

# the SPECTATOR

## George Padmore's life



**T**HE GIFT OF THE WEST INDIES to Western Culture has never been appreciated. Blacks, mulattoes, octoroons and whites have sprung from these beautiful mountains set in the tropic seas and giving birth on their peaks to fruit and flower, animal and vegetable and extraordinary human beings: Toussaint L'Overture and the Empress Josephine; Browning and Henri Christophe, the Dumas family, Gomez and Maceo and a host of poets, politicians and artists. And George Padmore, just dead at the age of 56.

I met him first in London when I was organizing the Pan-African congresses. He was a brilliant young writer and student and I kept in touch with him. He was born in Trinidad of well-to-do and educated parents. He came to the United States for his education and was trained at Fisk where I had attended college 30 years earlier; and then he took a degree at the Howard Law School. He joined the Communist Party as a young man and finally went to Europe, living and working in London, Germany and the Soviet Union.

George Padmore devoted his entire life to the cause of African freedom. He worked as a journalist and collected a remarkable library of books and newspaper clippings which formed the basis of his research for some of the best books ever written on British colonialism, especially in Africa. His last work was *Africa, Britain's Third Empire*.

In the Soviet Union he lectured, was a member of the Comintern and of the Colonial Bureau of the Communist International. He differed with the Soviet leaders on matters concerning Africa and the treatment of African leaders. Just what these points of difference



GEORGE PADMORE

were I do not know. I was hoping that when I went to Ghana I would have opportunity to discuss these matters with Padmore. Hitler deported him to England and the United States repeatedly refused him a visa.

**I MET HIM LAST IN 1945.** When I rejoined the NAACP in 1944, I was especially interested in continuing the Pan-African congresses. The next year the trade unions of the world met in Paris and, for the first time, African unions were strongly represented. White union leaders of Britain and America wanted to speak for these unions, knowing more or less consciously that low wages in colonies were the reason for high wages for white workers in Europe and America. Therefore it would not do to have these Negroes too vocal. But the overwhelming communist vote of Europe sustained the Negroes and they gave loud voice to their complaints.

When the Paris meeting adjourned, the African trade unionists, on advice of Padmore, demanded the calling of a fifth Pan-African Congress in London. The Pan-African movement had no office or permanent organization and I, as secretary of the last congress, was its only representative. Padmore wrote me and I gladly consented to call a Congress in London in 1945. There were difficulties about halls and accommodations, but at last Manchester invited us to meet there and gave us hearty welcome. I flew over to preside and Padmore and an African, Kwame Nkrumah, took charge of arrangements.

It proved a most inspiring meeting. There was a large number of Africans present, representing workers rather than professional men, as had been the rule in previous congresses. There was Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, afterward accused of abetting the Mau Mau rebellion. There was Nkrumah, who later secured the independence of Ghana and is now its prime minister. There was Johnson, the Liberian labor leader, and Nikol, leader of the cocoa farmers. Padmore was the inspiration and real organizer of the conference and the man who picked Nkrumah for leadership and groomed him for the job.

**WHEN NKURUMAH BECAME PRIME MINISTER** of independent Ghana, he called Padmore to be his chief adviser. Padmore conceived his role to be the shaping of a Ghana British in culture and American in economy. He published a book, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, arguing that West Africa should avoid the Soviet Union's example and try to develop a socialism along British lines. He said pleasant things about my Pan-African congresses, but I disagreed with him and urged closer ties with the Soviets and distrust of American capitalism.

Unfortunately we never had a chance to discuss this difference of view face to face. My wife Shirley Graham visited him in Accra last December. He died in a London hospital while his wife was with me and my wife in New York; and at an age far too young for the good of his race and era. He was a brilliant and devoted man. His death is a warning to the middle-aged: Watch your health; save your strength. Today as never before the Negro people need their leaders, particularly men of experience and learning like George Padmore.

—W. E. B. Du Bois