

**THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT
O F
LABOUR MOVEMENTS IN THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
T O
BRITISH GUIANA, JAMAICA AND TRINIDAD**

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b y

FRANCIS XAVIER MARK, M.A.



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P R E F A C E

This thesis traces the history of attempts to establish labour organisations in British Guiana, Jamaica and Trinidad, and describes the blossoming out of these attempts into mass movements. Special attention has been paid to describing the setting in which these movements emerged. The importance of the peculiar characteristics of West Indian society for the developing Labour Movements has been emphasized. No effort has been made to examine the relationship between organised labour in the three territories, or to discuss Labour Movements in the British Caribbean as a whole.

Writers on British Caribbean history either avoid the 20th Century or treat it in summary fashion. No systematic study of the history of labour organisations in the area already exists, to my knowledge. This thesis is intended as a contribution both to the general history of the British Caribbean in the 20th Century, and to the more specialised topic of organised labour in the area. It may also be of value for the comparative study of Labour Movements, though no attempt at comparisons has been made here.

A study of this nature involves the use of some sources not ordinarily employed by historians of the British Caribbean. The proximity of the period prevents the use of material in the Public Records Office or the Archives of the territorial Governments. Dispatches, especially confidential dispatches, the minutes of evidence of various commissions of enquiry, and police reports, all of which would possibly reveal a wealth of information, cannot be consulted.

This would not be a severe handicap, were it not that the prevailing attitude to keeping records in the British Caribbean is one of utter disinterest. The people with whom this study is concerned, too, especially before 1939, are the ones least likely to have kept any written accounts which would throw light on their activities. The effects of a tropical climate and frequent fires have contributed to the destruction of what documentary evidence of this nature there was. Thus, all Cipriani's papers were removed and destroyed upon his death in order to tidy up his office for its next occupant who, as Secretary of the TLP, should have realised their value. The records of both the BGLU and the Trinidad Labour Department were destroyed by fire in 1945 and 1948.

As a result, newspapers have been the main source of information for the early period, and reconstruction of events has presented occasionally the familiar problem of making bricks out of straw. For the period after 1939, much more evidence is available, a great deal of it con-

forming to the usual type. The detailed treatment given to the early period, therefore, may seem paradoxical when compared with the mere outlining of trends after 1939. I feel however, that apart from the necessity to deal more fully with the pre-1935 organisations about which there is so little known, developments in the British Caribbean since 1939 are too contemporary to allow of fully objective use of historical techniques in their evaluation.

In addition to written sources, information was acquired through the medium of interviews and checked whenever possible. I have avoided the use of information which cannot be substantiated.

F. X. M.

Edinburgh,

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The University of Edinburgh awarded me Post-Graduate Studentships in 1955-56 and 1956-57. The Colonial Social Science Research Council enabled me to visit Jamaica on an Historical and Administrative Research Grant in 1955-56. The Government of British Guiana provided a grant for a visit to British Guiana to examine local material in 1956. I have written this thesis while on the staff of the Research Section of the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies, University of Manchester.

I was encouraged to undertake this study by the late Professor Richard Pares. My supervisor, Mr. W.H. Marwick, who first guided my interest in Labour Movements, and Professor W.J.M. Mackenzie have sustained me with advice and criticism. To them I owe my greatest debt.

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CHAPTER 1

THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN
IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The history of the British Caribbean colonies in the 20th Century has been influenced in large measure by events and ideas of the preceding 75 years. Most significant of these was the Abolition of Negro Slavery, which gave citizenship to the large and growing Negro population and which, viewed in retrospect, set the pattern for the passing of political control out of the hands of the European and within the grasp of the coloured, Negro and East Indian population in the last 15 years. Although Europeans preceded both Negroes and Indians as settlers in the area, they have remained such a small element in the population that the tendency is to regard them as 'foreigners', and the Negro and Indian as true 'natives'. Important too has been the decline of the sugar industry, the result of a complex of high costs, foreign competition, labour supply difficulties, the loss of its protected markets, and the traditional inability of the landed plantocracy to adapt itself easily to environmental changes in society; with the decline of sugar vanished the prosperity of these 'sugar colonies', for whose possession nations had warred and bargained as jewels of great worth. And to weed the cane-

fields of the surviving plantations came a new element in the population, the East Indian immigrants who remained in numbers large enough to form an important racial minority group in the South-eastern end of the area, where they are now the largest racial segment of the British Guianese population, and are expected to achieve the same position in the Trinidad population in the next generation.

From the relationship with the United Kingdom in the same period stemmed formative influences, particularly in the field of government. From the beginning, political institutions have followed the British pattern, the old representative assemblies being imitations of the English Parliament. Crown Colony Government in the 19th Century has been followed by a return of semi-representative institutions, again on the pattern of the United Kingdom. One can hardly expect otherwise. As Lord Halifax wrote some 36 years ago, "The whole history of the African population of the West Indies inevitably drives them towards representative institutions fashioned after the British model ... they look for political growth to the only source and pattern that they know"¹ We might add that demands for representative institutions are more likely to succeed, in

1. Cmd. 1679, (1922).

the case of a colony, if modelled on what obtains in the metropolitan country, and that this consideration has no doubt been an ever-present though seldom expressed factor in the formulation of such demands.

But quite apart from the legacy of post-emancipation developments, the changes which have taken place in the British Caribbean colonies in the 20th Century have a pace and a character all their own, and could not have been foreseen, certainly, from 19th Century trends. One of the main causes of this is the technological achievements of the industrial world of Europe and the United States of America which have resulted in accelerating the "modernisation" of non-industrial areas by putting them, so to speak, on the map. Most notable from the point of view of this study was the revolution in transport and communications of which the steamship (and more recently the aeroplane), the motorcar, radio, the telegraph and the telephone are the examples that come to mind. The 'shrinkage' of the globe which they made possible brought current ideas and ideals into every West Indian's orbit. More and more people, drawn from a wider circle than was possible in the 19th Century, could travel abroad in search of education or employment, and could see at first hand what was happening in the outside world. Naturally, travel was mainly to the United Kingdom or the United States

of America, apart from the flow of labourers to Central America and Cuba; and the sophisticated ideals of industrialised societies were brought back to stir the aspirations of an area dependent upon agriculture.

Corresponding with this revolution in transport and communication with the outside world was the growth of education, which had the effect of enabling greater use of the increased facilities at the disposal of the Press. European, and particularly United Kingdom news, has always formed a large portion of the West Indian newspaper, sometimes to the virtual exclusion of local reports; in Jamaica where geographical proximity and population ties create an added interest, United States news also figured prominently from the beginning of the Century. And it was not newspapers alone which provided information for the rapidly increasing element in the population which was taking an interest in the outside world. Books, periodicals and other such media helped to bring the ideas and ideals of Europe and the English-speaking countries to many a lonely village, where the gleanings of an evening vigil by oil-lamp or candlelight were communicated the next Saturday to an interested audience at the village forum. The Two World Wars have had a tremendous impact on the British Caribbean; in particular, World War 1, in which many

volunteered for service abroad, and returned with ideas of self-government, human rights, socialism and trade unionism, to add to the ideological stock of a population to whom the principles enunciated at the Treaty of Versailles were not mere academic talk. Captain Cipriani, a white Creole planter, who returned to lead Trinidad's embryonic labour movement, is the outstanding example of this sort of influence.¹

The three territories with which this study deals are the largest and most prominent in the area, both in terms of West Indian development and in terms of the labour organisations which have emerged to date. A brief outline of the framework in which the labour movement grew in each territory is attempted at this point, as necessary to a full appreciation of the role of Labour in the Caribbean context.

Constitutions and Politics.

The deciding factors in the political life of the British Caribbean colonies have always been the constitutional relationship between the individual territories and Great Britain, and the governmental arrangements in the territories themselves. In terms of its eventual implications,

1. For Captain Cipriani, see below, Ch. IV.

Emancipation was an even more signal revolution in West Indian politics than in economics - it created the difficult problem of the position of the Negro (and ultimately of the Indian) in the scheme of things, and of their political rights as equal citizens. The problem was not immediate. All three territories, as colonies of Great Britain, were to a varying degree under the control of the Colonial Office ruling through its officials on the spot. Representative assemblies in British Guiana and Jamaica in the mid-19th Century had been highly oligarchic and undistinguished in the sphere of effective government. The British Guiana electorate in 1850-51 numbered 916, or 1.9% of the male population over the age of fifteen;¹ Jamaica in 1864 had an electorate of 1,903 in a population of 450,000.² In other islands the situation was no better. Crown Colony government was held to be a more desirable alternative than an extension of the franchise to the Negroes, and the Morant Bay uprising in 1865 provided the opportunity for the introduction into Jamaica of this system which had obtained in Trinidad throughout the 19th Century. By 1900 only Barbados and British Guiana retained something of their

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1. Sir C. Clementi, Constitutional History of British Guiana, (1928), p. 366.
 2. W.L. Burn, The British West Indies, (1951), p. 126.

old constitutions, the Dutch form of British Guiana's government having been liberalised.¹

The justification for Crown Colony government was that it ensured representation and reconciliation of all interests in the colony. It was even argued that the official element were the representatives, in fact, of the Negroes and Indians who, if given the vote, would have created an atmosphere of 'carpet-bag' rule,² and one writer has described it recently as "a sort of non-elective virtual representation through the governor and the Colonial Office."³ That this had ceased to be the case, at least in the opinion of the working-class with whom we are concerned in this study, in all three territories in this Century is obvious from an examination of such material as is available for the period.

The constitutional history of the 20th Century can conveniently be divided into two periods, with the disturbances of the 1930's marking the end of the period of Crown Colony rule and the start of the era of progress towards responsible government. In his report in 1922, Major Wood

1. R.V. Sires, "Government in the British West Indies: An Historical Outline," in Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 1957.

2. See Burn, op. cit., pp. 142-147.

3. Sires, op. cit.

had foreseen that increased local representation in the councils of government would have to be granted in response to popular demand. In addition to the developments mentioned above which made for rapid change in the Caribbean after World War I, he listed other specific factors which affected the political situation - the willingness of the "coloured and black intelligentsia ... to devote time and energy to propaganda among their own people", the grant of free institutions to Cuba and the Phillipines by the United States, and the example of Jamaica which, as we outline below, already possessed a measure of elective government.¹ In fact, just previous to his visit, Grenada had won in principle its right to elect representatives to the Legislative Council, after a campaign in which Mr. T.A. Marryshow sprang into prominence as leader of the new kind of West Indian politician. But in the 20's, the demand for "the inclusion in the legislature of a number of persons chosen by direct election"² did not include any desire for the transfer of responsibility to representatives so elected.

The position in our three territories until the changes effected after the disturbances of the 1930's was as follows:

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1. Cmd. 1679, pp. 5-6.
 2. ibid.

In Jamaica the constitution of 1865 which set up a nominated Council of the 'pure' Crown Colony variety in place of the old elected Assembly had been modified and amended in 1884 and 1895. It now provided for a Privy Council to advise the Governor and a Legislature of 14 elected members and not more than 14 nominated and official members presided over by the Governor with a casting vote only. Any nine of the elected members could veto a money bill or a new tax, while the unanimous vote of all fourteen elected representatives could veto any proposal whatsoever.¹ Against this veto, the Governor possessed reserve powers to carry out any measures declared by him to be of 'paramount importance', powers which in practice he never used. The franchise for candidates and electorate was based on property and income qualifications. As fixed by Acts of 1908 and 1909 which reduced the levels fixed in 1884, the suffrage was open to all adult males paying 10/- in rates on real property or 30/- on personal property, or receiving a salary or wage of £50 or more a year;² women were admitted with higher qualifications in 1919. "The franchise for both Legislative Council and the Parochial Boards are low and the

1. Hume Wrong, Government of the West Indies (1923), pp. 125-129; Cmd. 1679, p. 11.

2. Wrong, op. cit., p. 130.

great majority of the electors are persons of coloured or African descent" wrote Major Wood in 1922. As far as the Legislative Council franchise is concerned - that for the Parochial Boards was slightly lower - this view was open to serious criticism. A wage of £50 a year meant earnings of 3/2^d. a day six days a week for 52 weeks a year; this was far in excess of the rates paid even to skilled labour in Kingston at the time. The working-class was effectively excluded from participation in the politics of the day. In fact, there was general political apathy. Wrong tells us that such interest as there was in elections was confined to the white and a few of the coloured inhabitants - a view which is more in conformity with the evidence available than Major Wood's opinion - and concludes: "It seems impossible to claim that the large majority of the people of Jamaica takes even a momentary interest in the choice of representatives"¹ The numbers on the electoral lists lead us to this conclusion as well,

1896	-	38,376	1905 -6	-	18,607
1901	-	16,256	1910-11	-	27,257

Six seats were not contested in the 1906 elections, and in the remaining eight divisions only 1,628 votes were cast. The figures for 1920 tell a similar story.

One result of this restriction of the franchise to

1. Wrong, op. cit., p. 30.

persons of property and income was that workers as a class were compelled to rely upon the goodwill of individual elected members for the protection and furtherance of their interests, a pattern which we find also in the other territories. This was made increasingly possible in Jamaica after 1925 by the changing composition of the Council, which, with only 1 Negro member in 1910 (and five coloured councillors) had by 1935 been 'degraded into a Council of black men', to cite some contemporary opinions.¹ This was a reflection of a change in the political attitude of the Negro and coloured groups which had already been hinted at in the Wood Report, and of a growing interest in elections and the choice of representatives on the part of those who could qualify for the franchise. The figures for the four elections held between 1920 and the riots demonstrate this convincingly.

Jamaica Elections, 1920-35
(14 Constituencies. Adult Population 1921, 346,250 app.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Registered Electors</u>	<u>Voted</u>	<u>Seats Uncontested</u>	<u>% Poll</u>
1920	42,467	3,858	9	21.25
1925	54,678	15,357	4	34.87
1930	66,626	28,178	1	46.40
1935	66,085	27,545	2	48.23

Source: Calculated from Jamaica Blue Books

1. Quoted in Sires, "Modified Crown Colony Government in Jamaica", Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1955.

Of the elected members sympathetic to Labour, the chief was J.A.G. Smith, a coloured barrister who sat as Member for Clarendon from 1917 until his death in 1942, and who sponsored the passing of the Trade Unions Law in 1919. As president of the Representative Government Association which agitated for constitutional reform after 1920, he had the support of the Kingston workers - whom Major Wood dismissed as 'the radical and least substantial elements in the town',¹ and such Negro opinion as was organised in the United Negro Improvement Association.² The demands of the Representative Government Association, and of the Political Reform Association which worked along with it, were vague, apart from a general desire to increase the control of elected members over finance by giving them a majority in the Council. The negotiations broke down, after Major Wood had made his recommendations for a new constitution, on the question of the reserve powers vested in the Governor to override decisions of the majority on matters of paramount interest. There was no further constitutional change until 1944.

Trinidad had never had representative institutions at the central government level in the 19th Century, the Governor remaining practically an autocrat after its capture

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1. Cmd. 1679, p. 13.
 2. Sires, op. cit.

from Spain until 1831. The presence of a substantial number of free coloured citizens of French origin had been one of the reasons for the refusal of representative government to the island in 1810.¹ Movements for constitutional reform in 1850 and the 1880's produced little result and from 1898 until 1924, the Legislative Council was composed of 11 officials and 11 nominated unofficial members, the Governor having both an original and a casting vote. The failure to secure any degree of elective government had the effect of focussing political attention on the Port-of-Spain Town Council, an elected body which ran into financial difficulties and was replaced by Town Commissioners nominated by the Governor in 1899. The dispute between the Town Council and the Government brought to the fore the coloured and Negro professionals, many of them of free coloured ancestry, and paved the way for an alliance with the city artisans, who claimed to speak for the entire Negro working-class. It was inevitable that some, at least, of these leaders should be nominated to the Legislative Council. In the successful struggle for the restoration of the Port-of-Spain City Council the artisans played a great part, under the leadership of Alfred Richards and his Working Men's Association. Part of

1. Hewan Craig, The Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago, (1952), p. 15.

the difficulty was that the island was divided into a number of racial and interest groups, each concerned only with the effect of any change on its own position; a useful description of some of these is to be found in Major Wood's Report.¹ Moreover, even at that time, great importance was attached to avoiding any change which might create in the minds of investors in the oil and asphalt industries of the island fears or doubts about the stability of the local political scene. The campaign in favour of the constitution was led by a Legislative Reform Committee, which claimed to speak for the middle-class and for the peasants.² One of its most outspoken members was Captain Cipriani, at that time an honorary committee member of the Trinidad Working Men's Association which had been resurrected after the war.³ The Constitution provided for a Legislative Council of 12 official, 6 nominated and 7 elected members,⁴ with the Governor as President having both an original and a casting vote. The Governor was advised by an Executive Council of 3 ex-officio, 1 official and 1 nominated member.⁵

1. Cmd. 1679, pp. 23-25.

2. ibid.

3. For the TWA see below Chs. III & IV.

4. One of the 7 electives sat for the Island of Tobago.

5. Craig, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

Franchise qualifications for both candidates and voters were higher than in Jamaica and enough to exclude the working-class. They were: i) ownership or occupancy of property rated at £12.10 in a borough or £10 elsewhere; or ii) payment of an annual rent of the same amount; or iii) occupancy of property paying 10/- a year land tax; or iv) an annual salary of £62.10.¹ Besides, voters were required to understand spoken English, a provision which operated against the large East Indian population. Women over 30 could vote if they satisfied the general requirements. The measure of representation brought to Trinidad by this constitution was limited indeed; the degree of participation granted to the population in general was small, as is shown by the table below.

Trinidad Elections, 1925-1938
(7 Constituencies. Adult Population, 1921, 195,469 app.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Registered Electors</u>	<u>Voted</u>	<u>Seats Uncontested</u>	<u>% Poll</u>
1925	21,794	6,832	2	43.70
1928	22,020	2,407	4	41.19
1933	25,822	4,828	3	43.38
1938	30,911	3,592	5	48.18

Source: Calculated from Trinidad Blue Books

1. Craig, op. cit., p. 39.

The higher franchise qualifications in Trinidad meant a proportionately smaller electorate than in Jamaica (11.15% app. as compared with 15.79);¹ but as can be seen, interest in elections in Trinidad was greater until the mid-thirties.

The constitution did make it possible for Labour in Trinidad to have spokesmen in the Legislative Council on the same principles as in Jamaica though it did not allow them to accomplish many tangible results. It remained in force until 1945.

British Guiana's constitution between Emancipation and 1891 provided for indirect election through electoral colleges, based on a property franchise. There were two bodies, the Court of Policy, which acted as both Legislative and Executive Council, and the Combined Court consisting of the Court of Policy plus specially elected Financial Representatives, which had control over money matters. Popular agitation led to constitutional reform in 1891, which provided for direct elections based on property, tenancy or income qualifications; but even after the franchise

1. Percentages are based on the figures in the respective 1921 censuses of the population over the age of 20. Craig, op. cit., (p. 40), bases his on the total population, (5.9%) and gets a more sinister picture of the franchise, as over 1/3 of the population was under 20. His figure for the percentage poll in 1925 is incorrect.

qualifications were reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$ in 1906, the income requirement of £62.10. a year was still high enough to exclude the working-class. The Court of Policy was dissociated from the Executive Council, which now consisted entirely of officials. The Combined Court, in which 14 electives were a majority, had control of finance, even though in the Court of Policy the 8 electives were matched by 8 officials backed by the Governor's casting vote. Under this Constitution a number of liberal representatives, not all of them coloured or Negro, sat in the Court, and both regarded themselves and were looked upon as representing all the people of the country, but in particular the negro working-class and peasantry. This was illustrated in a dramatic fashion when Sir C. Clementi, Acting Governor in 1916 in the midst of a widespread movement for the recall of the Governor Sir Walter Egerton, made the claim that the official element in the Courts of Government represented the unfranchised 99% of the population. His words raised a storm of indignant denial from elected representatives, press and public alike.¹ Partly for this reason, and because the officials could usually count upon the support of such of the planters as were in the Court, the liberal electives came to regard themselves as the opposition, in practice if not avowedly.

1. See Daily Chronicle, passim, June/July, 1916.

The friction between elected and official members of the Court is mentioned by the 1927 British Guiana Commission as one of its reasons for proposing a new form of Government: "The Government ... have never been able to govern"¹ The Commission took the view that the 1891 Constitution was an impediment to the proper development of the country. Five years before, Major Wood had found no grounds for a material change of constitution, and had expressed the opinion that to raise without adequate cause any question of revising the constitution, with its traditional features of which the Guianese were so proud, would be a serious error. His assessment of the state of public opinion on the subject proved correct - the change, when it did come in 1928, was most unpopular, though the planter interests supported it. The Courts of Government established under the 1891 Constitution were replaced in 1928 by a Legislative Council of 2 ex-officio, 8 official, 14 elected and 5 nominated members;² the franchise arrangements remained unchanged apart from the enfranchisement of women and were modified only slightly in 1935.³ As a result, the new constitution made little difference in the numbers of the electorate, though it had the effect of

1. B.G. Commission, 1927, p. 51.

2. B.G. Constitution Order in Council, 1928.

3. B.G. Constitution Amendment Order in Council, 1935.

reducing the powers of the elected representatives by vesting control of finance in the hands of the Governor, who could command an official majority. Votes for women seem to have caused no increase in the size of the electorate.

Of the three territories, British Guiana shows most political awareness in the early 20th Century, probably because of its smaller population and of the opportunities offered by the 1891 constitution. The electorate was proportionately smaller than in either Jamaica or Trinidad, and transport difficulties must have made representation an arduous affair. The figures of elections held between 1921 and 1935 are given for comparison.

British Guiana Elections, 1921-35.
(5 Constituencies, increased to 14 in 1928)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Registered Electors</u>	<u>Voted</u>	<u>Seats Uncontested</u>	<u>% Poll</u>
1921	6,206	4,504	1	79.53
1926	1,208	8,123	-	72.47
1930	9,253	3,270	8	82.07
1935	10,009	3,165	8	76.41

Source: British Guiana Blue Books

In 1915, Negroes formed 62.7% of the electorate, East Indians only 6.4%.¹ No figures of the racial composition of the

1. Clementi, op. cit., p. 367.

electorate have been found for the above years.

The period 1943 - 1957 is remarkable in the history of the area for the rapidity of constitutional change. With the exception of the "Renison Constitution" now operating in British Guiana, new constitutions have meant an acceleration in the process of handing over responsibility for administrative and legislative policy to the local population. This has had the effect of involving Labour in the political control of all the territories in no small way. Constitutional change has been only a part of the general process of development in the area resulting from the disturbances of the 1930's. Political developments will be discussed further on in this study, and only the actual constitutional provisions are included here. The changes may be summarised as follows:

Under the new constitution of 1944, Jamaica adopted a bi-cameral Legislature consisting of a House of Representatives of 32 members elected by universal adult suffrage, and a Legislative Council, of 15 nominated official and unofficial members. An Executive Committee of 10 members under the Presidency of the Governor armed with a casting vote was the principal instrument of policy, responsible for the initiation of all legislation including money bills. The Committee was

was comprised of 5 Representatives elected by the House, 3 officials nominated by the Governor, and 2 unofficial members of the Legislative Council. The Governor had 'reserve' powers to disallow legislation after consultation with the Colonial Office.¹ A further innovation was the establishment of an 'embryo ministerial system' built around the 5 elected members of the Committee. This development extended to full ministerial responsibility in 1953.²

Developments in Trinidad have been similar.

Changes in the constitution in 1945 allowed of elections on a basis of universal adult suffrage the next year, and with lower property and income qualifications for candidates. In 1950 further reforms were enacted. The Legislative Council was enlarged to comprise 3 ex-officio, 5 nominated and 18 elected members, with a Speaker nominated by the Governor from outside the Council. The main policy-making instrument was to be the Executive Council, in which the Governor - with a casting vote only - 3 ex-officio members and 1 nominated member were joined with 5 Councillors elected by the Legislature and holding portfolios.³ The unofficial members of

1. Cmd. 6244, 1943.

2. Sir H. Foot, Constitutional Reform: A new system of Government for Jamaica, 1955.

3. Craig, op. cit., p. 158.

the Executive Council were to be elected by the Legislative Council from among its members. In 1956 this process was extended: 1 ex-officio and 1 nominated member were excluded from the Legislative Council and 6 electives added, the Speaker being elected by the House. Policy was placed in the hands of a Cabinet of 9 Ministers, with a Chief Minister elected by the House.¹

In British Guiana, the process of rapid constitutional development was arrested suddenly with the suspension of the Constitution in 1953. In 1943, the composition of the Legislative Council as instituted in 1928 had been altered, to consist of the Governor as President, 3 ex-officio, 7 nominated and 14 elected members. The Governor was advised on policy by an Executive Council of 3 ex-officio and 5 other members of the Legislature nominated by him.² A system of Advisory Departmental Committees consisting of Councillors was established at the same time. Franchise qualifications for both candidates and electorate were reduced considerably in 1945.³ The biggest step forward came with the 1951

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1. Report of the Constitution Reform Committee, (Trinidad and Tobago), 1955.
 2. B.G. Constitution (Amendment) Order in Council, 1943.
4 of the members of the Executive Council in 1950 were from the elected section of the Legislature.
 3. Col. No. 280.

Constitution, which introduced a bi-cameral Legislature. The lower House now included only 2 ex-officio members, the electives being increased to 24; the nominated members were transported to the upper chamber, the Council of State. The elected members chose a Chief Minister and 5 other Ministers with portfolios to sit in the Executive Council along with the 2 ex-officio members and 1 member elected from the Council of State. Adult suffrage was introduced, and the property and income qualifications for candidates were abolished.¹ The suspension of the Constitution in 1953 was followed by a period of interim rule by a wholly nominated council which preserved, however, the practice of having ministers (now called Members) responsible for the administration of various departments. Recent amendments under the constitution adopted in 1957 have retained the ministerial arrangement, while providing for a uni-cameral Legislature of 14 elected and up to 14 nominated members, on a basis of adult franchise.

It will be gathered from this sketch that participation by the entire population in the political life of the area is a recent development. Adult suffrage in Jamaica dates from 1944, in Trinidad from 1946, and in British

1. ibid.

Guiana from 1951. This has had the effect of making the working-class vote, which is an overwhelming majority in all three territories, the arbiter of political life, as is reflected in the trend of politics and political parties in the area since 1940. Another effect of adult suffrage in British Guiana and Trinidad has been to bring into prominence the East Indian population, whose franchise had been restricted under the old arrangements; in both these territories the East Indian vote is now of vital importance, and recent events in British Guiana have shown that, with the constituencies arranged as at present, the East Indian voter can decide the composition of the Government.

Until the 1940's too, politics in the area has been uninspiring, being remarkable mainly for the failure of the enfranchised property-owning and middle classes to evolve in any territory a lasting political party. The pattern throughout the pre-adult suffrage period has been one of independent candidature, or pre-election caucuses glorified by the name of parties, which dissolved once the elections were over. There have been, of course, exceptions, and some parties have survived post-election apathy for a year or two; the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, which became the Trinidad Labour Party in 1932, has a long history and a continuous record of public activity dating from the 1920's. But its very

difference, so to speak, provides at least one explanation: it was an association of workers to look after their interests, with a large membership in the 1920's and 1930's. The smallness of the electorate, and the nature of the constitution, made continuous party organisation seem a waste of time. This tradition of independents in political life is a factor which is apt to be overlooked in discussions of recent political developments, especially in Trinidad. In the new atmosphere of local responsibility for the making and execution of policy, it is a force to be reckoned with even in the most formally constituted party organisations.

The Economic Background.

The pattern of the British Caribbean economy was set long before the 19th Century. In the mercantilist era, productive enterprise had centred around the operation of large plantations for the growing of sugar, the main staple of the area; and in exchange for exports of tropical products, foodstuffs and manufactured goods were imported. The prosperity which this arrangement had brought to the area in the 18th Century hey-day of the system was on the wane long before slavery was abolished;¹ indeed, the

1. See L.J. Ragatz, The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean (1932); Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, (1944).

economic arguments for emancipation were an essential contributory factor in the success of the abolition movement.

No comprehensive study has yet been made of the economic history of the British Caribbean in the post-Emancipation period of the 19th Century, though a few specialised territorial studies and a brief history of the sugar industry exist. There is no dearth of information, however, as to the main trends of the period. Emancipation, when it came, did little to alter the main organisational structure of economic life. Sugar remained the chief export, the estate remained the unit of production, food and manufactured goods continued to be imported on a large scale. The drift of the emancipated slaves away from the estates, which is discussed briefly in Chapter II, led to the gradual development of a peasant sector of the economy which, in Jamaica at least, was of considerable importance. The sugar industry continued to decline, for reasons already listed, and by the mid-1890's it was in serious difficulties.

The difficulties and their repercussion on economic life led to the appointment of the West India Royal Commission of 1896-97, the first of the modern series of official enquiries into conditions in the area. The main features of the economy emerge clearly from these reports - the continuing dependence on agriculture, the importance of the sugar

industry in spite of its difficulties and of attempts to diversify production, the vulnerability of the main exports to competition and to fluctuations in world market prices, the poverty of mineral resources, and the unaltered dependence upon imported foodstuffs and manufactured goods.

The Agricultural Economy.

The importance of agriculture to the British Caribbean is evident from Table IV below, which expresses the value of the principal agricultural exports as percentages of the value of all exports at 7-year intervals since 1913. The principal crops included here are, for British Guiana, sugar and rice; for Jamaica, bananas, sugar, coffee, fruit, nuts and spices; for Trinidad, sugar and cocoa. The number of exports included in the case of Jamaica is the result of the greater diversity of that island's agricultural exports, a development which had already taken place before the start of the 20th Century. The smaller territories in the Caribbean, which we are not considering here, are even more dependent upon agriculture since they have no mineral resources to exploit. By-products of sugar, such as rum and molasses, are included as sugar exports.

Table IV

Value of Principal Agricultural Exports
as % of Total Domestic Exports.

<u>Year</u>	<u>British Guiana</u>	<u>Jamaica</u>	<u>Trinidad</u>
1913	70.9	70.5	78.3
1920	89.8	80.5	79.1
1927	65.3	85.7	46.4
1934	77.8	91.6	33.9
1941	54.0	85.9	58.0
1947	69.0	57.1	21.8
1954	64.4	63.4	16.4

Source: Calculated from Annual Reports, Statistical Abstracts of the British Empire.

It is clear that only in the case of Trinidad since the 1920's do principal agricultural exports account for less than half the value of all exports; for this, Trinidad's highly profitable oil industry is mainly responsible.

The high degree of dependence upon agriculture makes it necessary to pay some attention here to the character of agricultural enterprise. In spite of the movement towards peasant holding after emancipation, and of land settlement policies which have been pursued officially since the 1890's in an attempt to balance the monocultural plantation system, it has remained true to say that "sugar estates dominate the agriculture and the whole economic life of the West India colonies."¹ But estate organisation

1. Cmd. 6607, (1945), p. 45.

is not confined to sugar; many other crops, notably cocoa in Trinidad and bananas in Jamaica, are cultivated in large plantations. These estates vary in size from 13,000 to 1,000 acres in the case of sugar, and from 2,000 to 100 acres in the case of other crops.¹ The number of estates, particularly of sugar estates, has decreased since the mid-19th Century, there being, for example, only 21 sugar estates in British Guiana in 1950 compared with some 400 in 1838.² This decline in numbers is not attributable solely to estates being abandoned as a result of the industry's difficulties; there has been a continuing process of amalgamation of estates to form larger units in all three territories, so that even before 1900 "the number of estates abandoned did not mean a commensurate drop in sugar production."³ As late as 1939 there is evidence that in Jamaica small estates were still being amalgamated.⁴ The general view appears to be that large estates are necessary for further efficiency in West Indian agriculture. Professor W. Arthur Lewis argues that:

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1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 65; Cmd. 6607, p. 42.
 2. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 65.
 3. R.W. Beachey, The B.W.I. Sugar Industry in the Late 19th Century, (1957), p. 125.
 4. Cmd. 6607, p. 46.

"On the economic count, the advantage is practically always with large-scale agriculture. It is not only that this system is better capitalized It is also that it applies superior knowledge. It cultivates the land more carefully, and processes the product more efficiently. It is quicker to use new and better breeds of plant and animal, to take measures for controlling the spread of disease, and to adopt new techniques of management."¹

The Moyne Commission felt in 1939 that even more amalgamation was required, where possible, in the interests of efficiency.² At the same time the Commission felt that concentration on a single crop was preventing the estates from making full use of the possibilities open to them - this in spite of improved production techniques, modern machinery, central factories and other advances which evoked the conclusion that 'the equipment and technical management of the sugar estates in general are good and . . . they have now attained a reasonable level of productivity from the land.'³ Many estates which did not grow sugar also showed this tendency to concentrate on a single crop, though they usually had lower standards of efficiency.⁴

The current acceptance of the need for large-scale agriculture is in direct contrast to views held before

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1. Quoted in M. Proudfoot, Britain and the U.S.A. in the Caribbean, (1954), p. 189n.
 2. Cmd. 6607, p. 46.
 3. ibid, p. 44.
 4. ibid, p. 45.

the 1940's. The ex-slaves had been encouraged by their champions, the missionaries, to establish peasant settlements, and this movement had received official encouragement from the decision to sell Crown Lands in small lots at the end of the Century. In fact, as late as 1938 one of the first reactions to the unrest in Jamaica was the launching of a land settlement scheme. The ideas behind this policy were manifold - to increase the self-sufficiency of the Negro population, to lessen the economic hold of the planter, to offset the effects of depression in the sugar industry, to effect greater diversity in agricultural production, to cite only a few reasons. The part played by the peasantry in Jamaica in establishing the banana industry in the 1880's gave a fillip to land settlement advocates and encouraged those who, like Lord Olivier, regarded the planter as an exploiter of labour, to propose peasant holding as the solution to the area's economic problems. The disadvantages of all-out promotion of land settlement as an alternative to estate cultivation are obvious, even apart from the argument that large-scale agriculture is more efficient, in the context of the British Caribbean; it can provide, at best, only a short-term solution to the area's problems.

The proportion of small holdings to large estates may be seen from the number and size of farms as revealed by the 1943-6 Census.

Table V
Number and Size of Farms

	<u>British Guiana</u>	<u>Jamaica</u>
1 - 5 acres	15,203	37,903
5 - 50 "	6,966	25,774
50 - 500 "	127	1,953
over 500 "	4	540

Source: West Indian Census, 1934-6.

Trinidad has not been included as only some 30% of the land area is suitable for agriculture,¹ and, as we have seen from Table IV, its economy is less dependent upon its principal agricultural exports than the other territories.

The large number of extremely small holdings which the figures disclose is in part explained by the practice of dividing a holding between the heirs of the proprietor on his death.² Though there must be a stage at which this continuous process of division ceases, it is worth noting that there were 6,707 holdings of less than 1 acre in British Guiana in 1943.

Peasant farmers practise, in the words of the official economic survey of the area, "a diversified kind of non-rotational farming including a variable proportion of permanent crops such as citrus, cocoa, coffee, bananas and

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV., p. 201

2. Cmd. 6607, p. 42.

pimento and fruit-trees often mixed or intercropped, while short-term food crops - peas, beans, yams, coconuts, sweet potato and maize - are cultivated either on the shifting or sedentary principle."¹ Though this description was written of Jamaica, it may be applied to the other two territories as well. There are also specialised holdings, devoted to coffee, bananas, or ginger in Jamaica, and to rice in British Guiana, in particular areas. Usually a few livestock are kept - goats, pigs, sheep or cattle.

By comparison with estate agriculture, peasant farming in the area has been described as inefficient and backward, with unsystematic husbandry, low productivity, shifting cultivation, and almost universal indebtedness as its dominant characteristics.² In fairness it must be remembered that much of the land worked in this way is marginal, or worse, and that even estate agriculture, with its greater resources, has suffered from soil erosion and soil exhaustion, drought, poor seasons and all the other disabilities which the peasant can plead in extenuation. The task of improving peasant agriculture has been impeded by various factors, such as popular attitudes to farming, the shortage of skilled agricultural instructors, and, most

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 128.

2. Cmd. 6607, pp. 43-44.

of all, limited funds, all of which are discussed in the official report on developments in the period 1939-52.¹

The Sugar Industry.

It has often been said that the history of the West Indies is in fact the history of sugar; and this is still partly true of the first half of the 20th Century. Sugar continued to be of prime importance, though not so overwhelmingly important as in previous years, to the economy of the area. The story of the sugar industry since 1896 is one of ups and downs. In that year when sugar exports comprised 53% of the value of all exports from the area, (75% if Jamaica were excluded as well as gold exports from British Guiana), the industry was in the throes of depression.² Its already difficult problems were aggravated by an outbreak of cane-disease, by competition from subsidized beet-sugar in the United Kingdom market, and by a 50% fall in prices since 1881. The industry was rescued by the acceptance at the 1903 Brussels Convention of the recommendation made by the 1897 Royal Commission that the system of bounties on beet-sugar should be abolished. As a result, it enjoyed a moderate increase in prosperity until World

1. Cmd. 8575, 1952.

2. C. 8655, (1897).

War I, when the sudden disappearance of beet-sugar from the United Kingdom market produced a boom which reached its peak in 1920. Gradually, however, the situation deteriorated once more as improved techniques and increased production in the Caribbean and elsewhere in response to high prices created a surplus of supply which brought prices lower and lower, while a subsidized beet-sugar industry in Britain itself competed for the market. By 1929 the position was so desperate, in spite of Imperial preference in the United Kingdom market, that the Olivier Commission was appointed. The recommendations of this Commission¹ led to increased preferences for West Indian sugar in both the United Kingdom and the Canadian markets, and these, along with lower costs both in field and factory, so stimulated production that output increased by nearly 70% in the period 1928-1939.² But sugar prices continued to fall in the 1930's, and the stage seemed set for another crisis in the industry when the International Sugar Agreement was concluded in 1937 fixing quotas for the various sugar producing countries in an effort to stabilise prices. The Moyne Commission argued that artificial limitations, such as the I.S.A., on the productive capacity of the British Caribbean sugar industry were likely to have repercussions on employment

1. Cmd. 3517, (1930).

2. Calculated from Cmd. 6607, p. 25.

opportunities in the area.¹ Except in the case of Jamaica, World War II did not mean any substantial increase in sugar output, though from 1939-52 the British Ministry of Food purchased 'all the sugar which the colonies could export.'² Indeed, the tendency was for output to decrease in both British Guiana and Trinidad. By 1950, Trinidad was producing 10% more sugar than in 1938, and British Guiana's production had not increased, but Jamaica's had jumped to $2\frac{1}{3}$ times the 1939 figure.³

Perhaps the most important factor, both for the sugar industry and for the economy of the area so dependent upon it, has been the great fluctuations in price throughout the 20th Century. Prices dropped steadily after 1880 until 1903, then rose slowly until 1914, leapt during World War I to the peak figure in 1920, and declined rapidly thereafter till in 1934 they were back to the 1904 level. The calculations given below of the average export value of one hundredweight of raw sugar from British Guiana in various years illustrate the situation before World War II.

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1. ibid, pp. 26-7.
 2. Col. No. 281, Pt. IV, App., p. 273.
 3. Calculated from ibid, pp. 67, 131, 202.

Table VI

Average Price of British Guiana Sugar per Cwt.

1904	8/11	1923	25/7
1905	11/11	1924	20/6
1908	9/11	1927	16/8
1913	12/7	1929	12/4
1917	21/11	1934	8/11
1920	50/-	1937	8/11

Source: Based on Statistical Abstracts of the British Empire.

The position would have been worse but for preference of 3/8.8d per cwt. in the United Kingdom market after World War I. The open market price of sugar in London in 1923 and 1924 (25/9 and 21/9) is on par with the figures given above for those years. But in January - May, 1929, it averaged 9/3, and by the end of December it had dropped to 8/3.¹

The Second World War, sugar quotas, and bulk purchase by the Ministry of Food in the United Kingdom at negotiated prices have helped to keep the industry in a fairly prosperous condition since 1939. In fact, between 1946 and 1952, the negotiated price of sugar increased from 19/6 to 38/6 per cwt.,² (though these figures include pre-war amounts of freight and insurance).

The importance of sugar to the economy of our

1. Cmd. 3517, p. 10.

2. Col. No. 281, Pt. IV, App., p. 273.

three territories lies both in the employment opportunities which it provides and in its continuing value as an export product. Its role in providing employment is more fully discussed in Chapter II; it suffices to say here that in 1930 the Olivier Commission estimated that abandonment of sugar production would affect 50% of the working population in British Guiana, 33% in Trinidad, and 10% in Jamaica - the proportion in the other islands was generally much greater.¹ In terms of export value, sugar and its by-products averaged over 60% of British Guiana's total exports before 1939, and, even with the development of bauxite mining recently, amounted to 53.1% of total exports in 1954. Jamaica shows evidence of a great recovery on the part of the industry, which in 1913 could account for only 6.9% of total export values; the average since the War has been well over 30%. Trinidad has not been quite so dependent upon sugar exports, because of its cocoa industry early in the Century, and then because of its oil. But in 1941, with the oil industry affected by wartime conditions, sugar exports climbed to 46.8% of the total; in 1954 they stood at 11.4%.²

It is to be noticed here that while sugar is by and large an estate crop, a substantial number of peasants cultivate

1. Cmd. 3517, p. 13.

2. Percentages have been calculated from B.E. Statistical Abstracts and Annual Reports.

it in both Jamaica and Trinidad. These cane-farmers, as they are called, have been given much official encouragement since the 1930's. They numbered some 10,000 and produced slightly less than $\frac{1}{3}$ the total crop in 1950-51 in Jamaica where they have over 35,000 acres under cane (to the estates' 53,000).¹ In Trinidad they produced just over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 1951 crop, but nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ of their estimated 10-11,000 number grew less than 10 tons a year.² In British Guiana, where the physical difficulties in the way of cane-farming are enormous, there were only 800 of them, producing about 1% of the crop in 1950.³

Other Crops.

