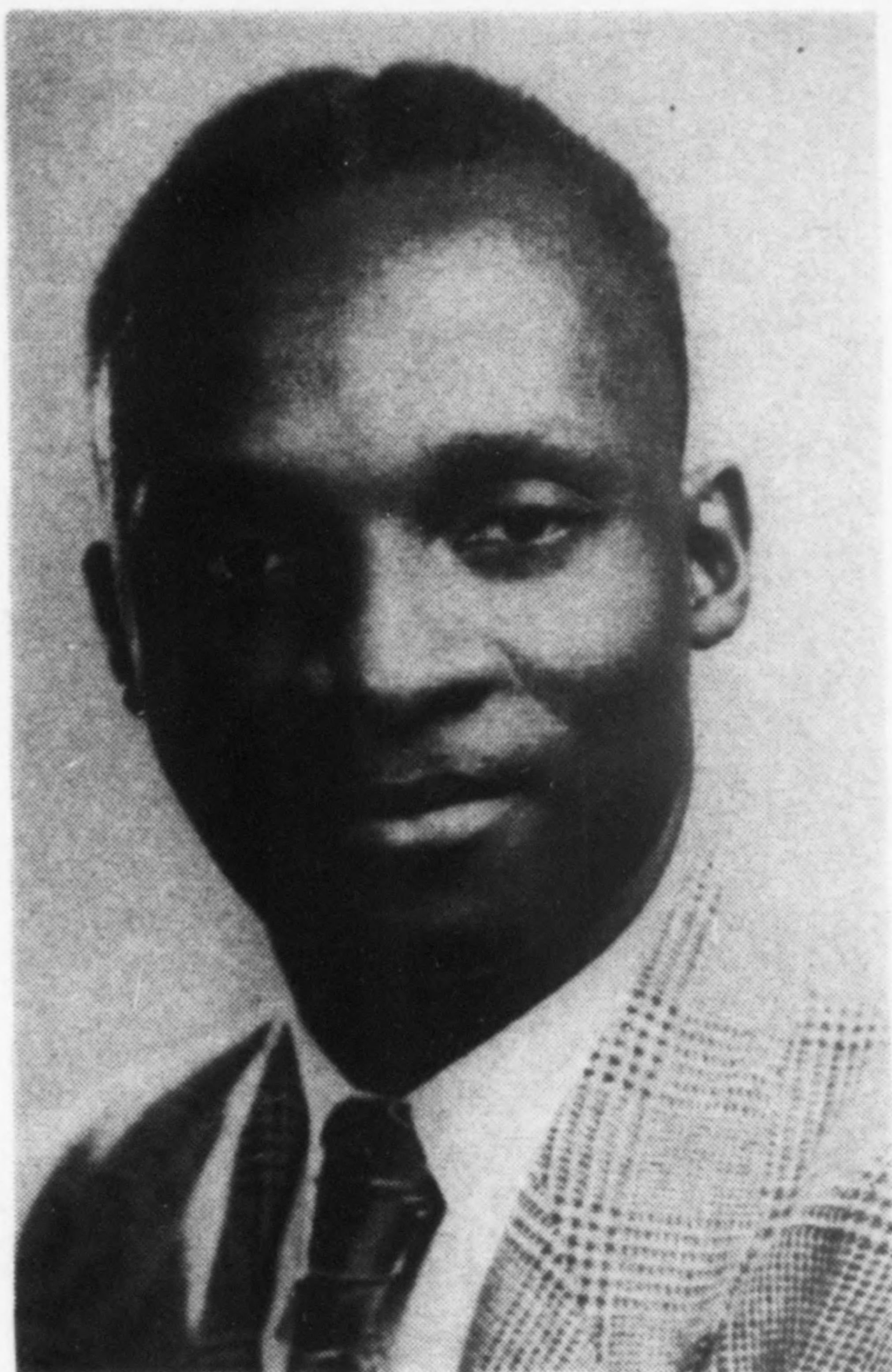
After a trial period of five years, the Secretary of State for the Colonies recently announced that Sierra Leone will be granted a new Constitution early in 1957 with an increased representation. Under this reformed government the Legislative Council, elected by the members, will be replaced by a House of Representatives, and will consist of a Speaker, from either within or outside the House. On the unofficial side, there will be 14 members elected from the Colony and 37 members from the Protectorate—25

elected, and 12 Paramount Chiefs, one from each of the tribal districts comprising the chiefdoms in that part of the country.

The ex-officio members will be reduced from 7 to 4—the chief secretary of the government, the financial secretary, the attorney-general, and the chief commissioner of the Protectorate. The governor, however, will have the right to nominate two members to represent foreign vested interests (trade and commerce) and will retain in his hands certain reserved powers and the veto over legislation in the interest of “good government, public safety,” etc., etc.

#### POLITICAL LINE-UP

At the last general elections in 1951, several politicians attempted to establish political parties, but these have remained mostly mushroom organizations without any mass membership or clear-cut economic and social programmes. Two of these have survived, one is the National Council of Sierra Leone, centered around an “old school” conservative politician, Dr. Bankole Bright, and drawing its main support from among the older generation of Creoles, who resent and fear the ascendancy of the tribal natives of the Protectorate. The other is the Sierra Leone People’s Party, led by Mr. S. M. Margai, a first-generation Protectorate intellectual and retired government medical officer. This party enjoys the support of the majority of the chiefs and the Protectorate members in the Legislative Council, as well as of certain younger people of the Creole community in Freetown, the capital of the colony. The leaders of the



*Koby Cambridge*

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Sierra Leone People’s Party distrust the Creole politicians and resent their claim to be the only fit and proper people to rule the country.

#### MINISTERIAL SYSTEM

The cleavage between the party leaders has been accentuated by the scramble for place and office under the “Ministerial system,” which the Colonial Office has introduced into most colonies since the end of the war. In April 1953, the then governor, Sir George Beresford-Stooke, appointed Mr. Margai and five other

leaders of the Sierra Leone People's Party (the majority group in the Legislative Council) to be ministers in charge of various government departments. At the same time the governor conferred upon Dr. Margai the title of Chief Minister. This gesture has so infuriated the Creole politicians of the National Council that Dr. Bright and his supporters are demanding the separation of the Colony from the Protectorate, rather than live under a government ruled by Protectorate people whom they consider their "inferiors." The leaders of the Sierra Leone People's Party, however, have no such resentment against the Colony people and are willing to join forces with the progressive Creoles in promoting the integration of the two regions into one united self-governing country.

One of the hopeful features of the new situation, which the proposed

Constitution has opened up, is the opportunity for young Creole intellectuals to come forward and play their part in public life. Already one of the ablest among them, Dr. E. W. Blyden, the grandson of the distinguished Afro-West Indian scholar, and himself a Harvard Ph.D., and former lecturer at Fourah Bay University College, has been invited to contest a Freetown constituency as an independent candidate. The future unity and progress of Sierra Leone will in large measure depend upon the extent to which able and progressive young Creoles, like Dr. Blyden, untainted by "aristocratic" exclusiveness, become leaders of the new national awakening. For they alone can create the means which will bridge the present gulf between the emergent people of the Protectorate and the old established westernized Creole community of the Colony area.

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*EVEN at the "old" age of seven months, we find little Anita Eugenia Amos, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Preston E. Amos of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, arguing for her civil rights. She holds the distinction of being one of the few NAACP members who belonged to the organization before birth. Her parents enrolled her as an NAACP member several months before she was born on Christmas Day, 1955.*