

The Empire Strikes Back

The West Indies are back in town. **Frank Keating** looks back to the era of patronising paternalism, and their first sweet victories over the old 'Mother Country'



David Frith Collection

Another Test match series between England and the West Indians gets under way – and again, no doubt, more than a few Englishmen will be complaining before the summer is out that the West Indians do not have a proper appreciation of the grand old game. In as much as they hit too hard with the bat, and bowl too fast with the ball.

Although the regular challenge between the two sides has only been deemed 'official' by the mandarins of the English game at Lord's for just over 60 years, we are in fact fast approaching a centenary of cricket contests between the Caribbean teams and the 'Mother Country' of the old British Empire.

The first English touring side was led by the redoubtable autocrat, Lord 'I shave twice a day, my professionals only once: a sign we each know our place' Hawke.

For matches in Barbados and Demerara (now Guyana), they declined to play any side which included a non-white in their team. But when they arrived at Port-of-Spain, the more multiracially advanced administration insisted they would have to. Hawke grumbled but, in the end, conceded.

They played two matches there, and Hawke's men lost them both. At which Pelham Warner, scion of a wealthy plantation-owning family, and later knighted for services to cricket, cabled back to England and *Wisden*, even then the cricketers' annual 'bible': 'Chief credit for the notable island victories rested with the two black bowlers, Woods and Cumberbatch, who between them took 39 wickets in the two matches. Woods bowled very fast with a somewhat low and slinging action. He is very straight and every now and then breaks back considerably. Cumberbatch, who is probably the better bowler of the two, is a medium fast right-hander. He breaks both ways and varies his speed with much judgement.' As I say, since then, through the whole century, there has been nothing new under the cricket suns of summer.

Warner also added in his notes for that *Wisden* of 1898: 'The fielding of the Trinidad team was splendid. Black men are especially fine fielders: they throw well and seldom miss a catch.' I suppose he felt it superfluous to explain that the black men, at least in the Trinidad team on those two days, had all been mighty well practised in the fielding arts by regular and compulsory fielding at games played by the garrison officers of the British army stationed in Trinidad, or by the sons of the well-to-do plantation owners – games in which, it goes without saying, native sons of the soil were not allowed an innings or a turn of the ball themselves.

Still, that first mention in *Wisden* of island cricket being taken seriously showed, in the face of the prevailing colonial certainties of the time, a surprising lack of patronising paternalism on the part of Warner; and, indeed,

it spelt out an enlightened prophecy of what was to come.