In addition to sugar, a number of other export crops have enjoyed varying success in the three territories in this Century. Bananas in Jamaica and cocoa in Trinidad have both surpassed sugar at times as the major export crop, and in British Guiana rice growing continues to increase in importance. In addition, citrus fruit, coconuts, coffee and tonka beans are useful minor crops, none of them sufficiently important to warrant detailed mention here. The great disadvantage of all these crops, in West Indian terms,

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1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 131.
 2. ibid, p. 202.
 3. ibid, p. 65.

is that they employ fewer workers per acre than sugar-cane, and their increased cultivation in preference to sugar would result in an even greater incidence of unemployment and under-employment in agriculture, even though they are well suited to a peasant economy. In addition, they are all subject to disease of various kinds, a factor which has proved a serious handicap in the past.

Bananas have been, and still continue to be, of great importance in the economic life of Jamaica. The crop was developed at first by peasant enterprise in the 1870's, being ideally suited for small-scale cultivation as it needed little capital outlay and gave quick returns. The estates soon took it up, existing sugar estates being converted in some cases, so that by 1893 there were 113 banana estates producing about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total crop.¹ After World War I peasant cultivation expanded rapidly, reaching 44% of total production by 1930. In the last decade of the 19th Century, production expanded at a great rate, accounting for 32.4% of total exports in 1896, and for more than 50% by 1910. The banana trade suffered during World War I but recovered quickly in the 1920's; in 1934 it amounted to 54.2% of all exports, nearly 3 times the value of the next largest item, sugar.

1. G. Eisner, The Importance of the Banana in the Economic Development of Jamaica During the Years 1880-1920.
(Unpublished Paper, 1958).

It enjoyed tariff preferences in British and Canadian markets, a minimum price per count bunch, and an agreement with the shipping companies which gave it a great price advantage over its Costa Rican competitors.¹ Decline set in after the 1930's, however. The spread of Panama Disease and Leaf Spot over a large area of banana cultivation seriously affected both output and quality. By 1954 bananas constituted only 17.4% of total exports.²

The cocoa industry, in Trinidad, achieved prominence in the mid-19th Century, and during the years 1870-1920 'the golden age of cocoa,'³ high prices and high yields led to a great deal of expansion. Cocoa exports amounted to 43.4% of the Island's total as late as 1920 when sugar prices were at their highest, and they had exceeded 50% in earlier years. Even as late as 1938, when the industry had already begun to decline and $\frac{1}{7}$ of the acreage in 1931 had passed out of cultivation, a little over half the total cultivated area of the island was under cocoa.⁴ Decline of the industry set in in the early 1930's and accelerated after 1939; its causes, in addition to the difficulties of all agricultural products at its inception, were soil exhaustion, lower yields as a result

1. Cmd. 6607, pp. 19-20.

2. Figures based on Eisner, op. cit.; Statistical Abstracts; Annual Reports.

3. Col. No. 182, (1942), p. 58.

4. idem.

of the increasing age of the cultivations, and competition from newer cocoa-producing areas such as Brazil and West Africa. It had serious effects on the peasant population of Trinidad, who tended about half the area under cocoa cultivation on holdings of less than 50 acres. Production fell from over 27,000 tons in 1929 to an average of 15,600 tons in the period 1934-38; in 1949, as a result of improved prices and of efforts to rehabilitate the industry, almost 6,000 tons were exported.¹ Prices had fallen suddenly from an average of \$21.00 per bag in the period 1874-1923, and a peak figure of \$33.00 per bag in 1921 to approximately \$10.00 per bag after 1933.² Because of its quality, Trinidad cocoa still enjoys a limited market in which it is used for blending with other varieties. It amounted to 5% of total export values in 1954.³

Rice cultivation began in British Guiana at the end of the 19th Century among East Indian immigrants who planted on abandoned sugar lands. The flooded coastlands of the country are ideally suited to rice growing. Cultivation prospered, the crop finding a market not only in British Guiana itself but in the West Indian islands, where it is a staple article of diet. By 1931 more than 80,000 acres were being reaped, though rice exports averaged little more

1. idem; Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 203.

2. Col. No. 182, p. 65.

3. Calculation based on Trinidad Annual Report for 1954.

than 5% of the total export values. The industry has continued to expand, and its success story is in contrast with the story of other chief crops in the area. This is perhaps the result of catering mainly for a market within the area, with its only competitors the rice-exporting countries of the far East. Though rice has never even challenged sugar as British Guiana's chief export crop, over 93,000 acres were under rice in 1950 (as compared with 65,000 acres under sugar).¹ Prices have shown a tendency to rise since the 1940's, and plans are under way for an expansion of output, which in 1950 was over 35% higher than before World War II.² Most of the rice is grown by peasants who rent holdings of 2 to 3 acres on properties varying in extent from 200 to 2,000 acres, many of them abandoned or converted sugar estates. A Government-operated rice development scheme with substantially larger holdings has been initiated to experiment with large-scale mechanical cultivation; if successful, it may well lead to rice-growing on an estate basis. In 1954, rice exports were 11.3% of British Guiana's total.³

Non-Agricultural Production.

Apart from agriculture, productive enterprise in

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1. Col. No. 182, p. 103.
 2. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, pp. 65-66.
 3. Based on British Guiana Annual Report for 1954.

the British Caribbean territories is concerned mainly with fisheries, forests, mineral extraction, and small manufactures. Fisheries are the least important of these, though fish forms an essential part of the diet of the area. In spite of the absence of any sizeable fishing industry, Jamaican waters are considered to be overfished, but considerable reserves exist in Trinidad and particularly in British Guiana. No reliable statistics of the size of the fishing industry are available as a great deal of the catch does not pass through recognised markets. Distribution and preservation arrangements are unsatisfactory. Fishing employs a negligible number of people, most of them independent small fishermen. Locally caught fish forms less than 50% of consumption in British Guiana and only 15% in Jamaica; the residue is made up by imported dried and pickled fish, mainly cod from Newfoundland, to the extent of several thousand tons a year.¹ Efforts are being made to develop the industry.

Forests cover more than $\frac{4}{5}$ of the area of British Guiana and several valuable types of wood, including the unique Greenheart, are to be found; but only $\frac{1}{5}$ of these timber resources are at present accessible.² Considerable use is made of timber locally, and there is room for developing

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, pp. 69, 135.

2. ibid, p. 68.

the export industry which has been impeded by difficulties of internal transport. The forests, mainly Crown lands, are exploited by small operators using primitive methods, and make little contribution to the country's export trade. Neither Trinidad nor Jamaica can meet even their local requirements in timber, though Trinidad has substantial forest reserves which are being developed to meet local consumption. Jamaica, where logwood dye formed an important minor export until World War I, has embarked on a re-forestation scheme to counter the effects of over-exploitation.

Outside of agriculture, mineral extraction is the form of activity of greatest importance for the economy of the area in this century. This is a development brought about by the discovery of oil in Trinidad and bauxite in British Guiana in the years before World War I, and of bauxite in Jamaica in 1942. Before then gold and diamonds in British Guiana and asphalt in Trinidad had been the only known minerals of any commercial value. Various other substances are known to exist in small or undefined quantities - gypsum, copper, iron, lead and zinc, chrome and manganese in Jamaica, kaolin, manganese, columbite, titanium, tungsten, mica and quartz in British Guiana, iron and coal in Trinidad¹ - but few of them are exploited. There are signs that the need for a

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, passim.

thorough geological survey of potential resources has at least been realised, particularly in British Guiana. The chance discovery of extremely rich bauxite deposits in Jamaica in 1942, the existence of which was unsuspected only 3 years earlier when the Moyne Commission reported, has been a powerful argument in favour of comprehensive investigation of the area's potential before any schemes of development are finalised.

Until now, Trinidad's oil has been the most important mineral export from the area. Oil mining or exploration leases cover nearly 89% of the total area of the island and there were, in 1950, 11 companies actively engaged in drilling¹, as well as a number of dormant ones. Locally produced crude oil is refined in two refineries which also process crudes imported from South America. Petroleum exports have risen steadily from 3.1% of the island's total in 1913 to over 70% since the end of World War II.² Production since the 1940's has averaged well over 20 million barrels, though average output per producing well has declined due to the depletion of reserves. It is expected that deep drilling and marine drilling in the Gulf of Paria already in progress will avert the danger of imminent exhaustion of supplies to which estimates of known

1. ibid, p. 205.

2. Unless otherwise stated, calculations throughout the rest of this section are based on Statistical Abstracts of the British Empire and the relevant Annual Reports.

reserves point. The oil industry is extremely important as a source of Government revenue, to which it contributes through income tax, customs duties on imported equipment, royalties for oil produced on Crown lands, and excise duties on petrol and kerosene. Over $\frac{3}{5}$ of the oil is produced on Crown lands.¹ This direct contribution of little less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of total revenue in the 1930's² had grown to \$16.9 million, or about $\frac{1}{3}$, by 1950.³ The oil industry has meant that the Trinidad Government is relatively affluent in terms of the area, but it provides employment for less than $\frac{1}{10}$ of the labour force.

The Pitch Lake, as Trinidad's unique asphalt deposit is called, has been mined from the surface for many decades now (Raleigh caulked his ships there in the 16th Century on one of his abortive quests for El Dorado), but no large-scale industry has developed, and it offers employment for less than 1,000. It is operated by a private company which holds a monopoly from the Government in return for a guaranteed minimum revenue. Production has increased steadily and stood at 132,900 tons in 1950 of which $\frac{1}{2}$ was exported.⁴ The importance

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 13.

2. idem.

3. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, pp. 209-10.

4. ibid., p. 206.

of the asphalt industry has diminished with the development of the oilfields, and asphalt exports since the war have averaged less than 2% of the island's total.

Bauxite mining in British Guiana was begun in 1917 by the Demerara Bauxite Company, a subsidiary of the Canadian Aluminium Company; a second company, with American finance, started production in 1942. The industry employs, even now, less than 3,000 people (about 2% of the labour force), but bauxite has become the second largest export item, contributing 27.6% of total export values in 1954. Production rose from 2,000 tons in 1917 to 500,000 in 1937, and to over 1,500,000 in 1950.¹ Operations are entirely extractive, the ore being washed and crushed and, in the case of the Demerara Bauxite Company's product, transported to a transfer station in Trinidad for transshipment to ocean-going vessels. The extent of the country's bauxite reserves, though unknown, is held to be considerable. In addition to ordinary taxation, bauxite in British Guiana is subject to an ad valorem export duty, but it does not bolster up the revenue to the extent that oil does in Trinidad.

Gold has been worked in British Guiana since the late 19th Century, mainly in small workings with hand operations, as the deposits found so far have been alluvial. Though 4 companies are engaged in goldmining, there are also a considerable number of independent proprietors. Output has

1. ibid, p. 69.

declined steadily since the 1930's, and in 1950 it stood at only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 1938 figure. Diamonds, first discovered in 1887, are also found entirely in alluvial deposits, and mining is carried on mainly by small producers. Production figures vary considerably from year to year. Both diamonds and gold are subject to export duty, but their share of total export values has decreased steadily since the 1930's.

Jamaica's infant bauxite industry has begun only recently to make an impact on the economy of the island. Three companies, one Canadian and two United States-owned, are in operation, and Alumina Jamaica, the Canadian-owned company, manufactures alumina (semi-processed bauxite) on the island instead of shipping the ore unprocessed. The island's bauxite deposits are extremely rich, though estimates of their extent vary considerably. Bauxite and alumina exports amounted to 18.4% of total exports in 1954.

There has always been a certain amount of manufacturing for export in the area, based on the processing of sugar and the production of molasses and rum. This may be regarded merely as a practical extension of the sugar industry. Apart from these, there have been only a handful of industries engaged in producing for export; Trinidad's long-established Angostura Bitters industry is probably the only one of any note, and it produced in 1950 less than .4% of the island's

export trade.¹ The recent emphasis upon industrial development has led to the introduction, under active Government encouragement, of a number of light manufacturing industries, ranging from laundry blue and textiles to cement and prestressed concrete, which, it is hoped, will cater eventually for neighbouring markets in addition to supplying local needs. Besides these, there have been throughout this century manufactures of articles such as soft drinks, beer, matches, soap and cigarettes for local consumption. Statistics relating to these industries have proved to be virtually non-existent so far; but they appear, in general, to be relatively unimportant to the economy, and with only one or two factories employing as many as a hundred workers, to have done little in the way of providing alternative employment to agriculture.

In spite of the predominance of agriculture in economic life, the area has remained highly dependent upon imports of foodstuffs, as well as of necessities like clothing and footwear. This dependence is only in part attributable to the need to import items, such as wheaten flour, which cannot be produced in the tropics. Emphasis has been placed for so long upon production for export that little attention is paid to producing for the home market. The role which imports of

1. ibid, p. 217.

necessities play in the total import figure is large indeed. Food, drink and tobacco formed 31.0% of Trinidad's imports in 1925, 26.8% in 1939, 21.3% in 1950. Cotton, wool and art silk piece goods, apparel, boots and shoes accounted for an additional 13.0%, 10.1% and 9.6% in the respective years. Figures for British Guiana and Jamaica are similar, though Trinidad is more dependent upon imported foodstuffs than they are and buys much tropical produce from the smaller islands. In spite of efforts to reduce imports of this nature (exemplified by Grow-More-Food campaigns and local manufacture of shirts and underwear), the two categories of imports listed above amounted to 30.6% of British Guiana's total figure in 1950 and 30.0% of Jamaica's. Several individual items of food - flour, milk, fish, butter and cheese, for example - merit permanent inclusion in the list of chief imports in all three territories. The necessities of life therefore make an important contribution to import duties which, averaging 80% of indirect revenue in 1938¹, still provided in 1950 38% of total revenue in British Guiana, 33% in Jamaica and 23% in Trinidad.² The Moyne Commission Report makes the point³:

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 71,

2. Col. No. 281, Pt. IV, pp. 74, 142, 210.

3. Cmd. 6607, p. 71.

Any marked change in the spending power of the people of a West Indian Colony is therefore likely to be reflected at once in the revenues of their Government. That power depends in the main upon the sale abroad of agricultural produce and it follows that the necessity for the relief of distress is liable to be greatest, through the failure of crops or inability to find a profitable market for them, at a time when the Government, through the consequent curtailment of their revenue, are least able to meet that need.

This state of affairs has a still more particular application. Decline in the earning power of the working-classes as a result of poor market prices for West Indian crops is not likely to be compensated for by a corresponding decline in the prices of food and clothing which are determined by production factors outside, and not within, the West Indian economy. Conversely, the pegging of wages to the cost-of-living could easily raise production costs to an uneconomic level in a period of depression and lead to various cost-saving expedients which create an even greater degree of unemployment, concealed or open, in a situation of already chronic under-employment.

West Indian Society.

Serious study of society in the British Caribbean has been neglected until very recently, and such sources as



are available tend to be inadequate for our purpose and uneven in worth. This deficiency is even more difficult to offset than in the fields of economics or politics as little information of authentic value can be gleaned from the official sources which serve so well otherwise. It is proposed to attempt in the following pages a mere outline of those features of British Caribbean society which are most relevant to our study, drawing upon observation and personal experience as well as upon written sources.

West Indian society is multi-racial. The 1946 Census of Population classified British Guianese into 8 "racial" groups: "East Indians," "Africans," "Mixed or Coloured," "Amerindians," "Portuguese," "Chinese," "Europeans (other than Portuguese)", and "Other Asiatics." Trinidad's classification into "racial or colour groups" allowed of greater ambiguity in its effort to achieve an impossible precision: (e.g. "African descent" instead of "African"), did not isolate Portuguese, who are not so important numerically as in British Guiana, from other Europeans, and replaced "Amerindians" by "Carib descent". The process went furthest in Jamaica which is, if anything, less cosmopolitan than the other two territories; the 1943 Census divided the population into "Black (African)," "Coloured (European-African)", "White (European)", "East Indian", "East Indian Coloured", "Syrian", "Syrian Coloured", "Chinese", "Chinese Coloured", and "Others". This divergence of classification, apart from the interesting

insight which it provides into differences of social attitude in the three territories, demonstrates the problems created by the two factors of greatest importance in West Indian Society - race and colour. The table below gives a comparative picture of the "racial" composition of population, an attempt having been made to systematize classification. All mixed groups in Jamaica, such as "Syrian Coloured" have been included in the "Coloured or Mixed" category, and the "Portuguese" in British Guiana have been included as "European". The unspecified groups are numerically unimportant.

Table VII

Racial Composition of Population 1943-6.

Racial Group	British Guiana	Jamaica	Trinidad
African	38.17%	78.10%	46.88%
East Indian	43.51	1.73	35.09
Coloured or Mixed	10.03	18.35	14.12
European	2.93	1.12	2.74
Amerindian	4.35	-	-
Others	1.01	.70	1.17

Source: W.I. Census, 1943-6.

It will be evident from these figures that the "African" or, as we refer to it throughout this study, Negro group is overwhelmingly larger in Jamaica than it is in the other two territories, which have correspondingly greater numbers of East Indians. In fact, the Negro and Coloured groups in Jamaica, that is to say, people of African descent, amount to

96.45% of the total population of the Island. In British Guiana and Trinidad, Negroes and East Indians form two almost equal sections of the population, with rather smaller coloured groups. It must be observed here that to some extent these figures must be regarded as merely presenting a broad picture, and not as detailed analysis. The line between "African" and "Coloured", or "Coloured" and "European" is not precise, and blurring often occurs on both sides of it. In some cases (for instance in the census district of Trinidad to which the author belongs) it was left to the person interviewed to decide into which category he or she fell; in others, the enumerator made the choice upon physical or other evidence. Thus these figures represent neither the percentages of those in each territory who consider themselves members of a specific racial group (an amalgam of social attitudes which might be of considerable interest) nor totals arrived at by the use of identical criteria. For our purpose, however, the broad picture will suffice.

Race, Colour and Class.

Preoccupation with race and colour is perhaps the most lasting legacy of slavery and the plantation system to the inhabitants of the area. The unit of organised life in slave society, the estate, was run on the principle of ownership by one race and the subjection of another. Differences

between French, English, or Spanish were insignificant compared to the social distance between white master and black slave. The process of miscegenation produced individuals who occupied the intermediate positions in the spectrum of colour, and by the 19th Century a whole number of identifiable colour-groups had evolved, in which the degree of "white blood" was calculated with computer-like precision. In politics, in economic life, and in social intercourse, the pyramid of privilege became identical with the pyramid of colour. Emancipation did nothing to change this situation. The immigration to the area which took place in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries added to the population at the level of the lowest group in the social system, the agricultural labourers. Until the 1940's the pattern which Caribbean society presents is one which, though infinitely more complex than slave society, still preserved as its essential feature the determination of privilege and social position on the basis of race and colour.

It has been argued that the issue in the British Caribbean (and in the entire Caribbean area) is not one of race but of class. Dr. Eric Williams, writing of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands but extending his arguments to embrace the whole area, contrasts the colour question there with that in the United States and concludes:

The absence of legal discrimination against the Negro arises from the fact that racial differences are subordinate to those of class White denotes class and status rather than colour and race. In the Caribbean generally a man is not only as white as he looks. If by virtue of his position or his wealth he moves about in white society he automatically becomes 'white' Muñoz Marín puts the same idea in different words: there are in Puerto Rico only two classes, those who wear neckties and those who don't. The situation is the same in the British West Indies, where the mark of differentiation is the wearing of shoes rather than of neckties.¹

Williams cites in support of his view the conclusions reached in a study of a Puerto Rican community that "social distinctions were based on class and not on race, and that the two coalesced merely because the Negro is never found in the upper class."²

This view holds true of Puerto Rico with its predominantly white population which belongs to all classes in society³; but it cannot be accepted as an accurate description of the situation in the British Caribbean. In all three

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1. Foreign Affairs, Vol. 23, January, 1945.
 2. idem.
 3. See Proudfoot, op. cit., Ch. IV, *passim*.

territories there is a fundamental correlation between race and colour on the one hand and class status on the other. Not only is colour more important than in Puerto Rico - census tables in that island do not distinguish between Negro and Coloured, for instance. The major racial and colour groups, Negroes and East Indians, are mainly peasants and workers, whereas the tiny white community is predominantly upper class, property-owning planters, businessmen and administrators. Class divisions are not racially exclusive, and some degree of mobility has taken place as considerations of occupation and economic status, as well as of political reality, begin to replace the determinant of colour. "Degree of wealth and degree of colour are by no means completely associated, and exceptions to even their general correspondence are frequent and striking."¹ Negroes and East Indians are to be found in both the upper and middle classes; and there are the hundreds of "Others", Syrians, Chinese, Jews, etc., who cannot be grouped en masse in any particular social class. "If race is seldom a complete barrier to the acquisition of social status," Siney tells us, "it may make this very difficult."² And Mrs. Proudfoot, writing in 1954 after a prolonged visit to the area, reports that "although the position

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 61.

2. T.S. Siney, Welfare and Planning in the West Indies, (1946), p. 20.

is changing, skin colour is still one of the most important factors in determining a man's position in society."¹

The identification of different economic classes with separate racial groups is a factor which conditions the whole character of organised Labour in the British Caribbean. It underlies relations between worker and employer, between union and employers' association, between labour politician and administrator. The sugar estates, the oil companies and the bauxite enterprises are owned and managed by whites, many of them imported for the job from outside the area. Until recently, control of the Government, which is a large employer of labour as well (apart from the Civil Service) was in the hands of white officials. The great inequalities of income between the upper- and working-classes are easily transposable in terms of white opulence and black poverty. In Blanshard's words, "the most obvious fact in Caribbean life (is) that there is a basic causal connection between colour, class and ownership, and that the three things form a single social pattern."²

The problems which are created by racial differences of economic opportunity do not end with employer-employee relations. There has been, and continues to be, considerable

1. Proudfoot, op. cit., p. 70.

2. Paul Blanshard, Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean, (1947), p. 51.

antipathy between Negroes and East Indians in British Guiana and Trinidad, which has influenced developments both in the field of organised Labour and in politics. The differences of occupation and location which modify its effects in the industrial field are discussed in Chapter II. In politics, where no such modification obtains, race appears to be becoming an increasingly important issue in British Guiana and in Trinidad.

Race and colour discrimination have applied until very recently in innumerable fields of employment, even at the level of department store clerks and bank clerks.¹ The same was true of the Civil Service, where senior officials were invariably white because few Negroes, East Indians or Coloured Civil Servants possessed the necessary qualifications², and where lightness of skin was as indispensable to the secretary to a Head of Department as ability to type.³ The more obvious manifestations of discrimination in employment have disappeared in the last ten years, but it would be optimistic to say that all discrimination is a thing of the past.

The values which obtain in British Caribbean society have fostered an attitude towards manual work which makes it

1. cf. Blanshard, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

2. Cmd. 6607, p. 60.

3. cf. F. Henriques, Family and Colour in Jamaica, (1954), p. 52.

the least socially desirable form of employment. This is not only the result of the identification of white planter and merchant with the upper class, and the "taboos ... which characterize white society in the tropics."¹ It is also a carry-over from the revulsion against slavery which caused agricultural wage labour to be regarded with disfavour by Negroes in the 19th Century. It is largely with the people who perform this type of socially undesirable labour that the industrial aspect of this study deals, and some attention will be given to this attitude in Chapter II.

Recent developments in the British Caribbean are creating upheavals in the structure of society and evolving new sets of values. Adult suffrage, trade unionism, social welfare facilities, and in particular, opportunities for education, have achieved a great deal in the way of replacing the criteria of race and colour by determinants more compatible with the multi-racial character of the area. It is of some significance that these changes in society date from the period of unrest which marks the beginning of Labour Movements in most of the territories.

1. Blanshard, op. cit., p. 55.

CHAPTER II

WORKERS AND OCCUPATIONS.

The multi-racial character of the British Caribbean population is almost entirely the result of efforts on the part of the European planter-class to ensure a sufficient and suitable labour force. Except in British Guiana, the original inhabitants had been virtually exterminated before the heyday of sugar cane cultivation. A first attempt at filling the need with indentured Englishmen or Irishmen, convicted and sentenced to transportation or snatched by press-gangs, soon gave way to Negro slavery, which was introduced as a source of labour which satisfied more ideally the requirements of plantation sugar cultivation.

This development was to have serious consequences for the labour situation. It meant that the plantation system was maintained only by the subordination of one concept of society to another, the European planter concept being dominant. All that Emancipation did when it came, was to abolish the legal sanction for this dominance; it provided no remedy for the inherent situation of conflict, nor was it accompanied by the political and economic adjustments which alone could ensure the smooth transition to a

society of wage-relationships.¹ It had not been taken for granted that owner and slave would fall into their new roles of employer and employee - or, to use the terminology of a less liberal 19th Century, master and servant - automatically; but the experiment of 'Apprenticeship', which was to allow time for adjustment, was not a success.

The effect of Emancipation was not merely to make the Negro a free man at law. It left him with a choice - either to accept the new European wage-labour system and to live within it, or to reject its implications and evolve his own separate organisation of society. By implication, the influx to the city which occurred in all these territories immediately after Emancipation was an admission of acceptance of the wage-labour system, which could be the only basis of city life, by such of the migrants as forsook their old homes permanently for the capital and the glamour of the higher wages paid to artisans.² But the city dwellers were, by all accounts, a minority of the labouring population, though we have no figures to show the extent of migration at this period.

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1. See Phillip D. Curtin, The Two Jamaica's 1830-65, (1955), for an excellent case-study of this clash of concepts.
 2. James Rodway, History of British Guiana, (1894), Vol. 3, p. 50, quotes a contemporary report that "tradesmen... were paid so high that field labour was looked on as degrading by comparison."

Labour Relations in the post-Emancipation period.

On the plantations, the ex-slaves continued at first to work, though now for wages which they had agreed upon with the planters, and did not immediately withdraw from the estates. Rodway cites a contemporary local review of the first year of freedom in British Guiana which affirmed that "some of the labourers had become partial vagrants, but the greater number remained steadily at work."¹ Curtin shows that while the rate of desertion from the estates varied from district to district in Jamaica, it was not until the devices thought up by the planters to secure control of the free labour force were put into operation that the trek to the backlands commenced.² In Trinidad, de Verteuil tells us, "the majority ... continued to live on the estates, actually occupying houses and lands free from all rent, and yet exacting from their masters whatever wages they thought proper"³

In the first few years of freedom there were a number of disputes, mainly over wages. The planter could reduce wages in two ways - he could either lower the actual

1. Rodway, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 36.

2. Curtin, op. cit., pp. 127-130.

3. L.A.A. de Verteuil, Trinidad, (1884), p. 16.

rate per day or per task, or he could increase the size of the task to be performed while continuing to pay the existing rate. Both these methods were employed, though at first task work was not usual on sugar estates. An able-bodied man could perform a task at that period in 4 hours, and often completed 2 to 2½ tasks in a day in Trinidad.¹ In 1850, we are told, it took six hours to complete a task in British Guiana.² By 1900, a task had come to mean the equivalent of a full day's work of 7 to 9 hours.³

Towards the end of 1841 relations between planter and Negro labourer in British Guiana deteriorated. At a meeting in December, the planters agreed to combine to cut their cost of production and to enforce the following uniform conditions: 1) no wages would be paid for tasks improperly done; 2) labourers who refused to work would be turned off the estates; 3) the granting of provisions, free housing, free medical attendance and free grounds was to be discontinued; 4) wages were to be reduced uniformly to 32¢ a day for field hands, and 48¢ for factory hands. This decision of the planters was influenced as much by their lavish

1. ibid.

2. Rodway, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 73.

3. Cd. 5193, Evidence, *passim*. Cf. also H.G. Dalton, History of British Guiana, Vol. 1., p. 441.

expenditure on unsuccessful immigration schemes as by the price of sugar; 9,100 immigrants were brought into British Guiana at private expense between 1835 - 1840.¹ District Agricultural Societies were formed in Demerara and Essequibo to enforce the new conditions, but in Berbice, where lower wages were paid, the planters had nothing to do with the movement. No effort was made to prepare the Negroes for these changes which were to come into operation in January, 1842, and they went on strike. At the end of six weeks the planters had to give in and agree to the same wages and conditions as before.² Labour had won the first round. Four years later an attempt on the part of the proprietor to reduce wages on one of the estates in Leguan resulted in rioting by the labourers.³ They so took advantage of the continued scarcity of labour that by 1847 able-bodied males working a 7½-hour day were earning \$9 and \$10 a week; when Apprenticeship came to an end in 1838, most planters had refused to agree to the rate of \$10 a month with house, medical attendance and grounds, which one or two of their

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1. Dalton, op. cit., Vol. 2, App., p. 491.
 2. Rodway, op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 62-64; Dalton, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 481-483; British Guiana Local Guide, (1864), p. 24. The views of both planters and labourers at the time are described in Barton Premium, Eight Years in British Guiana, (1850). Premium himself was a resident planter.
 3. British Guiana Local Guide, 1864, p. 28.

number had wanted to fix.¹ But with the Free Traders at work in England the wages boom could not last; 1848 saw reduced wages and general distress in the colony. The strike in 1842 had had one other important consequence - it was followed by a widespread movement towards peasant holdings. In that year alone, 15,000 acres of estates were bought by Negroes in co-operation, at a cost of \$250,000;² Plantations Bel Air and Ithaca in Berbice, Victoria, Buxton and Friendship in Demerara, now Negro villages, were all bought at this time at prices ranging from 25,000 to 250,000 guilders (approximately £166 to £1,660). Dalton estimates that of 80,000 field labourers at Emancipation, only a quarter were now prepared to perform wage-labour.³ A local commission of enquiry in 1850 found only 19,041 able-bodied men residing on the estates.⁴ Some planters were obliged to rent their estates out in holdings. The Negroes established free villages in which they devoted themselves to the cultivation of local foodstuffs, and the estate labour supply suffered in consequence.⁵

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1. A.R.F. Webber, Centenary History of British Guiana, (1938), p. 194 & p. 220.
 2. idem, p. 191.
 3. Dalton, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 483.
 4. idem, Vol. 2, App., p. 511.
 5. For the growth of a peasant population in this period see also R.E.G. Farley, "Aspects of the Economic History of British Guiana, 1781 - 1852," (1956).

Trinidad had been suffering an acute labour shortage even before Emancipation, and there had been trouble between planters and government over the illegal importation of slaves from Barbados in 1832.¹ In 1839 strikes for higher wages took place on several estates in the island, the strikers demanding a 100% increase on the current rate of 2/2d. a day. Unlike the British Guiana planters three years later, the Trinidad estates refused to pay a rate which they claimed would put their cost of production 50% above the selling price, and despite the loss of a large part of the crop, succeeded in breaking the strike after several weeks.² Consequently, when in 1844 the planters, many of whom had already been ruined, decided to reduce wages upon the suggestion of the Agricultural Society, opposition was desultory, the reduction being "opposed by the Labourers in some districts, though acceded to by those of others."³ This measure was introduced in as tactless a manner as that which we have already described in British Guiana two years earlier; and it proved the occasion for a labourers' combination, which, however, accepted the new rates. But the labourers remained dissatisfied and began to neglect work on the estates; as a

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1. L.M. Fraser, History of Trinidad, (1896), Vol. 2, pp. 305-317.
 2. H.C. Pitts, 100 Years Together, (n.d.), p. 33.
 3. Trinidad Standard, 15th August, 1844, Editorial.

result, large numbers were ejected from the estate houses which they occupied, and their provision grounds were destroyed.¹

The planters' decision to reduce wages had caused a meeting of 600 labourers "at the Couva river" on July 22nd.² Organised by one Charles G. McKay, the meeting agreed to form the 'Trinidad Free Labourers' Society' to aim at colony-wide membership. McKay was to prepare a report on the 'Statistical Accounts of the Island' for the benefit of members, and the next meeting was fixed for August 1st. On the actual reason for its assembly the meeting was very tame, accepting the reduced rates and affirming that the interests of the labourers were bound up with the continuance of cultivation on the estates.³ Its business was conducted "peaceably and with propriety." But in spite of the temperate and level-headed attitude which seems to have prevailed among its members, the combination was not well-received. While the right of labourers to unite "for any purposes, particularly such as would seem to affect their interest", was conceded, there was fear of "the consequences which may speedily ensue from any combination based on wrong principles, and having no

1. de Verteuil, op. cit., p. 17.

2. Trinidad Standard, 1st August, 1844.

3. ibid.

reasonable or definite object in view, as such is likely to be under the circumstances"¹ Neither "Missionaries, Clergy, Teachers nor Magistrates", the labourers' usual advisers, had a hand in the formation of the Society. There is no evidence that the Trinidad Free Labourers' Society was anything but an 'ephemeral combination.' It is certain that it would meet with severe reprisals from planters; and the difficulties involved in maintaining its organisation in 1844 must have proved insurmountable. No similar attempt at combination was made in British Guiana or Jamaica. The Trinidad Free Labourers' Society is a unique instance on the 19th Century labour scene.

The Jamaica planters had been the most determined in their opposition to Emancipation, and were now the most vindictive in their relations with the new free labourers. The latter, in turn, through the missionary churches - Baptist and Presbyterian and to a lesser extent Moravian - were better organised than in British Guiana or Trinidad.² When the planters combined to keep the rate of wages as low as possible immediately wages became payable - they offered 10d. a day with use of cottages, house and grounds as compared with the 2/4 - 3/4 at which labour was valued during Apprenticeship³ -

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1. Trinidad Standard, 15th August, 1844, Editorial.
 2. Curtin, op. cit., pp. 114-116.
 3. J.H. Hinton, Memoir of William Knibb, (1894), pp. 286-87; W.F. Burchell, Memoir of Thomas Burchell, (1849), pp. 345-52.

the missionaries often stepped in, advised the labourers what wage to accept, and bargained on their behalf with the planters; the planters in return accused the missionaries of forming workers' combinations and calling strikes.¹ During the period of Apprenticeship, many Negroes had bought land in the mountains and migrated there to form the beginnings of small-holding free-peasantry; the encouragement which the missionaries gave to this movement was prompted both by the desire to maintain the adherence of their congregations and by genuine concern to protect labourers from the poverty and insecurity which total dependence on estate wage-labour would mean in Jamaica. In their efforts to ensure control of the free labour force, planters adopted methods which only resulted in driving labour away all the faster, or in forcing upon the labourer a consciousness of how necessary his own house and land were for security. Thus they imposed a rent for each member of the family, raised rents arbitrarily if a labourer failed to turn out, and even ejected tenants, destroying the provision grounds, livestock and fruit-trees on which their food supply depended, in a vain attempt to re-introduce slavery in the economic sphere.² The inability of many

1. Curtin, op. cit., p. 115.

2. See J.J. Gurney, A Letter to the Planters of Jamaica, (1840), pp. 11-12; Curtin, op. cit., pp. 123-130.

estates to pay their labourers regularly, owing to a shortage of circulating capital, further encouraged labourers away. Among those who remained, there were outbreaks of strikes in 1863-64, a period of general distress and political discontent, in Cornwall and Hanover parishes for increased wages.¹

The second half of the 19th Century saw the Negroes established as a peasant proprietary class in all three territories. In addition to the private estate lands which they could buy as estates were abandoned, Crown lands were offered for sale at cheap prices though, in British Guiana particularly, the regulations made their purchase more difficult than the rate would suggest.² In Jamaica where the mountainous nature of the country is well suited to small-holding the most intense settlement had taken place, there being 92,979 small freeholders by 1896.³ In Trinidad, "by 1870 the old negro creole population had fallen back mostly into villages on the borders of estates or newly opened lands of the interior."⁴

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1. Falmouth Post, 19th January, 1864; 12th February, 1864.
 2. See, e.g., 1897 Royal Commission, App. C., Vol. II, Pt. II, Evidence of N.D. Davis, Comptroller of Customs, p. 54.
 3. Amy K. Lopez, "Land and Labour to 1900" in Jamaica Historical Review, Vol. I, No. 3, December, 1948.
 4. Beachey, "The British West Indies Sugar Industry in the Late 19th Century", (1957), p. 102.

The East Indian Indenture System.

The planters, deprived of one source of labour, set about finding replacements. Already before the Negroes had turned en masse to peasant holding attempts had been made to establish alternative supplies of labour. Between 1834 and 1837 there arrived in Jamaica over 2,000 'north-European blonds', mainly Scotsmen and Germans, and about 100 Irishmen¹; another 1,363 had entered the Island by 1845. British Guiana imported more than 30,000 Madeirans between 1835 and 1872. Trinidad had no sizeable immigration of non-Africans in the first years after Emancipation, but from 1835 numbers of free Negro labourers from the smaller West Indian colonies entered the Island. In addition the Negro labouring population of all three territories was increased by 'liberated Africans', slaves captured on the high seas or settled in St. Helena, and by labourers from Sierra Leone and the Kroo Coast. By 1861, nearly 8,000 free Negro immigrants had entered Jamaica; by 1872, 29,581 had gone to British Guiana, 18,150 to Trinidad. More than 25,000 Chinese were introduced under indenture to the three territories in the period 1852-1881, about $\frac{2}{3}$ of them going to British Guiana. But Chinese coolie immigration is more akin to East Indian immigration which was to prove the biggest source of replacement for the plantations' lost

1. Figures for immigration in the post-emancipation period are taken from N. Deerr, The History of Sugar, (1950), Vol. 2, Chs. XXIII, XXIV.

labour supply.

The first East Indians in the area arrived in British Guiana in 1838¹. Their introduction, the work of John Gladstone (father of the famous Liberal statesman) who owned Plantation Vreedestein in Demerara, was sanctioned by an Order-in-Council which also stipulated a contract of five years' service with repatriation rights for the immigrants at the end of their term.² Opposition from the Anti-Slavery Society and from liberal opinion in England prevented any further immigration until 1844, when permission for the introduction of East Indian to British Guiana, Jamaica and Trinidad was granted by Act of Parliament. The unsatisfactory character of the first immigrants introduced at this time, and the inadequacy of the arrangements made for them caused a temporary halt to the scheme in 1845. It was started again in 1851 (1860 in the case of Jamaica), and continued until 1917 when pressure of public opinion forced the Indian Government, which had never been completely at ease about the scheme, to bring it to an end. By then 239,220 East Indians had gone to British Guiana, 134,183 to Trinidad, and 33,533 to Jamaica.³ The modification of the scheme in later years which allowed the

1. idem; Cd. 5192 (1909), p. 52.

2. ibid, p. 391.

3. ibid, p. 398.

indentured immigrant to renew his indenture for a further period of time, and then to relinquish his repatriation rights in return for a grant of land, resulted in the permanent settlement of a large number of East Indians in British Guiana and Trinidad particularly.

Opposition to East Indian immigration continued in the British Caribbean until the system was abolished. In the beginning, it was the Anti-Slavery Society and the missionaries who opposed the indenture as a new and subtle form of slavery. By the turn of the Century, the voice of the Negroes, or of those who claimed to be their spokesmen, had joined in the protest. They alleged that East Indian immigration was keeping the rate of wages down, that Negroes were being deprived of employment, that through taxation, the public was being made to support a system detrimental to its interests for the benefit of the planters.¹

The wages and conditions of employment of indentured labour were regulated by a number of laws passed locally in each territory. The following extract from a memorandum of the Protector of Immigrants, Jamaica, may be regarded as typical of the conditions of service in the 20th Century²:

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1. See, e.g., Cd. 5194 (1910), pp. 18-22, Memorandum from the People's Association of British Guiana; p. 77, Secretary, Jamaica Baptist Union to Governor of Jamaica; Cd. 5193, Evidence of Alfred Richards, pp. 225-236.
 2. Cd. 5194, p. 70.

2. The immigrant is required to work every day in the week except Sunday and authorised holidays.
3. When ill he is sent to a hospital provided by the Government, and receives medical attendance, medicines, medical comforts, and food free of all charge.
4. His employer is bound to find him work on each working day or pay him his wages.
5. All earnings are paid weekly. No deductions whatever, except for rations during the first three months (the prescribed period of initiation) are allowed.
6. Suitable dwellings are provided for the immigrants on estates, free of rent. These are erected on sites approved by the Immigration and Medical Officers and are kept in good repair by the employers.

Detailed provision was made concerning hours and conditions, wages, leave of absence, dwelling and hospital accommodation, marriage and education; regulations for dealing with deserters and vagrants were in force, and statutory medical inspection carried out at regular intervals. The responsibility for carrying out the Immigration Ordinances rested with a special officer, the Immigration Agent-General (sometimes called Protector of Immigrants) who was assisted by agents residing in various parts of the territory.

Wages and hours differed according to the territory in which the labourer was indentured. Payment was on a piece-rate rather than a time-rate basis, particularly in the

case of field-work on the estates; an enquiry into East Indian conditions made just before the system was abolished revealed that between 80% and 90% of the labour performed on estates in Trinidad was paid for by the task¹. The concept of the task, as prescribed by law, was simple. In British Guiana and Trinidad, it was the work which "the immigrant to whom it is assigned" ought to be able to perform "within one working day of seven hours without extraordinary exertion."² In Jamaica, an Ordinance passed in 1912 stipulated that a task should allow an "able-bodied trained male", 18 years old or over, to earn "upwards of 1/6 a day for a fair day's work of nine hours with ordinary exertion."³ In practice the determination of the size of a task was much more complicated, and not always so equitable. No account was taken, for instance, of the differing capacities of different workers.⁴ Differences of soil, of soil condition, or of crop growth which depended upon the particular field, the season of the year, the weather, or upon the nature of the work previously performed on the particular site made anything like a standard task an impossibility and left it to the discretion of the

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1. Cd. 7744 (1914-16), p. 16.
 2. ibid, pp. 15, 65.
 3. Cd. 7745 (1914-16), p. 206.
 4. Cd. 7744, p. 15.

overseer, who would be forced to make an on-the-spot decision when assigning the day's tasks. On the whole, it appears that in Trinidad there was little grumbling about the size of the tasks, which in British Guiana was the cause of many complaints.¹ Men employed on ordinary work seldom performed more than one task a day (though it was not unknown for a man to perform two).

Task workers in Trinidad were usually in the field from 6.00 or 6.30 a.m. to 2.00 or 4.00 p.m., with a break of ½ an hour to 1 hour at 10.30 a.m. for meals. Time workers finished later, at 4.30 p.m. In British Guiana all workers kept the hours 8.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. with an hour off for meals in the middle of the day. Jamaican indentured labourers worked longer hours, as their legal working day was 9 hours; no provision for rest periods was made in the regulations governing the hours of their employment.²

In the factory, time-work was more usual. This was also the rule in the case of skilful field labourers assigned to special jobs, or weak labourers who were incapable of prolonged effort. In practice most workers had 5 days' work a week, taking half-days off on Monday and Saturday.

A minimum wage for able-bodied labourers of 1/- or 24 cents per working day in Jamaica and British Guiana and of 25 cents in Trinidad was fixed by law. For women in Jamaica

1. ibid., pp. 18, 69.

2. Cd. 7745, p. 206.

the rate was 9d., for the non-able-bodied in British Guiana and Trinidad it was 16 cents¹. Rates fixed for task work were required by law not to fall below these minima. In other respects the rate of wages was to be governed by rates paid to the Negroes and other unindentured immigrants on the estate, and by rates on neighbouring estates. Official reports of the period, even those based on first-hand visits to the estates, all unite in lamenting the absence of reliable information about average earnings. The memoranda and evidence submitted to the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates² reveal wide divergence of opinion both about actual rates of wages and about average earnings in all three territories. Figures of average earnings differed so widely as to render them of little value. It would appear that in general the legal minimum wage was paid, but that few labourers worked for the full 280 days a year on which the estates were required to provide them with employment.

Relations between indentured labourer and his employers depended to a great degree upon the character and temperament of the white manager. As head of the estate administration, he was the visible symbol of authority in the lives of his labourers. Occasionally large estates had a deputy

1. Cd. 5194, passim.

2. Cd. 5192-4 (1910).

manager; next in the order came the overseers, also white but occasionally coloured, who had charge of gangs of workmen. Supervision of the gangs in the field was provided by headmen, who were mainly East Indian. The manager was a patriarch who was often called upon to fill the role of judge, father confessor, adviser and even savings bank.¹ The nature of labour-management relations on an estate could be gathered from the number of prosecutions against its labourers for infringing their terms of contract, and the frequency of their complaints (usually about the size or rate of task-work) to the Immigration Agent. The Indian Government's investigators found in 1914-16² that in general relations on estates were cordial, though British Guiana was less so than Trinidad. One possible source of misunderstanding, which they criticised, was the inaccessibility of the management, resulting from the absence of any established procedure for workers to approach the manager about personal or labour problems. Difficulties stemmed from other causes as well. East Indian indentured immigrants were imprisoned for infringements of the code which could in no way be considered crimes. They were excitable by nature, easy to misunderstand and to be misunderstood. Irregular sexual relationships between East Indian women and overseers, forbidden by law, were an inevitable source of trouble. That the number of serious disturbances which

1. Cd. 7744, p. 35.

2. Cd. 7744, 7745, passim.

occurred on estates were so few is to the credit of the Immigration Departments in all three territories.

Free Wage Labour.

During the years when the indenture system obtained, a number of free labourers could still find employment on the estates. Unskilled labour in the towns and skilled or semi-skilled industrial employment was almost entirely the province of Negroes - this was particularly true of employment groups like the dock-workers, where great physical strength was required. In agriculture, however, the Negroes were outnumbered (except in Jamaica) by large numbers of free East Indians, who remained resident on the estates after their terms of indenture. In British Guiana in 1908, 69,140 East Indians, more than half of the total number in the country, were resident on sugar estates, and of these only 9,784 were under indenture¹. Of more than 10,000 East Indians employed on estates in St. Mary and Vere in Jamaica in the same year, only 2,833 were indentured.² Free labourers were usually better workers than indentured labourers, even in the performance of ordinary work.³ It was stated that free East Indians in British Guiana chose to remain on the estates because while they enjoyed the same

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1. Cd. 5194, p. 9.
 2. ibid, pp. 80-81.
 3. Cd. 7744, p. 22.

advantages as the indentured labourer, their superior skill and familiarity with the work to be done enabled them to earn twice as much.¹ They were given greater latitude by managements which feared to lose their services, and so they worked at their own pleasure; moreover, they were allowed facilities for raising cattle on the estates. To some extent the better treatment meted out to free East Indians on the estates was an inducement held out by planters anxious to retain an abundant supply of labour.

The estates made use also of free non-resident labour, both Negro and East Indian, during the crop season and for heavier jobs. These non-residents might be regular wage-earners who also cultivated a peasant holding (their own property or rented), or else peasants who became occasional wage-earners during the crop in response to the greater seasonal demand for labour.² The laws which fixed a minimum wage for indentured labour had made it clear that higher rates were payable if free labourers received them. It had not been the intention to regard the minimum wage as an adequate rate, but merely as a figure below which wages should not fall. In effect, the planters seem to have looked upon the legal minimum wage rather as the optimum wage which they should pay. Only in Jamaica where free labour was at a premium (large numbers of indentured

1. ibid, p. 67.

2. See, e.g., Cd. 5194, pp. 85-88.

labourers were to be found only in Portland, St. Mary and Clarendon)¹ did free labourers receive higher wages - 1/6 to 2/- a day compared with 10½d. to 1/5¼ paid to indentured labourers.² In British Guiana and Trinidad the same rates for task-work were paid to all labourers. Higher wages were paid in Trinidad to free men for time-work, which was allowed only in the case of jobs requiring superior skill or strength, usually of a casual nature.³ The Committee which inquired into the Labour Question in Trinidad in 1906 had recommended differential task-rates which would take into account the extra benefits, such as free housing, etc., enjoyed by estate residents.⁴ This recommendation became law in 1908, an addition of 15 cents a day to the wage of free labourers being sanctioned⁵; but in 1914 Messrs. McNeill and Lal reported that "the free Indian labourer worked at the same rate as the indentured Indian, whether the former lived on or off the estate."⁶ In British Guiana there had even been instances of free labourers being offered marginally useful work on take-it or leave-it

1. ibid, p. 79; Beachey, op. cit., p. 108.

2. Cd. 7745, pp. 206-208.

3. Cd. 7744, p. 22.

4. Trinidad Council Paper, 13 of 1906.

5. Cd. 5192, p. 67.

6. Cd. 7744, p. 22.

terms at wages below the statutory minimum for indentured labour; another practice was to give work out on contract, when there was a surplus of labour available, at a rate lower than that paid to indentured workers.¹ No instance was discovered in British Guiana by the investigators of higher wages being paid to non-resident labour. The inadequacy of the wages paid to free agricultural labour for the needs of some sections at least of the labour force was stressed by the Acting Governor of British Guiana in a dispatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies²:

The African labourer ... cannot attain his standard of comfort on a shilling a day, the statutory minimum wage of the indentured East Indian A shilling a day, however, gives the East Indian a degree of comfort, indeed of luxury, unknown in his country.

Even in agriculture there was occupational differentiation between Negro and East Indian. 4 out of every 5 skilled workers on the sugar estates - blacksmiths, mechanics, carpenters, engineers, coopers, etc., - were Negroes.³ In the field, the Negro was given jobs "where his greater strength told in his favour"⁴, heavy labour such as cane-cutting, trenching and

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1. ibid, pp. 66, 70.
 2. 26/5/1909, Cd. 5194, p. 6.
 3. idem.
 4. Cd. 7744, p. 22.

cleaning drains.¹ Beachey, writing of the period before 1903, says that planters in British Guiana preferred to pay a Negro shovelman 4/- a day rather than engage an East Indian to do the same job at 1/4.² The more tedious and less arduous routine work, such as weeding and cane-thrashing, was performed by the East Indian who was considered to be better suited by temperament for this type of occupation than the Negro. In Jamaica the situation was different because of the small number of East Indians. All estate labour in Trelawny was performed by Negroes - it is of interest to note that their wages and conditions were held to be worse than anywhere else in the Island, a state of affairs which was attributed to their complete dependence upon estate employment.³ In other areas, many Negroes, the sons of small landowners and peasants, were said to be averse to certain kinds of work - banana-heading, cane-thrashing, hoeing and weeding, for example - which they considered fit only "for coolies and women."⁴ Unemployment appears to have existed in some areas of Jamaica at the same time as shortage of labour in other districts, without any flow of labourers from the one to the other resulting. This was particularly so in the case of banana plantations

1. Cd. 5192, p. 59.

2. Beachey, op. cit., p. 103.

3. Cd. 5193, Evidence of Sir S. Olivier, p. 225;
Cd. 5194, p. 91.

4. ibid, p. 90.

which advertised for labourers without success while at the same time more than 10,000 labourers were migrating to Panama every year under the lure of high wages¹. This sort of situation, which had obtained on Jamaican estates since the 1870's, was attributable to labour attitudes to estate employment, to poor wages which the estates could offer, to the distance of most Negro villages from the estates, and to the inability of estate managements to provide work for more than 3 or 4 days a week.²

The custom of allowing free East Indians to reside on estates on the same conditions as indentured labour had important consequences for the system of estate labour once indenture was abandoned. Just as the essential features of the indenture system accorded well with estate organisation in the days of slavery - housing provided on the estate free of cost, employer responsibility for labourers, workers identified with the estate, labour performed in gangs under a foreman - so did the change to completely free labour come about without disturbing the set patterns of estate life. The perennially migrant character of a section of the labour force, which was a feature of indentured labour, disappeared. But the fact that a large number of employees - in latter years the greater portion - had always been unindentured served to disguise the

1. ibid, p. 91.

2. Beachey, op. cit., pp. 106 - 109.

need for a new appraisal of labour relationships. Workers continued to reside on the estate and to identify themselves with it. The management, not wishing to alienate its employers, made no effort to disclaim responsibility for those special amenities which free resident labourers had enjoyed along with indentured immigrants. In essence, however, the situation had changed. "The abandonment of indentured labour introduced an important change in the position of the labour force, though this appears to have passed quite unrecognised."¹ The labourer now had no legal rights to safeguard his residence on the estate. As a workman he was bound by no special contract; but conversely he had no claim to anything except his wages in return for his labour. He and his family could be evicted at any time if they displeased the management, or if he refused to work. Any extra inducements held out to him, such as the privilege of keeping cattle or planting a kitchen garden, were at the discretion of the manager and could be revoked. He was now dependent upon wages for a living without any guarantee that he could find employment on the estate all year round. This had been the position of free labour resident on the estates while the indenture system obtained, it is true; but the presence of indentured labourers who were under the protection of the Government did not leave the estate manager complete licence in dealing with his labourers. In fact, the Protectors of Immigrants continued to look after the interests

1. Cmd. 6070, p. 15.

of free East Indians until the posts were abolished early in the 1930's¹. The position of the free labourer on the estate after the indenture system came to an end was substantially the same as that of the ex-slave in the first years of freedom after 1838. In the surging prosperity of the sugar industry after World War I, the planter needed all the labour he could get and could afford to hold out every inducement to labourers to stay on the estates. By the time depression set in in the 1930's, the pattern of estate free labour had been set, and the planter had grown to accept the implications of the system - responsibility not only for the housing and living conditions of the labour force, but also for providing employment to resident labour.² This was partly the outcome of the patriarchal nature of the estate community; it was also dictated by long-term self-interest, as the estate which looked after its workers in bad times could expect not to suffer from a shortage of labour when it was needed.

Occupations, Employment and Unemployment.

The statistics of occupation and employment available for the area in our period are very unsatisfactory. There has

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1. cf. D. Nath, A History of Indians in British Guiana, (1950), passim.
 2. Cmd. 6070, p. 16.

been no attempt to standardize classification in the different territories and even in the same territory successive census reports classified the same people in different ways. It was not until the last census, taken in 1946 (1943 in the case of Jamaica) that the approach was made towards presenting as clear a picture as possible. The entire question of occupations, employment and unemployment has been befogged, even as late as 1930's, by traditional attitudes and prejudices, by false and rash generalizations, and by the absence of facilities for acquiring more precise information through the medium of statistics. Information of a particular nature originating in one territory often cannot be compared, even now, with the situation in other territories because similar investigations have not been carried out. Thus, for example, the racial distribution of the working population of Jamaica in the main industrial groups is available from the 1943 Census; but similar statistics were not to be had for British Guiana as late as 1950, the only information available being that "generally speaking, it can be said that field workers on the sugar plantations, and other manual workers, are East Indian, African or of mixed race. Persons of all race groups are found in commercial and professional occupations and in the civil service."¹

The number of wage-earners at the time of the last census is shown below.

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 61.

Table VIII

Wage and Salary Earners

	Wage Earners	% of Gainfully Employed	% of Total Population
British Guiana	94,392	64.58	25.12
Jamaica	283,439	56.12	22.91
Trinidad	153,003	71.80	27.42

Source: Census of Population, 1943-6.

The census data reveal that in all three territories the wage-earning force shows certain interesting features - a preponderance of unskilled labour, both in agriculture and in other pursuits; a high percentage of domestic and personal service workers; and a relatively small number of skilled workers. Almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of all wage-earners in each territory were women. There were, moreover, large numbers of unpaid helpers (47,611 in Jamaica alone) who are not included in the figures for wage-earners given above. Unskilled labour occupied 59% of the wage-earning population in British Guiana, 51% in Jamaica, and 35% in Trinidad; of these, agricultural labourers alone amounted to 43%, 36% and 21% of the wage-earning population in the respective territories. More than $\frac{1}{4}$ of all wage-earners in Jamaica were in domestic or personal service, which occupied a little over $\frac{1}{10}$ of the labour force in British Guiana and Trinidad. It is difficult to arrive at a figure for the number of skilled workers; in general the level of skills in the

area is not very high, both skilled and semi-skilled workers being included in this category without distinction. Cumper estimates that of some 60,000 Jamaican artisans shown in the Census, not more than half could really be considered skilled workers.¹ This would amount to approximately 10% of all wage-earners, or less than 6% of the labour force. The same considerations hold good of British Guiana and Trinidad, where the uncorrected figures for skilled tradesmen amount to 16.0% and 22.1% respectively of the labour force.

The importance of agriculture in providing employment is emphasized by the figures for industrial distribution of the working population shown in Table IX.

Table IX
Industrial Distribution of the Labour Force

	B.G.	Jamaica	Trinidad
Agriculture	41.82%	43.83%	25.27%
Mining	2.83	0.12	3.18
Forestry	3.35	0.46	1.56
Fishing & Hunting	0.98	0.85	0.75
Manufacture & Repair	15.88	11.97	17.78
Construction	4.96	6.76	10.14
Transport	4.24	2.26	6.00
Commerce	8.24	7.81	8.84
Professions	3.61	2.17	3.61
Public Service	4.09	2.01	8.24
Personal Service	8.79	16.11	10.59
Others	1.21	5.65	3.62

Source: W.I. Census, 1943-6.

1. G. Cumper, The Social Structure of Jamaica, (n.d), p. 57.

In all three territories the total numbers engaged in agriculture, and particularly the numbers of farm labourers, showed a considerable decline since the 1921 Census. In Trinidad this has been regarded as evidence of the change from an agricultural to a semi-industrial economy, an interpretation which is in part borne out by the size of the construction, manufacture and repair sectors of the labour force. A similar change to industrial employment does not appear to have taken place in British Guiana or Jamaica; in the latter the surplus appears to have been diverted largely into domestic and personal service occupations. The inability of agriculture to absorb its share of the rapidly increasing population has been worsened by its decreasing need for manpower as a result of mechanization.¹

Sugar remains the biggest employer of labour. The problems presented by any attempt to discuss the industry as a field of employment in detailed terms are well expressed in the Report of the Jamaica Sugar Industry Commission, 1944-45²:

The labour situation in the industry is complex, and an assessment of the many associated factors has in the past always presented considerable difficulty. The reasons for this are several: There is a wide seasonal variation in the numbers employed. There is a high proportion of part-time workers even among what may be regarded

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 120.

2. p. 142.

as the regular labour force. There is a wide range of operations demanding all degrees of skill. Labour is employed on a task or piece work basis, and on a daily or weekly basis depending upon the nature of the work; and finally, little attempt has been made, until recently, to keep even elementary statistics in regard to the employment of labour.

This may be taken as a fair statement of the position in all three territories. The importance of the sugar industry as a source of employment does not end with the workers whom it employs directly, as a large number employed in ancillary services, such as transport and shipping, are also dependent upon sugar.

Seasonal variation in employment levels and the number of part-time workers it employs are perhaps the two outstanding features of the sugar industry. The number of workers who gave sugar as their main field of employment at the time of the census is considerably in excess of the average numbers employed by the sugar estates; while some of this excess is attributable to wage-earners on cane farms, it is nevertheless true to say that there is "an appreciable amount of labour moving in and out of the industry."¹ Thus the average numbers employed on the sugar estates - 22,788 in Jamaica (1943), 21,423 in British Guiana (1949), 18,710 in

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 202.

Trinidad (1946-50) - are substantially smaller than the 35,000, 33,000 and 23,000 who are estimated to find employment in the industry (exclusive of office and supervisory staff.)¹ The average numbers employed annually are the mean between average employment figures in and out of crop which show considerable variation. The following are given as random examples. In Trinidad in 1950 the fortnightly average for the crop season of 19,873 workers employed on the sugar estates dropped to 17,113 in the out-of-crop season, the highest number employed in any fortnight being 21,843 and the lowest 15,100. For Jamaica in 1943 numbers employed on the sugar estates averaged 30,290 in the crop season and 18,645 during the rest of the year; the peak employment figure of 29,998 field-workers on sugar estates in British Guiana during the 1949 crop was 1.7 times the figure of 17,414 employed in the worst fortnight of the year.²

Workers on the sugar estates may be divided into three categories: the permanent establishment, the unskilled

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1. Figures for employment in the sugar industry are taken from: 1943-6 Census; Sugar Industry Commission Report, Jamaica, 1944-5; B.G. Sugar Industry Commission Report, 1947; Commissioner of Labour's Administration Report, Trinidad and Tobago, 1951; Annual Reports.
 2. For seasonal employment cf. H.D. Huggins, "Seasonal Variation and Employment in Jamaica" in Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1953.

labourers, and the seasonal part-time workers.¹ The first group, which includes most of the skilled and semi-skilled factory workers, is entirely dependent upon the industry for employment and works all the year round. The second group, the unskilled labourers, is by far the largest of the three; its members, mainly employed as field-workers, also look to the industry for their entire earnings. The majority of workers in both these categories are resident on the estates. A survey in Jamaica showed that 39% of estate employees in the crop season and 50% of those employed out of crop were provided with estate housing free of rent.² In British Guiana nearly 20,000 of the 28,000 employed by the estates in field and factory in 1949 were resident workers, while the total population on the estates numbered 77,985.³ The third category of estate worker normally earns his living by some other means - and supplements his income by putting in six or eight weeks work on the estate at the peak of the crop season.⁴ While it is not possible to calculate precisely the size of this category of workers, comparison of the average figures for the two

1. Cmd. 6070, pp. 17-18.

2. Sugar Industry Commission Report, Jamaica, 1944-5, p. 150.

3. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 72.

4. Cmd. 6070, p. 17.

seasons of the year suggests that there must be considerable variation from territory to territory and from year to year.

It follows that the majority of sugar workers "cannot expect to be earning wages for more than half the year,"¹ even when they are entirely dependent upon the industry for their livelihood. Various arguments have been advanced at different times in an attempt to modify this aspect of the employment situation by showing that the value of free housing, of allotments and of privileges such as grazing cattle on estate grounds goes a considerable way towards relieving unemployment and lack of wages in the out-of-crop season of the year. Orde Browne, after an enquiry into the entire situation, came to the conclusion that in general these allotments "probably furnish only a meagre amount of employment or produce," and that for a large portion of each year many sugar workers were "idle, underfed and naturally discontented."² It is possible to make too much of both sides of this controversy. The sugar estates, which need the surplus labour in the crop season, and are therefore anxious to keep a large resident labour force in reserve, obviously have an interest in putting the best construction upon the situation. On the other hand Orde Browne's Report shows him to be thoroughly opposed to the idea of a resident labour force dependent upon

1. idem.

2. idem.

the estates for free housing, not only because it is inefficient and underproductive, but because of the complications for labour-management relations. Recent official enquiries show that in general estates are able to provide on an average only 3½ to 4 days work a week for each worker, but very frequently the resident labourer works fewer days per week on the average than he might.¹ The seasonal employment position is probably at its worst in Jamaica where in some areas it has been found necessary to provide seasonal relief work to offset unemployment in the out-of-crop period.² The availability of alternative employment, in any territory, varies with the district. In numerous instances workers resident on the estates must find themselves deterred from seeking other work by the loss of a home which this would involve.³

Outside of agriculture there are very few sizable employers of labour. One of the largest fields of industrial employment, the oil industry in Trinidad, had an average of 13,074 wage-earners (in the pay either of the companies or of contractors) in 1939⁴; by 1950 the number had risen to 16,550.⁵ By comparison, British Guiana's bauxite industry

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1. See, e.g., Col. No. 249, p. 3; Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, pp. 139-140.
 2. Sugar Industry Commission Report, Jamaica, 1944-5, p. 150.
 3. Cmd. 6070, p. 17.
 4. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 205.
 5. Commissioner of Labour's Administration Report, Trinidad and Tobago, 1951.

occupies a mere 2,500 - 2,800 workers.¹ In all three territories the Government is one of the largest employers of labour, skilled and unskilled wage-earners (as distinct from salaried staff) being found in departments such as Agriculture and Public Works. In British Guiana, for example, the latter department alone had as many daily-paid workers in 1954 as the entire bauxite industry.² In Trinidad in 1950 the monthly average of daily-paid workers employed by Government was 22,363 (with an additional 1,366 port workers and 1,703 manual employees of City and Borough Councils), a figure slightly higher than the peak number of 21,843 for the sugar industry in the same year.³ Such statistics of employment in other industrial fields as are available show that opportunities are spread over a number of tiny units. 621 establishments registered in Jamaica as factories in 1949 (excluding sugar factories) employed only 13,856 workers, an average of 22 workers per factory⁴; an official estimate of numbers employed in 154 factories in Trinidad in 1950 yields an average of 27 workers per factory.⁵

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1. B.G. Annual Report, 1954, p. 25.
 2. ibid, p. 24.
 3. Commissioner of Labour's Administration Report, Trinidad and Tobago, 1951, App. 1, p. 30.
 4. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 139.
 5. ibid, p. 206.

As in agricultural labour, a large portion of the industrial wage-earning population is unskilled; 16% of all wage-earners in British Guiana, 15% in Jamaica and 14% in Trinidad were so classified at the last census. For many persons in this group, usually referred to as casual labourers, regular work is a matter of chance and odd-jobbing a familiar experience. Working conditions, when employment is available, are often unsatisfactory, particularly as long hours and relatively low wages tend to be the rule.¹ The rates of pay for unskilled industrial labour, however, have been higher usually than those given to agricultural labourers. Even from Labour Department sources no employment figures are available except for major industries and services, and no detailed account of this unskilled industrial labour can be given.

Unemployment is a serious problem in the area, particularly since the rapid rate of population growth (more than 2% per annum) means that the supply of labour is increasing faster than the demand. The position has been most critical in Jamaica where the 1943 Census revealed that in the week ending December 12th, 139,499 persons or approximately 25% of the total labour force were unemployed, ³/₇ of these being women. Of this number, 50,518 were young persons seeking a first job; this meant that 31.4% of those who were normally

1. cf. Cmd. 6070, p. 75.

wage-earners were unemployed in that week. At the other end of the scale, less than 3,000 wage-earners in British Guiana were found to be unemployed at the time of the 1946 Census. The measurement of unemployment levels has been hindered by the unwillingness of labourers to use the Employment Exchanges, some of which have been functioning since the 1920's. Even if satisfactory statistics of unemployment were available, however, their value would be limited, because the seasonal nature of employment, the high incidence of under-employment and the number of marginally productive "own-account" workers who might work for wages if jobs could be obtained, would create intricate problems of interpretation.¹

Under-employment is an equally serious feature of the labour situation in the area, and is common to almost every category of wage-labour. Even more than in the case of unemployment, its incidence is difficult to measure, but it follows logically enough from the other characteristics of the labour situation. It was particularly noticeable among dock-workers (until the introduction of Registration Schemes for port labour) and is still a prime factor in non-urban areas, aided by the practice in many quarters of employing people for brief spells on a rotational basis in order to

1. cf. Proudfoot, op. cit., p. 224. She gives an example of estimates of the number of unemployed in Jamaica in 1945 by two economists which differed by 100,000!

offset the hardships of seasonal unemployment.

Wages and The Cost-of-Living.

The high incidence of unemployment and under-employment has serious consequences for the labouring population which must be borne in mind in any appraisal of wage rates and wage levels. In the conditions which have obtained in the area in our period, wage rates are no guide to workers' incomes. No realistic picture of living levels can be obtained unless the rate of payment is considered in conjunction with the availability of work and the number of days actually put in. Orde Browne, noting that the wage rate had been the point at issue in many of the disputes which occurred prior to his visit to the area, observes¹:

Any estimate of conditions founded upon consideration of the wage rate alone will be erroneous and misleading; the only true valuation must be based upon a combination of the wage rate, the cost of living and the availability of employment ... Clearly the crucial point is the amount of money earned by the worker from January to December rather than the actual figure of the wage to which he is entitled.

Recent figures of aggregate annual incomes, where they are available, indicate that in general the level of working-class incomes is extremely low, in spite of the increases in

1. Cmd. 6070, p. 28.

wages which have been obtained since the 1930's. The actual figures of annual earnings, again, mean little except in relation to the cost of living; but one indication of the low level of incomes is the fact that, while income tax is generally assessed on net incomes of \$1200 (£250) or over, only a tiny proportion of the gainfully occupied population - less than 3% in British Guiana, for example - is liable to income tax.¹ Prest calls attention to the sums paid out each year in poor relief, the number of beggars in the street in the towns, and the leisurely pace at which work is carried out as evidence of the high degree of unemployment or under-employment and of low productivity which combine to keep earnings at a low level.²

The blame for the low level of earnings and for the incidence of poverty or near-poverty is often placed on the workers themselves. It has long been alleged that West Indian workers are idle and lazy, and will work for only enough wages to keep them above the subsistence level; that this dislike of work often means that a rise in the rate of wages is followed by a reduction in the amount of work performed, and in the time spent at work. "Anyone at all familiar with the West Indian scene will be aware that the laziness and unreliability of West Indian workers has been the

1. Based on Col. No. 281, Vol IV, passim.

2. A.R. Prest, A Fiscal Survey of the British Caribbean, (1957), p. 12.

particular motif cry of the sugar planters in the B.W.I. for many generations," Mrs. Proudfoot reminds us.¹ It is possible to bring statistical evidence to the support of this view - male employees on sugar estates in British Guiana, for instance, "worked an average of only 2.3 days per week in the case of residents and three days per week in the case of non-residents" in 1947, when the average amount of work available throughout the year was 3.66 days per week. But this apparently simple proposition is not to be accepted so easily. Various factors, some traditional, some environmental, and some psychological, affect the attitude of workers in the area to labour, and complicate the straightforward picture of a lazy people unwilling to work.² Aversion to estate labour, which offers little prospect of advancement or improvement in one's standard of living, has persisted since the post-emancipation period; even in the period of indentured labour, the East Indians seldom worked on all of the 280 days a year on which they were entitled to claim wages. Recent surveys have revealed deficiencies of diet which made continuous labour among some groups of workers impossible.³ The long hours - 10 to 12 hours per working

1. op. cit., p. 237.

2. cf. ibid., pp. 236-240.

3. See, e.g., Report of the Nutrition Committee, Jamaica, 1936-37; Report of the Sugar Industry Welfare Committee, Trinidad, 1944; Report on Nutrition in the Colonial Empire, 1939.

day - which until recently have been the rule in most fields of unskilled employment greatly reduced efficiency in the hot tropical climates. Much of the work is arduous or tiresome. And in the conditions which prevailed in all territories until the disturbances of the 1930's - and even afterwards in many cases - there was little incentive for workers to try and improve their lot, since the level of their aspirations was severely limited by the realities of life in West Indian society. It is worthy of mention that workers outside of agricultural labour in the area who receive higher wages are not so open to charges of absenteeism and unreliability, and that West Indian workers have an excellent reputation in Central America and the United States. For this reason, Mrs. Proudfoot concludes that the limitations which are noticeable in the aspirations of workers in the area are due to backwardness, lack of education, and the absence of a large enough artisan or middle-class to emulate.¹ It would be fairer to say that the worker's attitude to labour in the British Caribbean reflects with some accuracy those features of upper-class life which he desires most: a love of leisure and an indisposition to hard physical work. Some allowance must be made when applying standards which are not those of West Indian society to workers in the area.

Consideration of the cost of living is bedevilled

1. op. cit., p. 239.

by the same absence of reliable statistics which has been noted in other spheres. There is a marked differentiation in expenses according to territory, and between town and country, dependent upon the level of rents, the pattern of consumption, and the availability of supplementary articles of diet.¹ The early estimates of average weekly expenditure which have been discovered all appear to be based upon more or less arbitrary allocations, but they are unanimous in showing expenditure to be more than income.² Orde Browne in 1939 came to the conclusion that "in comparison with the moderate cost of living it (the low rate of wages) would frequently suffice to maintain the worker in fair comfort were it not for the constant depressing effect of intermittent employment."³ This is rather inconsistent with his other conclusion about the cost of living - that it was impossible to estimate on the basis of the information available and in view of the great variations in expenditure. Attempts made recently to work out cost-of-living indices have been no more satisfactory than the earlier guesses. The comment upon the Index for Trinidad (based on the estimated expenditure

1. Cmd. 6070, p. 28.

2. e.g., Wages Committee, Trinidad, 1920; estimates by BGLU in Daily Chronicle, passim, 1916-30.

3. Cmd. 6070, p. 29.

of a working man on consumer goods and rent) that "the combined effects of changes in consumption standards and government subsidization of items heavily weighted in the Index have tended to make it unrealistic" indicates the difficulties which arise even when information is available. The unsatisfactory nature of cost-of-living estimates has caused a change recently to Indices of Retail Prices. Even though special estimates have been made for sugar workers in some territories, the great diversity in conditions even within the same territory makes for extreme caution in using them. Differences in diet and in expenditure patterns between Negro and East Indian are a further complication.

The investigations on which some of these recent estimates have been based reveal a considerable degree of poverty in some households. Of 1,418 households in Georgetown with incomes of less than \$60 a month (£150 per annum) in 1942, 381 had less than \$5 a week and 663 others less than \$10 a week, while average weekly expenditure was \$8.23, food alone costing \$4.58 (56%). There was, on the average, one wage-earner for every 2 dependents.¹ Estimates made in Jamaica in 1944 gave the average weekly expenditure of regular field workers on sugar estates as 28/9 (\$6.90), 55% of this being spent on food; average weekly expenditure exceeded average weekly income by 3/6, a phenomenon which is described

1. Col. No. 281, Vol. IV, p. 78.

as "a usual feature in all Income and Expenditure Surveys covering working class people in Jamaica."

Several features of the labour situation which has been surveyed briefly above appear worthy of additional mention, in conclusion, because of their bearing on the character of organised labour in the British Caribbean. The surplus of labour supply, the high incidence of unemployment and under-employment, and the low level of earnings, combine to produce a climate of perpetual slump (alleviated only by occasional accidental factors like the building of United States bases during World War II) which is usually a deterrent to trade unionism, as instanced by the history of trade unions in countries where they have been established for a longer time. The workers of the area are predominantly unskilled and agricultural labourers - precisely the kind of workers who are most difficult to organise. In British Guiana and Trinidad, the continued existence in large measure of an occupational differential between Negro and East Indian workers, along with a degree of racial rivalry, has its effect on trade union unity within the territories. The practice of company housing, free on the estates or at low rentals in the oil and bauxite industries, is a potential deterrent to trade union membership. The absence of large units of employment outside of sugar, oil and bauxite, and some Government departments, increases the difficulties of organisation for the

unions. And the identification of race and economic class in the area creates complications in political and social life which have their repercussions on the trade union movement, as well as on the role of organised labour in politics.

CHAPTER III

LABOUR UNREST, 1896 - 1915

The first permanent labour organisations in the British Caribbean were formed at the end of the first World War. But their formation had been preceded by sporadic unrest and various isolated attempts at organisation for some two decades. With one exception, none of these pioneer associations lasted long enough to leave any record of its activities, nor did they achieve much in the way of benefits for their members. They did, however, have this value - they planted the seeds of the idea of organising labour in each of our three territories.

The main factor underlying labour unrest at the turn of the century was the pressure of population growth, particularly of the urban population, at a time when the sugar industry was in serious difficulties. It is significant that British Guiana, which was most dependent upon sugar, was the most troubled territory, and that in Jamaica, with its greater diversification, there was no sign of trouble. The improvements which had been effected in the technique of sugar cane production, coupled with the effects of continuing competition even after the abolition of bounties on beet sugar, tended to reduce the volume of the labour force which the industry needed. For example, it is

estimated that in Jamaica whereas 30,000 people were employed in sugar in 1860, only 20,000 could find work on the estates in 1910.¹ In British Guiana and Trinidad, too, the continued introduction of indentured immigrants down to 1917 had the same effect of reducing the amount of employment open to the free rural wage-earner. The decline of sugar did not affect the rural labourer alone; the regularity with which the urban worker obtained employment varied with the volume of trade in sugar exports. The standard of living of the entire working-class was affected.

The emergence of a large landless urban working-class.

The preponderance of small-holding peasant farmers and indentured labourers in the population in the 19th Century, created conditions in which it was unlikely that workers' organisations would develop. Labour movements demand the existence of a landless class of urban wage-earners, whom circumstances force to form "a continuous association ... for the purpose of maintaining or improving the condition of their working lives."² While a man can grow his own

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1. G.E. Cumper, "Labour Demand and Supply in the Jamaican Sugar Industry, 1830 - 1950" in Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 2, No. 4, (1954).
 2. S. & B. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, (1920 ed), p. 1.

food crops or migrate easily to employment where better wages are offered, he has little incentive to rely upon combination in order to better his condition. The period 1891 - 1946 saw the growth in the British Caribbean of a large city population dependent upon wage-labour, faced with rising costs and high house rents, and caught up in a web of increasing underemployment. The rate and incidence of this growth varied in the three territories; its effects were felt soonest in British Guiana and latest in Jamaica.

The factor mainly responsible for this development was the increase in the population of all three colonies, both as a result of natural causes and through immigration. Inadequate or inelastic supply of manpower had been the labour problem of the 19th Century; unemployment and underemployment were to be the problem of the 20th. Jamaica and Trinidad are small islands and can accommodate and provide employment only for a limited population, even with the application of intensive cultivation, planning, controls, industrialization, and all the other paraphernalia of intelligent modern government. British Guiana, with its vast hinterland, is capable in theory of supporting an unlimited increase in population for many a generation; in actual fact, physical difficulties such as drainage, water-supply, transport, communications and other factors in the special circumstances of the territory make successful expansion into

the interior a venture beyond the capabilities of any peasantry or population without planned development schemes calling for resources and reserves far in excess of the country's modest means.

The population of British Guiana in 1891 was just over twice the 1851 figure; much of the increase was due to immigration, mainly of East Indians, though numbers of Portuguese, Chinese and West Indian Negroes helped to swell the growth. It increased a mere 6.5% between 1891 and 1921, but by 1946 it was $\frac{1}{5}$ as large again as in 1921. Population growth in Jamaica was slower between 1844 and 1891, the increase being 69.4% of the 1844 total. There had been a negligible amount of immigration to the island, most of it consisting of Indians and Chinese who amounted to just over 22,000, less than 3% of the population in 1911.¹ Moreover, considerable emigration from Jamaica had been going on since 1860 - no accurate figure or satisfactory estimate has been obtained, the figure for the years 1881 - 1921 being put at 146,000.² Between 1891 and 1921 the population increased by $\frac{1}{3}$, and the rate of increase in the ensuing generation was only slightly less. There were almost twice as many

1. Census of Jamaica, 1911.

2. G.W. Roberts, The Population of Jamaica, (1957), p. 140.

inhabitants in 1943 as in 1891, a serious state of affairs when it is remembered that Jamaica was by no means 'undeveloped' in the 19th Century in the sense that British Guiana and Trinidad were. It is in Trinidad that population growth has been greatest. The number of inhabitants in 1891 was almost three times the 1851 figure, and by 1946 the population was more than 2½ times that of 1891. This rate of growth was due largely to immigration, not only of East Indians, but of Negroes from the other islands, who numbered almost 50,000 (1/11th of the population) in 1946.

Population figures and percentage increases in the period 1891 - 1946 are shown in the tables below. The figures for British Guiana are given exclusive of the Amerindian population of the interior. The figures for Trinidad do not include the island of Tobago.

Growth of Population, 1851 - 1946¹

<u>Year</u>	<u>British Guiana</u>	<u>Trinidad</u>	<u>Jamaica</u>
1851	127,675	68,600	377,433*
1891	270,865	200,028	639,491
1911	289,140	312,790	831,383
1921	288,541	342,532	858,118
1931	302,585	387,418	No census
1946	359,379	530,762	1,237,063**

* Figure for 1844

** Figure for 1943

1. Source: Census Reports for years given.

The population of the chief towns grew even more rapidly than the total population. The number of citizens in Georgetown increased by over $\frac{3}{4}$ between 1891 and 1946, almost two-thirds of this increase occurring after 1921. The population of both Kingston and Port-of-Spain in the 1940's stood at $2\frac{1}{4}$ times the 1891 figure. The widespread drift into the city which is noticeable in Port-of-Spain after 1891 and in Kingston after 1921 had already occurred in Georgetown between 1861 and 1891, when its population increased from 30,863 to 53,176.

Concentration of population was greatest in Georgetown where the ratio of city population to total population had risen steadily from 1 in 5 in 1891 to 1 in 4 in 1946. Port-of-Spain's 1 inhabitant for every 6 of the Trinidad population in 1891 had increased to 1 in 5 by 1911; the lower ratio of subsequent years is attributable to the development of the oil industry in the southern half of the Island, at the furthest remove from the city. Concentration in urban Trinidad is greater than the figures suggest, especially since the 1930's, because the effective city area extends both east and west of Port-of-Spain proper, much in the same way as the effective city area in Jamaica is Kingston - St. Andrew, that is, Kingston and surrounding districts. In Jamaica the city population remained at 2 in every 15 until 1921, but had grown by 1943 to 1 in 5. The correlation

between these figures and the incidence of urban labour unrest is striking. Georgetown's workers were uneasy from 1905, Port-of-Spain's from 1917; but a comparable situation did not develop in Kingston until the 1930's.

Growth of City Population, 1891 - 1946

	1891	1911	1921	1931	1946
<u>Georgetown</u>					
Population	53,176	57,577	59,624	69,663	94,035
% of Total	19.6	19.9	20.6	23.0	26.1
<u>Port-of-Spain</u>					
Population	33,787	59,796	61,581	70,334	92,793
% of Total	16.9	19.1	18.0	18.1	17.5
<u>Kingston - St. Andrew</u>					
Population	86,359	112,447	118,309	-	238,229*
% of Total	13.5	13.5	13.8	-	19.3

* Figure for 1943

Source: Census Reports.

The drift to the cities was not due entirely to the decline in the sugar industry. Better rates of pay prevailed in the city and were conducive to urban migration. This had a greater effect in British Guiana and in Trinidad than in Jamaica, where there was the counter-attraction of high wages in Panama, Cuba, Costa Rica and the United States of America. As a result, heavy concentration of population

did not take place in Kingston until after the completion of the Panama Canal and the imposition of immigration restrictions in 1924. But while most of Georgetown's increase seems due to Negro migration from the country districts, Port-of-Spain's is more attributable to the decision of a large percentage of immigrants from the neighbouring islands to stay to swell the city's general labour force. There were good reasons for this greater migration into Georgetown. The facility with which Crown Lands could be obtained in Trinidad between 1870 and 1906 was not matched in British Guiana where more restrictive rules were applied.¹ Rice growing did not develop on any scale in British Guiana until after 1910, and while the Trinidadian had cocoa cultivation as an alternative, the Guianese went prospecting in the interior or to Georgetown; even prospecting was curtailed by regulations made in 1909. Just as hurricanes and drought helped to accelerate Jamaican migration by the distress and uncertainty they caused the peasant population, so did drought, as in 1898 - 1900, and the physical difficulties of peasant cultivation in British Guiana, increase the attraction of Georgetown.² Some enticement, too, must have come from

1. See, e.g., 1897 Royal Commission, App. C., Vol. II, Pt. II, Evidence of Hon. N. Darnell Davis, p. 54.

2. Berbice Gazette, 1900 - 1902, passim.

the introduction of modern entertainment media like the picture palaces of the early years of this century. And even crowded slum 'yards' can acquire allure to a naturally gregarious people by their contrast to the eerie stillness and the early darkness of the lonely tropical countryside.