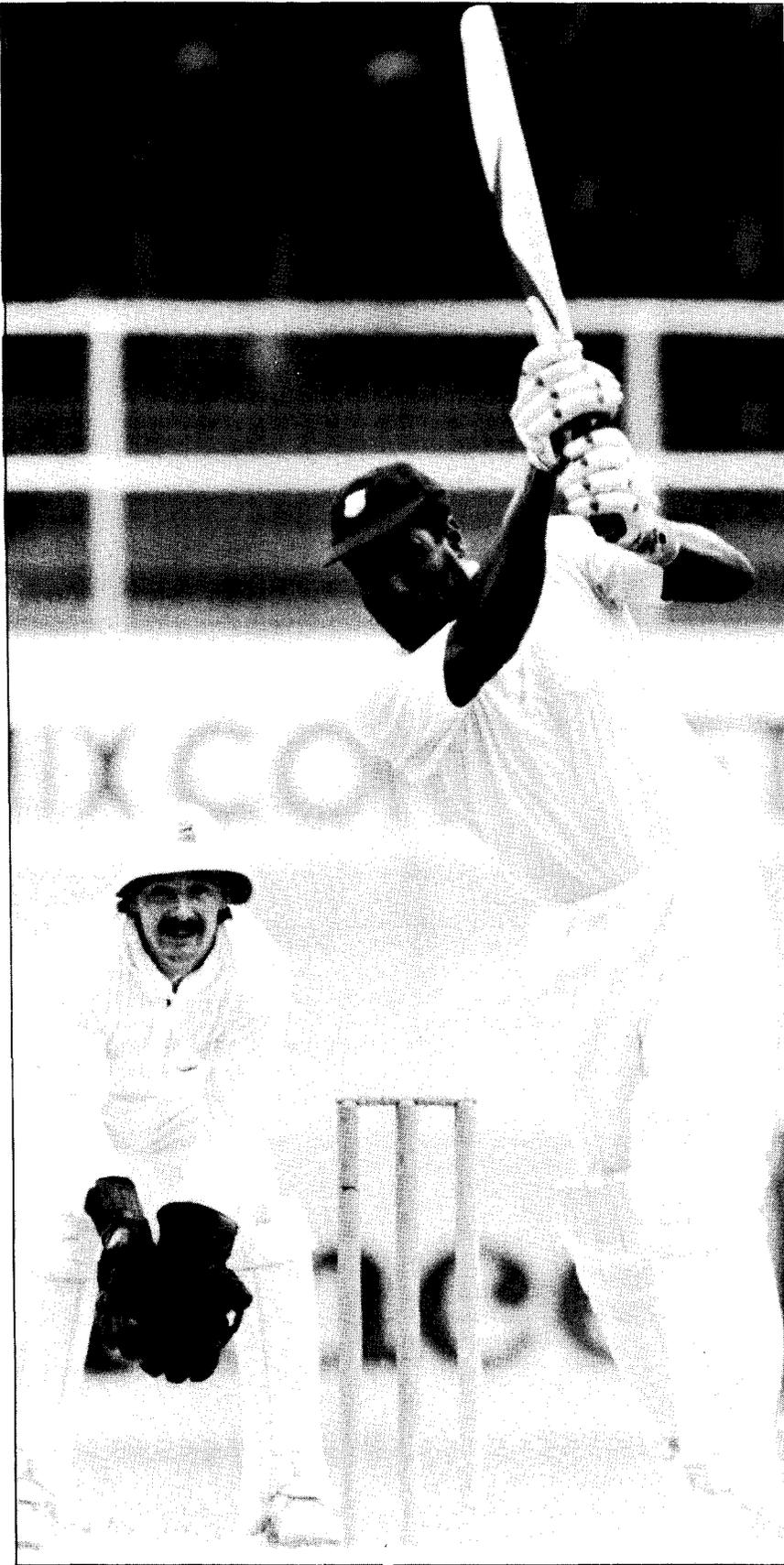
But patronising paternalism had a long course to run yet. Oh dear me, it did. Three years after that first tour by Hawke's men, Pelham Warner's older brother, RSA Aucher Warner, brought the first 'unofficial' (as Lord's called it) collective and multiracial team across to England. It was made up of players from Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guiana. On the day they disembarked at Southampton from the banana boat, the London *Evening Star* carried a large cartoon featuring Dr WG Grace, the English cricket champion, in a towering, regal pose, bat in hand instead of scimitar, while around him cowered and simpered seven or eight black men, all shedding tears and imploring the doctor, 'sorry, sah, we have only come to learn, sah'.

The team played a number of county sides, but did not do themselves justice. Of 17 games, they lost eight and drew four. Another London paper of the time, *The Sun*, summed up: 'They field fairly well, but their bowling is weak and their batting crude and possessing little style. None of them seems to have any idea of forward play and there is little variety in their strokes. Few of them score freely on the offside, but one and all are good at the old-fashioned leg-stroke, and they time the ball admirably.'

The writer, alas, offered not a jot of allowance for the pitches – or the climate – that these cricketing tyros had been born to, back home on their islands. For the batsmen, playing forward was unwise due to the unrolled, hard, uneven, sunbaked wickets, for a start. And as for the poor bowlers, well, some of them were having to bowl in boots for the first time. Warner Sr and Lord's kitted them out with cast-offs for foot-wear. Must keep up appearances, what! In the early match, against Gloucestershire at Bristol on June 28 1900, the same Woods who had so impressed Warner Jr three years ago in Trinidad, marked up his run in boots for the first time. Two whacking great cornish-pasty-like things at the end of his legs. It must have been, to him, like running in concrete. Gloucester's crouching demon of a hitter, Gilbert Jessop, sprang at poor Woods mercilessly, flailing an astonishing 157 in just over an hour.

Early on in the assault, Woods approached his white-man captain at mid-off – 'Please, Mr Warner, sir, I have only ever bowled if I can feel the pitch with my toes. May I take my boots off – even for just one over, sir, then I am sure I can get this man out?' 'Certainly not, my good man. This is England. You are playing cricket against a first-class county, sir!'