The importance of all three towns as seats of Government and centres of commercial activity was reinforced by the introduction of railways in the late 19th Century. In addition to providing regular and easier means of communication with country districts, - in itself an inducement - railways helped to confirm the capital as the focus of commercial and industrial life, and to stimulate in it secondary activities offering further fields of employment.

The Causes of Unrest.

The causes of the growing labour unrest at the turn of the last century were mainly economic. Cundall's collection of West Indian Riots between 1838 and 1906 reveals the interesting conclusion that five of the seven disturbances which took place after 1896 were concerned with financial matters, four of them being caused by dissatisfaction over wages.¹ Of these four, three occurred in British Guiana,

1. F. Cundall, Political and Social Disturbances in the West Indies, (1906), p. 7.

two of them among indentured East Indians on plantations in 1896 and 1903, the third in Georgetown in 1905. There had been no riots caused by wages before 1896, and only three of the eighteen which occurred before that date had been the result of dissatisfaction over financial arrangements (taxes or land tenure). There seem to be grounds for the view that the cost of living of the working-class rose steadily after 1890, though, on the whole, this conclusion is based upon assertions to this effect which appear to have been accepted generally at the time, and not upon statistical evidence, as no reliable figures are available.¹ In his evidence to the 1897 Royal Commission, the Comptroller of Customs in British Guiana said that poverty and distress had been widespread in Georgetown for some ten years, and were not confined to the working-class. It is possible that, in addition to the increased cost of food and clothing which we may infer from these references, a more urbanized pattern of consumption and a gradual replacement of ex-slave and peasant by European-orientated tastes may have contributed to this state of affairs.

At the same time wages not only failed to rise proportionately, but were reduced in many cases as a result

1. See, e.g., 1897 Royal Commission, App. C., Vol. II, Pt. II; Evidence of Hon. N.D. Davis, p. 56; of Rev. D.J. Reynolds, p. 96; idem, Pt. IV, Letter from Working Men's Reform Club, pp. 348-9.

of the general distress. The 1897 Royal Commission reports that "the wages of artisans have already been substantially reduced," though the reduction in the wages of ordinary labourers was less general, and while predicting that "there may yet be a general reduction in the wages of labour,"¹ warned that wages in the sugar industry could be lowered no further.² In Jamaica, where the rate paid on estates was 9d. - 1/- a day, there had been no increase since the post-Emancipation period, and few labourers could find more than 3 or 4 days' work a week.³ Wages in Trinidad had been reduced in 1884, and unsuccessful attempts at further reduction had been made.⁴ In British Guiana sugar workers' wages were reduced in the 1890's, and rates for unskilled labour in Georgetown had fallen by 15%.⁵ The dockers claimed in 1905 that they had worked for the same wages 'for thirty years', a claim which the British Guiana merchants did not deny but rather used as an argument against granting an increase!⁶

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1. idem, Report, p. 36.
 2. idem, p. 15.
 3. Cumper, op. cit.; Beachey, op. cit., p. 125.
 4. 1897 Royal Commission, Report, p. 36. Also App. C., Vol. II, Pt. IV, Evidence of C.W. Mitchell, pp. 262-65; Letter from Working Men's Reform Club, p. 349. See also Trinidad Council Paper, No. 13 of 1906, App. J; Beachey, op. cit., p. 105.
 5. 1897 Royal Commission, App. C., Vol. II, Pt. II, Evidence of J.H. De Jonge, merchant, pp. 43-45; Beachey, op. cit., p. 101.
 6. Daily Chronicle, 1st December, 1905.

Attempts at Organisation.

Attempts at organisation are to be found only among the Negro working-class population before 1918. No permanent form of industrial combination could emerge among workers who were bound to give their services for a period of time and were not free to labour for another employer, the position in which indentured East Indian labourers found themselves. Strikes and disturbances occurred among them often and on almost all estates, usually over the rate to be paid for a particular job. There was a fixed procedure for settling these disputes: the labourers took their case to the nearest Immigration Officer, who then went to inspect the job and tried to arrange a settlement; if his efforts failed, the case was brought before a magistrate, outside assessors being retained by both sides.¹ By extension, this system of conciliation and arbitration applied to free East Indians who remained on the estates. Lord Oliver suggests that the Government, through the Protector of Immigrants, acted as a sort of trade union on behalf of the East Indians,² a view in which we concur. The Immigration Officers always represented the 'coolies' if the dispute

1. The Immigration Office, or Department of the Protector of Immigrants, as it was called in Trinidad, was concerned with all matters relating to East Indian immigrants. See D. Nath, op. cit., for an outline of its working in British Guiana.

2. Olivier, White Capital, (1907 ed.), pp. 121-26.

reached the magistrate. Political interest among East Indians in these years was directed towards the situation in India; few of them possessed the property or literacy qualifications essential for West Indian politics of the pre-1940 period. There were East Indian Associations in both British Guiana and Trinidad which paid attention to local civil rights and identified themselves with the rising nationalist movement in India.¹

The attempts to organise the Negro working-class before World War I are best considered separately for each territory.

1. BRITISH GUIANA

No attempt had been made to organise the working-class in British Guiana before 1900, though Political Associations with labour support had helped to secure the 1891 constitutional reforms and had contested election in 1896. Some Guianese Negro labourers realised the value of combination but seemed to expect a lead from outside their own ranks. For example, A.E. Trotz, a carpenter, speaking for some 200 general labourers and artisans before the 1897 West

1. In Trinidad there were both an East Indian National Association and an East Indian National Congress. The British Guiana East Indian Association absorbed a splinter group, called the National Congress, after a few weeks.

India Royal Commission complained: "We are very much discouraged in respect of the method of banding ourselves together as a body of mechanics ... There is no trade union amongst the people, there is just the chance of catching work wherever you can."¹

Shirley and 'The People'

The first sign of such a lead came from the Reverend H.J. Shirley, a young minister of the Scots Congregational Church who was appointed to the Mission Chapel, New Amsterdam, in July 1900 after successfully organising thrift clubs among workers in the Fulham area of London. He found a country impoverished by the depression in the sugar industry, the peasantry suffering severe distress because of continued drought in 1898 and 1899, the East Indian population seething with discontent, and the Government blithely ignoring public feeling in its pursuit of unpopular policies. Six weeks after his arrival he was criticising the existing order in a manner which no cleric had dared to use since the Reverend John Smith had been 'martyred' for his sympathy with the slaves some 80 years before. He attacked in particular the system of taxation - its burden, he said "fell upon the poor and was meant to fall upon the poor" - and

1. 1897 Royal Commission, App. C., Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 89.

Government's controversial education policy which he denounced as "designed to keep the black and coolie races in ignorance."¹ Fresh from the London of Ben Tillett and Tom Mann, he rejected the local liberals' preference for political action by elected members in the Courts of Government and called for more direct working-class action through a well-organised labour movement. He outlined four practical aims for the working-class to improve its lot: 1) All wage-earners "from the clerk to the coolie" should form Trade Unions to protect their rights; 2) the now defunct political associations of the 1890's should be revived with a labour bias; 3) public opinion should be educated and apathy dispelled by frequent public meetings; 4) the British public and press should be kept informed of events in British Guiana so as to exercise influence in London.² He opposed hostility to planters as a class, as long as they paid fair wages, and supported East Indian immigration, since a controllable labour force was needed for the country's staple crop.³ His criticisms touched off a stormy controversy, with both the people and the liberals rallying to his support.

Apart from organising Young People's Improvement

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1. Reported in Daily Chronicle, 12th September, 1900. and Daily Argosy of same date. Also Berbice Gazette, 19th September, 1900.
 2. ibid.
 3. Berbice Gazette, 1st May, 1901.

Societies to stimulate the interest of the youth, and a non-denominational Sick and Provident Society in New Amsterdam "to encourage thrift and mutual helpfulness between the working men of the town,"¹ his most significant activity was the establishment of a people's paper, owned and published by the Negroes in their own interest. After a widespread campaign for support, the People's Newspaper Company Limited was registered in September 1901 with a nominal capital of \$20,000 in \$2 shares, the biggest shareholder having only twenty shares.² 'The People' appeared fortnightly from the end of 1901, priced at one penny, with Shirley as its first editor. The first board of Directors comprised Patrick Dargan, A.B. Browne, C.E.D. Farnum, A.A. Thorne, Dr. Wills and Shirley. All of these, except Dr. Wills and Shirley, were, or were to become, elected members in the Combined Court; Dargan, Browne and Farnum were barristers-at-law, while Thorne was an immigrant Barbadian who had taken an active part in the struggle for the 1891 Constitution, and who now ran a private school in Georgetown. It was intended to be "an unpretentious paper, unscurrilous, dignified, earnest, devoted to truth and fearless in its expression always."³ From the first, returns were

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1. Berbice Gazette, 16th January, 1901.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 6th October, 1901.
 3. Daily Chronicle, 24th March, 1901. Reported words of Shirley.

disappointing, and after Shirley's departure from British Guiana in 1903, both sales and standards declined rapidly. It seems to have been subsidised by Government during 1904, and this led to popular criticism of its policy on the grounds that its literary and political standards had become less important than favourable balance-sheets.¹ At a noisy meeting of shareholders on March 1st, 1909, it was claimed that circulation was falling, that the paper had deviated from its aims, and that it was losing its following among the people. Many of these criticisms appear to have been justified; 'The People' seems to have suffered from inept business management, incompetent editorial guidance, and a series of directors who wanted to 'play politics' with the paper. It appears to have ceased publication in 1914.²

Shirley's brief sojourn is interesting as being the first direct call to workers in British Guiana to organise as labour, and to use these organisations for bettering their position within the wage-labour system. All the liberals' protests of the period looked backward, as it were, to saving the situation by further extension of peasant settlement.

1. e.g. 'Onlooker' to Editor, Daily Chronicle, 11th February, 1905; 'Plebian' to Editor, Daily Chronicle, 15th February, 1905. See also reply of N.R. Salton, one of the directors, Daily Chronicle, 19th February, 1905.

2. It has not proved possible to examine any files of 'The People'. The Annual Blue Book for British Guiana does not include it in the list of Colony newspapers after 1914.

Two minor attempts at combination are reported at this time. The tailors of Berbice formed a union early in 1901 "to seek the tailoristic advancement of its members."¹ But this may have been rather a craft guild for fixing prices and standards than a combination of journeymen tailors, as most tailors worked independently for the public. The overseers on the sugar estates had also combined in December 1901 in an effort to secure increased wages.² But both these combinations seem to have been shortlived.

The Georgetown Riots of 1905.

Much more important for the rise of organised labour in British Guiana were the disturbances which occurred in Georgetown in 1905 and their aftermath. The trouble began in November with a strike for wages on the wharves. Wharf labour provided the biggest field of employment for unskilled labourers in the city. Each firm had its own wharf, and employed a number of regular porters in the course of its business; in addition large numbers of occasional labourers would be hired to load and unload ships when they were in port, for periods varying from a few hours to a few days. It was by such casual labour that the majority of

1. Berbice Gazette, 3rd April, 1901.

2. Daily Chronicle, 1st June, 1902, says they failed to win an increase, and asks what has become of the Union.

wharf labourers made a living. When a ship arrived in port, they would flock to the offices of the firm concerned, in the hope of catching the stevedore's recruiting eye, but none of them could expect work for more than two days a week. Occasionally ships would remain 'out in the stream,' and then lighters were employed to convey cargo from ship to shore. Both men and boys were employed, the wage for boys being lower.

The strike started among the boys on one wharf on Tuesday, November 28th; the men on that wharf came out soon after, and by the next day the entire waterfront was on strike. It was the city's first strike, and by Thursday afternoon the novel spectacle had drawn 'thousands, the majority of whom had never worked on a wharf,'¹ including numbers of women. This was only to be expected in an overcrowded city where unemployment and poverty had been rife, both among working-class and impoverished middle-class families, for more than 10 years; prominent in the Thursday crowds were the products of the city's slum 'yards', the 'centipedes' as they were known locally. By Thursday evening the holiday mood of the first two days, the result in large measure of tactful handling by Inspector Kerr in charge of the Georgetown police, and of the feeling that police were in sympathy

1. Daily Chronicle, 1st December, 1905.

with strikers, had changed to one of muttered menaces and pent-up passions at bursting point. This was due, not so much to the blunt refusal of the merchants to consider an increase which the Inspector as self-appointed negotiator had to convey to the strikers, as by the arrival of armed policement with fixed bayonets to control a crowd which had limited its indiscretions to a few brief scuffles at points where black-legs were attempting to work, and to extracting from one employer¹ - who subsequently maintained his belief in the need for an increase - a promise that he would pay higher wages if in future he took on any casual labour.² The Riot Act was read four times in a vain attempt to disperse the crowds and the Governor issued proclamations closing all liquor shops between dusk and dawn and announcing his resolve to put down riotous assemblies by force. That night the city bakers went on strike.

Meanwhile the strike fever had spread to Ruimveldt, an estate on the immediate outskirts of Georgetown where

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1. J.P. Santos & Co. Mr. Santos, a Portuguese merchant, took the lone view at a meeting of merchants called by the Governor on Monday, December 4th, that wages were too low. He was willing to give an 8¢ rise (12 $\frac{1}{2}$ % - 16 $\frac{2}{3}$ %) to men and boys, with 16¢ an hour for broken periods of work. P.P. 1906, Cd. 2822, Governor to Lyttleton, 5th December, 1905.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 1st December, 1905.

wages were particularly low.¹ First the Negro porters in the factory came out on Wednesday (the second day of the wharf-labourers' strike), and by Friday morning all Negroes employed on the estate had struck. On Wednesday evening, the artillery had arrived, bringing with them part of the curious city crowd, and the cane-cutters had joined the strikers. Early on "Black Friday" morning a banner-bearing crowd arrived from the city to swell the numbers of the Ruimveldt strikers. The police, under Major De Rinzy, foolishly tried to arrest one of the demonstrators, were stoned by the mob at 30 yards range, and fired "in self-defence."² The sight of the wounded being conveyed to hospital in the city maddened a people excited from the day before, and Europeans, Portuguese, and all known to be connected with the administration or with the merchants were stoned and attacked on sight. Twice during the day crowds were fired upon in the city, and at the day's end, there were 7 dead and 18 wounded by rifle fire.³ Only the

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1. Cane-cutters at Ruimveldt were paid 2/- - 3/- a bed as compared with 4/- - 8/- at the neighbouring Diamond estate, and claimed that 12/- a week was their average maximum earning. All the cane-cutters at Ruimveldt were Negroes, employed seasonally. Daily Chronicle, 5th December, 1905.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 2nd December, 1905.
 3. ibid.

Governor's assurance that there would be no more shooting, and the heavy rains of Friday evening saved the situation. Warships raced into port over the week-end, and though by Monday strikes had broken out among labourers on both banks of the Demerara, there was no further serious disturbance. On Wednesday the wharf labourers returned to work.

The outburst of strikes and rioting had important sequels. First of all, the wharf labourers won a partial victory. Although they failed to gain an actual increase in wages, which remained at 48¢ a day for boys, 64¢ for men with night work paid double, they had wrung from the merchants agreement to forego the practice of employing men for 'broken hours' and to pay a minimum of ¼ day's pay for work done.¹ The merchants also agreed to put down objectionable practices by which labourers had been kept idle "until certain carts (or lighters) in the earnings of which one or more wharfingers were interested were available."²

Secondly, the labourer's traditional belief in the justice and impartiality of Governors, as representatives of the Crown, received a severe jolt when Governor Hodgson's part in the affair became fully known. The estate labourers

1. H.G. Williams, Secretary, Georgetown Chamber of Commerce to Government Secretary, 5th December, 1905, in Daily Chronicle, 6th December, 1905.

2. Daily Chronicle, 5th December, 1905.

who had gone on strike had won no increase in wages because the Governor had used his influence, and in the case of Schoon Ord estate and one or two others where the managements were willing to grant an increase, had resorted to threats of withdrawing police protection, in order to prevent an increase being given.¹ Yet when approached, on the day before the shooting took place, by Dr. J.M. Rohlehr who had been commissioned by a deputation of Ruimveldt cane-cutters to put their case to the Governor "Sir Frederick Hodgson caused a reply to be sent to the effect that he could not interfere in a dispute of the kind affecting the wages paid on a sugar estate."² Even on the face of it this attitude to the cane-cutters was inconsistent with his public undertaking, given at the Public Buildings on "Black Friday" in the heat of the riots, that he would look into the dockers' grievances. But the Governor's role was even more partial and two-faced than either strikers or public knew. Before this meeting with the City merchants about the dockers' claims - all he did at this meeting was to ask the Chamber of Commerce to draft "a tariff to include rates of pay for all classes of work at the wharves"³; no effort

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1. Creole, 30th December, 1905; Daily Chronicle, 3rd January, 1906; P.P. 1906, Cd. 2822, Hodgson to Elgin, 9th January, 1906.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 5th December, 1905.
 3. idem.

was made to secure fairer rates of pay for the men who put such pathetic faith in the integrity of his office - he had already decided that "it would be most impolitic to consider any question of changing the current rate."¹ He later justified his action on the ground that the grant of an increase at that time would have led to Colony-wide demands and "a general rising on the plea that wages must be increased"², and, in support of this view, rationalised that the Negro labourers on the estates could have no legitimate grievance since "at no time during the last ten years have they represented to their employers that they had, nor have they shown that they were dissatisfied."

The most charitable assessment which can be made of Sir Frederick Hodgson's behaviour in this question is that he was abysmally ignorant of conditions among the people he was supposed to govern, and that he allowed his personal and social prejudices to blind him to the responsibilities of his office. His conduct was regarded by labourers and liberals as a breach of faith, and his recall was demanded. Attempts to have a Royal Commission of Investigation appointed failed, and a People's Petition with over 6,000 signatures was rejected by Lord Elgin as representative of the views of "only

1. P.P. 1906, Cd. 2822, Hodgson to Lyttleton, 5th December, 1905.

2. P.P. 1906, Cd. 2822, Hodgson to Elgin, 9th January, 1906.

one section of the population, and that not the most numerous"¹ - which is merely another illustration of how misinformed the Colonial Office could be.

The Labour Union Scheme, 1906.

The most important result of the disturbances was the general awareness of the need for industrial organisation among the Negro labourers which was created, and the interest taken by the liberal middle-class in promoting such a combination. Architect of the Labour Union Scheme of 1906 was Dr. J. M. Rohlehr, a coloured Guianese who had been an enthusiastic associate of Shirley in New Amsterdam. Support for the idea was widespread, an organising committee was appointed at a well-attended meeting held on January 8th, 1906, "for the purpose of forming a labour and trade union for British Guiana", and meetings were held in several country districts to publicise the movement.² But good intentions are no substitute for knowledge, and the committee had not the faintest idea of how to create a union structure, and only a distant acquaintance with the practical problems involved; its membership consisted of middle-class professionals, clerics, doctors and lawyers, with a schoolmaster as provisional secretary. Their dilemma was obvious from the

1. Daily Chronicle, 1st July, 1906.

2. Daily Chronicle, 10th January, 1906; 21st January, 1906.

beginning. Rohlehr had defined the objects of the new union: to prevent a recurrence of bloodshed and disturbances and "being wrong through ignorance;" and to bring together "men capable of discussing the subject and able to speak to employers of labour and have matters settled." His words envisaged some sort of middle-class leadership and active participation in the set-up; and inevitably the union would fulfil a political function.¹ The concept of independent liberal political action had been discarded for united labour activity. The circular letter issued by the Committee's secretary began with a ponderous recital about "Recent events having pressed upon the attention of all who are interested in the welfare of the labouring classes of the colony the necessity of labour ... being organised" and a plea to sympathisers "to impress upon those of the labouring people within your influence through the medium of public meetings where possible, the advantages to be derived from such a combination" ; but it postponed giving information about the aims or working of the proposed union and invited suggestions as to what was to be done.²

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1. "if they had a union they would be able to get rid of such a Governor." Speech of Dr. J.M. Rohlehr at the Demerara Missionary Industrial Institute, 8th January, 1906. Reported in Daily Chronicle, 10th January, 1906.
 2. Circular letter from Wm. Wallace Wilson, Honorary Secretary, re the proposed Labour Union, in Daily Chronicle, 19th January, 1906.

Excluding fatuous generalisations like "the actions of the union will be governed by certain rules," the committee could make only one concrete suggestion as to organisation - that the funds be all put in a common treasury - and two affecting policy - the preference for snowball strikes, and the need for strike pay,¹ both of which were unrealistic unless the union were first properly organised. The entire effort resembled rather an exercise in political stomping than a determined attempt at creating a workers' organisation. It is no surprise to learn that two months later Dr. Rohlehr in distress had written for draft rules to John Burns and Mr. Shirley in London, and that the formation of the union was "unavoidably held in abeyance pending the arrival of communications from England."² Later in the year, Rohlehr left for England, to return in a cloud of unpopularity caused by suspicions of his having 'sold out his people.'³ The Labour Union Scheme was to remain a dream for nearly thirteen years.

It had not been well-received in all quarters.

Among the critics were the influential Catholic authorities who foresaw "mutual mistrust" between workers' and employers' organisations, and would have preferred an Arbitration Board

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1. Speech of Dr. Prowd at Providence School Hall, 19th January, 1906. Reported in Daily Chronicle, 21st January, 1906.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 21st March, 1906.
 3. Daily Chronicle, 19th August, 1906.

with purely judicial functions, and power to bind both sides to adhere to its decisions for a given period.¹

Unrest, 1905-14.

After 1905, unrest continued among both urban and estate labourers in British Guiana, and the years 1905-14 were punctuated by minor strikes and stoppages, usually abortive but on the whole non-violent. The most interesting was the dock strike of September, 1906. The dockers had learnt one or two lessons from 1905, among them the need for level-headed action and for keeping their strike under control. When the truck-boys struck for a 50% increase in September, 1906, it was on no sudden impulse; their action had been planned and previously discussed. "The strike was timed to affect the handling of the cargo of the Armstrong line steamer Uller ... and the C.M.S. Ocamo"² Though few men among the wharf labourers joined in the strike, they seem to have supported the boys' stand. The strikers prudently kept away from the business area of the city which was affected by the stoppage. Four days later, many of them had lost their jobs and the strike had been broken. Among the temporarily unemployed was one Hubert Critchlow, one of the

1. Daily Chronicle, 20th January, 1906; Catholic Standard, February, 1906.

2. Daily Chronicle, 26th September, 1906.

ringleaders, against whom the police failed to prove a charge of assault upon a non-striker while on picket duty. He was soon to found the first trade union in the territory, now the oldest existing union in the area.

2. TRINIDAD.

In 1897 Trinidad celebrated the centenary of its capture from Spain by the British. Amidst all the ceremony, the first meeting of the Working Men's Reform Club might have passed unrecorded had not "an humble congratulatory address to the Queen" on the occasion of the celebrations been proposed by Mr. Chairman Phillips.¹ The Club drew its membership from the "licensed watermen, viz., boatmen, droghermen and ships' labourers" on the Port-of-Spain waterfront, and it appears that its leading spirit was Charles Phillips, who was chairman of that first meeting and who is described as being the 'father of labour movements,'² - an indication perhaps of his role in the attempt to organise the workers of the city. The imminent visit of the Royal Commissioners in 1897, and the need to have an organisation which could put

1. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 11th February, 1897.

2. 1897 Royal Commission, Appendix C., Vol. II, Pt. IV, Trinidad, Letter of Working Men's Reform Club, pp. 348-49.

the views of the labourers to them, may well have been the motive behind the founding of the Working Men's Reform Club. Its protest against increased taxation, higher rents, the depression in trade, reduced wages and the utter destitution which was the lot of the working-class, shows little difference, except in the unsophisticated style of its language, from the liberal middle-class protests of the period. There is no further record of the Club's activities, and it seems safe to assume its early dissolution. By 1906, at any rate, its founder Charles Phillips had become a member of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association.

Alfred Richards and the TWA.

Less authentic as a working-class organisation in this period, but more permanent, was the Trinidad Workingmen's Association. Founded in 1897 also¹, it seems to have been at first a sort of civic rights group which came into existence during one of those struggles between the Port-of-Spain

1. W.A. Lewis, Labour in the West Indies, (1939), dates it from the early 1890's; this view is given some support by the statement of M.E. Corbie, Secretary and a founding member, at a meeting on May 3rd, 1906, that the Association had been 'inaugurated ... twelve years ago', i.e., in 1904. Mirror, 7th May, 1906. But the official notices of the Association in the Press and elsewhere give its date of foundation as 1897. J. Parry and A. Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies, (1956), p. 280, incorrectly give the date as 1907.

Town Council and the Trinidad Government which ended with the temporary abolition of an elected Town Council; the Association survived until 1932 when it became the Trinidad Labour Party, but after 1918 its aims and activities altered so much that all it retained of its earlier character was the name. Its membership comprised "both ordinary and professional workers"¹ and a special invitation was made to "all honest and industrious workmen of a good character and not deemed to be a convict, and ... above the age of 18 years"² to join up. But in actuality it appears to have consisted largely of small property owners, one or two professional men, and a few artisans; in 1897, W.M. Mills, President, had claimed a membership of "carpenters, masons, labourers, tailors, and other trades."³ Its numbers, fifty in 1897, had risen to some 200 by 1909, though there were allegations that it was a one man Association.⁴ The stated objects of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association placed heavy emphasis on its character as an

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1. Address of Alfred Richards, President, on May 3rd, in Mirror, 7th May, 1906.
 2. Notice in Mirror, 15th May, 1906.
 3. 1897 Royal Commission, App. C., Vol. II, Pt. IV, p. 301.
 4. See, e.g., evidence of Peter Abel, ibid, p. 146. Sir N. Lubbock, President of the West India Committee and Chairman of a Company owning large sugar estates in Trinidad, denied the existence of "... real organisations of that sort in the West Indies" and was sure that its members, if any, would be white! ibid, p. 93. In fact most of its members were Negroes, many of them immigrants from the other islands; most of the Committee were men of some substance.

organisation of workers, but its aims and policies were only mildly liberal social-reformist. It did not, for instance, demand adult suffrage in its call for representative institutions, would have been content to leave the initiative of Legislation in the hands of an Executive Committee with an overwhelming majority of official members, and would have been satisfied with property or income qualifications for voters which would limit the electorate to "at least 50,000" in a population of over 300,000.¹ It performed no trade union functions.

Of the early activity of the Association no coherent record has been found. Lewis asserts that its leaders were prosecuted for their part in the Water Riots in Port-of-Spain in 1903, and that it declined in consequence.² The election of Alfred Richards as President in 1906 was the beginning of a period of activity of some interest to this study. Richards registered the TWA as an incorporated body in 1906.³ His purpose in doing so is obscure, unless it was felt that legal recognition of its activities was some sort of protection

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1. See letter of John D. Alcazar in Mirror, 5th April, 1910.
 2. Lewis, op. cit. The leading role in the 1903 riots was played by the Ratepayers Association, not the TWA, and it appears from the official and press reports of the incident, that Lewis' view is incorrect. He seems to have been unaware of the active role of the TWA in 1906 and subsequently.
 3. Mirror, 27th April, 1906, and 7th May, 1906. The Association was exempted from paying the £50 registration fee required by law.

against police interference. It is a reflection of the insecure position in which radical and liberal leaders felt they were placed at the time, and an indication that organising or speaking on behalf of the people was a hazardous undertaking. Cipriani was to follow this example of incorporating his organisation in 1932 when he refused to accept a trade union law which did not allow of peaceful picketing.

Richards did not envisage the TWA as filling the role of a trade union, however. Perhaps because of the absence of an elected element in the Legislative Council, the Association was to be concerned mainly with political action, and for this purpose Richards converted it into a unique kind of pressure group. The TWA was affiliated to the British Labour Party in 1906, and besides petitioning and pressing the local Government, exerted pressure through the medium of questions asked by Labour Members of Parliament in the House of Commons.

Thomas Summerbell, Labour M.P. for Sunderland, acted as corresponding representative of the TWA until his death in 1910 when Joseph Pointer, M.P. for Attercliffe, Sheffield, and a Junior Labour Whip, took over. Pointer, who was known in the House as 'the Member for Trinidad,'¹

1. He acquired his name 'by reason of the fact that he inherited from the late Thomas Summerbell the right to ask questions in the House on behalf of that part of the Empire.' Obituary Notice in Manchester Guardian, 20.11.1914.

paid a fraternal visit to the Island in 1912. Richards felt that this arrangement gave his group the advantage of "enjoying Parliamentary Representation in a peculiar way."¹ No evidence of the official nature of this relationship has been found in British Labour Party sources; the TWA is not listed among its affiliated bodies at the time. This attempt to use the Labour Party as a proletarian counter-balance to the West India Committee achieved little tangible result apart from the restoration of an elected City Council in Port-of-Spain.

The pressure-group policy eventually met with opposition. At a stormy meeting on December 1st, 1910, dissatisfied members protested that monthly meetings were not held, that subscriptions were not being paid, and that no corporate functions were being carried out. There was obviously a body of opinion in favour of more active organisation and agitation among the workers; the leaders of this group, John Corbie, J. Sydney de Bourg and Leon Fuentes claimed to have taken the lead in founding the Association originally. A spirited defence of the committee system of pressure-group activity was made by E.M. Lazare, a Negro solicitor who soon afterwards became one of the nominated

1. Mirror, 7th May, 1906.

members of the Legislative Council, on the plea that "... the system of government was such that the Association might be misconstrued and it might be said that the Association desired to misrepresent facts and raise trouble among the working-men of Trinidad."¹ This divergence of opinion as to method led ultimately to the secession of one section of the membership who set up a rival association of the same name. The date of this parting of the ways cannot be ascertained accurately, but it seems to have occurred about 1916. By the end of that year, at any rate, it is certain that there were two 'branches' "neither of which can truthfully claim to represent any important section of the people ... at loggerheads" with each other.²

Unionism.

The restricted activity of the TWA obviously could not meet the need for composite action which the city workers would feel in the face of rising living costs. Two attempts to organise trade unions for this purpose are to be found in 1910. The city bakers formed the Trinidad Bakers Association to protect its members against unfair working conditions and

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1. Mirror, 2nd December, 1906.
 2. Enclosure in Trinidad Dispatch No. 102, 10th March, 1917.

to agitate for the improvement of standards in city bakeries. Their demand for a rise in wages was met in a large number of cases by dismissal, and their subsequent strike was not a success. The Association seems to have been shortlived.¹

More ambitious was the aim of the Progressive Crafts Union 'to bring together artisans of all crafts in Trinidad and Tobago, and to form a co-operative body of such craftsmen.'² Disclaiming the intention to incite discontent or strikes, it called upon the Government to protect local craftsmen against competition from imported articles which could well be made locally. No further record of this Association has come to light.

By 1914 there had failed to emerge in Trinidad any organisation of workers concerned with organising the support of the masses.

3. JAMAICA.

There is little evidence of serious unrest among the working-classes in Jamaica before 1916. This is as we would expect. The steady flow of migration to Panama, Costa Rica, Cuba and the United States of America provided an outlet for dissatisfied labourers which was not so readily

1. Mirror, 23rd June, 1910.

2. Mirror, 27th June, 1910.

available to the territories further south, while the greater diversity of the Island's agricultural crops and its proportionally larger peasant population helped to cushion the effects of the decline in sugar prosperity. Minor stoppages of work are reported in Kingston from time to time, but the unemployed 'countrymen' could always be found willing to replace strikers at current rates of wages.

The only serious strike took place in 1907, and is of some interest, in that it provides evidence of the existence of at least one trade union at the time. In January of that year, a terrible earthquake wreaked havoc in the island, and one of its temporary consequences was a sudden steep rise in the cost of living in Kingston, caused by scarcity of food-stuffs. This led to a strike of workers in the printing trade for increased wages, the strikers being organised in the Printers' Union. The strike was led by Marcus Garvey, the famous negro leader of the United Negro Improvement Association in the post World-War I period, who, though only 20 at the time, was already employed as a master printer in Kingston. Garvey had had no hand in planning the strike, which, indeed, took him by surprise,¹ but once the journeymen had come out he joined them and, as the only foreman on strike, was elected

1. E.D. Cronon, Black Moses, (1955), pp. 12-13.

their leader. The strike won no support from other workers in Kingston. It dragged on for three weeks until "the union treasurer absconded with the funds and the employers began to introduce linotype machines with imported printers to operate them."¹ Then the union collapsed, and the men drifted back to work without having won any increase.

Garvey, now blacklisted in the printing trade, had had his first taste of mass leadership and a first awareness of the power of his oratory. He soon helped to found, in association with Dr. Thomas Love, a Negro member of the Legislature, a political discussion group called the National Club. The Club appears to have had little influence, though it may have served as a forum for informed Negro opinion in Kingston. The Daily Gleaner of 12th June, 1909, reports one of its debates on a motion calling for the aid of the Labour Unions to end East Indian immigration - this was in line with similar objections to immigration made by the TWA in Trinidad and by the negro People's Association in British Guiana.

The motion is noteworthy in that it lends support to the view that there was a number of trade unions operating in Jamaica at this time. This is also the inference contained in Cronon's description of the Printers' Union as "one of the oldest and most powerful labor organisations in

1. idem.

the Island."¹ Cronon, however, bases his reconstruction of Garvey's early life in Jamaica on popular accounts in various later newspapers connected with the Garvey movement of the 1920's, particularly in the 'New World', and the expression may be mere journalese. We are left to conclude that there may well have been one or two unions, most probably small unions of craftsmen, operating in Kingston in the early 1900's; but the evidence is too slender to reach any firm conclusion on this. In the more sophisticated society of Jamaica, such organisations would not have received the attention which would have been theirs in either British Guiana or Trinidad at the time.

One other attempt to organise a trade union in Jamaica has been discovered - a local branch of the International Brotherhood of Bookbinders was formed in 1908, but it soon fizzled out. The bookbinding trade was extremely small, and it is not difficult to understand why the union did not survive.

With these exceptions, there is little to show that the idea of organising labour had taken any root in Jamaica before 1916. As in Trinidad and British Guiana, the working-classes were totally unorganised when the effects of World War I began to make themselves felt in the British Caribbean.

1. idem.

CHAPTER IV

PIONEER ASSOCIATIONS, 1916 - 1933.

The end of World War I was followed by world-wide unrest among the working-class, caused by the economic and psychological consequences of the war and influenced by the Russian Revolution. Even in the under-developed areas, various currents of unrest, labour, agrarian and social, contributed to manifestations of labour awakening, marked by the beginnings of trade unionism in Africa and Asia, and in Latin America by "mass strikes, some of which assumed the character of uprisings without any clear objectives."¹ Developments in the British Caribbean territories fit into this general pattern, beginning with the post-war strikes and sporadic disturbances out of which emerged the first permanent labour organisations in the area.

The unrest in our three territories had distinctive features stemming from the particular circumstances of the area. The last years of the war had been a time of high food prices, which had not been accompanied by any adjustments in the level of earnings. Soon there were social overtones to the demonstrations of dissatisfaction with this economic grievance. The primary influence in this development was the awakening of race-consciousness on

1. L.L. Lorwin, The International Labour Movement, (1953), pp. 61-62.

the part of the Negro population, as a result of the movements associated with the names of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. DuBois, a coloured American with a "comfortable middle-class" background¹, had taken the lead in "the Niagara Movement" for full equal rights for Negroes in the United States, and was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. At the end of World War I, he took up the idea of Pan-Africanism, first expounded by H. Sylvester-Williams, a Trinidadian barrister, who had organised a Pan-African Conference in London in 1900. DuBois convened a Pan-African Congress in Paris during the Peace Conference at Versailles in the hope of winning some sort of international recognition of a charter of human rights for Negroes.² A dignified, respectable movement of intellectuals, the DuBois protest was concerned with securing for Negroes freedom and equality of opportunity in whatever country they happened to live. 'Black Zionism', as Garvey's movement has been called, was entirely different in character and method, though its ultimate objective, social justice for the Negro, was the same. Garvey had returned to Jamaica from England in 1914 to found, on August 1st, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery, the Universal Negro Improvement and

1. G. Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism, (1956) p. 106.

2. ibid, pp. 117-119.

Conservation Association and African Communities League.¹ Crossing to New York in 1916 to seek support for his association which enjoyed a luke-warm reception in Jamaica, Garvey launched upon the path which was to make the U.N.I.A. the most potent force in the Negro awakening of the 20th Century. The burden of Garvey's doctrine was that all Africans should return to Africa, and he set up in anticipation a paper Negro State, complete with nobility and military, with high-sounding titles and resplendent uniforms. The grandiose character of the Garvey movement, with its flamboyant vision, had more appeal than the dry intellectualism of DuBois. Both movements, particularly through their periodicals and magazines, *The Crisis*, *Negro World*, and *Black Man*, played their part in arousing among Negroes in the British Caribbean a consciousness of their colour that held promise rather than shame.

There were other local influences at work channelling the expression of labour unrest into permanent organisations. Chief among these was the return of numbers of West Indians and Guianese who had served in World War I, and some of whom had come into contact with socialist or trade union circles while abroad, or had been impressed by the social reforms which had been carried out in England in the years before the War. Cipriani, the most important of these in this period, had already been mentioned; but there were

1. Cronon, op. cit., p. 16.

numerous others, and in British Guiana especially, there is evidence that they played some part in establishing the British Guiana Labour Union. In the middle 'twenties, this influence was reinforced by personal contact between the British Labour Movement and the rising labour leaders in the area. Both Cipriani and Critchlow visited England at the invitation of the Labour Party, while the Hon. F.O. Roberts, Labour M.P. for West Bromwich and Chairman of the National Executive of the Labour Party in 1926-27, visited the Trinidad Working Men's Association in 1926.¹ Again the influence of its contact with the British Labour Movement is distinctly noticeable in the BGLU after 1925.

The labour organisations which emerged in this period were not part of an integrated movement, but separate and isolated manifestations of a common discontent. There was more intercourse between the individual territories and the United Kingdom than between one territory and another. Physical distance, which even to-day makes for a great degree of isolation in the area, was reflected in an isolation of thought, interests and attitudes on the part of most sections of the population. Jamaica, which belongs geographically to the Greater Antilles group, was, for practical purposes, further from the two southernmost territories than London or New York. Between British Guiana and Trinidad there was, traditionally,

1. R. Mitchell, His Best Orations, (n.d.), p. 91.

more contact, and a feeling of kinship and co-operation soon developed between organised labour in these two countries. Individual visits in the earlier years led to the First British Guiana and West Indies Labour Conference called by the BGLU in Georgetown in 1926, to which delegates came from Grenada, Trinidad and Surinam. Though little that was permanent emerged from this and two subsequent conferences, they foreshadowed the formation in 1945 of the Caribbean Labour Congress in which all trade union, labour and socialist organisations in the area were associated once labour movements began to develop.

The associations formed in the period 1916-33 differed from earlier attempts at organisation in the area in that they were general unions, drawing most of their active membership from among the unskilled city labourers. This was in direct contrast with the unions formed or attempted in the years before 1916, all of which were exclusively concerned with skilled workers with the exception of the abortive Labour Union Scheme of 1906 in British Guiana. That craft unionism should be the form of organisation first to appear on the scene is in line with trade union development in other parts of the world - in Britain, France, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries, for example. It is not easy to account for the failure of these early craft unions to survive. The depressed nature of the economy, the absence of any high

standard of skills or of a demand for it, the breakdown of the practice of apprenticeship in crafts¹, the fact that many craftsmen were own-account workers, and the strength of the friendly society movement which may have decreased the attraction of unionism, all appear to have contributed in some measure. The Printers' strike in Jamaica in 1907 illustrates quite clearly the weakness of small craft unions when faced with intransigent and ruthless employers. The area offered so few fields for skilled employment, that labour was at a disadvantage; and even on the estates, where a number of artisans were employed, the same factors which affected the agricultural labourer's attitude to combination operated to the disadvantage of craft unionism.

Among the unskilled workers who were the main support of those labour organisations which emerged in these years, the dockers were the leading group in all three territories. In British Guiana they provided the outstanding figure in the trade union movement in the entire area before 1939, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, the only working man to emerge as a leader at this time. Critchlow, a Negro born in Georgetown of Barbadian parents, was virtually self-educated, having had to leave school at the age of 13 years to help support his mother

1. cf. Commission of Enquiry into the Condition of the Juvenile Population of Jamaica, 1874.

after his father's death. A trim, neat-looking man of medium height is the impression which photographs of him in the 1920's convey. Even in old age, his softly modulated voice had an arresting quality which must have given a distinctive appeal to his oratory. By his own account, the riots in Georgetown in 1905, and the failure of the 1906 dock-boys' strike of which he was one of the leaders, made a deep impression upon him. In the years after these events he read voraciously to compensate for his lack of schooling, motivated by a desire to improve his lot and that of his fellow-dockers; the achievements and ideals of trade unionism in England at the time interested him enormously. As a result he showed, from the first days of the BGLU, an awareness of his goal and a clarity of purpose so superior to the ideas of his comrades that his leadership was ensured. He was not, however, a fanatic with no time for anything but his obsession. He was a young man of considerable athletic ability, and was an excellent cricketer (it has been claimed that he was worth a place in the Colony team); one of the most popular non-union functions of the BGLU was its sports section, and Critchlow captained the cricket team in the local club competitions in the first few years of the union's existence.

Andre Arthur Cipriani, the other outstanding labour leader of the period, presents quite a contrast to the proletarian background of Critchlow. A descendant of French-

Corsican families which had settled in Trinidad in the early 19th Century and played a leading role, as planters and merchants, in the public life of the island, Cipriani was a true patrician. He was educated at the Island's leading Catholic College, and followed the family tradition of cocoa planting until World War I, when he was the first Trinidadian to enlist in the B.W.I. Regiment, in which he received a Captain's Commission. His sympathy for the underprivileged Negro, already in evidence during his college days, was strengthened by his war experiences, and on his return to Trinidad he plunged into public life, associating himself with the TWA. At some stage of his career he acquired the occupations of auctioneer and conveyancer. Dressed in his uniform of Khaki which he adopted to indicate his association with 'the barefoot man' as he described the worker, Cipriani was a strange blend of socialist, nationalist and conservative, with a firm belief in the British Empire. He was certainly the most outstanding figure in public life in Trinidad between the wars. He too was a keen sportsman, and one of the leading race-horse owners in the island.

Critchlow in British Guiana and Cipriani in Trinidad were responsible for the emergence of the two most important labour organisations in the area in the years 1916-33, the British Guiana Labour Union and the Trinidad Working Men's Association. No permanent association of lasting importance

appeared in Jamaica in this period, but there were a number of transient combinations both in that island and in the other two territories, which are mentioned further on in this study.

1. THE BRITISH GUIANA LABOUR UNION.

The BGLU was formed in 1919 after two years of unrest among the Georgetown dockers during which Critchlow emerged as their leader. The events of 1905-6¹, however, are regarded by the Union as the real beginning of the struggle.² The immediate cause of the unrest in 1916 was the rise in the cost of living brought about by high food prices due to the war. The dockers prepared a comprehensive list of grievances which they wanted to discuss, and submitted it to the merchants who took no notice. Only when they found a strike on their hands some weeks later did the merchants agree to discuss the men's claims, and even then, only after mediation by the liberal-minded Colonel of Police. The offer of a reduction in the length of the working day from 10½ hours, excluding mealtimes, to 10 hours was the only concession which the employers were

1. Above, pp. 125-136.

2. See, e.g., Report of 1st Annual Conference, BGLU, in Daily Chronicle, 19th March, 1920; 31st Anniversary and Labour Conference, Report, 1950.

prepared to make.¹ After another stoppage, however, they were forced to give an increase of wages, the first on the waterfront for at least 40 years.

It was the failure of the next strike on the waterfront that led to the formation of the BGLU. Critchlow, in describing himself as "an agitator for higher wages"² was telling only a part of the story; his real aim was to make labour conditions on the Georgetown waterfront comparable with what was Labour's aim in Europe. In this his ideas were often far in advance of those of the dockers who followed him. When he launched his 8-hour day movement in 1918 - the only word one employer could find to describe it was 'preposterous',³ - even some of his fellow-workers felt it was too radical a demand. This time strike action failed, and the Government turned a deaf ear to the workers' requests that it intervene. As a result "the labourers realised the advisability of a labour organisation, and on the 11th day of January the British Guiana Labour Union was formed."⁴ The Union grew rapidly. The

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1. H. Critchlow's Address at inaugural meeting of Buxton Branch, BGLU, Daily Chronicle, 18th June, 1919.
 2. ibid. This was his retort to police accusations that he was inciting strikes in 1916.
 3. ibid.
 4. Statement on History of the BGLU, Daily Argosy, 2nd February, 1922.

original 16 members in January had become 1,400 by June and between 12,000 and 13,000 at the end of 1919. It shows the measure of Critchlow's leadership even at the time, that he could suffer defeat without losing support.

A great deal of the popularity of the Union in the first year of its existence was the result of its signal success in its early negotiations with employers. At a meeting on April 5th 1919 two directors of Booker Bros.¹ who were present suggested a "Labourers' Industrial Board" (a form of Joint Industrial Council) composed of 3 merchants and 3 dockers, to discuss the Union's demands. The suggestion was taken up and three days later, the Union emerged triumphant from the discussions; the 8-hour day on the docks had been won, as well as a further increase in wages!

The result was an immediate surge of enthusiasm in the city, which was soon followed by the formation of branches by the Negro villagers all over the country; the creation of the first country branches seems to have been due in large measure to judicious canvassing by Mr. J.L. Griffith, who had been closely allied with the Georgetown

1. Booker Bros., Mc Connell & Co., are the largest employers of labour in British Guiana. They control and own 80% of the sugar industry, run an import and export business which does a substantial portion of the country's trade, operate retail shops and own a number of ships which provide transport and cargo facilities. Because of this, the initials "B.G." are often alluded to as meaning "Bookers' Guiana." Cf. Michael Swan, Guiana, Land of Six Peoples, (1957).

movement from its inception, and who possessed some standing among the villagers in Demerara's East Coast. In the course of the next months, Griffith, Critchlow, A.A. Thorne, W. Norville, a founder-member, and W. Hosannah, the Union's first President, travelled all over the inhabited coastlands inaugurating branches. Their aim was to organise the entire labouring community, as otherwise 'the Union would be handicapped.'¹ By the January of the following year, 36 branches were in existence.²

By the very fact of its expansion in the country districts the Union was broadening the base of its proposed activities, and acquiring a political flavour to colour its industrial character. This was inevitable from the nature of the country membership - propertied wage-earners and occasional labourers, with a tradition of independent action and thought which was more positive than the city dwellers had been able to achieve. It is arguable that in the conditions of British Guiana in the 1920's, it could not be long before the Union would find itself compelled to take a stand and voice its opinion on political issues. Even more valid is the view that in the circumstances, no purely industrial association could have maintained its success for any time.

1. Daily Chronicle, 16th July, 1919.

2. Resolution of Confidence in Hubert Critchlow, Secretary-Treasurer, passed by branches of the BGLU, in Daily Chronicle, 4th January, 1920.

The entire social and economic climate of the country made political agitation a necessary adjunct to industrial organisation.¹ The British Guiana Labour Union movement was not merely an acceptance of the value of industrial combination, but a form of 'social protest'² of the same essential character as, though better ordered than, the unorganised rioting of the 1930's in other parts of the area.

British Guiana Labour Union - The Fight for Recognition.

The period of harmony between Union and merchants was brief. The settlement reached in 1919 had been formalised by written agreement binding on both parties for a year. As soon as this term had expired, the Union demanded a further increase, basing its claim on the abnormal rise in the cost of living, which it estimated to be between 200% and 300%.³ "In keeping with the method adopted by the several recognised Labour Unions throughout the world", a detailed draft agreement covering wage rates and overtime rates, working hours and conditions, legal holidays, provision for

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1. cf. J.H. Richardson, An Introduction to the Study of Industrial Relations, (1954), p. 138. "In order to gain its objectives both industrial and political action are essential to trade unionism."
 2. cf. J.D.M. Bell, "Trade Unions" in A. Flanders & H.A. Clegg, ed., Industrial Relations in Great Britain, p. 130.
 3. Secretary, BGLU to Secretary Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, 28/4/1920, in Daily Chronicle, 23rd May, 1920.

the hiring of casual labour, and a closed shop on the waterfront for Union members, was submitted to the Chamber of Commerce; the agreement also pledged the Union "not to uphold incompetency, striking of work, pilfering, or broaching of cargo" and to take action against offending workers.¹ The Chamber of Commerce decided to postpone its reply until a Sub-Committee could go into the question, and so the Union announced a 'general strike' on the waterfront to begin on May 21st.² The reply of the Chamber, dated the 22nd May, questioned the legality of the Union, its right to enter into agreements, and the accuracy of its cost of living figures; it offered all-round increases of from 10% to 20% on existing rates, but on the understanding that the Chamber had no power to bind its member-merchants to these terms, and suggested a wage-freeze for 12 months; and it pointed out to the Union that the real cause of the current discontent was not an inadequate rate of wages to meet the high cost of living, but the effect of over-concentration of unskilled labour in Georgetown on the incomes of casual labourers.³ The Union failed in its attempt to bring out the regular porters in support of the strike,⁴ but the casuals

1. idem.

2. ibid., 9th May, 1920.

3. President, Georgetown Chamber of Commerce to Secretary, BGLU, ibid., 23rd May, 1920.

4. ibid., 22nd May, 1920; 27th May, 1920.

stayed out. After a week the merchants offered further increases, amounting in all to 36% of the former rates. A mass meeting of strikers decided to return to work, but to do no overtime until their demands on this point were met. The next morning they refused to work along with non-strikers, and walked out again.¹ The strike lingered on for another week, until 150 city youths, volunteer strike-breakers, were introduced to load a ship held up by the strike, and paid at the new rates offered. Critchlow admitted partial defeat and advised a return to work.²

The stoppage on the docks touched off a series of strikes in the city, not all of them connected with the Union. All through June and July the stoppages continued, and when the city workers had settled their differences, sugar workers began to show signs of unrest in August. The main reason for these strikes was the continuous increase in the cost of living since the dockers won their first claim in April 1919. Though this was in part the result of post-war economic conditions, it does appear that the increased cost of handling imported foodstuffs which the dockers had brought about was being passed on to the consumer; and as imported goods went up in price, so did the price of locally grown foods, including

1. Daily Argosy, 28th May, 1920 and 2nd June, 1920.

2. ibid, 5th June, 1920.

the Government controlled rice market crop.¹ Comparison of lists of retail prices for various articles of food in Georgetown in April 1919 and May 1920 shows rises in price ranging from 14% for flour (from 7¢ to 8¢ per lb.) to 200% for potatoes (from 4¢ to 12¢ per lb.). Most imported items of food on the lists showed a 20% to $33\frac{1}{3}\%$ increase, milk, butter and cheese being among them. Locally produced food-stuffs were not listed, but rice which was included had risen from 5½¢ to 6¢ per pint, and muscovado sugar had increased in price by 22%, yellow sugar by 43% (from 7¢ to 10¢ per pound).²

That there was general distress and unrest is undeniable. Municipal council workers, journeymen tailors, seamstresses, public works labourers, hospital porters and cooks, city scavengers, all demanded increases or went on strike in alarming progression. The newspapers of this time report complaints of unemployment, reduction of staff, and attempts to reduce wages in the city, on sugar estates, and up-river at the Bauxite Company's works. Critchlow claimed that by mid-June, merchants were employing only 50-60% of the labour force they wanted normally.³

In the midst of this turmoil the Union found its

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1. Daily Argosy, 19th June, 1920. See also letter of C.G. Colthrust in Daily Chronicle, 26th August, 1919.
 2. Daily Argosy, passim, April 1919, May 1920.
 3. Daily Chronicle, 22nd June, 1920.

fight for better conditions suddenly transformed into a struggle for recognition. An Ordinance to legalise Trade Unions had been passed in the Court of Policy on May 26th, all three readings being taken in the same day.¹ The Union had been agitating for 'incorporation' for some time, and it was obvious that, as the only Trade Union in existence in the country, the Ordinance was meant to give official blessing to the BGLU. It was even whispered that the Governor, Sir Wilfred Collett, was in sympathy with the Union's aims; he had confessed his inability to influence the attitude of the employers.² The accusation made by the Chamber of Commerce on May 22nd that the Union was an illegal conspiracy at common law had been silenced by the passing of the Trade Union Ordinance a mere four days later. For the next month discussion centred round the technicality of the Union's position, since it was not yet registered under the Ordinance.

The threat to the Union's newly won position came, not from doubts as to its legal status, but from the deliberate policy of some employers not to recognise it as a bargaining body. The trouble began on July 1st when the manager of the Demerara Foundry dismissed one of the engineering workers for "wasting a lot of time by holding meetings to organise strikes." His fellow-unionists immediately came out on

1. B.G. Ordinance No. 17 of 1921.

2. See Daily Chronicle, 7th July, 1920.

strike, and work was resumed only after a Union official had turned up and had him reinstated.¹ Early in July the Union presented claims for skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers in the employ of the Demerara Electric Company, which operated the city's electricity and tramway services, and of the Sprostons and Demerara Foundries. All three managements refused to negotiate with their men 'through a third party', and objected to the Union's interference in relations between firms and employees.² On July 5th Georgetown was paralyzed by a general strike as all the men concerned came out while the dockers, in whom lay the Union's strength, stopped work in sympathy to demand recognition of their Union. The Houston Match Factory girls, who had been refused an increase on their miserable wages³, also walked out. The next day the sawmill workers went on strike for a 50% wage increase and an 8½-hour day.

Two issues were now involved - the settlement of the strikers' demands for higher pay, and the right of the

1. ibid, 2nd July, 1920.

2. ibid, 6th July, 1920; 8th July, 1920.

3. They were employed at piece-rates which they claimed allowed an average wage of 12¢ a day. According to retail prices current in mid-December of the same year, a week's wages would suffice to buy either a pound of butter, or 2 yards of cheap print cloth. Of the essential commodities listed only sugar, rice, flour and onions cost less than 12¢ per lb., the cheapest of them being rice at 6¢ a pint. See Daily Chronicle, 15th December, 1920.

Union to represent its members. All three managements were willing to treat with their men if approached personally, but strikers insisted on putting their case through the Union. On the first issue the men were successful; eventually increases averaging 10% and an 8-hour working day were offered by all three concerns. But the Union lost in its fight for recognition. The tramway strike was broken in a week, after public opinion went against the strikers for refusing the Company's offer.¹ They had done so against the advice of Critchlow who seems to have realised the danger of their unwillingness to compromise. The sawmill workers had to return to work with a mere promise that an increase would be considered. The Sprostons Foundry had offered an increase of 10% all round and an 8-hour day and issued an ultimatum that the factory would shut for three months if the men did not return to work within 24 hours;² the Demerara foundrymen held out for 3½ weeks, then gave in, their management having refused even to acknowledge the Union's letters.³ It was on the waterfront, the scene of earlier triumphs, that the Union suffered the worst setback. The men returned to work on the 14th to find at work a gang of strike-breakers from the Islands, led by a Barbadian immigrant named Trim who had

1. Daily Chronicle, 11th July, 1920.

2. ibid.

3. Daily Chronicle, 28th July, 1920.

adopted the role of professional black-leg. The following week two of the chief stevedores, Labour Union men, were dismissed, and Trim and one of his cronies given their jobs.¹

The defeat of the Union was complete.

If the employers were determined to refuse the Union recognition, labourers showed every sign of realising its value. Its success, and the high cost of living, had attracted to it not only the Negro population but East Indians on many of the sugar estates. There had been an influx of these members in the first months of 1920. As one well-wisher put it²:

The East Indian has waited a year, has become satisfied, and now is storming the doors of the Union in hundreds.

Soon it became the practice for the East Indians, members of the Union or not, when a dispute arose with the estate management, to march into Georgetown and seek the aid of Critchlow, (often joining the Union at the same time), in the same way as they had marched to see the Protector of Immigrants in the years before the Union had come on the scene. On at least one occasion, dissatisfied with the decision of the Protector that they were not being underpaid, they claimed that he was in league with the manager and went off to get the Union's

1. Daily Chronicle, 22nd July, 1920.

2. Rev. H.W. Grant at 1st Anniversary, Buxton Branch BGLU, Daily Chronicle, 2nd September, 1920.

help.¹ Critchlow usually went to the estate himself and tried to effect a settlement. There was some danger to the Union in this state of affairs. Steeped in the fuel of racial and social prejudice and personal grievances, labour relations on estates tended to be highly inflammable and required the most trivial spark to touch off an explosion. Passions were easily roused, men resorted to violence as the only immediately satisfactory remedy for their grievances; in such a situation discipline was difficult to maintain, and the Union could not hope to command obedience of the quality which the dockers had displayed. At the same time it appears that it was Union policy to canvass for members, especially on the East Bank and East Coast plantations in Demerara, nearest to Georgetown.

Even before the 'general strike' in Georgetown the Union had secured increases for workers on some sugar estates - at Cane Grove the increase had amounted to 25% of the rate previously paid.² In August the attack on the Union was taken up by the estates. Forty-four strikers at Diamond and Providence who had joined the Union were given notice to quit their barracks; at Diamond strikers claimed that the estate authorities had cut their water supply.³ The Union had had

1. Daily Chronicle, 22nd August, 1920.

2. Daily Chronicle, 19th June, 1920.

3. Daily Chronicle, 10th August, 1920.

no part in the strike, though its representative on the East Bank had tried without success to see the estate managers, and Critchlow had been forced to rush to the scene to prevent a mass march into Georgetown. When some 2,000 angry sugar workers, East Indian and Negro, staged a demonstration in the city five days later, Critchlow found himself summoned by the Governor to answer the planters' allegations, which the strikers themselves denied, that he had incited the men to strike. He was excluded from the subsequent interview at which the Governor heard the men's grievances.¹ This loss of the Governor's goodwill, so essential in the absence of any machinery for settling disputes, was a great blow to the Union.

The effect of these setbacks can be seen in the way the BGLU faced the next crisis. Reductions in wages and in the numbers employed on sugar estates throughout the country in the middle of 1921 were followed by the merchants' decision to effect a 20% reduction in wages all round after a week's notice. The fall in the world price of sugar was the reason they gave. These reductions followed close upon a general rise in house rents in Georgetown consequent upon a slight increase in the municipal rates, which had been seized upon by the landlords as an opportunity to exploit

1. Daily Chronicle, 13th August, 1920.

the city's housing shortage.¹ The Union meeting to consider how to face the situation, could take no positive industrial action beyond warning employers against the dangers of arbitrary reductions without prior consultation.² Its decision to resort to political agitation at this time was as much a confession of weakness as a demonstration of understanding that in face of economic crisis, some weapon other than the strike was required.

The BGLU and Politics.

Political agitation was not a new technique for the BGLU. One of its first public activities had been to press (though without success) for a legal minimum wage for all classes of labour, and to this end it had combined a handbill campaign to canvass public opinion with efforts by sympathetic members in the Court of Policy.

The next issue on which the Union took a stand, the Seditious Publications Bill in September, 1919, gave it the support of the whole country (except, of course, the planter-merchant clique). This bill, though framed in general terms embracing all publications which might tend to create or arouse "seditious" feelings among the population, was really an attempt

1. Daily Chronicle, 14th July, 1921.

2. Daily Chronicle, 21st June, 1921.

to ban the importation of American Negro literature which had soared in the post-war heyday of Garveyism; Garvey's own "Negro World" and Dr. W.E. DuBois's Pan-African publication, "The Crisis", were the main targets. At the second reading of the Bill in the Court of Policy, the Governor, displaying an issue of the "Negro World" which contained the headline 'BRITISH COLONIES MOST PREJUDICED BEASTS ON EARTH'¹, said:

..... this journal which ... employs forever the language of battle and ... tries to inculcate doctrines of race and class hatred, is not matter that can safely be put in the hands of half-educated people ... It is in order to prevent people from playing with fire that this bill is introduced.

It was a tactless legislative effort, tactlessly introduced by Mr. C. Clementi², acting for the Governor, whose patronising Oxford manner and contempt for local sentiment evoked a dislike which was matched only by his own disapproval of those institutions which allowed the Guianese to cling to the shadowy myth of political freedom. He stressed the necessity for the bill since the censorship imposed under the Defence of the Colony Regulations during the war was no

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1. Daily Chronicle, 24th September, 1919.
 2. Mr. (later Sir) C. Clementi, Government Secretary of British Guiana from 1913 to 1922, and author of the standard Constitutional History of British Guiana.

longer possible. But the Government had other legislation at its disposal, notably the Ordinance under which copies of the "Negro World" were seized by the Post Office after the bill was withdrawn.¹ Moreover, the "Negro World" had been banned on June 2nd, 1919, as "prejudicial to the interests of H.M. Government" under the Defence of the Colony Regulations.² East Indian nationalist literature had been banned long before 1914.³

Opposition to the bill was motivated by different fears. Liberals and electives regarded it as an attempt to stifle criticism of the Government, and objected to the loose framing of some of its clauses which provided no safeguard against the administration's interpreting them to suit its own purposes.⁴ The Union felt that it "was wickedly framed to put an end to the activities of the BGLU", and amplified this in its official protest⁵:

The working classes in this colony might ... be deprived of certain publications from the United Kingdom and the United States of America from

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1. British Guiana Ordinance 21 of 1893.
 2. Daily Argosy, 1st November, 1924.
 3. Governor in Court of Policy, 23/9/1919. Reported in Daily Chronicle, 24th September, 1919.
 4. See, e.g., Daily Chronicle, 9th September, 1919, Editorial "Muzzling the Press".
 5. Daily Chronicle, 24th September, 1919.

which they learn of the progress of labour there and of the legitimate and constitutional means adopted by fellow labourers for their own progress and welfare. Alternatively, coloured people here might thus not be able to gauge the progress made by coloured folk in, say, the U.S.A. Such a denial is calculated to imbue the people with suspicion of the Government

In fact, much of the Union's inspiration, and many of its ideas and ideals, its organising and propaganda techniques were culled from these sources;¹ the directive supplied by Labour's practical demands for better living and working conditions probably had a greater effect on the 'half-educated' negro than the visionary prospect of a distant Africa which, at best, served to re-create a racial self-respect which slavery had destroyed. In the making of the incipient Labour Movement in British Guiana the two forces were complementary. Against the Seditious Publications Bill the BGLU organised a protest meeting of citizens at the Town Hall and a demonstration outside the Public Buildings on the morning of its first reading; the crowd, some 2,000 strong, dispersed upon being given the assurance that Government had no intention to take all stages of the Bill that day.² Government's subsequent

1. cf. Letter of J.S. Johnson in Daily Chronicle, 19th September, 1919.

2. Daily Chronicle, 12th September, 1919. This demonstration was regarded as the reason for the presence of a warship in port on the day the bill was read a second time; the Governor's explanation that it was 'co-incidental' won little credence, Daily Chronicle, 24th September, 1919.

decision to abandon the bill was looked upon as a victory for the Union.

Following upon the general reduction in wages in June 1921, the BGLU conducted a city-wide campaign for a Rent-Restriction Ordinance, which the Government was persuaded to introduce some eight months later. But controlled rents were only one factor in the cost of living; casual employment was a more serious grievance. A campaign against unemployment was begun, therefore, with the same technique of public meetings, demonstrations and petitions as before. These petitions, the result of resolutions passed at union meetings, were a conglomeration of current grievances, remedies suggested for their removal, and the old demands for social and industrial legislation which the Government did not see fit to introduce. Constantly recurring in these petitions were the need for fixing a minimum wage for all classes of labour by law, and some sort of legislation to protect domestic servants who had to work 12 - 16 hours a day for wages of £15 - £35 a year, paid monthly;¹ the latter demand may have been a reflection of the increased female membership of the Union. To relieve the unemployment situation the Union petitioned for the inauguration of extensive public works schemes, and for better transport facilities between Georgetown and the mining and balata

1. Daily Argosy, 15th August, 1922; Blue Books, 1920-23.

districts of the interior which would allow greater mobility of labour.¹ The demand for public works soon evolved into a broader plan that Government should develop schemes to provide employment for artisans, and establish its own workshops to supply the requirements of government departments² - an indication perhaps of increasing unemployment of skilled workmen in the 1920's. Most of these petitions bore little fruit, and the situation deteriorated rapidly. To the Union the Government replied that unemployment was "partly due to people not being able and willing to go where labour is required, or to accept the wages offered", and suggested that workers would find jobs on the sugar estates.³ Then the East Indian Association, for the estate workers, petitioned about the current distress, only to find that the Immigration-Agent General's figures for wages and foodstuffs showed such an improvement in workers' conditions since 1913 that they must have wondered how they had managed to exist at all in that year.⁴ The Government might have had a more realistic view of the situation had it not acquired the habit of basing its reply to labour petitions on the opinions expressed on them

1. Daily Argosy, 15th August, 1922.

2. Daily Argosy, 20th February, 1924.

3. Daily Argosy, 22nd August, 1922.

4. See Government's reply to East Indian Association re labour conditions, in Daily Argosy, 3rd July, 1923.

by the Chamber of Commerce, to which they were forwarded for comment.¹ Political agitation, by itself, was obviously a failure. By mid-1923 Critchlow had arrived at the conclusion that the only way to maintain living standards in face of once more rising costs and increasing unemployment was "to increase the earning capacity of the workers".² It was this change from peaceful political agitation to industrial action that led to the Ruimveldt tragedy of 1924; for politico-racial factors were beginning to complicate the Guianese scene.

By 1923 the effects of the post-war surge of Negro consciousness were making themselves felt in British Guiana. Three separate trends may be distinguished: 1) the economic and cultural uplift movement, centred round the Negro Progress Convention and such associations; 2) a religious movement, involving withdrawal from the worship of a 'white God', exemplified by the growth of the 'Jordanite' sect; 3) an extreme racialism which saw all issues in terms of colour and preached aggressive assertion of equality, confined mainly to a few vocal individuals. None of these was new to Guianese society, or the direct result of Garveyism, which merely provided the focus for a revival; there was little relish for

1. See, e.g., Daily Argosy, 30th June, 1923 and 22nd March, 1924.

2. Daily Argosy, 31st May, 1924.

the 'Back to Africa' idea. Negro "Improvement" Associations predated the NPC by at least 20 years. After a visit of Sylvester Williams¹, the British Guiana Afro Improvement Association, a branch of the Pan-African Association, had been formed in Georgetown in 1900 and a Negro Improvement Association in New Amsterdam in 1906.² Afro-Christian cults had persisted in the Caribbean throughout the post-slavery era in spite of restrictive legislative and police action by an uncomprehending and orthodox officialdom. The 'Jordanites' were so named after their founder 'Jordan', "an elderly black man who wears a beard" who preached at street-corners "against the Government, the white man, and organised religion."³ The extremists were the products of conditions existing in society and their protest took on a racial context because the oppression of race by race was a feature of Guianese life; had they lived in Britain, they would have stomped the Welsh coal-fields preaching socialism and damning the Tories. To the European minds of merchant-planters and officials, these all amounted to one unwelcome fact - the deliberate propagation of race hatred.⁴ Open discussion of the race question was viewed

1. Above, p. 148.

2. Daily Chronicle, 23rd June, 1901 and 6th September, 1906.

3. Daily Argosy, 6th April, 1924. The Argosy, voice of the planters, is an extremely biased source. The 'Jordanites' still operate harmlessly in Georgetown.

4. The Daily Argosy, passim, 1st-15th April, 1924.

with alarm by the uneasy elite who remembered only too well that there had been race-riots between Negroes and Portuguese in 1859 and 1885, and that in 1905 both sides had made allegations of racial prejudice as responsible for the police shooting and the mob looting which occurred.

The BGLU and NPC had much in common. Both aimed at better living and working standards for the Negro labourer; the Union's leadership and most of its membership were Negro, its professional advisers were many of them members of the NPC, and Critchlow himself had been a member of the Convention's first Committee, though there is no record of his attending after 1922. Fears that this association would lead to racialism in the Union's policy had been voiced as early as 1919.¹ It was inevitable that the Union would be strongly Negro-conscious, and that economic justice for the labourer should be allied with social justice for the Negro. How easy was this association of economic condition with race can be seen from the following extract from one of 'Professor' Osborne's speeches²:

The hour has come, demand your rights and see that you get them. Worship the 'white god'

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1. e.g., "The Union cannot, without a violent disregard of its obligations, take up a racial attitude ... In the ranks to-day are to be found members or races other than Negro". 'Charity' to Editor, Daily Chronicle, 19th November, 1919.
 2. Daily Argosy, 2nd April, 1924.

no longer but know yourselves; If Critchlow is killed, thousands of Critchlows will be born every hour. Don't accept starvation wages -- you have the right to live as other races live

Even the Daily Argosy, however, admitted that Critchlow was no racist and put his actions down to personal vanity.¹

Union leadership was also moving rapidly towards Socialism, under the influence of its contacts with the British Labour Movement, and of the literature emanating from Britain which was considered less objectionable by Government than Garvey's writings and came in without hindrance. In September 1923, the BGLU inquired about affiliation with either the British Labour Party or the Labour and Socialist International.² After Critchlow paid his first visit to Britain to attend the W.E.A. International Conference in August, 1924, it became affiliated with the Union of Democratic Control; George Lansbury was to be one of its 'representatives' in Britain.³ Critchlow's visits (he attended the Commonwealth Labour Conference of 1925 as well) were useful in that he gained first-hand knowledge in the working and organisation of trade unionism in Britain, and he returned with plans for

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1. April, 1924, passim.
 2. Daily Argosy, 15th January, 1924.
 3. Daily Argosy, 8th October, 1924.

improved social services and a National Insurance scheme.¹ Something of the revolutionary militancy of the British Labour Movement of the day must have communicated itself to the BGLU. Religious services (the initial movement had received active support from the native Methodist clergy), hymns, the National Anthem and 'Rule Britannia', with which Union meetings and demonstrations had begun and ended in the early years gave way after 1923 to 'Socialist hymns' and the 'Red Flag'. The Union's official language of this period, too, betrays an aggression in tone and character which was lacking in earlier years.

These were the influences which created the state of tension surrounding the Ruimveldt riots of 1924. The riots themselves were not so serious as in 1905. A lightning strike by Union men, casual labourers on one of the wharves, took place on March 31st; the men had made no formal demands before striking, but they wanted a 20% increase.² The Union organised a general demonstration for an Arbitration Board the next day, but this got out of hand, the crowd forcing a total stoppage of business, transport and essential services; after strenuous efforts, Critchlow persuaded the demonstrators to disperse and re-assemble in the evening to hear the outcome of deliberations with the Governor

1. idem; 13th January, 1925.

2. Daily Argosy, 1st February, 1924.

and employers. Critchlow deplored the resort to violence, which he had never advocated, and it seems that extremists like Osborne had been hard at work. At 3.00 p.m. martial law had been declared, all liquor stores shut, and a warning issued that force would be employed to quell riotous assemblies.

The trouble came, once again, from the East Bank sugar estates where the strike had spread. A crowd of East Indians and Negroes, (estimated at 3,000)¹, marching to Georgetown to seek Critchlow's aid were stopped by armed mounted police at the La Penitence Bridge, where the road crosses a large 'trench' which blocks any other approach to the city. The next day the police compromised by agreeing to allow 10 delegates from the now restless strikers to proceed on their mission, but refused to let the crowd await their return without dispersing. The people refused to leave. The Riot Act was read, the crowd became menacing, and once more the police fired 'in self defence' on a 'hostile mob' armed with sticks and cutlasses and 30 yards away.² Twelve of the crowd were killed and twenty-one wounded. The decision of the crowd to march to Georgetown appears to have been the result of canvassing for membership by both the BGLU and the East Indian Association in the past, accompanied by promises of assistance if disputes were brought to the notice of

1. The Daily Argosy, 4th April, 1924.

2. The Daily Argosy, 5th April, 1924.

these bodies. The East Indians had been disturbed by the report of a delegation from India which had criticised the deplorable wages and conditions obtaining on estates, and which had led the East Indian Association to renew its efforts to represent estate labourers.¹

Georgetown had remained quiet after its day of disturbance, the Governor insisting on a return to work while a conference was arranged between the shippers and both union and non-union representatives of the employees. Nothing came out of these talks except a promise of an increase for the women who supplied coal for ships in port; both sides agreed that the real problem was the casual nature of port employment, and that the cost of living would follow a rise in wages in a never-ending spiral. To the Union's subsequent request for arbitration the Governor replied by the appointment of a seven-man Commission into the port labour situation, with equal labour and merchant representation and two Government officials under the presidency of Mr. Justice Douglas.² The sugar workers, it appears, received no satisfaction.

The Ruinveldt riots mark a decline in the fortunes of the BGLU; never afterwards did it attain the prestige and

1. Daily Argosy, 5th April, 1924.

2. Government Secretary to Critchlow, 5th April, 1924, in Daily Argosy, 6th April, 1924.

place in the public life of the country which it had enjoyed in its first years of existence. It continued to press for social and industrial legislation, though with little success except in the field of relief measures for the unemployment which continued to sweep the country - free meals for the unemployed and for school children, loan passages and food for unemployed miners, a scheme to provide land, tools and seed for the growing of cash crops by the city populace.¹ Unfavourable economic conditions were an even more potent deterrent to industrial action than the opposition of the employing class, and the Union remained tranquil until the mid-1930's.

BGLU - Organisation.

As the only successful trade union in the British Caribbean before the new policy of official encouragement in the 1940's, the BGLU's internal administration is of some interest. In this sphere, too, its path was that of the pioneer who would travel into uncharted territory. Practical difficulties had to be overcome without the sort of guidance on which contemporary trade unions can depend. The BGLU was well served by a number of professional men and clerics, who acted as honorary advisers - notable among this

1. BGLU 31st Anniversary and Labour Conference. Report.

band was P.N. Browne, a barrister-at-law who was elected to the Court of Policy in 1921 with union support. But none of them had more than an advisory voice in the Union's executive affairs in this period; its leadership revolved around Critchlow, who remained first and foremost a trade unionist - he became a full-time paid union official within a year of the Union's foundation at a salary which now appears startlingly inadequate - and did not seek political honours until 1947. The contrast with the trade unions which sprang up after 1938 is refreshing. The Union began its activities, too, free from that propensity for constitutional form which is the bane of organisation in the British Caribbean - the Labour Union scheme of 1906 had foundered on this rock. This atmosphere of informality was soon to lead to a minor revolt by the more orthodox-minded members; but it permitted the building up of a strong personal following for Critchlow, the one man who appears to have had some idea of what was wanted, combined with the drive, the courage, the sincerity of purpose and the unswerving honesty essential to its achievement. In spite of his popularity and his virtual dominance of the Union's affairs, the charges of converting the Union and its funds to his own purposes which have been levelled against leaders in comparable situations in the newer unions, and particularly against Bustamante in Jamaica and Butler in Trinidad, could never seriously or honestly be made against Critchlow.

From the start the 'amalgamated' nature of the Union was emphasised.¹ The branches were based on geographical divisions; each had its own committee, and was "entitled to all the rights and privileges and immunities enjoyed by the Central Branch in Georgetown and of the Union."² The Georgetown branch was sub-divided into occupational sections, each with a committee. All funds collected were remitted to a central fund, over which Critchlow as Secretary-Treasurer had control; minor attempts at peculation by various local officials forced the indefatigable Treasurer to exercise a hawklike vigilance on his sub-Treasurers in the early stages.³ The Union had both a General Committee and a smaller Executive Committee which ran its day-to-day business; the Executive Committee, 3 in number at first, Critchlow soon increased to 6 on his own initiative.⁴ It was against this Executive Committee that the revolt broke out in January 1920, spearheaded it seems by some members of the General Committee who felt that they were being by-passed. Because of the difficulties of communication, it was inevitable that the majority of members on the Committees would be from Georgetown. The three-co-opted Executive members were from the country Branches, and

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1. Critchlow at formation of Buxton Branch, in Daily Chronicle, 18th June, 1919.
 2. Resolution of confidence in Hubert Critchlow, in Daily Chronicle, 4th January, 1920.
 3. Daily Chronicle, 10th January, 1919,
 4. Daily Chronicle, 29th January, 1920.

Critchlow's aim may have been to make the administration reflect more accurately the composition of its membership.

The substance of the protest was for greater overall control of policy decisions by the General Committee, less autocracy on the part of the Secretary-Treasurer, proper constitutional arrangements for the control and banking of Union funds, and the appointment of trustees. It appears that some consideration had been given to these matters, but decisions had been postponed pending the result of the negotiations for 'incorporation', i.e., trade union legislation, in which the union was currently engaged. The alternative was to make financial arrangements in keeping with the requirements for Friendly Societies.¹ The district branches remained loyal to Critchlow and averted a situation which might well have deprived the Union of his vigorous and skilful leadership, for some of the rebels had questioned his fitness for the post and condemned the plurality of his office. A compromise was reached by the appointment of trustees and the dismissal of an assistant-secretary whom Critchlow had engaged on his own initiative. After these initial growing pains, the Union remained free from internal dissention. Later in the year a demand for greater autonomy on the ground of divergence of interests by the branches at Wakenaam and Auruca, on

1. Daily Chronicle, 30th January, 1920.

the Essequibo coast, resulted in their dissolution.¹

The concern for the Union's funds was engendered by the healthy finances which it enjoyed; with an entrance fee of 50¢ and a weekly contribution of 8¢, the Union could collect \$1,309.07 in June, 1920, in Georgetown alone,² though the friendly society benefits which encouraged regular payment of dues were in their turn a big drain on the finances; in January 1920, for instance, they took up over \$1,000 while in 1921, with the death levy at 2¢, over \$9,000 were paid out in death benefits alone.³ The Union's purchase of its own hall, and a car to facilitate official visits to country branches, assisted both its organising activities and its chances of survival. Not all its financial ventures were successful, however. The mortgage on the hall was foreclosed in 1923, and only the intervention of a wealthy sympathiser saved the property.⁴ Its effort at a newspaper, 'The Labourer', was a failure.⁵ And its most ambitious undertaking, the Negro Industrial Trading Company, formed to promote trade between peasant farmers and urban workers in an effort to reduce the

1. Daily Chronicle, 1st August, 1920.

2. Daily Chronicle, 27th June, 1920.

3. Daily Chronicle, 27th January, 1920; 26th January, 1922.

4. Daily Chronicle, 24th February, 1923; 27th March, 1923.

5. Daily Chronicle, 30th January, 1920.

cost of local foodstuffs and to remedy the uncertain markets from which the peasantry suffered, was a colossal loss.¹

In spite of the decline in its fortunes, the BGLU managed to survive and to hold the allegiance of a loyal, though decreasing, number of members right down to the 1930's. No evidence of the actual numbers in the Union after 1920 has so far been discovered.

2. THE TRINIDAD WORKINGMEN'S ASSOCIATION.

There seems to have been a certain amount of labour unrest in Trinidad during World War I, but information about it is scant, particularly since newspapers did not carry full accounts owing to wartime restrictions. It is certain that there was "a substantial increase in the rates of wages throughout the Colony"² in 1916-17, though reliable figures pertaining to the increase have not been obtained. The most serious disturbances took place among workers in the oil and asphalt industries, who struck for higher wages in March 1917. According to the official version, the real reason for their discontent was very obscure, and it was felt that wages were not the entire cause of the stoppages³:

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1. Daily Chronicle, 21st August, 1919; 28th August, 1920; 26th June, 1921.
 2. Trinidad Dispatch 306/1917.
 3. Trinidad Dispatch 123/1917.

The men have no real grievance as they are among the best paid labourers of their class in the Colony, and in addition to that the majority of them are provided with free quarters.

It seems, however, that the effects of the war were beginning to make themselves felt in the rising cost of living; it was reported later in the year that while normally the average working-class diet was not deficient in proteins, "it may be so at the present time (August 1917) owing to the increased cost of certain articles of food."¹ It is not unusual for the better paid workers to take the lead in resisting any decline in their standard of living.

The strikes took place between March 19th and 26th in the Point Fortin oilfields and at Brighton where the Asphalt Company had its refinery. The prompt dispatch of a small number of armed policemen at the first sign of unrest kept the oilworkers at Tabaquite quiet, while at Fyzabad only 20 had the courage to go on strike. These were immediately dismissed and evicted from the Company's property. It was at Point Fortin that the men first came out, on the 19th, and by striking held up the fuelling of an Admiralty Transport ship. An attempt by the police to mediate had no success - the strikers refused to work at current rates of pay, and the

1. Trinidad Dispatch 316/1917.

Company said that an increase was impracticable; it does not appear that the men made any specific demands about the amount of the increase desired. The Company retaliated by threatening to dismiss and evict from its property all those who stayed out. Since all the men at Point Fortin lived either in free Company quarters or in houses of their own on lands rented from the Company at a nominal price, this was a potent threat, especially as some enterprising souls were making a profit out of the arrangement by letting the houses which they had erected.¹ This threat, coupled with the arrival of a skeleton labour force of 50 soldiers to replace the strikers, and the prompt expulsion from the area of all the leaders by the police,² led to the sudden collapse of the strike after five days. At Brighton the strike of asphalt workers which began on the 21st threatened to be more serious. On the evening of the second day of the strike, two fires which broke out on the premises "under circumstances which point strongly to incendiarism"³ destroyed buildings, plant and refined asphalt to the value of \$100,000. Though the weapon of eviction which the U.B.O.T. Company had employed at Point Fortin was available, the Asphalt Company's Manager preferred

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1. Enclosure in Trinidad Dispatch 123/1917.
 2. idem.
 3. idem.

to persuade rather than coerce his workers. By the 26th about 540 men (the majority of those on strike) returned to work, after having given their names as willing to do so; it was alleged that the strike was the work of a few malcontents who had prevailed upon the majority by intimidation and threats. 15 people were arrested as a result of these strikes, on charges ranging from arson and causing disaffection among the civilian population to impeding the transport of war material. Among them were two Americans, one of whom had assaulted an armed sentry, and a Seventh Day Adventist preacher who was charged with attempting "to cause dissatisfaction among the civilian population at Brighton by putting up a placard which read 'Awake ye Stevedores and be men' and then proceeding to advise the Brighton stevedores to strike".¹ It is not recorded that any increases in wages were secured as a result of these strikes, but on the evidence cited above² there may have been some adjustment later in the year.

The Two TWA's.

The split in the TWA was never healed, Richards at first ignoring the rebel branch completely.³ His group continued its lobbying and its caucus organisation, but its

1. idem.

2. p. 187.

3. Enclosure in Trinidad Dispatch 102/1917.

contacts with the British Labour Party must have suffered during the war, and it gradually became little more than the voice of Richards who was active in municipal politics and became Mayor of Port-of-Spain. After one TWA petition in 1917 which Richards initiated, it was noted officially that he could not claim to be speaking for anyone but himself.¹ As the rebel branch of the TWA became increasingly involved in the unsavoury business of trade union activity, Richards began to stress the fact that his was purely and simply a political organisation and eventually a notice to that effect, signed by the secretary, appeared in the press²:

The Trinidad Workingmen's Association (Incorporated), affiliated to the Parliamentary Labour Party, England ... is a political organisation for the furtherance of social reform. It seeks the political and industrial emancipation of the workers through organisation and representation of the elective of all and every governing body (sic). Since 1900 it has carried on its propaganda throughout the country. The Workingmen's Association (Inc) is a Political body for all earnest SOCIAL REFORMERS. It is not a Labour Union and not for gain.