Poor Woods. I always think fondly of his memory. And every time, these last few decades of the century, when I've witnessed an English batsman hopping and ducking and diving away from rearing, devilishly fast balls, delivered by



Above: The emperor Viv Richards. Left: Woods and Cumberbatch, a winning combination

his heirs in any West Indies new-ball attack, I fancy that Woods is looking down contentedly, and with vindication.

But that team of heroes and pioneers began a regular, two-way traffic of cricket tours across the Atlantic. In 1901 an Oxbridge side played a dozen games around the islands; in 1905 Lord Brackley's XI played a 'Test' against 'the All-West-Indies XI'; a year later another West Indies side toured England.

Each match, each Englishman's wicket taken or English bowler's delivery dispatched through the covers or to the midwicket boundary was another firmly struck pin in the edifice of self-esteem of a people hitherto wretchedly submerged in slavery and degradation. As the great Trinidadian writer, VS Naipaul, had it in *The Middle Passage*: 'In a society which demanded no skills and offered no rewards to merit, cricket

was the only activity which permitted a man to grow to his full stature and to be measured against international standards. Alone on a field, beyond obscuring intrigue, the cricketer's true worth could be seen by all. His race, education, wealth did not matter. We had no scientists, engineers, explorers, soldiers or poets. The cricketer was our only hero figure. And that is why cricket is played in the West Indies with such panache.'

And so it came to pass. Four years after the first world war, and a quarter of a century after the racist snub of Lord Hawke's first tour of the Caribbean, a full West Indies team – still 'unofficial' and, as they would be till the 1960s and Sir Frank Worrell, still captained as a matter of course by a white man – made their way round England on another tour. Three black cricketers made up a luminous trio in the side which hugely impressed the English shires: the two George's, John and Francis, who bowled with cunning and speed, and a 22 year-old all-rounder of blazing opulence, Learie Constantine.

The glorious resplendence of Constantine's cricket was the prophecy which foretold the coming of such legendary giants to the whole world game as George Headley, 'the black Bradman', the 'Three W's' – Everton Weekes, Clyde Walcott, and Worrell – the 'onliest' Sir Garfield Sobers, Clive Lloyd, and the merciless emperor himself, Vivian Richards. And there followed a whole stream of bowlers – mystical wizards like Sonny Ramadhin, Alf Valentine, and Lance Gibbs, and fiercesome heirs to Woods and John (who, according to CLR James, Trinidad and the world's grand poet, philosopher, and marxist, 'began the thing by striking many a batsman on the pads, to fell him like an ox'), and on to such a litany of new-ball saints as Martindale, Gilchrist, Hall, Griffith, Holding, Roberts, Croft, Garner 'the Big Bird', and Marshall 'the Macho Man'. Plus many more superlative bowlers from whence they came.

And Constantine, of course, was not only founder of the feast at cricket. He went on to become a QC at London's Middle Temple, a governor of the BBC, rector of St Andrews, a cabinet minister in Trinidad, and the first Baron Constantine of Nelson and Maraval – the first black peer in all history to sit in the House of Lords of the United Kingdom and Her Majesty's Commonwealth of Nations. There's a 'V-sign' for you, relishingly given on behalf of old Woods, of the cornish-pasty boots at Bristol all those years ago. In that time cricket has triumphantly filled a gap in the West Indies' consciousness and needs. But also in Britain's, did we but admit it.

Tell you what, it is mighty good to have them back among us, *The Champions*.●

Frank Keating is sports writer for *The Guardian* and *The Spectator*.

'Alone on a field, beyond obscuring intrigue, the cricketer's true worth could be seen by all'



No Marks For Education

Many on the Right contend there is too much of the state in our education system. **Andy Green** argues there is not enough – and never has been

‘We have a bloody state system I wish we hadn’t got. I wish we’d taken a different route in 1870. We got the ruddy state involved. I don’t want it. I don’t think we know how to do it. I certainly don’t think secretaries of state know anything about it. But we’re landed with it.’ (Keith Joseph)¹

The proper role of the state in British education is more contested now than at any time since the 1860s. For over a century it was generally accepted that in a democratic society universal education could be properly delivered only by a national system funded and managed by the state. Education was a collective social need and civic right and as such could not be left to private and local interests. It had to be a public service vouchsafed by the state. At least that was the theory.