Finally, in May 1920, Richards sought an injunction from the Supreme Court to restrain the leaders of the rebel group, David Headley, James Brathwaite, Aaron Fitzroy Brathwaite,

1. idem.

2. Argos, 24th November, 1919.

Henry Cecil Bain, Mortimer Phillips, John Sydney de Bourg, and William Howard Bishop, from "using the name of the association for any company in which they are interested, directly or indirectly."¹ There is no evidence of what decision the Court arrived at; but Richards must have been unsuccessful, because in the press report of an address of welcome to the new Governor in 1922, the TWA with most of the people listed above on the Committee, describes itself as an incorporated body affiliated to the British Labour Party.² No more is heard of the Richards faction of the TWA after 1920.

The rebel branch of the TWA had pursued its policy of attracting a large membership and was rapidly becoming involved in trade union activity; by the end of 1919, it could claim a membership of nearly 10,000.³ Membership was open to all classes of labour, including clerks as well as "to capitalists who, however are made honorary members."⁴ In an address to the BGLU in Georgetown early in 1920, David Headley, then President, stated that they had tried to form a trade union but had desisted after the police had accused them of fomenting strikes and had threatened the leaders with deportation.⁵ The deportation threat highlights the most remarkable feature of the TWA at this time - the large

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1. Trinidad Guardian, 21st May, 1920.
 2. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 18th January, 1922.
 3. Daily Chronicle, 13th January, 1920.
 4. idem.
 5. idem.

number of its members, and particularly of its leaders, who were immigrants from the smaller West Indian islands, and especially from Barbados and Grenada. This followed from the fact that most West Indian immigrants to Trinidad were to be found then in industrial employment either in the oil-fields or in the town. Of the original secessionist leaders only J. Sydney de Bourg, who was 1st Vice-President in 1920, remained and late in the year he left for the United States to become an official in Garvey's U.N.I.A.

The 1919 Strikes in Trinidad.

The men who run the Workingmen's Association are of little importance either socially, commercially or financially; in fact they have no weight or influence with any class of the community.¹

However true this may have been in 1917, it could not have been said of the rebel branch of the TWA from 1919 onwards.² The campaign of active organisation on which its leaders embarked in that year placed it dramatically in the spotlight during the wave of strikes which swept Trinidad in November. Reports of a meeting of the association held on October 31st,

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1. Enclosure in Trinidad Dispatch 102/1917.
 2. After this the name TWA is used to refer only to this rebel branch and to the organisation which it eventually became under Cipriani's leadership.

which show incidentally the concern of the leaders for keeping their activities within the bounds of law and order, reveal the motive behind all this organisation. According to the Trinidad Guardian¹, the President proclaimed:

It was their intention to plant their tenets in every corner of the island, and when they were thoroughly organised they could affiliate themselves with the Union in Demerara and the 15 other West Indian colonies. The effect of this confederation of labour would be that when a strike was declared and the Government or anybody else wanted to send for labour to St. Vincent, labour there would be able to say, "We cannot come."

The response of the workers whom the Union was trying to organise was enthusiastic, no less than 129 members being enrolled at the inaugural meeting of a branch formed in San Fernando early in November.²

In March 1919, strikes on the waterfront brought pay increases of from 25% to 40%, with higher overtime rates and double time on Sundays and public holidays; this meant a basic rate of \$1.50 per 10-hour day for warehouse porters, while stevedores, the highest paid grade of waterfront labour received \$2.00 for a 9-hour day. The lightermen, who transported the cargo between ship and shore and were paid by

1. 31st October, 1919.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 7th November, 1919.

piece-rate, also had their rates increased.¹ There is no evidence that the TWA had any hand either in the strikes or in the negotiations which terminated them. Public opinion had been heavily weighted in favour of the strikers, and the newspapers were sympathetic.

Between March and November, the TWA leaders appear to have devoted their attention to organising the waterfront workers. On November 13th, the shipping firms were confronted with a demand for further increases in wages, an 8-hour day, and increased overtime rates for stevedores, bargemen, and porters, in a circular letter from the Association.² It was later claimed, both by the Acting Secretary of the TWA, Aaron F. Braithwaite, and Mortimore Phillips, a stevedore who represented the strikers on the Conciliation Board, that the men had decided to strike of their own accord, and without any prompting from the TWA which merely intervened to approach the shippers on the men's behalf before the strike actually took place.³ The immediate reaction of the shipping firms to this demand was that as the men themselves had always conducted their own negotiations in the past, they could not recognise an association whose claim to represent the stevedores might be without foundation; they regarded this as an

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1. Trinidad Guardian, 16th November, 1919; 22nd November 1919.
 2. Trinidad Guardian, 14th November, 1919.
 3. Trinidad Guardian, 3rd December, 1919.

attempt by trouble-makers to foment unrest on the waterfront.¹ As a result there was a partial stoppage on the docks on the 14th, and on Saturday 15th about 800 stevedores assembled at the offices of the Royal Mail Company, the largest of the shipping firms, as a demonstration that the TWA did represent them. This forced the Company to recognise the Association.

The Royal Mail authorities received the deputation well, and after some discussion recognised the officers of the Association as having the mandate of the working men.²

But when the shippers insisted on the strike being called off before any discussions about an increase were held, negotiations broke down. On the 21st the lightermen, who had remained at work, demanded, through the TWA, wage increases corresponding to the claims of the stevedores.³ Three days later, women coal porters at one of the wharves went on strike for a 25% increase on their wage of 80¢ a day, and announced their intention of joining the Association.⁴

There was an atmosphere of unrest in Port-of-Spain. Already before the dockers' strike the city had been breadless for two days because of a strike of the bakers for increased

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1. Trinidad Guardian, 14th November, 1919.
 2. Trinidad Guardian, 16th November, 1919.
 3. Trinidad Guardian, 22nd November, 1919.
 4. Trinidad Guardian, 25th November, 1919.

wages, which they obtained. On the 21st sixteen labourers in the employ of the town council demanded a 50% increase on the 80¢ a day which they had been awarded only a fortnight before. News arrived that estate labourers at Macqueripe, only a few miles away, had struck work, at the very moment when housewives were faced with a fuel shortage as East Indian charcoal vendors refused to sell coal in protest against the Government-fixed price which they regarded as too low.¹ The situation on the docks became more tense on the 24th, when it was made clear that the shipping firms were determined to make alternative arrangements for providing labour. The Santelle arrived from Barbados with 'a considerable number' of labourers on board to unload its cargo in Trinidad, and the following day the Royal Mail Company recruited Venezuelan workers from various parts of Port-of-Spain to load and unload its ships.² Previous efforts by the shippers to recruit labour from the country districts had been foiled by TWA officials who toured likely areas dissuading people from accepting labour on the docks, while those who did accept were either whisked off the docks and persuaded to join the TWA and go on strike, or so intimidated that they left in fear of being beaten up.³

1. idem.

2. idem; 26th November, 1919.

3. Trinidad Guardian, 23rd November, 1919.

At this point the strikers called upon the Government to intervene. James Braithwaite, secretary of the TWA, was refused an interview by the Governor, Sir John Chancellor, who would not accept him as a representative of the strikers and who insisted upon a deputation drawn entirely from among the stevedores.¹ After consultations with both sides, the Governor made his position clear: while he desired a settlement satisfactory to both sides, the Government could not intervene in a labour dispute except it became disorderly; should strikebreakers be molested, police protection would be given to them. By this time the manager of the Royal Mail Company, who acted as spokesman for the merchants, had had second thoughts about recognising the Association whose leaders, he claimed, were merely misleading the stevedores by demanding increases when they "had no knowledge of conditions affecting the shipping interest."²

Up to that time, the strikers had been very orderly, a fact which says a great deal both for the intentions of the TWA leaders and for their control over the men. That things got out of hand on December 1st, as the dock strike was entering its third week, is not surprising. Faced with the shipping firms' withdrawal of recognition from the Association, and with the Governor's refusal to intervene, it must have appeared to

1. Trinidad Guardian, 26th November, 1919.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 28th November, 1919.

the stevedores, if not to the TWA officials, that active measures were required if they were to ensure that blackleg labour were not employed indefinitely. On that Monday morning strikers attacked recruits who arrived at the docks from the country districts to replace boatmen on one of the coastal steamers who had gone on strike on the previous Saturday. The trouble soon spread. After lunch, a large crowd, which included numbers of women, chased strikebreakers off the waterfront, attacked some of the shipping agents, and resisted the efforts of mounted policemen to disperse it. The mob soon made its way into the city, bringing business to a standstill in some streets in the shopping district, and demanding the closure of the offices of the Trinidad Guardian, which had been hostile to the strike.¹ Police closed all liquor stores in Port-of-Spain - some of the rioters had penetrated as far as the suburbs - but otherwise took no offensive action. The disorder continued on the morning of December 2nd.

This display of exasperation on the part of the strikers had the desired effect. Aaron Braithwaite, for the TWA, and 5 representatives of the stevedores from different shipping firms asked the Inspector General of Police to approach the firms on their behalf, and proposed that an Arbitration Committee of four dockers' and four merchants' representatives be set up.² Meanwhile a number of prominent citizens had sent

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1. Trinidad Guardian, 2nd December, 1919.
 2. Trinidad Guardian, 3rd December, 1919.

one of their number, Dr. S.M. Lawrence, to confer with the Governor about the situation. He agreed to the appointment of a Conciliation Board of six - two to be nominated by the shippers, two by the strikers (one of these to be himself a stevedore), and two appointed by the Government.¹ The Board met on the afternoon of the 2nd, in private session, and it was agreed that the shipping companies should be asked to reconsider the claims for wage increases which they had received. The workers' representatives, on their part, undertook to persuade the demonstrators to go home quietly. On the following day, it was announced that the shipping authorities had given written agreement to a 25% increase in wages and a 9-hour day for all grades of dock labour.² Formal recognition was given to the TWA as the bargaining body for labour on the waterfront. The stevedores made the dismissal of all blacklegs a condition of their returning to work - and won their point.³

But the unrest was not yet over. The TWA presented the Port-of-Spain City Council with claims for wage increases and shorter hours on behalf of cartermen and others in its employ. The city scavengers, who received little more than agricultural labourers, went on strike for a 50%

1. idem.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 4th December, 1919.

3. Trinidad Guardian, 5th December, 1919.

increase and better conditions. All grades of workers employed at the Water and Sewerage Works petitioned for an increase in war bonus.¹ In the country, estate labourers went on strike in various parts of the sugar belt, from Cunupia to Chaguanas, and outbreaks of violence were reported. At Woodford Lodge Estate, the manager and deputy manager were arrested after one of the crowd of men who were exhorting the estate labourers to go on strike had been shot dead.² Skilled and unskilled labourers employed by the Trinidad Central Oil-fields Company at Tabaquite went on strike for a 25% increase after refusing the company's offer of 20%. News of strikes in other isolated country districts poured in to the city, though it was reported that on some estates workers had won increases. Policemen and bluejackets from HMS Calcutta, all armed, were dispatched to the sugar districts. Reports of serious disturbances in the island ward of Tobago, where 1 man was killed and 7 injured³ when police fired on a crowd which had forced banks and shops in Scarborough to close down after labourers of the Public Works Department declared themselves on strike, contributed to the atmosphere of crisis and of impending revolution. Armed sentries had been guarding

1. idem.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 7th December, 1919.

3. Trinidad Guardian, 10th December, 1919. Early reports of casualties were grossly exaggerated.

key buildings in the city since the first day of the Port-of-Spain riots; the Governor now called up the reserves, and issued a proclamation that violence would be put down "by force if necessary."¹

There was no evidence that the TWA had any hand in the unrest which was sweeping the agricultural areas. Its leaders, however, were blamed and accused publicly, though names were not mentioned. During the dock strike, both the Press and the merchants had portrayed them as agitators, "men whose only guiding motive in life seems to be to stir up strife and bring about an industrial unrest which nothing can justify ... who dream of a Utopia on Soviet lines which is impossible in these days of practical materialism."² The Chamber of Commerce, meeting on December 6th, made it clear that its members had brought pressure to bear on the Governor to deal firmly with the situation, and that they had even threatened to cable the Secretary of State for the Colonies, so critical were they of the measures taken to deal with the strikes, and of the tolerant attitude of Government officials towards the strikers and the Association.³ The most vociferous and reactionary member of the Chamber, Edgar Tripp, seconding a

1. Trinidad Guardian, 7th December, 1919.

2. Argos, 21st November, 1919.

3. Trinidad Guardian, 7th December, 1919.

motion to this effect, called for the deportation of "the agitators at the back of all the trouble ... scum of the wharves of the West Indies ... hooligans ... whose mission appeared to be the taking of Trinidad back to Hayti", and who ought to be taught "... that Trinidad was conquered by the British and would remain the property of the British."¹

The wave of strikes ceased with the appointment of a Wages Committee by the Governor to go into the question of wages and the cost-of-living in the colony. The Committee reported that the cost-of-living had increased by 126% in Port-of-Spain and 145% in rural Trinidad over the 1914 cost-of-living, - though the basis on which it arrived at these figures is not very satisfactory - and recommended minimum rates of pay with a sliding scale to accommodate changes in the cost-of-living.² Allegations in the Chamber of Commerce that the police had not been employed to quell the disturbances in Port-of-Spain because the officers could not rely upon the loyalty of their men led to the appointment of a Commission into the Conduct of the Constabulary, which in its report completely exonerated the police, and concluded that "The riot seems to have been brought about primarily by the failure of an influential group of employers to remedy the genuine economic grievances of their employees."³

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1. Report in idem.
 2. Wages Committee, Trinidad, 1920.
 3. Trinidad Council Paper No. 121 of 1921.

The Postponement of Trade Unionism.

The TWA had won recognition as the bargaining body for workers on the waterfront, and in some other fields of employment where it had put forward claims for its members, these claims had not been rejected out of hand. It was to be expected that the Association would now consolidate its position as a trade union and proceed with its avowed intention of organising workers throughout the island. Indeed, at the end of December 1919 it presented claims to the New Trinidad Asphalt Lake Company at Brighton on behalf of all grades of labour employed by the company.¹ The Company refused to consider any change in the rates of wages paid to its employees pending the report of the Wages Committee, and took up the position that it did not recognise the Association, having always bargained directly with the men.² When the TWA pointed out that the purpose of the Wages Committee was merely to find a basis for fixing a minimum wage, and that the Association was representing at their own request employees who belonged to it, the Company declined to enter into any further correspondence.³

The failure of the TWA to take advantage of its

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1. Acting Secretary, TWA to Manager, N.T.L.A.Co., in Trinidad Guardian, 6th January, 1920.
 2. Manager, N.T.L.A.Co. to Secretary, TWA, idem.
 3. Trinidad Guardian, 8th & 9th January, 1920.

newly-won recognition in accepting this snub from the Asphalt Company, and its subsequent retirement from the trade union field may be attributed to a number of factors. It has already been pointed out that the Association was particularly vulnerable to suppressive action by Government, since most of its leaders were not natives of Trinidad. Two of them, Bruce McConney and Mortimore Phillips (the stevedores' representative on the Conciliation Board) were convicted of rioting and, on appeal, had the sentences doubled. James Braithwaite, the Secretary, who had been fined £25 for rioting and assault on evidence which, as reported in the press, was not very convincing, was refused leave to withdraw his appeal and received the harsher sentence of three months' imprisonment.¹ The fact that the magistrate who imposed the original, and more lenient, sentences was a local French Creole, while the justices of the Supreme Court were Englishmen, helped to strengthen the conviction that the Government intended to suppress the TWA whose members marched 3,000 strong in protest against the sentences.² McConney, on his release from prison, was deported in tears to Barbados³, while the Rev. E. Sellier Salmon, who succeeded James Braithwaite as Secretary, was put on board a ship bound

1. Trinidad Guardian, 21st January, 1920.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 22nd January, 1920.

3. Trinidad Guardian, 20th March, 1920.

for his native British Honduras at the end of March, 1920.¹ It is clear that deportation or imprisonment was likely to be the lot of any TWA leader who did not 'behave' at that time. David Headley, the President, at a meeting of the BGLU which he addressed in Georgetown in January, 1920, complained² that "the last thing the Government did was to write us (the TWA) a letter threatening to deport any of us who authorised a strike."

In face of such obstacles, trade union activity would have to be shelved, at least for a while. The next attack upon the TWA came, as it did in the case of the BGLU in British Guiana, in the form of an Ordinance to ban Seditious Publications, which was introduced in the Legislative Council in March 1920. A memorandum of protest by the TWA³, and public criticism and protest meetings in which a number of prominent citizens, including the Deputy Mayor of Port-of-Spain, took part, resulted in a startling allegation by the Trinidad Guardian⁴ of a revolutionary plot to overthrow the Government. Under the front-page headline "Why The Seditious Bill Is Necessary" it disclosed the alleged plans of a "secret organisation" with "six ringleaders, not one of whom is a

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1. Trinidad Guardian, 28th March, 1920.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 13th January, 1920.
 3. Trinidad Guardian, 4th March, 1920.
 4. 21st March, 1920.

Trinidadian," to destroy organised government and eliminate the white population: every negro child was to be trained to hate the white man, white merchants were to be boycotted, the British were to be driven out and a Negro republic set up in Trinidad; it claimed that men employed at the Government quarry were being persuaded to steal dynamite for the conspirators, who were also suborning the police. The importation of literature issued by the Garvey and DuBois movements in the U.S.A. was cited as final proof of the existence of this plot¹:

The villainous doctrines of the irreconcilable agitators in America were industriously circulated whenever opportunity offered, and emissaries were sent into the country districts to arrange for the promotion of strikes and to enrol local supporters of the seditious campaign.

The Government, according to the Guardian, had been aware of this conspiracy for some eight months, and the Seditious Publications Ordinance was their way of preparing to deal with it.² This disclosure created an enormous sensation in the Island and helped to heighten the tension which had existed since the previous November. It is quite obvious that the TWA and its leaders were the object of this allegation, which appears to have been entirely without foundation. Certainly, had there

1. idem.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 28th March, 1920.

been any truth in it, the attitude of the Government towards the TWA which has been described above would have resulted, one would expect, in wholesale arrests and imprisonments. The disclosure served the purpose for which it was intended, however, in spite of demands from a hastily-formed 'Citizens Committee' that the Guardian either name the ringleaders and hand over its evidence to the courts, or stand accused of stirring up "racial hatred against the masses."¹ The Ordinance was passed, and immediately the Governor banned the importation of the 'Negro World', the 'Crusader', and the 'Messenger'.² As late as 1929, in reply to a question by Cipriani who cited the example of St. Lucia and Grenada, the Government stated in the Legislative Council that it had no intention of repealing the Ordinance, even though no prosecutions had been made under its provisions.³

From the infrequent mention of TWA activities in the Press after 1920, we can only surmise that the Association suffered a serious decline during the next four years. It continued to petition for various labour and social reforms - an 8-hour day for all classes of labour, double time on Sundays, Trade Union legislation, Workmen's Compensation - and

1. Trinidad Guardian, 25th March, 1920.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 8th May, 1920; 21st May, 1920.

3. Trinidad Hansard, 29th November, 1929.

for purely political measures like the withdrawal of the Seditious Publications Ordinance, the institution of competitive examinations for entry to the Civil Service, representative government, and West Indian Federation.¹ It appears to have been organised at this time in occupational sections, bakers, railwaymen, dockers, etc.² It does not seem to have performed any trade union functions in this period, and perhaps for this reason its membership figures fell. When Cipriani threw his lot in with the TWA in 1924 it had no more than 40 members.³

The TWA Under Cipriani.

Perhaps the most important influence in turning the TWA from trade union activity and converting it into a political party was its alliance with Captain Cipriani. It is not clear exactly how or when this alliance began. Certainly it must have been after the events of 1919-20 related above, as there is no evidence of Cipriani's participation in the affairs of the Association at that time. It is probable that the identity of views on the question of constitutional

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1. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 23rd March, 1921; 24th January, 1922.
 2. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 18th & 21st January, 1922.
 3. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 21st August, 1929.

reform and representative government between Cipriani and the TWA leaders brought them together in 1921-22; Cipriani had been from the very beginning one of the most outspoken proponents of the case for a representative legislature. The first occasion on which he appears on record in association with the TWA is the interview granted to that body by Major Wood on his visit to Trinidad in 1922; Cipriani is described at that time as an honorary member of the TWA committee.¹ At the end of July, 1922, the TWA petitioned the Secretary of State that Cipriani be appointed a member of the Constitution Reform Commission which had been set up to devise a new form of constitution for the Colony. The Governor advised rejecting the suggestion on the grounds that the TWA had no special claim to representation on the Commission, which had been "carefully selected to represent different shades of political opinion and ... (was) ... not intended to include representatives of trades or professions."² On the basis of the evidence discovered up to now from references to the TWA in the Press and elsewhere, we must conclude that it is incorrect to hold that the TWA went out of existence in the years before or during the war, and that its revival in 1919 was

1. Port-of-Spain Gazette, January, 1922, passim.

2. Trinidad Dispatch 485/1922.

the work of Cipriani.¹

Cipriani must have appeared to Headley, Adams, the Braithwaites and Bishop as the ideal person to lead the TWA once it had incurred the displeasure of the Government. A man of independent means, belonging to one of the most prominent families in the island (his brother was a nominated member of the Legislative Council at the time of the 1919 disturbances), with a record of loyalty to the British Empire, and able to meet the merchant-planter group on their own social level, he had been nevertheless an outspoken champion of the working-class and a professed Socialist even before he identified himself with the TWA. But for Cipriani the patrician trade unionism must have held little appeal. With the introduction of elected members into the legislature in 1925, Cipriani emerged as the representative of the working-class in the island's politics. In the Report of the General Secretary of the TWA for 1925 (the only one which we have discovered so far), the Association is called the "Local Labour Party", and its affiliations are with the "Labour Party of England, the Labour and Socialist International, and the League of Nations at Geneva".

The subsequent activities of the Association leave little room for doubt as to its political character. The

1. This is the impression contained in references to the TWA in Craig, op. cit., pp. 68-9; Mitchell, op. cit., p. xxi; Labour in the West Indies; Parry & Sherlock, op. cit., p. 280.

section of the report entitled "The Industrial Side of Our Work" describes the TWA's concern for "the obtaining of compensation for injured workers, the seeking out of avenues of employment for workers, and generally, so far as in our power lies, to alleviate the conditions creative of the great and growing unemployment in the Colony."¹ Instances are reported in the Press of the period when the TWA intervened after labourers had gone on strike, and negotiated with the employers on their behalf. But in no instance did the Association call a strike itself, or concern itself with bargaining for workers as an alternative to strike action; its role was always that of mediator and advocate, and it appears to have performed these services irrespective of whether the men were members of the Association or not.

In the 1925 Legislative Council elections, Cipriani stood as the official candidate of the TWA, on a platform that called for a Workmen's Compensation Ordinance, Trade Union Legislation, an 8-hour day, the abolition of child labour, compulsory education, competitive examinations for entry into the Civil Service, Poor Law Relief, abolition of the Seditious Publications Ordinance, a law to deal with habitual idlers, and a Commission of enquiry into the cane-farming industry. His election campaign was conducted with the aid of slogans

1. TWA Report, 1925, p. 4.

such as "Trinidad for the Trinidadians", and "Votes for sons of the soil",¹ which had tremendous appeal, but which could be considered inconsistent coming from the representative of an organisation many of whose members were not strictly speaking Trinidadians, a representative who, moreover, had been quite satisfied with income and property qualifications in the franchise that excluded a substantial number of his followers. His declared aim was to bring Capital and Labour together, "a fair day's work for a fair day's wages". With no support from the Press which felt that he was too 'red',² he won a three-cornered contest by a majority of 1,647, gaining nearly three-quarters of the total poll in the Port-of-Spain constituency. He was re-elected to the Council in the 1928 elections and again in 1933. Sarran Telucksingh, an East Indian who sat as member for the sugar-growing constituency of Caroni from 1925 to 1946, joined the TWA in 1926 but left it after he disagreed with Cipriani over the Divorce Bill in 1931³; Cipriani had supported one of his rivals in the 1925 election⁴, and his association with the TWA may have been mainly a matter of convenience. Timothy Roodal, another prosperous East Indian who sat in the Council from 1928, also joined the TWA, became its

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1. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 16th September, 1924.
 2. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 20th January, 1925.
 3. Craig, op. cit., p. 86.
 4. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 16th September, 1924.

Vice-President, and on Cipriani's death was elected President of the Trinidad Labour Party into which the TWA had been transformed. But neither Telucksingh nor Roodal seems to have exercised much influence in the TWA at this time, and their support was valuable largely because they represented the East Indian community.

The activities of the TWA between 1925 and 1933 centred mainly around Cipriani, who was President and Treasurer from 1925 onwards. He soon found that, under the limited constitution which the colony enjoyed, his advocacy of working-class interests cast him constantly in the role of unofficial opposition. The predominance of official and nominated members in the Council made social reform measures unlikely to succeed unless the Government introduced them; the Trinidad Hansard for the period is replete with Government replies to questions on such measures by Cipriani that they were not considered necessary, that conditions did not permit of their introduction, that Government had no intention of introducing them at that time. In such a situation, Cipriani exploited to the full any opportunity to criticise, embarrass or expose the Government on issues which affected working-class interests. His contacts with the British Labour Party enabled him to use the tactics first employed by Alfred Richards of having questions asked in the House of Commons; he could then raise the same point in the Legislative Council. But for all this, he was achieving no tangible benefits for Labour through legislation. It was

obvious that mere representation was not enough - self-government must be the next objective.

In his demand for self-government Cipriani was speaking, not only for the working-class as organised in the TWA, but for most of the rest of the country as well. The falling prices for both cocoa and sugar were beginning to have their effect on economic life; wages had been reduced after 1921¹, the recommendations of the 1920 Wages Committee with regard to a minimum scale of wages had not been put into effect², the need for additional revenue had led Government to increase the customs duties on imported foodstuffs.³ As Cipriani's campaign for self-government gathered momentum after 1928, criticism of the Government's failure to deal with the worsening economic situation was mounting. The editor of the Port-of-Spain Gazette observed⁴:

It is impossible for any person ... to fail to be struck by the absolute indifference shown time after time alike to the best interests of the people and to the wishes of the people as expressed through the only media possible under existing conditions

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1. Handbook of Trinidad and Tobago, 1924, p.
 2. A Minimum Wage Ordinance was not passed until 1935, and even then it remained a dead letter. Cmd. 5641, (1938), p. 49.
 3. Handbook of Trinidad and Tobago, 1924, p.
 4. 23rd August, 1929.

To Cipriani, self-government was "a clear labour issue ... the answer to the present economic distress."¹ At one of the mass meetings held for the purpose of sending a petition to the Secretary of State on the issue, he gave his reason for rejecting the idea of trade union activity - he was not advising the workers to go on strike, he said because strikes might lead to disturbances, 'slaughter', and loss of lives.² The self-government campaign is conclusive proof of Cipriani's instinctive preference for politics, even when political activity was producing few results, rather than trade unionism. He obviously regarded the strike as a revolutionary weapon, and was insistent on using constitutional means to "overthrow the Government".³

In spite of his distrust and dislike of trade unionism, the demand for trade union legislation was one of the most consistent planks in his, and the TWA's, platform, and he kept on asking questions in the house in the hope of coaxing the Government into introducing a permissive law. This was one of the measures which the TWA had advocated at least as early as January 1922, when Headley was still President. The introduction of a Trade Unions Bill, however, was the result

1. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 23rd April, 1929.

2. idem.

3. idem.

of instructions contained in a circular dispatch from Lord Passfield, then Labour Secretary of State for the Colonies, in September 1930.¹ Only five months earlier, on April 25th, Government had stated in the Council, in reply to a question put by Cipriani, that it did not consider any trade union legislation necessary in Trinidad at the time.² The Bill introduced by the Government did not provide for peaceful picketing by unions, nor did it give them immunity for actions in tort. It was held that these two provisions, on which all parties were not fully agreed in the United Kingdom, should not be introduced into the Trinidad law. When the Government's reluctance to introduce any trade union legislation at all is remembered, its willingness to use this excuse to retain as much control as possible over any trade unions which might emerge is only too obvious. Immediately, and with the subsequent backing of the British T.U.C., Cipriani opposed the omission of these provisions from the Bill, though from his speech in the Council it appears that he was more concerned about securing the right to peaceful picketing than about immunity for the unions.³ When the Bill was finally passed without these provisions, he refused to take advantage of the

1. Cmd. 5641, p. 43.

2. Trinidad Hansard, 25th April, 1930.

3. Trinidad Hansard, 17th June, 1932.

newly-acquired legality of trade union organisation and transformed the TWA into the Trinidad Labour Party. In fact, it is difficult to imagine Cipriani in the role of trade union leader. The transformation was merely a change of name, the TWA having been concerned, since 1926, with activity that was mainly political.

Since his first election to that office in 1924, Cipriani had remained President of the TWA. Because of this, of his emergence as the outstanding leader of organised labour at this time, and of the attention which his role as the political champion of the working-class focussed upon his speeches and actions, the identification of the TWA with Cipriani the man was easily achieved. This has made it impossible to reconstruct what we know of the history of the TWA in the period except as a chronicle of Cipriani's activities, for that is the way in which the available surviving evidence is presented. But its Secretary's Report for 1925¹, does throw some light on the organisation of the TWA at this time. It consisted in that year of 16 branches, with a total membership of 16,526. Most of these branches were based on geographic divisions, centred on towns or villages; the Port-of-Spain Branch was the largest of these, as was to be expected, with over 5,500 members. None of the others, which were scattered over the

1. pp. 5-6.

Island, had as many as 400 members. There were also a number of cane-farmers societies affiliated to the TWA, and their 7,230 members constituted nearly half the total membership. The Port-of-Spain branch was sub-divided into occupational sections - waterfront workers, porters, engineers, domestic servants, ironworkers, shipwrights, quarrymen and carpenters, as well as a general womens' section. Railway workers all over the island were organised into one branch, numbering 1,200 members. The branches outside of Port-of-Spain were composed of all kinds of labourers in the same group.

This deliberate policy of grouping workers into occupational sections, which is more in accord with trade union organisation than with political activity, may have been a legacy of the earlier post-1918 period of the TWA. It is probably responsible for the impression gathered by the members of the Foster Commission which investigated the 1937 disturbances that, while the TWA was not itself a trade union, "it had two branches, the Railway Union and the Stevedores' Union, which appear to have operated as Trade Unions."¹ This impression is not supported by any evidence in the newspapers for the period.

As part of its self-government campaign the TWA launched on a programme of island-wide recruitment for membership, in order that it could claim to be representative of

1. Cmd. 5641, p. 48.

majority opinion in the colony; by 1930 its activities had been extended to Tobago. It grew from 16 branches with 16,526 members in 1925 to 72 branches and nearly 65,000 members in August, 1929.¹ By the early 1930's, it was claiming a membership of 120,000.²

Apart from securing the passage of a Workmen's Compensation Ordinance which made no provision for agricultural labourers,³ the political activity of the TWA in this period under Cipriani's leadership achieved little tangible improvement for the working-class. Its greater freedom in the Port-of-Spain City Council, of which Cipriani was a member continuously after 1926 (he was eight times Mayor during the years 1926-44), enabled it to achieve various reforms such as slum clearance and holidays for municipal labourers in the city; but even here the control exercised by the Colony Government over the city's finances appears to have been a handicap.⁴

As economic conditions in Trinidad grew worse in the 1930's, it was inevitable that the workers would turn from the TWA, and from political agitation, to more direct industrial action. In the working-class revolution of 1934-37, the TWA was to be bypassed completely.

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1. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 21st August, 1929.
 2. Lewis, op. cit.,
 3. No. 8 of 1926; cf. Cmd. 5641, pp. 49-50.
 4. See, e.g., Trinidad Guardian, 24th January, 1930.

Other Associations.

Though the BGLU and the TWA were the only permanent labour organisations of importance to emerge before 1933, there were a number of other associations formed in the period.

In June, 1920, in the midst of the general distress which preceded the widespread strikes in British Guiana, 40 city artisans - carpenters, boat-builders, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors and others - formed the British Guiana Amalgamated Trades Union, with aims similar to those of the BGLU, and a demand for a living wage.¹ The motivation behind this union was the feeling that a body composed mainly of unskilled labourers should not be allowed to represent skilled workmen - the BGLU had presented demands for the carpenters in 1919.² A feature of the Union's programme was the sponsoring of candidates to represent tradesmen in the Courts of Government. From the absence of any further mention of this association in the Press, it must be concluded that this move to establish an aristocracy of labour was unsuccessful.

In Trinidad, a Bakers' Association was formed during the two-day bakers' strike which preceded the dock strike in Port-of-Spain in November, 1919, but it was dissolved two days later once the strikers had won the increase which they

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1. Daily Chronicle, 12th June, 1920.
 2. Daily Chronicle, 21st September, 1919.

demanded.¹ There is also mention of a shop Clerks' Association in 1921², but no further evidence that it was ever active has been discovered.

In Jamaica, although no permanent organisation emerged in this period, there were a number of minor associations which came briefly into existence at this time. A wave of strikes similar to those already described in British Guiana and Trinidad swept the island in 1918; it began among labourers at the West Indies Chemical Works in Spanish Town early in January.³ In April workers employed by the Kingston - St. Andrew Corporation in the Fire Brigade and Sanitary Departments went on strike, after waiting for weeks for an increase to which the Corporation had agreed in principle, but for which it needed the approval of a reluctant Government; this strike was broken by employing new men.⁴ In mid-June, strikes for wage increases took place among all classes of labour on the Kingston docks; a conference of the shipping agents agreed upon an increase in the rate for dockers from 3d to 4d an hour.⁵ The refusal of the United Fruit Company to abide by this agreement led to minor incidents on the U.F. Co's wharf on the 18th, when a crowd of 600 men, women

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1. Trinidad Guardian, 12th-14th November, 1919.
 2. Port-of-Spain Gazette, 8th February, 1921.
 3. Gleaner, 5th January, 1918; 9th & 15th January, 1918.
 4. Gleaner, 6th April, 1918; 9th April, 1918.
 5. Gleaner, 18th June, 1918; 19th June, 1918.

and boys set upon men who had accepted work from the Company at the old rates. The strike spread to other fields of employment in Kingston, railway workers, banana carriers and general labourers all making demands. By July, the strike fever had spread to the country districts, labourers on sugar and banana estates and the Public Works Department going on strike in the various parishes, often with incidents of violence.¹ The situation appears never to have acquired the serious character which marked the strikes of 1919 in Trinidad.

For this credit is due to the employers, many of whom acceded to demands for wage increases readily, and to the sympathetic attitude of the new Governor, Sir Leslie Probyn. As in the other territories, the war had led to a substantial increase in the cost-of-living, estimated by the Gleaner to be double in 1918 what it was in 1913.² The effects of this rise were to be seen in the rags, hunger and obvious poverty which were becoming familiar sights in Kingston.³ It appears that in some instances employers had raised wages voluntarily during 1916⁴; but the Government's refusal to agree to an increase for the municipal workers was part of its general

1. Gleaner, passim, June & July 1918.

2. Gleaner, 20th June, 1918.

3. idem.

4. Olivier to Editor, Gleaner, 13th September, 1916.

policy towards wages. A motion by F.R. Evans in the Legislature calling on Government to increase the wages of labourers in its employ was withdrawn after opposition from the official element in the Council, during which the Director of Public Works claimed that the rates paid in Jamaica (1/10 - 2/9 per day) were higher than in Canada.¹ After the strike of municipal workers mentioned above, a Bill was introduced to forbid strikes in the fire or health departments of the Parochial or Municipal services.² With the arrival of Sir Leslie Probyn in June, Government adopted a more realistic attitude towards wage demands. In fact, the Governor's opening speech, it was rumoured in many parts of the country, had advocated a wage of 'a dollar a day' for labour, this being the rate currently paid in Central America.³

Three trade unions appear on the scene at this time. The Longshoremen's Union No. 1 of the Jamaica Federation of Labour was formed in January 1918 by A. Bain-Alves, its first President, "who had been active in making representations on behalf of the Machado Tobacco Company employees" previous to its formation.⁴ It would seem, from the name of this Union,

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1. Gleaner, 7th March, 1918.
 2. Gleaner, 20th April, 1918.
 3. cf. Gleaner, 21st June, 1918.
 4. Hart, op. cit., p. 25.

that Alves' intention was to organise various groups of labour in the Island into some kind of Federation. Addressing a meeting of banana carriers and coal heavers during the strikes, after he had led a delegation to the United Fruit Company on their behalf, he exhorted them to organise themselves in a "Banana Carriers and Coal Heavers Union" and to federate with the Longshoremen.¹ At that same meeting he announced the existence of a Cigar Makers' Union, which was probably the outcome of his association with the employees of the Tobacco Company; but no other reference to this union has been found. The Longshoremen's Union continued in existence for two or three years, and Hart claims that it "exerted considerable influence spreading to several outports."²

In existence in 1918 too was the Montego Bay Labourers' Benevolent Union, which was sufficiently well established in January 1918 to have a branch functioning in Port Maria and putting forward a programme of social, economic, agrarian and fiscal reform as a remedy for the social ills of the island.³ The Montego Bay section had some 80 members, half of them artisans, the others agricultural labourers and boatmen.⁴ In February the Union, in a circular sent to employers of labour

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1. Gleaner, 27th June, 1918.
 2. Hart, idem.
 3. Gleaner, 16th January, 1918.
 4. Gleaner, 17th April, 1918.

in the district, made demands for increases on the rate of 1/6 per day paid to labourers; the circular invited employers to consider whether 1/6 was a fair wage, and whether it ought not to be increased in view of the abnormally high cost of living.¹ A meeting held by the employers at the Montego Bay Court House on April 12th, and attended by a number of artisans, ended abruptly when the workers expressed dissatisfaction with the employers' attitude to their claims.² In June it was announced that the Montego Bay employers had agreed to increase the rate of wages, and this instance of peaceful negotiation between workers and employers was held up by the Press as an example to be emulated.³

In September 1919 workers on the Jamaica Government Railway formed the Workmen's Co-operative Association after a successful four-week strike during which they had won considerable public support.⁴ The union failed to attract workers in other fields of employment. "Within a year the Government had transferred some of the leaders to outstations and squeezed others out of the service, and the Union was for all practical purposes destroyed."⁵ The railway workers continued to show dissatisfaction, however, and in 1923 they won

1. Gleaner, 16th April, 1918.

2. idem.

3. Gleaner, 11th & 20th June, 1918.

4. Gleaner, 18th Sept., 1919; Hart, op. cit., pp. 25-6.

5. Hart, idem.

increases and improved conditions after another strike which lasted three weeks. In 1919 a second waterfront union, the Longshoremen's Union No. 2 of the Jamaica Federation of Labour came into existence, but it seems to have been shortlived.¹ The Garvey movement does not appear to have had the same impact on labour organisation in Jamaica as it had in British Guiana and Trinidad. This may be due to the fact that Garveyism did not reach its peak in Jamaica until 1929; the close association of Garvey himself with the movement in Jamaica was probably responsible as well, since Garvey was not particularly concerned with trade union activity.

As economic conditions grew worse in the late 1920's and the effects of the Great Depression began to be felt, new associations began to arise for the purpose of organising labour. These were the fore-runners of the unions of the 1930's, and they grew out of the same economic conditions as the later unions. To this group belong the Trinidad and Tobago Trade Union Centre and the Jamaica Trades and Labour Union. Neither of these survived for very long. The former was a general union formed in 1929 which is said to have had some 2,000 members in 1930.² The latter was organised in the same year with

1. idem; Trade Unionism in Jamaica, 1918-46.

2. Trinidad Guardian, 17th January, 1930; Lewis, op. cit.

encouragement from two American unions, and had branches in several parts of Jamaica, especially in the banana-growing areas; it ceased to function, however, after a few months.¹

More political than economic was the motivation behind the British Guiana Workers' League, which grew out of two informal conferences called by A.A. Thorne, who had dissociated himself from the BGLU in 1920. The occasion of these conferences was the election of the second Labour Government in Britain in 1929; the purpose, to formulate some sort of planned Labour programme for British Guiana for transmission to the BLP with which several people had maintained contact since 1923. After the second of these conferences the Workers' League was formed, though there were few workers in the group.² Its Council was a representative selection of radical Negro opinion - 2 doctors, 6 clergymen, a number of schoolmasters, and 3 ladies. Critchlow seems to have been the only working-class member of the Council. The League went through the usual formula of holding public meetings to which all workers, 'professional and unprofessional, skilled and unskilled' were invited.³ It is not clear what specific plans the League had, or how

1. Hart, op. cit., p. 26; Padmore, Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers, p. 108.

2. Daily Argosy, 21st August, 1929.

3. Daily Argosy, 1st September, 1931.

close a relationship it established with the BLP. It was conceived as a political organ, not in competition to the BGLU. But by 1931 its aims had changed, and in that year it was registered as a trade union.

CHAPTER V

THE WORKING-CLASS REVOLUTION.

The disturbances which took place in the British Caribbean territories in the years 1934-39 have been heralded as the crucible out of which Labour Movements in the area were born.¹ The evidence of widespread dissatisfaction which they revealed, the concurrence of unrest in almost every territory in the area, the publicity given to them in the United Kingdom, the need for new lines of policy in the area to which they drew attention and the outlining of these new policies in the Moyne and Foster Commissions and in the Orde-Brown Report on Labour Conditions which were a direct consequence of these disturbances, all these factors have helped to focus attention on this narrow span of six years. The fact that official acceptance of trade unionism and most of the unions themselves date from these years, and that very little is known or remembered, even in Labour circles, of events which occurred before 1934 makes it all the more convenient to hold that the 1930's gave birth to organised labour in the area.

Quibbling about the exact starting-point of social movements is usually a pointless and unproductive exercise. There are grounds, however, for regarding the entire period

1. See, e.g., Lewis, op. cit.; his pamphlet, which deals with these years, is sub-titled "The Birth of a Workers' Movement."

1918-39 as one of gestation in the history of organised labour in the three territories with which we are concerned. Certainly the difference between the unrest of 1918-19 and that of 1934-39 is one of extent rather than of character. They stemmed from essentially the same social and economic conditions, and manifestations of discontent took the same form - waves of strikes among unorganised or recently organised workers, most of whom struck first and made their demands afterwards. The disturbances of 1934-39 were the result of a process of reaction by workers to conditions in the area which had been going on since World War I; they were not the expression of a sudden awareness that all was not right in the West Indian's world. The disturbances at the end of World War I had occurred during a period of boom in the economy, when it was possible to grant wage increases. The failure of the workers' associations which emerged at this favourable moment to establish themselves securely may be ascribed to a variety of causes. Of these, suppressive action by Governments fearful of the revolutionary racial undertones of existing organisations had already been mentioned in Chapter IV. Of considerable importance too, is the absence of any previous tradition of craft unionism, which meant that the knowledge and example of workers organising to promote their interests had to be imported. The predominantly agricultural character of the working-class and the high incidence of casual labour in the industry are factors also to be considered

in a period which, after the 1920-21 peak years, was one of continuous slump that reached its nadir in the mid-1930's.

It is more than likely that the disturbances of 1934-39 would have been less serious had adequate and effective constitutional machinery existed through which working-class discontent could be given expression. It is important to stress the word 'effective' because some sort of machinery did exist. In theory, workers could voice their discontent through representatives in the legislatures (provided they could find a representative who satisfied the property and income qualifications for membership); but the experience of Cipriani in Trinidad shows how ineffective political agitation was for improving the workers' lot. They could also form trade unions, for by 1935 Trade Union Laws, which recognised unions as legal, were in existence in all three territories.

Jamaica was the first of the three territories to legalise trade unionism, the law being passed in 1919 on the initiative of J.A.G. Smith who, as leading Negro lawyer and a member of the Legislature, had negotiated on behalf of some of the strikers in Kingston in the previous year.¹ The Ordinance² did not protect unions from actions for damages, nor did it recognise the legality of peaceful picketing; in

1. Gleaner, June-July, 1918, passim.

2. Law 37 of 1919.

fact, the former provision was omitted specifically from the law at the instance of the Government.¹ In British Guiana the BGLU had been in existence for more than two years before its position was safeguarded by legislation which legalised trade unions.² Here, too, the right of peaceful picketing was not granted, though unions were to be immune from tortious actions. Legal existence was not accorded to unions in Trinidad until 1932, neither provision being included in the Ordinance.³ In general, the laws were based on the United Kingdom Trade Union Acts of 1871, 1876 and 1913, the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 and, in the case of Trinidad, the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Acts of 1927.

The right of workers to combine in trade unions was, in fact, insufficient without the establishment of machinery for the settlement of disputes between employer and employees. In Trinidad one of the measures passed in the Legislature after the unrest at the end of 1919 was an ordinance⁴ providing for the establishment of a standing Industrial Court "whose duty it shall be to settle any industrial dispute which may be referred to it for settlement, and also to advise

1. cf. Cmd. 6607, p. 198.

2. See above p. 163.

3. See above p. 217.

4. No. 26 of 1920.

the Governor on any industrial or economic question which he may refer to it for advice." The court was to consist of representatives of workers and employers and of independent members under a President, all appointed by the Governor. On this point the Forster Commission reports¹:

We understand that shortly after the passing of this Ordinance a President was in fact appointed. No Court was ever established, however; the appointed President never functioned; and the Ordinance has remained inoperative to the present day. It is clear to us that at no time has the Industrial Court Ordinance been regarded as a serious factor in the Colony's industrial system.

No similar provision existed either in British Guiana or in Jamaica. In the absence of any legal provision for the settlement of disputes, labour relations were conducted on the basis of whatever form of formal negotiation was agreed upon by both sides in any particular dispute. As early as 1906 it had been suggested in British Guiana that an Arbitration Board with power to bind both employers and workers to agreements for a fixed period of time should be instituted.² Expedients adopted after 1918 included a 'Labourers' Industrial Board' of 3 employers' and 3 union representatives in

1. Cmd. 5641, p. 48.
2. Above, pp. 134-5.

British Guiana¹, a Conciliation Board of 2 workers' and 2 employers' representatives along with 2 nominees of the Governor in Trinidad², and an Industrial Arbitration Tribunal (composition unspecified), to which workers could bring their grievances in Jamaica³. But these were all called into existence after a dispute had arisen; no attempt was made to provide machinery for the peaceful settlement of differences before they reached the point of an actual breach. And only in the case of the BGLU's agreement with the merchants in 1919-20 was provision made for revision after a certain period. In the absence of any established machinery for the airing of grievances, it must have appeared to unorganised labourers that going on strike was the safest and most logical way of ensuring a hearing for their claims, and this had the further advantage of protecting individual spokesmen from the victimisation and dismissal which were likely to be their lot if negotiations were begun before the strike was called.

While, with the exception of the few instances discussed in previous pages, organisations of workers did not

1. Above, p. 157.

2. Above, p. 200.

3. Gleaner, 26th & 27th June, 1918. It is not clear that this Tribunal ever came into existence; the Governor's announcement that he intended to set one up is all that is recorded.

exist and demands for wage increases or improved conditions were largely the result of ad hoc combination by groups of labourers, especially in the field of agricultural labour, planters and merchants were well organised in all three territories, both having trade associations with a long history and a high degree of efficiency. The Moyne Commission came to the conclusion that while no formal agreement existed among planters for fixing the rate of wages, informal consultation achieved the same end.¹ In the case of the merchants, it emerges quite clearly from their relations with the BGLU and TWA that the Chamber of Commerce both in Georgetown and in Port-of-Spain acted as an employers' association; indeed the settlement by arbitration of disputes arising in business enterprises was one of the acknowledged objects of the Trinidad Chamber.² As a result, "collective bargaining in the British sense has been virtually an impossibility, and wage rates have followed standards laid down by employers alone,"³ except in those few fields of employment, such as dock labour, where the workers had succeeded in achieving some improvement of conditions through trade union action.

It is usual to lay all the blame for the lack of

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 197.

2. Handbook of Trinidad and Tobago, 1924, p. 177.

3. Cmd. 6607, *ibid.*

communication between workers and employers on the planter-merchant groups in the British Caribbean. To do this is to ignore the fact that each Colony Government was one of the largest, and in many cases the largest, single employer of labour in its territory, and that no greater facilities obtained for the expression of workers' grievances among manual employees of the Government than on sugar estates or on the docks. Certainly the various Governments could have given a lead to other employers by establishing, by legislation or in practice, recognisable machinery which would encourage an atmosphere of friendly labour relations. "One of the results of the exaggerated particularism of West Indian administration is a lack of any common labour policy," wrote Sir Samuel Hoare in 1921.¹ Had he said "any common positive labour policy" we might agree with him. For the negative policy of Governments in the area towards labour problems was, in essence, a policy held in common. All governments made it a practice not to interfere in labour disputes except to preserve law and order. Outside of that, the degree and nature of intervention depended upon individual Governors; the disputes discussed in the previous pages of this study make this clear. They make clear, too, the fact that in numerous instances other employers were willing to follow the

1. "The Problem of Crown Colony Government in the Caribbean", in The Nineteenth Century, April, 1921.

Governor's lead or to accept his opinion, expressed or implied, with regard to claims for wages. It is likely that the administration, which found itself at one with planters and merchants on so many social and political matters, never realised that it, too, was an important employer of labour. An awareness of its own position should surely have resulted in a more constructive attitude to labour than the evidence of the period 1918-1935 reveals.

The Background of Discontent.

Indications of underlying unrest in the British Caribbean can be observed long before 1934; even apart from the big stoppages which took place in all three territories in 1917-20, and in 1924 (in British Guiana), countless minor strikes in various fields of employment occurred throughout the 1920's and the early 1930's. Many of these involved no more than a handful of workers on an estate or in a local 'gang' employed by the Public Works Departments. The frequency with which reports of such strikes reached the newspapers - and we can safely assume that not all of them were reported - precludes their dismissal as merely trivial and insignificant incidents. They form a pattern, indicative of general dissatisfaction with social and economic conditions which were growing steadily worse. That serious and violent outbursts occurred in 1934 and after is no surprise, when viewed in the perspective of

time; rather, what is surprising is that the storm was delayed for so long.

"Discontent has serious grounds in the unsound basis of West Indian society," Macmillan warned in 1936.¹ This view was echoed by the Forster Commission on the Trinidad disturbances²:

... Our investigations have led us to the conclusion that the true causes of the disturbances had such wide ramifications throughout the social structure of the Colony as to make it essential for us to treat our subject on a comprehensive basis.

The Moyne Commission regarded the disturbances as "a symptom of which the principal causes are low earnings and irregular employment," and quoted with approval the admission made in the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for the Colonies that "these feelings of unrest are a protest against the economic distress of the Colonies themselves, a protest against some of the consequences of that economic distress: uncertainty of employment, low rates of wages, bad housing conditions in many cases, and so on."³

Economic distress was certainly the factor which

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1. W.M. Macmillan, Warning From The West Indies, (1936), p. 59.
 2. Cmd. 5641, p. 7.
 3. Cmd. 6607, p. 197.

triggered off the working-class revolution. The fall in the price of sugar by $\frac{2}{3}$ between 1923 and 1929¹ was not the only catastrophe which beset agriculture in the area; most other crops were affected as well, bananas and cocoa being particularly hard hit. The decreased demand for agricultural labour which resulted affected the unemployment and underemployment situation in country and city. In both it meant an increase in the irregularity of employment - in many parts of the country districts this was a deliberate expedient adopted to alleviate unemployment by spreading the work available as widely as possible; in the cities the already large casual labour force was swollen by migrant labour from the agricultural areas in search of opportunities for employment. At the low level of wages then prevailing, workers could not suffer a reduction of incomes, at a time when the purchasing power of money was decreasing, without serious repercussions.

In both British Guiana and Trinidad there had been signs and reports of increasing unemployment since the late 1920's, but Jamaica was the worst hit territory. The size of its working population was increased by young school-leavers entering the labour market at an estimated rate of 20,000 a year², and by migrants returning from Cuba and Central America.

1. See above, pp. 36-37.

2. Memo on Medical and Housing Conditions, D.M.S., Jamaica, (1936).

Before 1926, the number of recorded departures from the island had usually exceeded the number of labourers returning; in the period 1926-1939, however, only 24,492 labourers left Jamaica while 57,746 returned, a net addition of 33,254 to the labour force.¹ This meant more than just an increase in the number of job-seekers in the island; it represented a serious decline in the spending power of the working-class which had been augmented handsomely by remittances from workers abroad. A commission which investigated the unemployment situation in 1936 found that out of a population of 90,000 in Kingston, 5,000 were unemployed, two in every five of these being countrymen in search of work.² Unemployment had increased considerably since 1930, the greatest hardship being felt by artisans and "those educated and trained to become clerks, shop assistants, etc.," but the high incidence of casual labour, especially among wharf labourers, made the position appear worse than it actually was.³ That underemployment was itself a condition of great distress, the Commissioners obviously did not appreciate. Combined with the low rate of wages, it meant that in 1935 the average income of 92% of the working population fell below 25/-

1. Based on figures in Proudfoot, op. cit., p. 404, which are taken from L.G. Hopkins, Migration of Jamaican Labour, 1883 to 1944 (Unpublished MS).

2. Report of Commission on the Incidence of Unemployment, Jamaica, 1936.

3. idem.

a week, 71% receiving 14/- a week or less on the average¹. The average size of the working-class family which enjoyed these incomes was 5, there being 1½ wage earners to each family.²

The conditions in which labourers lived and worked were only in part due to the prevailing economic situation however. Unemployment and underemployment were, as we have seen, permanent features of the labour market in good times as well as in bad, and were to some extent regarded as necessary to ensure an adequate supply of estate labour in those few months of the year when the crop was being harvested. Apart from pious pronouncements, in British Guiana for example, that the high incidence of casual labour in the city was the result of workers' refusal to move to areas where labour was required, nothing was done to facilitate this mobility which was felt to be necessary. Jamaica's problem was obscured for long by the facilities which existed for migration, and by its well-established peasantry. In Trinidad, where internal communications were good, the oil employers whose rates and conditions of labour were the best in the island, never suffered from a shortage of labour. A situation of increasing unemployment was allowed to develop from 1924 onwards without any attempts being made to deal constructively with it - it was not until the 1930's that any investigation into the employment situation was undertaken

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1. Report of the Nutrition Committee, Jamaica, 1936-7, p. 4.
 2. Memo on Medical and Housing Conditions, Jamaica.

in any territory. Low wages and long hours had always been the rule throughout the area, whatever the economic climate; it was only when workers combined to demand increases or disorders occurred which had obvious economic motives that anything was done about raising the rate of wages.

These were symptoms of an attitude to labour on the part of employers which fitted in with the whole social pattern, and to which may be ascribed particularly the acceptance of housing conditions both on estates and in towns. This attitude, in brief, conceded the worker's right to exist at his current miserable level of living without admitting his claim to aspire to an overall improvement of his lot. Hence demands for wage increases could be granted, economic conditions permitting, providing labourers could show that the cost of living had risen; but likewise, when prices fell cuts must be imposed. No evidence has been discovered, for example, of any sugar employer taking steps in the 1917-1921 period of prosperity to improve the living conditions of resident labour by providing better housing, water or sanitary facilities. In Trinidad, it was noted in 1937 that while some employers had shown concern for the material well-being of their workers,¹:

others, particularly some of those engaged in the sugar industry, appear to have displayed a lack of regard for the well-being of their labour which has clearly been such as to

1. Cmd. 5641, pp. 75-76.

create an underlying current of resentment. In no direction is this lack of regard more apparent than in the deplorable conditions in which a large number of the labourers and their families are housed.

Housing indeed was the most obvious feature indicative of the generally low standard of living which prevailed. The Moyne Commission reported¹, after personal investigation by its members, that "in both town and country the present housing of the large majority of the working people in the West Indian Colonies leaves much to be desired; in many places it is deplorable ..." Actual descriptions provided by the Moyne Commission Report, by Orde Browne, by the Forster Commission, and by non-official sources² all emphasise the inadequacy of structure, the squalor, lack of sanitation, privacy or comfort, and the overcrowding which were universal. The tradition of housing workers in barracks or ranges which persisted through the indenture period from slave days was blamed for the poor standard of agricultural housing.³ In towns, slum tenements had grown up as the urban population grew, and many of these reproduced the main features of estate ranges - a large number of families living in single rooms, all using one

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 174.

2. e.g. A. Calder-Marshall, Glory Dead, (1939), pp. 98-121.

3. Cmd. 5641, p. 36.

common yard, with common outdoor toilet and water facilities. Housing in towns, moreover, was affected by high rents and unscrupulous landlords. But housing was no worse than other social conditions: inadequate water supplies, the high incidence of diseases such as malaria, hookworm and tuberculosis, diet deficiencies which affected the capacity to labour, poor health and educational services. Nor did the working conditions of the majority of the population give cause for anything but discontent, even apart from low wages and long hours. Workers out of doors had to brave both the tropic rain and the tropic sun; many estate labourers in British Guiana had to work partly submerged in water. The litany of bad conditions could be continued indefinitely. The inadequate attention which most employers paid to these questions was emphasised by the efforts of individual estates or of some non-agricultural firms such as the bauxite company in British Guiana and the asphalt company in Trinidad to improve working and living conditions for labourers in their employ.¹

It was natural to blame the system of government, and those who administered it, for economic and social misery, and voices were not wanting to suggest that more power in the hands of locally elected representatives was the best hope for alleviating economic distress. One of Cipriani's chief arguments for self-government was the sterility of a system of government

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 176.

which accorded to elected representatives of the people nothing but nuisance value, and the potential development which, in the hands of a government with the people's interests at heart, Trinidad's resources could provide.¹ By 1935 the demand for self-government, united with a desire for federation, was being voiced, in major or minor keys, throughout the area, and voiced by the only leaders who could claim to represent the people. It is difficult to assess the degree of public support which these demands could claim. As long ago as 1922, Wood had played down the popularity of the Representative Government Movement then sweeping the area in these terms²:

With an ignorant and uneducated population, it is comparatively simple for good organisers to arrange effective mass meetings to advance a cause, with regard to which not one person in twenty, if cross-examined as to what it was all about, would be able to give an intelligent reply.

The Forster Commission felt that it was labourers' working and living conditions which underlay the unrest in Trinidad, and that the question of self-government did not enter into the situation.³ The same point of view was expressed in an

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1. See e.g., Port-of-Spain Gazette, 1929, passim.
 2. Cmd. 1679, p. 6.
 3. Cmd. 5641, p. 79.

article in The Times¹:

... the demand for constitutional reform is of no great importance. There is an adolescent quality about it. The young man wants his latch-key and wants it so badly that he does not think of the equipment of the house to which it gives access. For this reason the political claims of the educated classes are not endorsed by the bulk of the labouring population.

This suggestion that the working-class discontent had no political undertones is not borne out by other contemporary accounts, nor by the keen political role which Labour Movements have played since. Macmillan² had found that "even in Jamaica, on the surface a strikingly contented community, the political opposition manifestly owes its strength and persistence to an undercurrent of discontent among poor wage-earners, both small-holders and landless." The Moyne Commission found "a substantial body of public opinion" convinced of the need for greater participation by the people in the business of government, and felt that claims for constitutional reform reflected "a genuine sentiment ... a growing political consciousness"³

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1. "The Free West Indies - From Slavery to Riot," 25th May, 1938.
 2. op. cit., p. 107.
 3. Cmd. 6607, p. 373.

The essential connection between working-class discontent and the crown colony system has been expressed most perceptively by an American writer on the Caribbean¹:

Dependence and backwardness are not synonymous, but they frequently go hand in hand ... Blaming 'the government' for all kinds of difficulties is by no means confined to the Caribbean colonies. What distinguishes the colonies from independent countries is that 'the government' is not their own, or at least not wholly their own. The almost universal desire in the Caribbean for greater autonomy ... is based on a psychological need for respect, as urgent as the economic needs

Labour dislike of the political system was reinforced by the identification of the colonial administration with the employer interests which it facilitated. This identification began on the level of race, colour, and social contacts, and its extension into politics was logical enough. The expatriate character of the colonial official, the social system in the area which made him automatically one of the white elite, created a gulf between governors and governed and paved the way for that "union between government and vested interests" which made the administration "indistinguishable in outlook from the local gentry."² The instinctive opposition to

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1. A.B. Fox, Freedom and Welfare in the Caribbean, (1949), pp. 5-10.
 2. The West Indies Today, (1938), pp. 34-5; cf Cmd. 6607, p. 57.

Government by elected representatives of the people, "vehement and continual critics," which the Moyne Commission deplored¹ had its roots in the social conditions which reserved the plums of high office for a colour elite as much as in the political system which preserved these criteria of privilege. The record of successive administrations in dealing with labour questions and labour aspirations since the beginning of the 20th Century had done little to erase the impression that Governments were in general hostile to labourers' interests and apathetic about their welfare.

The political content of the protests of the 1930's owed a great deal of their inspiration to the new pride in their race and colour which the Garvey movement had imparted to the Negro working-class.² There was abundant evidence that racial feeling was on the increase in the area. "Where people of one colour are predominant among employers and the workers are found almost wholly from those of another colour, it is perhaps inevitable in times of labour troubles that racial and economic issues should be confused," says the Moyne Report.³ But economic issues in the British Caribbean in the 1930's could not be separated from racial issues. They were part of the same social pattern. Much of the justification

1. Cmd. 6607, pp. 56-57.

2. Eric Williams, The Negro in the Caribbean, (1942), pp. 57-58.

3. Cmd. 6607, p. 59.

for low wages and abominable conditions of labour was phrased in terms of race and colour, not in terms of economic expediency. Planters, merchants and officials might not go so far as to say with Sir William Coaker¹:

The negro is not a capable workman ... He is mentally defective ... is still careless about his residence. A hut or anything enclosed to protect the inmates from the sun will suffice for a home

But most of them would have agreed that the needs and desires of labourers in the area were low because of the fact that they were Negro or East Indian workers, and so did not have the same claims to a higher level of living which white workers would have had. Instances of dissatisfaction due to racial questions - the employment of white South Africans in the Trinidad oil industry², the feeling widespread in the area that the Ethiopian War was another example of race prejudice in that the League of Nations was unwilling to risk war over a black state, criticism of appointments in the public services - are numerous enough in the 1930's for us to conclude that race and colour played their part in contributing to the general background of discontent.

Because the disturbances of the 1930's had their origin, not only in economic grievances among the working-class, but in the social and political conditions existing in the area

1. Sketches of Jamaica, (1928), pp. 2-25.

2. cf Cmd. 5641, pp. 78-79.

at the time, they assumed the character not of mere disorderly strikes, but of a widespread social revolution. The reforms to which they gave rise justify this view.

Riots, Reactions and Reforms.

The series of disturbances which mark the working-class revolution in the British Caribbean began in May 1934 and erupted intermittently until February 1939. The main events in our three territories were as follows:

- May - July, 1934 Sugar workers strike in Trinidad.
- February, 1935 Oil workers strike and hunger march, Trinidad.
- May, 1935 Wharf labourers strike, Falmouth, Jamaica.
- September - October, 1935 Sugar workers strike in British Guiana.
- June, 1937 Oil workers strike and general disturbances, Trinidad.
- May, 1938 Sugar workers strike, Frome, Jamaica.
- May - June, 1938 Dock workers strike and general disturbances, Jamaica.
- February, 1939 Sugar workers strike, Leonora, British Guiana.

Besides, there were serious disturbances among sugar workers in St. Kitts in 1935, coal haulers in St. Lucia in 1935 and sugar workers in 1937, in St. Vincent in 1935 and in Barbados in 1937. All but three of these were accompanied by disorders serious enough to lead to the appointment of local commissioners of enquiry; only one, the 1937 disturbances in Trinidad, led to

a commission of investigation from the United Kingdom.¹ But the cumulative effect of them all was enormous, and their result was the West India Royal Commission of 1938-39 (the Moyne Commission), "to investigate social and economic conditions ... and matters connected therewith, and to make recommendations."²

These disturbances followed the usual pattern which we have seen for earlier years - an unorganised strike in one spot soon spreading to other estates or to workers in other fields of employment, and eventually getting out of hand. This pattern is in itself indicative of the extent of the discontent from which the riots stemmed. Not all of them began with strikes, however. The St. Vincent riots of 1935 were the result of the Government's insistence on legislating for an increase in customs duties (which would raise the cost of food and clothing) at a time of severe economic distress, in the face of universal disapproval.³ The Barbados riots were the result of Government's action in deporting to Trinidad Clement Payne, who had been organising labourers in the island since March 1937 (he had been associated with Uriah Butler in Trinidad before then), and whose deportation could be justified

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1. Cmd. 5641, (Forster Commission).
 2. Cmd. 6607, p. xiii.
 3. cf Lewis, op. cit.; Press censorship made the exact details of this disturbance difficult to obtain, as no official report was published.

only by a legal technicality.

It is possible to denote two distinct phases in this series of disturbances, divided by the year 1936. The earlier manifestations were mainly peaceful; only in the case of the sugar strikes in 1934 in Trinidad was there any serious disorder in our three territories. There was a more alarming situation in the smaller territories in this phase, probably because in every case the Government tried to deal with the situation by 'gunboat diplomacy' - calling out the special police, and cabling for warships to preserve order. With the exception of the 1937 episode in Barbados which is to some extent linked with events in Trinidad, it is in the three largest territories that the serious outbreaks occurred after 1936. In British Guiana, the Leonora disturbances took place after the Moyne Commission had been appointed, in the very month in which the Commissioners visited the colony. The more serious character of the later events appear to have been the result of increasing exasperation on the part of the people. In spite of strict press censorship, too, reports of happenings in other parts of the area, as well as of the labour unrest in the U.S.A. and in Europe must have had their effect in convincing workers in each territory that theirs was not a lone protest.

In the course of maintaining law and order which the Colonial Governments regarded as their first duty at this time,

46 people were killed and more than 400 injured.¹ An unestimated number were arrested, prosecuted or imprisoned as a result. The attitude of individual Governments varied, depending to a large extent on the point of view of the Governor and the balance of social forces in the territory. The earlier strikes in the smaller islands, for example, were met by a show of force which in many instances could be regarded as unwarranted. By contrast, the attitude of Government both in Trinidad and in Jamaica appears to have been tolerant and, in the case of Trinidad, extremely sympathetic to the strikers, until disorders occurred. It is true, though, that tactless police action on occasion may have precipitated violence in a dangerous situation - for example, the attempt to arrest Uriah Butler in Trinidad while he was actually addressing a crowded meeting, which transformed the oilfield strike into a riot.² It also served to strengthen labour resolve, by making martyrs of individual leaders; this was the case both with Butler in Trinidad and with Bustamante who was arrested during the dockers strike in Jamaica.³

The prevailing attitude of the officials, and of a large proportion of the upper- and middle-classes to the riots was one of disapproval. This disapproval was aimed, not only

1. Figures from Lewis, op. cit.

2. See Cmd. 5641, pp. 58-62.

3. Cf. W.J. Makin, Caribbean Nights (1939), p. 69.

at the disorders, but also at the working-class activity and at the organisations which were springing up at this time. Trade unionism in the area has had to overcome an extreme degree of social prejudice, which is not altogether the result of economic interest. The character of unrest which the absence of conciliation machinery had forced upon working-class activity made anything concerned with labour organisation 'not quite respectable'. (This attitude, which was largely a middle-class attitude, also applied to politics to a lesser extent.) Middle-class people concerned with conformity and respectability were perturbed by the police surveillance and the brand of 'agitator' which was the lot of those concerned with organising workers. Police reported what was said at public political meetings - even in the 1956 pre-election meetings in Trinidad the police shorthand writer was a familiar figure - informers, it was said, were widely used, workers' leaders were often arrested on trivial charges, or else tried for "sedition" and "causing disaffection among the population". The sort of police action to which working-class political activity was subject at this time is illustrated by Calder-Marshall's description of the prohibiting of a meeting held by the Negro Welfare and Cultural Association in Trinidad in protest against the Shop Hours' Bill in 1938.¹ There was in existence, too, among some sections of the upper-class, the feeling best

1. op. cit., pp. 205-210.

expressed by Makin's 'old white resident' of Jamaica who likened the 1938 disturbances there to the Morant Bay rebellion¹: "It's the only way to deal with these fellows. Shoot 'em down." But some of this disapproval was offset by the number of prominent citizens who, after the first moments of shock at the thought that the disturbances should have occurred, came forward to mediate, to advise the workers, and in some cases even to head the new labour organisations which emerged from the turmoil.

Apart from local attempts to provide palliatives such as unemployment relief works and land settlement schemes, the main reaction to the disturbances of 1934-38, and the principal reforms which they brought about, lay in the appointment and recommendations of the Moyne Commission. The idea of a Commission was not universally welcomed. "The people of the West Indies had asked for bread; they received a Royal Commission," parodied Makin.² The reason for the lack of enthusiasm in many quarters was that the Commission was intended to "'investigate' what had been 'investigated' at least a score of times before, during the past quarter of a century."³ As the Man Power Citizen's Association, a trade union cum political

1. Makin, op. cit., p. 53; cf. Calder-Marshall, op. cit., p. 55.

2. op. cit., p. 89.

3. T.P. Achong, Mayor's Annual Report, 1942-3, (1944), p. 64 n.

party founded in British Guiana in 1936 observed in its official brochure¹:

Hitherto our experiences with Commissions have not been very happy We found that their labours were nearly in vain, their recommendations were pigeon-holed and a waste of time, energy and money.

The Commission was appointed in August 1938 and its members visited every territory in the British Caribbean between November 1938 and March 16th 1939. Its report², dated December 21st 1939, was not published until 1945; its recommendations, however, were published in 1939.

The Commissioners recommended the setting-up of a West Indian Welfare Fund under a Comptroller independent of the Colonial Governments, "to finance schemes for the general improvement of education, the health services, housing and slum clearance, the creation of labour departments, the provision of social welfare facilities, and land settlement, apart from the cost of purchase of land."³ They made no concrete recommendations of economic policy; they drew attention to the need for increasing "home production of essential foodstuffs on a basis of mixed farming", in view of the rapidly increasing population,

1. MPCA, Foundation Souvenir, 1936-9, p. 3.

2. Cmd. 6607.

3. ibid, p. 428.

and recommended increased preferential assistance for the sugar industry and an increase in the basic export quota. Local industries were to be fostered by "quantitative restriction of imports coupled with safeguards for the consumer against an undue increase of price."¹ In land settlement, equal attention should be paid to improving the husbandry of small-holders and to providing additional lands for their sons.² In the field of politics and administration, federation was to be the ultimate aim; in the meantime, universal adult suffrage, wider representation of interest in the Executive Councils, and an Advisory Committee System (a kind of first step to Ministerial Government), should be considered; Governments should take steps to explain their policies to the people.³

Some of the recommendations of the Commissioners on Labour and Trade Unions⁴ are of particular relevance to our study. They were:

1) Legal protection for unions against actions in tort, provision for peaceful picketing with access to workers both at home and at their place of work, compulsory registration of unions and audit of their funds;

1. ibid, pp. 440-444.

2. ibid, pp. 446-7.

3. ibid, pp. 449-453.

4. ibid, pp. 437-9.

2) the establishment of Labour Departments¹, and their assistance in regulating wages and conditions of employment in the formative period of trade unionism; to assist them Advisory Boards of employers' and workers' representatives with impartial chairmen should be set up;

3) the establishment of statutory Wages Boards in each territory, and of an Industrial Court for the whole area;

4) the formation of Whitley Councils for civil services, and an extension of this principle to subordinate staff and to teachers, as an example to other employers by Governments.

There were other items relating to labour welfare provisions, factory legislation, Workmen's Compensation, and the appointment of Labour Advisers.

The reception which these recommendations received was not over-enthusiastic, though few went as far as Achong did in calling the report "the most stupendous hoax ever launched by the Colonial Office in the Caribbean area during this century."² The most detailed examination and criticism was made by the People's National Party, which had emerged after the 1938 disturbances in Jamaica, and had formulated its own comprehensive programme of reforms. While approving of most of

1. This recommendation had already been made by Orde-Browne in his Report on Labour Conditions, and acted upon in some cases.

2. T.P. Achong, op. cit., p. 65 n.

the social welfare recommendations, it condemned the economic policy section as "disappointing and in some respects misleading", since no proposals had been made on the subject of indirect taxation, banking, industrial development, unemployment, or income redistribution.¹ The criticism of the political section of the Commission's recommendations was even more caustic²:

The Royal Commission were expected to say that the problems of Jamaica and the West Indies were economic rather than political. It was unlikely that they would condemn, as it deserves to be condemned, the whole system of Colonial Office administration in the West Indies and it was certain that they would fail to see or pretend not to see the connection between the political decay that is apparent, the administrative system and the failure to solve the economic problems of the country ... the Recommendations on the political system ... are an evident compromise resulting in a vague and somewhat meaningless set of tentative and hesitant proposals ... eloquent of the distrust and the indifference and the subservience to concealed aims that is the real reason for the denial of a policy for self-Government to these Colonies.

There was, indeed, little to applaud either in the general economic policy proposals or in the political recommendations of the Commissioners. The relation between the basic economic distress of the area and social conditions was such

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1. PNP Report of First Annual Conference, 1939, pp. 69-74.
 2. ibid, pp. 80-84.

that social welfare measures could be but palliative unless accompanied by bold economic reforms. The conviction that "the problem of the West Indies is essentially agrarian,"¹ and that increased food production was essential in the face of a rapidly expanding population, resulted in a strangely inadequate approach to the economic question which was inconsistent with the thorough attention given to welfare and labour. It is difficult to see how the Commissioners, on the basis of their recommendations, expected levels of living in the area ever to be raised, except at the expense of permanent subsidisation through the Development and Welfare Fund. In their constitutional proposals the Commissioners opted for minor changes; they apparently envisaged the possibility of the appointment of Labour representatives to Executive Councils, but were not prepared to recommend measures which would result in the widespread election of Labour Councillors to the legislature, because of the opposition to Government which was usual among popular elected members.² The financial assistance received from the United Kingdom - which was to be stepped up in the form of the Development and Welfare Fund - was the reason given for opposing any transfer of authority from colonial officials to elected representatives. These measures, and the reasons given for proposing them, could not be expected to please that section of

1. Cmd. 6607, p. 422.

2. ibid, pp. 373-4.

the population which had made the social revolution. In the light of the Commissioners' conviction that the demand for increased local control of public affairs was sufficiently widespread to make the success of social reform measures doubtful unless they were accompanied by constitutional development,¹ their hesitant constitutional proposals were inconsistent and indicative of their inability to understand that political factors made a basic contribution to working-class discontent.

The recommendations made by the Commissioners on Trade Unionism were more satisfactory. The need for peaceful picketing and immunity from actions for damages consequent upon strikes was obvious, if trade unionism was to be encouraged. Compulsory registration and the audit of accounts were measures which could be used to restrain and guide trade unions in their formative years. The provisions for Labour Departments, Labour Advisory Boards and Wages Boards implied that a more positive approach to labour questions on the part of Colonial Governments in future was envisaged. The Commission suggested that the Jamaica Law of December, 1938, which established conciliation and arbitration machinery for the settlement of labour disputes, be copied in other territories.² Unless unemployment and under-employment were tackled, however, facilities for trade union action and measures such as workmen's compensation would be merely

1. idem.

2. idem, p. 439.

temporary palliatives for working-class discontent. The only attempt to deal with the unemployment situation, outside of land settlement plans, was the suggestion that in the larger territories the possibilities of unemployment insurance schemes should be investigated.¹ In the conditions of the British Caribbean this proposal was so utopian as to reinforce the conclusion that the Commissioners preferred to dodge the basic issues at the root of all the trouble.

The Moyne Commission Report marked a new departure in West Indian policy in the fields of social and labour legislation and welfare. In spite of its shortcomings, it must be regarded as the most important official document relating to the area in the 20th Century.

The Rise of Trade Unionism, 1934-39.

From the point of view of Labour Movements, one of the main results of the disturbances of the 1930's was the impetus which they gave to organising workers in the British Caribbean. There had been signs of a revival in the years 1929-31, when a few trade unions came into existence, but it was doomed to brief duration by the economic circumstances which engendered it. The existing organisations such as the Trinidad Labour Party and the BGLU, had either failed to retain popular support or, in the case of the TLP, continued with a policy

1. idem, p. 199 .

which could achieve few positive benefits. Only the traumatic events of 1937-39 could provide the renewal of enthusiasm which was necessary for the emergence of permanent unionism. As it was, under the influence of a few individuals of dynamic and flamboyant personality, the movement to unionism swept the area like a fever, acquiring in these months a messianic character which was lacking in earlier efforts. It was this semi-religious fervour, born of desperation, which ensured that labour organisations would survive and grow, aided by the new attitude to trade union organisation among officials, employers and middle-class, and by the wage concessions and improvement of conditions of which the unions could boast in these early years.

TRINIDAD.

It was in Trinidad that trade union development made the greatest strides in this period. The continuing economic depression after the conversion of the TWA into the TLP in 1932 had resulted in loss of popularity for Cipriani among some sections of the workers, particularly in the oilfields area.¹ Cipriani seemed unaware of the quickening tempo of labour discontent, even though he was sufficiently convinced of the seriousness of the situation of increasing unemployment to sound repeated warnings to the Government.² His disavowal of the

1. cf. Lewis, op. cit; Ralph Mentor, Trade Unionism in Trinidad, (1946).

2. Trinidad Hansard, 1933-35, passim.

Trade Unions Law continued in a refusal to sanction trade union organisation which was, in the end, fatal to the TLP. A section of the party catering for shop assistants and clerical workers was formed in 1933, (Lewis¹ calls it the Clerks' Union), but it remained unregistered, even though its membership reached 500. Ironically enough, it was the success of Cipriani in securing, by constitutional action, a Minimum Wage Ordinance in 1935 that led to the final discomfiture of the TLP. As long ago as 1920, the Report of the Wages Committee had made recommendations for a minimum wage, but no action had been taken on them. Cipriani had continued to ask questions about the implementation of the report in the Legislative Council from 1926 onwards, but no action was taken in this regard until in 1935 a Board was set up under the Ordinance to bring the Wages Committee Report up-to-date. The Report of this Board, published in 1936, caused widespread disillusion, as in many cases its recommendations were lower than the current rates of wages.² This is not surprising, as the earlier report was compiled in a boom period, while in 1935 Trinidad was in the throes of depression. The Minimum Wage fiasco made it clear that if workers were to find relief from current distress, constitutional action in the Legislative Council was not enough.

There had been, in 1934, widespread strikes in the

1. Op. cit.

2. Mentor, op. cit; Trinidad Council Paper No. 88 of 1936.

sugar district, and the following year a short strike in the oilfields led to a hunger march of 120 men, who had become temporarily unemployed as a result of the strike, from Apex, in the south of the island, to Port-of-Spain. The march, which caused a sensation, was terminated after intervention by Cipriani, and trouble was averted.¹ At the head of this march was Uriah Butler, who was to figure prominently in the Labour Movement from then on. Butler was a Negro, native of Grenada, who had arrived in the island in 1922 at the age of 30. He has been described in the Forster Commission Report² as "a fanatical negro ... of extremist tendencies", while Dalley³ regards him as "a curious phenomenon ... in his personality, his phenomenal egocentricity, his wordly shrewdness and his crude speeches and leaflets with their Biblical and religious references ... more akin to a 17th Century 'Fifth Monarchy' man than a 20th Century trade union leader." Much was made of the history of mental derangement in his family. In fact, Butler's role at this time was that of mouthpiece of the general discontent. His obvious sincerity and his willingness to run the risks of leadership were more important than the unlettered manner in which he expressed working-class sentiment.

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1. cf. Mentor, op. cit.; Cmd. 5641, p. 58.
 2. Cmd. 5641, pp. 57-8.
 3. Col. No. 215, p. 14.

The disenchantment of workers with the policies of the TLP had led to the formation of two political groups with more positive policies - the Negro Welfare and Cultural Association in Port-of-Spain, and the Citizens' Welfare League in San Fernando. Most of the members of the San Fernando group, which was led by Adrian C. Rienzi, an East Indian who had studied law in England and had been associated with the socialist movement there, were ex-members of the TLP. Rienzi himself had been chief organiser of the southern section of the party, while Butler had been expelled from the TLP after the 1935 march. The aim of the CWL was to organise and educate the people, and to secure the election to the Councils, both Legislative and Municipal, of representatives of workers in South Trinidad.¹ Butler was soon dissatisfied with a tactical policy as sterile as that of the TLP, and in 1936 he formed the British Empire Workers' and Citizens' Home Rule Party, to organise workers in the oilfields. By the next year, he had attracted "100 paying members and 900 sympathisers ... (including) ... many who were prepared to adopt violent methods."² Butler campaigned for support in his protest at the rate of wages paid to oilworkers, and, receiving no reply to his letters to the employers, advocated strike action. The

1. cf. for these developments, Calder-Marshall, op. cit., passim; Craig, op. cit.

2. Cmd. 5641, p. 58.

strike, which had been rumoured to begin on the 7th June, actually started on the 19th. The police had been preparing for trouble - reinforcements had been posted in San Fernando and at Fyzabad oilfields - and a warrant was issued for the arrest of Butler on charges of "using violent language which might lead to breach of the peace, and of counselling and inciting the commission of breaches of the peace and acts of violence." The strike had been orderly up to then.¹ It was only when the attempt was made to arrest Butler as he was addressing a meeting of strikers that evening that the trouble broke out; the crowd of some 200 put the police to flight. By the 21st the disorder had spread to the Point Fortin oilfields and the Usine Sainte Madeleine sugar estate; on the 22nd it became general, with outbreaks as far apart as Port-of-Spain and Rio Claro.

The immediate result of the oilfields strike was the appointment of a Mediation Committee which secured a return to work by strikers, and a promise from the oil companies to meet workers' representatives. After prolonged deliberations, during which the employers' offers of an all round increase of one penny an hour, a pension scheme, one week's holiday with pay, and the replacement of the identification card known as the 'Red Book', which was regarded by labourers as an instrument of victimisation, by a different² system, were all rejected², the

1. Cmd. 5641, pp. 57-74, for a description of the disturbances.

2. cf. Lewis, op. cit.

oilworkers formed, on July 25th, the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union, with Reinzi as its first President. He had been active during the disturbances as an intermediary between Butler, who had gone into hiding, and the Mediation Committee, and had been closely connected with the situation among the oilfield workers.

It is obvious that the workers' representatives must have felt their lack of organisation a handicap in their deliberations with the employers. The Butler party had had little formal organisation, and was centred around the figure of its leader. The decision to opt for orthodox trade union organisation was momentous in the fillip which it gave to the trade union movement in Trinidad. On the announcement of the appointment of the Forster Commission, the Union accepted provisionally the offer of an increase of one penny an hour and suspended its own claims - an increase of six cents an hour and 2 weeks holiday with pay; the companies, on their part, abandoned the 'Red Book' system.¹ The general expectation that the Forster Commission would make recommendations with regard to wages was not fulfilled; the Commissioners felt that this was not only outside their terms of reference, but was potentially harmful to the development of collective bargaining in the colony.² The oil dispute was finally settled by an Arbitration Tribunal, the rate being increased by four cents an hour.