This consensus no longer exists in British politics. Since 1979 Conservative governments have declared themselves profoundly uneasy with the whole concept of state maintained education. Former secretary of state, Keith Joseph, in a recent interview with Stephen Ball, went so far as to claim that secretaries of state knew nothing about education – a truly astonishing admission from someone once entrusted with the education of the nation’s children, but very revealing of a certain mentality. He went on to lament that Britain had ever developed a state education system and assured that if he had been around in 1870 he would have taken a different route. Many of the most powerful political voices in education today still want to take that other route – one that would lead to educational vouchers and a free-market in education – in other words to the end of state education as we know it. Several of the measures in the 1988 Education Act have taken us some way down that road already.

This is the clear agenda of the so-called new Right, which has provided some of the dominant political discourses of the last 12 years, not least in education. The thinking of the free-marketers in education, as elsewhere, is now quite familiar. Their critique of state education is

that it is a bureaucratic and inefficient state monopoly dominated by producer interests and unresponsive to the demands of its consumers, the parents and employers. Most of the problems in education, they maintain, can be attributed to the meddling of misguided administrators and self-interested teachers, to misconceived policies of social engineering through comprehensive schools and to so-called progressive teaching methods. ‘The present parlous state of state maintained education’, wrote Stuart Sexton in 1987, ‘is not the result of six years of Conservative government, it is the result of 30 years or more of successive government attempts to run education as a government managed service’.²

Seen from a comparative or historical point of view, the claim that what ails British education is an overdose of state management seems rather bizarre. In the first place British education is very much less ‘managed’ by the state than is the case in most other countries, including many, like France, Germany, Japan and Sweden, which are generally considered to have rather better records in terms of educational participation and levels of achievement in a broad range of subjects. The education system in England and Wales has traditionally been regarded as peculiarly decentralised. Legislation has typically been permissive not prescriptive; there has been no national curriculum until recently, and considerable responsibility has been devolved to individual institutions and their teachers. This may now be changing but it was certainly the case during most of the postwar period vilified by Stuart Sexton. Compared with most continental systems its main peculiarity has been its singular lack of central state management. Nor has any other European state sought to introduce the kind of free-market measures advocated here.

You will look in vain in France, Germany, Austria or Sweden for any equivalent of educational vouchers, local management of schools, open enrolment, or other policies designed to stimulate free-market competition between schools. The educational free-market is

largely a home-grown invention.

The second point is that on a longer historical evaluation many of the educational problems attributed to the post-war era, and to the politics of social democracy, can, in fact, be traced much further back to the liberal politics of the last century. Indeed, it is arguable that the peculiar underdevelopment of various aspects of UK education and training derive in no small part from the legacy of the laissez-faire policies of the 19th century which were never quite superseded in the era of the welfare state. On this reckoning, the very solutions offered by the neo-liberal Right are in reality part of the longer, and peculiarly English, historical problem.

England was the last major country to create a national education system and the most reluctant to put it under state control. Many continental states, including France, Switzerland, Holland and the German states, had developed their state systems by 1850. These included networks of elementary schools, administered and largely funded by the state, providing near-universal and sometimes compulsory education, in the case of Prussia up to 14 years of age; significant, though less widespread, networks of state secondary and trade schools; fully-fledged central educational bureaucracies responsible, among other things, for setting curricula and inspecting schools; and national systems of teacher training and state examinations. By the mid-19th century, England had few vestiges of a state system and its church schools enrolled scarcely more than half of the children of school age. The foundations of a public system were not laid until the 1870 act created the local board schools to supplement the existing voluntary system. A unified educational bureaucracy was not created until 1899, and state secondary schools did not emerge until 1902, one hundred years after Napoleon created the *lycées*. Compulsory education until 14 was not legislated until 1918, 90 years after similar legislation was put on the Prussian statute books.

The reasons behind the differential development of national systems in 19th century states are complex. The educational advance of some continental states no doubt had something to do with the deliberate state-building policies of the 18th century absolutist monarchies and dirigiste regimes of the post-revolutionary era. Military ambition and the desire to escape economic underdevelopment frequently gave stimulus to educational development. Schools were designed to provide loyal military recruits, experts for the state bureaucracies, and engineers to promote industrial development and civic works. Education was an important vehicle for generating the cultural and linguistic cohesion required by the developing nation states, and an effective conduit for the ideologies which would underpin the political hegemony of the rising