1. idem.

2. Cmd. 5641, p. 52.

The connection between the June disturbances and the growth of trade unionism is unmistakable. Between August and November, 1937, five unions were registered, three of them industrial and two of them general. By the end of 1939 only four more unions had been formed, not including the Civil Service Association and a general union formed in Tobago. Before the disturbances, only one union had been registered.

Table XII
Registered Trade Unions, Trinidad
1933 - 1939

Abbreviated Name	Registration Date	Character
ABWU	30. 3.36	Building trade
FWTU	27. 8.37	General union
OWTU	15. 9.37	Oil workers
SWWTU	19.11.37	Waterfront workers
ATSEFWTU	24.11.37	Sugar workers
PWPSWTU	26.11.37	P.W.D. employees
ATTGWTU	8. 6.38	General union
RWTU	25. 7.38	Railwaymen
PITU	11.10.38	Printing trade
CSA	23. 3.39	Civil Service
TITU (Tobago)	3. 9.39	General union
TIU	10.10.39	Tailors

Source: Files of Registrar of Trade Unions,
Trinidad & Tobago.

There was a close connection between several of these unions, the result of the process of organisation from the top which characterises trade unionism in the area at this period. Rienzi and Macdonald Moses, who were the leading figures in the OWTU, were also President and Vice-President of the sugar workers' union, the ATSEFWTU, which they organised at the invitation of the sugar estate workers. The FWTU and the ATFGWTU were also formed as a result of active organisation by Rienzi and Moses.¹ A second group was composed of the SWWTU and the PWPSWTU, which were organised by the Negro Welfare and Cultural Association, which Lewis calls² "probably the most radical (body) in the island ... with its more or less marxist philosophy and purely working class leadership." In existence as a political group since at least 1934, it had been active in organising meetings and demonstrations, and calling attention to current labour distress. One of its leaders, Jim Barratt, was imprisoned for sedition after the 1937 disturbances. The SWWTU and the PWPSWTU catered for the two most important classes of workers in and around Port-of-Spain, the waterfront workers and the unskilled Public Works Department employees.

The reception which these new unions met with from employers varied. The oilworkers' dispute had gone to arbitration only after the Industrial Adviser had intervened to

1. cf. Lewis, op. cit.

2. op. cit.

prevent a recurrence of the strike begun in June. The ATSEFWTU, after declaring a strike in April, 1938, after a conference with the Sugar Manufacturers' Association, which at first rejected its claim for wage increases for field and factory workers, had reached no solution, was forced to advise a return to work after a fortnight. The failure of the Union was due, not to the refusal of the workers to support the strike, but to the strategy adopted by the estates to persuade the canefarmers to work as blacklegs rather than lose their crop. This setback was a serious blow to the organising activity of the ATSEFWTU, which was already only poorly organised among the fieldhands who form the majority of sugar workers.¹ By contrast, the SWWTU secured recognition from the shipping firms at the start of 1938, and in December of that year concluded an agreement regarding wages and hours which remained in force until 1946.² The PWPSWTU, also secured wage increases for Public Works employees after negotiation with Government in its character as employer.³

It has not proved possible to secure any accurate figures for the membership of these unions before 1939. Lewis claims that the PWPSWTU had a membership of 800 in 1939, while about 8,000 oilworkers, more than $\frac{4}{5}$ of all those employed in the industry, belonged to the OWTU.

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1. idem.
 2. Col. No. 215, p. 8.
 3. Lewis, op. cit.

JAMAICA.

The wave of unrest reached Jamaica last of the three territories in this study. Before the disturbances actually occurred, a number of unions came into being, and at least one old union was revived. The old union was the Longshoremen's Union No. 1 of the Jamaica Federation of Labour, which had been established in 1919 (though it did not register as a trade union until February 1922). It is possible that some of the dockers who had belonged to the union in the 1920's were active in its revival. In January, 1935, the revived union changed its name to the People's Progressive Union No. 1, Jamaica Federation of Labour.¹ There is nothing to show that it ever functioned. In 1935 the Jamaica Workers' and Tradesmen's Union was formed under the presidency of A.G.S. Coombs; a general union which had some support among agricultural workers as well as among dock labourers in Montego Bay, it claimed a membership of 5,000 in 1936.² The Kingston branch of the JWTU launched out on its own in that year as the Builders and Allied Trades Union. In 1937 the Jamaica United Clerks Association was formed among shop assistants in Kingston at a meeting held on November 26th; by the end of 1938 it claimed 1,500 members.³ A Hotel Employees Association was formed in that year as well, and Hart

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1. Files of Registrar of Trade Unions, Jamaica.
 2. Lewis, op. cit.; Hart, op. cit., p. 27.
 3. Clerks Union Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1938.

records a Motor Omnibus and Taxi Drivers Association which seems to have ceased to function before it could be registered. An interesting titbit about some of these unions is the length of time which elapsed between their formation and registration.

The failure of the BATU is ascribed in the official police report to the Kingston workers' lack of confidence in the sponsors of the union, lack of funds, dissension among the leaders, their inexperience and ignorance of trade unionism. In the police view, "the tradesmen and agitators forming it were almost without exception low-class scamps with a gift for talking and little else", who would willingly have used trade unionism as a means to gain a livelihood.¹ The activities of the BATU were regarded as having contributed to discontent among the Kingston workers, and a demonstration by unemployed ex-servicemen in August 1937 was broken up by the police riot squad. A series of minor strikes throughout 1937 resulted in increases for banana labourers, but unrest continued, and one stoppage at the Serge Island sugar estate in St. Thomas was particularly serious.²

Considerable attention was being attracted at this time by the series of public meetings conducted in and around Kingston by Alexander Bustamante, a remarkable figure even in an area of flamboyant personalities. A "tall, lean-faced

1. Police Report on Recent Labour Riots and Disorders, Jamaica, 1938.

2. Report of Jamaica Disturbances Commission, May-June, 1938.

individual, with the high cheek-bones, flashing eyes and wild, unruly mop of hair ... as paradoxical a figure in the events which were to follow as he was a paradox even in himself ..."¹ Busta was to become the most widely known labour leader in the Caribbean, the first Chief Minister of Jamaica, and a knight. He is described as an 'educated and clever ... agitator ... (who) elected to espouse the cause of labour and quickly ousted all other labour agitators from the position of leadership."² A wonderful orator with a likeable personality and a flair for the dramatic, he first appears on the Jamaican scene as a money-lender in 1934.³ Early accounts of his career vary; but they all agree that he was adopted as a child by a Spanish couple whose name he took (he was born Clarke) and had a story-book career of adventures and occupations in the Spanish Moroccan campaign, in Latin America and in the United States. Originally a member of the JWTU which he must have left at the same time as the other BATU organisers, he preached a campaign of labour organisation which reached its height in the weeks before the Kingston riots.⁴

These disturbances had been preceded by a strike among construction workers at the West Indies Sugar Company's

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1. Makin, op. cit., p. 44.
 2. Police Report, Jamaica.
 3. idem; Makin, op. cit., p. 45.
 4. Police Report; Makin, op. cit., p. 61.

new factory at Frome in Westmoreland. This incident, which was complicated by various local grievances and by the presence of a large number of job-seekers who could not be employed, resulted in four deaths, and was brought under control only after the despatch of most of the police reserves from Kingston.¹ The tension in Jamaica at the time is conveyed by the fantastic rumours which Makin says² were current after the Frome disturbance on May 2nd:

There were to be simultaneous outbreaks all over the island, Kingston was to be denuded of armed police, and then, Kingston itself would revolt ..

News of the disturbances in Trinidad and Barbados, which had been fully reported in the Jamaica press, contributed to the tension. It is held too, that the belief of many people in country districts that on August 1st 1938, the centenary of the abolition of slavery, would be fulfilled a Royal promise to give the land to the Negroes which had been made before Emancipation³, helped to foment the widespread feeling of unrest.

The first minor strikes on the waterfront in Kingston between May 11th and 20th which mark the start of the general disturbances were quickly settled. On the 21st, there was

1. Westmoreland Disturbances Commission, Report, 1938.

2. op. cit., p. 58.

3. Police Report, Jamaica. This view was advanced by Frank Hill, who had been active in the Labour Movement in the 1930's, as late as 1956.

a complete stoppage on the docks, the result of claims for higher wages. A strike of street-cleaners on the morning of Monday 23rd soon became a riot, as people on the way to work threw their lot in with the strikers. The next day transport workers struck, and Bustamante, who had been prevented from holding public meetings, was arrested along with his chief lieutenant, St. William Grant, when they tried to induce the Fire Brigade to come out on strike. It was a day of ugly incidents and shooting in the city. On the 28th "the wharf labourers refused to consider any settlement of their dispute with their employers until Bustamante and Grant were released."¹ Bustamante was released; Norman Manley, the leading barrister in the island came forward to act as mediator and to speak for the strikers, who were eventually granted an increase of 2d. an hour, double time on Sunday, and overtime.² The disorders had spread to the country districts meantime, strikes on sugar and banana estates in various parts of the island and among wharf labourers at Montego Bay and Port Morant being accompanied by rioting and violence. The situation did not become normal again until the middle of June, by which time 8 people had been killed, 32 wounded by gunshot and 139 injured otherwise; 745 prosecutions resulted from these disturbances.³

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1. Police Report, Jamaica.
 2. idem.
 3. Jamaica Disturbances Commission, Report.

The formation of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union was the most important sequel to these disorders. The martyr's halo which his arrest had won him swept enthusiastic workers into the union from July onwards, and by 1939 he could claim over 50,000 union members.¹ From the start, and by the very nature of its formation, the union was obliged to adopt a 'blanket' character. It had a central executive, and workers divided into industrial sections, seven in number, for Transport, General, Maritime, Municipal, and Factory Workers, Artisans, and Clerks. Each section was presided over by a Vice-President; these, together with the General Secretary and the President, formed the Executive Council. In addition, the union had branches organised on the basis of locality.² The constitution endowed the President with office for life and executive authority of an almost despotic nature.³

The extensive membership of the union soon began to pose problems with which its embryonic organisation could not deal effectively. The wave of minor strikes continued into 1939 and the Union was faced with unauthorised stoppages one after another, particularly among the agricultural workers. As union discipline was virtually unknown, and the island's system of internal communications made for rural isolation,

1. Lewis, op. cit.

2. See Memo of W.A. Bustamante on BITU, 23/11/45. CLC Papers.

3. Rules of the BITTU.

the unauthorised stoppage took on the character of a fait accompli which the union had to acknowledge to maintain its popularity, and which could often be resolved only by the personal intervention of the leader himself.

Four other trade unions were registered in Jamaica in the 1938-39 period, though none of them acquired any importance. The formation of the Trades Union Advisory Council in 1939 and the subsequent split in the trade union movement in Jamaica are discussed in Chapter VI along with other developments in trade unionism. The immediate result of the working-class revolution in Jamaica was the emergence of one gigantic organisation which bid fair to be the nucleus of a unified national labour movement.

Table XIII.

Registered Trade Unions, Jamaica
1933 - 1939

Abbreviated Name	Registration Date	Character
JWTU	29. 6. 37	General Union
JHEA	1.12. 37	Hotel Workers
JUCA	7. 4. 38	Shop Assistants
BATU	12. 7. 38	General Union
PWLA	12. 9. 38	Printers
BITU	23. 1. 39	General Union
JAFU	30. 1. 39	Not Specified
JESTLU	24. 2. 39	General Union
JDA	20. 7. 39	Dressmakers

Source: Files of Registrar of Trade
Unions, Jamaica.

BRITISH GUIANA.

In some ways British Guiana had had its revolution before the 1930's, and the general disturbances which occurred in Jamaica and Trinidad had no parallel there. The city workers had been highly organised in the BGLU, and even though its membership had fallen off, the union continued to exist and was a potential vehicle for the expression of labour grievances. The union's success in obtaining various minor relief measures such as garden lots for city workers helped to soften the effects of the slump in Georgetown. It was among the East Indian labourers in the country that serious disturbances occurred, in February, 1939.

The major advance in labour organisation in British Guiana in the 1930's was the formation in 1936 of the Man Power Citizens' Association, to organise the East Indian Sugar Workers. By 1939 the MPCA could claim 10,000 members, 90% of these employed on sugar estates, with 41 district secretaries; it had penetrated to every estate and village in the territory.¹ The officials of the union were most of them professional men, the committee of 12 including two jewellers, a doctor, a journalist, a Hindu Priest, a merchant, and an ex-planter. This was inevitable in view of the low standards of literacy among East Indian sugar estate workers in the country; Its middle-class officialdom, too, was responsible for the largely political

1. MPCA, Foundation Souvenir, 1936-9.

character of the association, as contained in its programme. It did not focus its attention primarily on winning wage increases for its members, like the more militant unions in Jamaica and Trinidad. Its concern ranged from labour legislation to constitutional and economic reform. It was critical of the impartiality of the Labour Commissioner and of the Police.¹

The MPCA was registered under the trade union ordinance in 1937, however. After the spontaneous disturbances at Leonora in February, 1939, in which 20 estate workers were killed, the MPCA signed an agreement with the sugar employers which accorded it recognition as the bargaining agent for estate workers, and gave it the right to hold meetings on the estates.² This was a significant gain for the Association which had complained previously that "many of the members and District Secretaries have been victimised, penalised, oppressed and evicted."³ Its success led to fears among the Negro workers that its racial character might eventually lead to trouble; but it was the Association's policy to welcome Negroes, who were useful because of their generally better education which enabled them to assist with union administration. The President of the political wing of the MPCA which developed in the

1. idem.

2. cf. Lewis, op. cit.

3. MPCA, Foundation Souvenir, 1936-9.

1940's was J.L. Griffiths who had helped Critchlow to form the BGLU in the 1920's.

A number of smaller unions emerged, almost exclusively among Negro workers, in the years 1937-39. The strength of organisation among government employees was partly an indication of the benevolent attitude to labour of the administration of the day, and also the result of Government's being the most important employer of non-agricultural labour. Lewis mentions one union, the B.G. Miners' Association, which does not appear on the register.

Table XIV.

Registered Trade Unions, British Guiana
1933 - 1939

Abbreviated Name	Registration Date	Character
MPCA	5. 11. 37	General
BGSU	16. 2. 38	Seamen
TWU	23. 3. 38	Transport
BGPOWU	30. 6. 38	Post Office
SMEU	28. 9. 38	Medical Employees
BGCGW	4. 10. 38	General
SGEA	6. 10. 38	Gov't Employees
BGCA	1. 8. 39	Clerks
MMU	4. 9. 39	Moulders
BGSU (2)	28. 11. 39	Wood Sawyers

Source: Files of Registrar of Trade Unions, British Guiana

CHAPTER VI

LABOUR MOVEMENTS SINCE 1939.

The development of Labour Movements in the British Caribbean since 1939 is remarkable for the rapidity and completeness with which organised labour has been accepted in all spheres of social, economic and political life. Trade unionism is now no longer regarded as disreputable - it is, on the contrary, considered to be a valuable stabilizing influence in the community. Leadership of a trade union has become a vehicle for social and political advancement. In politics, not only is leadership anxious to win and retain working-class support, but the Labour or Socialist party has been for many years the form of political organization most likely to win electoral success. Labour leaders, instead of being ostracized, prosecuted and treated as agitators, now find themselves on committees, delegates at conferences, persons of importance who must be consulted about decisive events in the affairs of the territory, and welcome guests at official functions.

This new situation is the logical outcome of the social revolution of the 1930's and of the reforms which resulted from it. The acceptance of organised labour was not automatic, however, either among employers or among the middle class. It was made possible by the official attitude of encouragement to trade unionism, by the decision of a

number of respected men, most of them professionals, to participate in the movement, by the identification of organised labour with nationalism and the demand for self-government, and by the constitutional reforms which, from the end of World War II onwards, put political power effectively in the hands of the working class voter through the medium of adult suffrage. Although in practice Governments have not always conformed to the spirit of encouragement in their dealings with trade unions, and in spite of opposition from employers which has led to a number of serious and prolonged strikes, trade unionism has grown steadily.

= It is in the field of politics that organised labour in the British Caribbean has made the greatest advances by comparison with the pre-1934 scene. Only in Trinidad had there been anything like organised labour politics, in the form of the activities of the TWA.¹ The BGLU in British Guiana had made political demands, but its interests had been mainly industrial. In the first rush of organising enthusiasm which had followed the working class revolution, little attention was paid to political organisation. This was understandable. The revolution had been triggered off by immediate economic grievances, and its spontaneous

1. above, pp. 209-220.

character gave any organisations which emerged the role of organs of social protest that were not exclusively economic or political or social, but a combination of all three.

Trade unionism was not only the most effective form of organisation for securing immediate economic relief; it was also a more active and dynamic kind of association than a political party, and so, more suited to the needs of the moment. Under the constitutions which were in existence, political activity must needs be slow and unrewarding and as the examples of the Cipriani and self-government movements show, likely to prove futile.

In the troubled years which preceded the riots, some political groups had emerged - the Negro Welfare and Cultural Association¹ and the Citizens' Welfare League² in Trinidad, and a number of Citizens' Associations in Jamaica. Some of the people who took the lead in these groups held socialist beliefs. There are also references which indicate the existence of a Left Book Club in Jamaica,³ though our efforts to discover more about its activities at the time have so far been unsuccessful. But in Trinidad the leaders of these associations turned their attention to trade union organisation in the first heat of the disturbances, and political activity was further hindered by the kind of police

1. above, p. 271

2. above, p. 267.

3. Daily Gleaner, 1936-39, passim.

intervention described by Calder-Marshall.¹ No political association appears to have been formed in British Guiana at this time, although the MPCA had a distinctive political complexion. It was only in Jamaica that a Socialist Party sprang up within a few months of the riots.

The advent of World War II in 1939 meant a temporary slowing up in the pace of developments in organised labour. Many labour leaders were imprisoned - Bustamante and Butler among them - as precautionary measures, while special Defence Regulations were enforced which limited the right to strike in essential services and imposed other restrictions upon labour activity. Some labour leaders, too, relinquished their demands of their own accord for the duration - the People's National Party in Jamaica, for example, meeting on September 3rd, 1939, declared its support for the United Kingdom and announced that it would abstain from agitating for constitutional reform during the course of the war.² Wartime conditions affected the employment situation and the cost of living; the building of U.S. bases, the acceptance of West Indians for war service, the price controls and rationing which were introduced, created an artificial economic situation which, allied to emotional and other factors, took much of the impetus out of the surging labour movements.

1. op. cit. pp. 205-210

2. PNP, Report of 1st Annual Conference, p. 12.

A brief survey of the main trends of development in each territory from 1939 to 1955 follows.

Developments in Jamaica after 1938

After the formation of the BITU, the most important development in the emergent Labour Movement in Jamaica was the founding on August 28th, 1938 of the People's National Party. It arose out of a conference, called on the initiative of Norman W. Manley, of delegates from every parish in the island, and from the Kingston and St. Andrew Federation of Citizens' Associations, the National Reform Association, the Jamaica Progressive League and the Jamaica Union of Teachers;¹ it was in essence, therefore, a middle class party at its formation, and this is reflected in the composition of its Steering Committee, which consisted of a number of distinguished professional men, among them being Manley himself, H.P. Jacobs, N.N. Nethersole, O.T. Fairclough and W.G. McFarlane. Its objects were, among others, to develop the political life of the island, to organise it into a country of small settlers, farmers and workers, and "ultimately to earn and achieve political self-determination and responsibility as a National Unit";² it was to be organised on the basis of geographical party groups, with delegates from these groups meeting in parochial (regional) conferences to select candidates for elections, and in party conference

1. PNP, Report of the 1st Annual Conference, 1939, p.4.
2. PNP, Constitution

to elect annually the General Council.¹ The PNP drew much of its inspiration from the British Labour Party, on which its organisation was modelled; at the public meeting to launch the party which met with enthusiastic reception, the chief speaker was Sir Stafford Cripps.

Since the PNP had been born out of the working-class revolution and supported 'the development of Organised Labour' in its official policy - Manley had proclaimed himself to be an avowed and genuine believer in the Trade Union movement in Jamaica² - some rapprochement with the BITU was inevitable. Accordingly, "the Chairman was authorised to open discussions with the Bustamante Unions for the purpose of defining their relations with the Party". It is probable that what was envisaged was the sort of relationship which exists between the British Labour Party and the Trade Unions. No formal agreement was reached, but Bustamante joined the PNP in January, and "for some months to come the Party and the Unions worked in open but unofficial alliance".³ Bustamante appears to have considered trade union activity more important than politics at this time. In an address at the 1st General Conference of the BITU on January 7th, 1939,

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1. ibid.
 2. Manley to Governor in Gleaner, 21st February, 1939.
 3. PNP, Report of 1st Annual Conference, p.5.

he gave his view:¹

I think the most important job now is to organise labour thoroughly, and when that has been accomplished I can think about going up for the (Legislative) Council.

The alliance between the BITU and the PNP led to the formation in February 1939 of the Trade Unions Advisory Council. As a result of the threat of a general strike called by the BITU in support of its demands for waterfront workers, Emergency Regulations had been put into force, and armed guards were protecting strikebreakers on the docks. In this situation it appeared that many of Labour's hard-won gains would be lost, and the decision to call out sugar workers in sympathy to coerce the Shipping Companies was criticised. Trade unionism, not yet really welcomed by all sections of the community, was beginning to assume a mantle of irresponsibility which the dramatic boasts of Bustamante served only to make more alarming.

The Trade Unions Advisory Council was formed at a meeting convened by Manley under these circumstances, for the purpose of strengthening and unifying the trade union movement; it was to include all existing trade unions.² The composition of the Council, again, reveals a large

1. Gleaner, 9th January, 1939.

2. Minutes of Inaugural Meeting in CLC Papers.

element of professional men. It was admitted that very few of them knew much about trade unionism, and that one of their first tasks was to educate themselves. At this meeting, which elected a Committee with Nethersole as chairman and A. Richard Hart as Secretary, the dispute between Bustamante and A.G.S. Coombs, which had existed ever since Bustamante left the JWTU, was patched up. The Council aimed at organising workers into occupational unions, each to comprise related groups of workers, with one union for each group of occupations. There were to be nine such unions. Interloping unions, or those which refused to fall into the occupational framework, would be discouraged. The TUAC would audit union accounts and advise about financial matters, and would keep statistical records relating to Trade Unionism in the Island.¹ A public reconciliation between Bustamante, Coombs and E.E.A. Campbell, a barrister and Member of the Legislative Council who was also president of the JUCA, signified the new spirit of unity.

The newly found unity was not to last. In April, Bustamante resigned from the Council in disagreement over the constitution adopted by the TUAC at two meetings from which he was absent; the provisional draft, however, had been accepted by him and had not been substantially altered for adoption. The causes of the disagreement were the

1. Draft Constitution in CLC Papers.

decision to allow for representation of Unions on the Council, but to limit any one union's representatives to five, and the requirement that affiliated unions should be organised and run democratically.¹ The first provision would operate to the disadvantage of the BITU, which was more than five times as large as all the other unions put together; the second would affect the position of Bustamante himself and his control over the BITU. With his resignation, the TUAC was dissolved, and the Labour Movement in Jamaica split into two irreconcilable halves. The split, when viewed in retrospect, was almost inevitable. The revolutionary character of the BITU, and the dominant personality of Bustamante, could hardly have been harnessed to the highly disciplined organisation which Manley, himself a strong personality, was trying to build. The socialism of the PNP, too, was an irritant - as early as February, 1939, Bustamante had been complaining about having to work on the TUAC with Richard Hart, its secretary, who was later expelled from the PNP for his communist views.²

The PNP next set about developing a trade union wing of its own. Ken Hill, Richard Hart, and Floriziel Glasspole embarked on a programme of organising workers who were not already involved with the BITU; they had their main successes in and around Kingston among manual government

1. PNP, Report of 1st Annual Conference, pp.7-8
2. Gleaner, February-March, 1939

employees, municipal and parish council workers, railway and transport workers and employees in the catering trade. Ken Hill had been a Vice-President of the BITU before the split and was the most popular trade union figure in the PNP camp at this time; he was one of the few leading trade unionists who was not a professional or white-collar worker. The TUAC was revived in the guise of the Trades Union Congress, with Nethersole as chairman. Its rules stipulated that affiliate unions must have written into their constitutions provisions for regular elections of officers, safeguarding of union funds, and no restrictions against members "on the grounds of race, colour, religious or political beliefs or affiliations." The extent of the PNP's success in organising trade unions at this time is illustrated by the fact that of 30 trade unions registered between 1940 and 1944, 13 were later amalgamated (along with the JUCA) in July, 1949 when the TUC was transformed into one composite functioning union.¹ Of the remaining 17, only 3 were functioning when the amalgamation took place.

The alignment of organised labour in Jamaica into two hostile camps was completed with the granting of a new constitution to the island in 1944.² Hitherto, the PNP had had a clear field in politics as Bustamante confined his attentions to trade union organisation. The party's decision

1. Files of Registrar of Trade Unions, Jamaica.

2. above, pp. 20-21.

to forego agitation for self-government had not prevented it from taking the lead in discussions for an advanced form of constitution when it was decided to alter the existing one. Bustamante, on the other hand, had not been particularly concerned with political developments. With elections scheduled to take place at the end of 1944, however, he suddenly formed, in opposition to the PNP, the Jamaica Labour Party. The JLP was, in effect, merely a convenient political name for the BITU; it had no organisation, or mass membership independent of the union. Its candidates were adopted in the same way as all candidates sponsored by causes in the area - they were merely a number of prominent men who accepted the label of the party for purposes of the election. The success of the JLP, however, its association with the BITU and with the governing of the island, and the existence of an opposition in the PNP, helped to mould it into a permanent association.

Labour Politics in Jamaica

The PNP and the JLP, between them, have dominated the Jamaican political scene completely since 1944. This has turned politics in the island partly into a battle between the two rival personalities, Manley and Bustamante, and partly into a clash of rival political ideals. The PNP, avowedly a socialist party, had as its initial policy a comprehensive programme of social and economic reforms which stressed the need for a planned economy, which included a

large measure of nationalisation:¹

The Industrial Programme of the Party involves:-

- (a) The state ownership of all public utilities.
- (b) The Public ownership of all Industries which enjoy a complete monopoly.
- (c) Public ownership or effective state control of all Industries which enjoy or require subsidies from public funds.

By the 1950 elections, however, the PNP, defeated soundly in 1944 and accused of communism by its opponents, had modified its nationalisation programme to include two public utilities - Light and Power, and Telephone Services, the cost of both of which was extremely high - and nothing more.² The difficulties of nationalisation as illustrated by the experience of the British Labour Party in the intervening years may have contributed to this departure from principle.

The JLP, on the other hand, has made little use of the ideological propaganda traditionally associated with Labour Movements; on the contrary, it has plumped for free enterprise rather than socialism, has proclaimed its belief in co-operation between Capital and Labour, and opposed self-government. One observer has described it as "an organ of conservatism". The JLP made no pretence

1. Outline of the Policy and Programme of the PNP, April, 1939.

2. Why you should join the PNP, (Election Pamphlet, 1949).

at believing in a planned economy, but placed emphasis on the material benefits to the individual worker to be gained by returning the party to power. It has placed great reliance on the frankly charismatic appeal of Bustamante, and on his record of service:¹

WORKERS OF JAMAICA
WORKING MEN AND WOMEN
OF ALL CLASSES...

Vote for the man who has worked for you for twelve years, for the man who has done more for the working people of Jamaica than any other person or group, who has secured higher pay and better conditions for Jamaica's workers.

V O T E L A B O U R

Vote for Bustamante and the J.L.P.

The reaction of the PNP to the success of this sort of campaign has been to free itself from the charges of communism which have been levelled at it, and to emulate the JLP by building Manley up into a father-figure, "Father of the Nation". The party, from its inception, had to rebut charges of communism in its ranks,² and the official

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1. JLP Election Pamphlet, 1949.
 2. See, e.g., Gleaner, 6th March, 1939.
Jamaica Arise, 1945, passim.

party reply that all members of the party were bound to observe its fundamental principles had been unconvincing and evasive. The left wing of the PNP had been strengthened by the internment of some of the party's organisers during the war;¹ three of its leading trade unionists, Ken Hill, Richard Hart, and Frank Hill, were admitted communists. A rift between left and right wings in the party in 1949 had been patched up because of the approach of the elections, which the PNP lost. Whether the desire to make itself acceptable to the electorate by expelling its known communist members was the main reason for the purge which the party undertook in 1952 is not clear - there have been hints of a struggle for power within the party between Glasspole and Nethersole on the one hand, and Hart and Ken Hill on the other, which allege that the communist leanings of the left were used merely as a convenient excuse.

The expulsion of its left wing, the fruits of its policy of building up party groups in every district of the island, the rising unemployment in Jamaica which had led to large-scale migration to the United Kingdom since 1950, and which was sure to affect the JLP vote, and the reputation which the PNP had been fostering as a party for planned progress and intelligent government, all contributed to its success in the 1955 elections.

1. cf. T.S. Simey - "Colonial Policy on Trial - The Test Case of Jamaica" in Manchester Guardian, 26th March, 1946.

Table XIV

Jamaica Elections, 1944-55

<u>Party</u>	<u>1944</u>		<u>1949</u>		<u>1955</u>	
	<u>% Votes</u>	<u>Seats</u>	<u>% Votes</u>	<u>Seats</u>	<u>% Votes</u>	<u>Seats</u>
JLP	41.4	22	42.7	17	39.0	14
PNP	23.5	5	43.5	13	50.5	18
Other Parties	5.1	-	1.2	-	5.5	-
Independ- dents	30.0	5	12.6	2	5.0	-
Poll	58.7%		65.2%		65.1%	

Source: Election Reports

Trade Unionism in Jamaica

Developments in trade unionism in Jamaica have been dominated by the early ascendancy acquired by the BITU, and by the policy of the PNP to build up a rival group of democratically run trade unions. After the purge of the PNP in 1952, the TUC, which was controlled by the group which had been expelled from the party, severed its connection with the PNP, which then formed the National Workers' Union as a replacement. Although active in the regional trade union movement in the Caribbean, however, the NWU has made little headway in Jamaica itself; it can claim only approximately 6% of all trade union membership. The close relationship between trade unions and rival political groups in Jamaica has meant not only rivalry but actual hostility between competing unions. This factor, though

deplorable from the point of view of trade union unity, is less detrimental than might be expected because of the pattern of union membership. Although 96% of all trade union members were concentrated in 3 unions, while 8 others had less than 4% between them, in 1955, the vast size of the BITU reduces the danger of this political rivalry, and of the representational disputes which are its consequence, for the working class as a whole. The figures for 1955 are not exceptional, and reflect a pattern which obtains throughout the period. Trade union membership has increased from 1500 before the 1938 disturbances, and 13, 500 in March 1940 to 58,500 in 1946 and 93,370 in 1955.¹

Table XVI

Size of Trade Unions, Jamaica, 1955

<u>Name</u>	<u>Paying</u>	<u>Non-Paying</u>	<u>Aggregate</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
BITU	49,804	16,885	66,689	71.3
TUC	6,300	12,370	18,670	20.0
NWU	1,842	3,183	5,025	5.4
8 others	<u>1,859</u>	<u>1,217</u>	<u>3,076</u>	<u>3.3</u>
	59,805	33,655	93,460	100.0

Source: Annual Report, 1955.

In spite of the larger organisations in Jamaican trade unionism, and perhaps because of them, there has been a high rate of mortality among trade unions. This is a feature common to the other territories in the area as well,

1. Trade Unionism in Jamaica, 1918-46; Annual Report, 1955.

but it is particularly noticeable in Jamaica because of the greater willingness shown by the Registrar of Trade Unions to declare moribund associations dissolved or cancel their registration under powers given him by the Trade Unions Law. Seven of the nine unions formed between 1937 and 1939 have failed to survive, while only six of the 21 formed during the next decade (excluding those amalgamated to form the TUC) still existed in 1955. Only the BITU can claim an unbroken history since the working class revolution. The tendency to form new unions still continues, 8 of them having been registered since 1950.

The most serious problem which the developing trade union movement in Jamaica has had to face, once it had outgrown an early tendency to brandish the strike weapon rather in the manner of big stick diplomacy, has been the number of jurisdictional disputes between the big rival unions over the right to bargain for various groups of workers. This problem first became serious in the months after the elections of December 1949, when the TUC amalgamation had increased the bargaining power of the Manley group of unions. The TUC representatives blamed blanket agreements, to which workers belonging to minority unions objected, and agreements in which employers promised to give preference to members of a particular union, for this state of affairs, and rejected the idea of political causation.¹

1. Board of Enquiry into Labour Disputes between Trade Unions, 1950, Report.

The Board found that "the causes of this type of political unrest are basically inherent in the existing union-political set-up . . .", even though the genuine grievances of workers faced with a rising cost of living were of equal importance.¹ The solution adopted for these disputes was a secret ballot at the place of work to determine which union should have bargaining rights, the union winning 51% of the votes being recognised. Between 1950 and 1954, 79 of these polls were taken; in one dispute in the sugar industry in 1951, the BITU, up till then recognised as the bargaining agent, agreed to negotiate jointly with the TUC and to have polls taken on those estates claimed by Congress.²

This agreement between the BITU and the TUC symbolises the increasing maturity of the Jamaican Trade Union Movement, which is no doubt due, not only to greater familiarity with collective bargaining procedure and the increased respectability that comes from social acceptance, but also to the emergence of trade union leaders, such as Hugh Shearer (BITU), Ken Stirling and Thomas Kelly (NWU), who are themselves workers, and first and foremost trade unionists. This maturity is reflected in the fact that while 97 strikes occurred out of 147 disputes in 1945, only in 18 of the 118 disputes which were reported in 1953 was recourse had to strike action.

1. ibid.

2. Report on the Achievements of the Jamaica Labour Department, 1945-54.

Developments in British Guiana

There was little political activity on the part of organised labour during the war years, though the MPCA had a political wing. Labour may have been silenced by the fact that both Critchlow, who was still Secretary of the BGLU, and Ayube M. Edun, President of the MPCA, had been invited by the Governor to sit as nominated members in the Legislative Council.

Trade Unionism, however, was making great strides. From 2 unions with 266 members at the start of 1937 the movement had grown to 15 unions with 3,611 financial members in 1941, and to 27 unions with 6,279 members by 1946.¹ As was the case in our other territories as well, the movement was much larger if one considered non-paying members as well. The MPCA, for instance, could claim a membership of approximately 22,000 in 1941, only 1,310 of whom had paid their subscriptions. The tendency to a multiplicity of small unions was already apparent in British Guiana in 1941; of the 15 unions then in existence, 5 had less than 50 members, 5 others had less than 100 members, three had between 100 and 250 members, and two had just over 1,000.² These last two, though, were general unions both catering for sugar workers in particular - the MPCA and the BGWL - and only one other general union, apart from the BGLU, had been set up.

1. Files of Registrar of Trade Unions, British Guiana.

2. ibid.

Perhaps it was this tendency to fragmentation that caused the failure of the Trade Union Council which was set up in March, 1941; it could attract no more than the three founder unions by the end of 1942, as a result of disagreement among delegates over the rules to be adopted.¹ By 1944, however, awareness of the need for the TUC prevailed, 13 of the 23 unions on the register were affiliated, including the MPCA and BGLU, and more than 80% of all trade unionists. Among its objects were the furtherance of lawful political objectives affecting labour, and the settlement of disputes.² The ideal of amalgamating some unions was advocated by a TUC Committee, appointed in December, 1945 to consider the question of trade union membership, but it was opposed by constituent unions for practical and political reasons.³ The unions involved appear to have been the BGWL and the MPCA, the one led by A.A. Thorne, a Negro, the other by Ayube Edun and particularly strong among East Indians. Both unions were concerned with organising sugar workers, for whom the MPCA had been recognised as the bargaining body as long ago as 1939.⁴ In 1945 the Sugar Producers Association signed an agreement with

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1. British Guiana Department of Labour, Report, 1942.
 2. BGTUC, Revised Rules, 1946.
 3. British Guiana Department of Labour, Report, 1946.
 4. See above, p. 281

the BGWL recognising its right to have representatives on joint committees on 26 estates.¹ From 1946 the MPCA became disaffiliated from the TUC.

The political complexion of the issues affecting trade unionism which began to arise at this time is confirmed by a Report on the Trade Union and Political Situation in British Guiana, written c. 1946:²

Politically the East Indian politicians have united the Indian masses behind them and it is probably they would sweep a general election on universal suffrage, as the Indian masses would vote racial regardless of the wealth of most Indian politicians. This has given rise to an anti-progressive stand on the part of some of the Trade Union Council leaders (Negro) like Thorne, the President, who oppose universal suffrage.

The split in the trade union movement did not acquire a clear-cut racial complexion, as can be seen from the composition of the British Guiana Labour Party in the 1947 elections. The BGLP was in reality a caucus of TUC leaders and prominent people sympathetic to labour. It was formed in October, 1947 to contest the November elections, with Critchlow as President and Aston Chase, who was to be

1. Memo in CLC Papers.

2. In CLC Papers. It is undated, but its contents indicate that it was written before the elections of November, 1947.

Critchlow's successor as secretary of the BGLU and a minister in the PPP government of 1953, as secretary. There were four East Indians on its executive committee, and five among its fourteen candidates. The BGLP's policy is interesting in view of later developments in British Guiana. In addition to the objective of Responsible Self-Government for the country within five years, and the usual platform of social reforms, it advocated:¹

1) Immediate constitutional changes, a legislature of twenty-four members, adult suffrage, the abolition of property and income qualifications for members, and wholly elected local authorities;

2) Full employment, a 40-hour week, a saving wage, and development of secondary industries;

3) Nationalisation of "certain industries", and public utilities, compulsory investment by Firms registered outside of British Guiana of 40% of their net profits in the country, a discriminatory tax on foreign-owned primary producing industries, and a development plan for the interior;

4) Legal enforcement of the closed shop in Government services and essential industries.

In the elections, the BGLP won five seats to the MPCA's one - the MPCA had sponsored six candidates, only one of whom, Dr. J.B. Singh, was successful; it is likely that Dr. Singh, who was a prominent and popular personality in

1. BGLP, Policy Pamphlet, 1947.

his own right, would have won even without the sponsorship of the NPCA. Among the BGLP candidates elected were Critchlow and Theophilus Lee, a Chinese, and President of the Cosmopolitan Workers Union, who had been the only pro-Labour elected member in the old Legislative Council. Of the other candidates elected, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, who stood as an Independent Labourite for Central Demerara on a platform described as "openly Communistic",¹ joined the BGLP immediately; his wife, Janet, was defeated in Central Georgetown by John Fernandes, an independent of "socialist sympathies".² Two of the other independents elected were regarded as pro-socialist. The 'victory for the left' which these elections seemed to herald was wasted, however. The BGLP failed to agree on the reply to the Governor's official statement of policy, and rapid disintegration followed. The political organisation of Labour was to be postponed until the formation of PPP two years later.

The PPP and the 1953 Crisis

The most important development in the history of organised labour in British Guiana since 1939 was the coming of the People's Progressive Party to power in 1953 and the subsequent suspension of the constitution of the country, which was followed by a split in the party's ranks. It is not possible to do more than give a brief outline here of the

1. Beacon, 15th November, 1947.

2. Beacon, 29th November, 1947.

background to the crisis, and of the sequence of events since.

After the failure of the BGLP to survive in 1948, the Jagans founded the Political Affairs Committee in order to keep labour politics alive.¹ Out of this Committee the PPP was born in 1950. Multi-racial in character, it appears from the start to have been composed of three elements: a left wing, to which Jagan, Sydney King, Westmass and Martin Carter belonged; a less doctrinaire section, whose members were, none the less, fond of using the socialist terminology popular in "progressive circles" at that time - Burnham was one of this group; and a third group, composed of people who were important for their appeal and influence with the people, as Dr. Latchmansingh was among sugar workers. The PPP received support and encouragement from the Caribbean Labour Congress and its constituent parties; in 1949, arrangements were made for Burnham, then a law student in London and Vice-President of the London branch of the CLC, to visit Jamaica on his way home in order to study the organisation of the PNP.²

The success of the PPP was due to a number of factors - its solution of the race issue by having both Burnham and Jagan as outstanding leaders, its organisation and the devoted effort of many of its leading members, the obvious sincerity of the movement, its demand for self-

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1. cf. B.G. Constitutional Commission, 1954, p. 23
 2. Notes and Itinerary in CLC Papers.

government and a platform not unlike that of the BGLP which had won support, and the poverty of organised opposition.¹ With the exception of the MPCA, most of the major unions had come to support the PPP by 1953, and its leadership was reflected in their officers. On the sugar estates the Guiana Industrial Workers Union, with Latchmansingh as President, had had its branch secretaries victimised and evicted by the estate managements after a prolonged strike for recognition in 1952. The support of the Party did not come, of course, from the upper class, and drew its strength from the "low standards of living and the limited opportunities for personal advancement".² The PPP, therefore, was the embodiment of the same sort of protest as the working-class revolution, though its appeal was to "all races and all classes"³ - except of course, the European upper class.

The party's opposition to the safety devices built into the 1953 Constitution stemmed from its demand for self-government. It opposed the inclusion of a nominated State Council in the constitution, the presence of officials in the Legislative Assembly, and the veto powers of the Governor.⁴ The overwhelming victory of the PPP in the elections of April 1953, when it won 18 of the 24 seats on the Council, was the first step towards a crisis. It is obviously difficult for

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1. B.G. Constitutional Commission, 1954, pp. 23-4.
 2. ibid., p. 35
 3. idem.
 4. See Cheddi Jagan, Fight for Freedom - Waddington Constitution Exposed.

a party which decries a constitution as inadequate to be anxious to make that constitution work. The character and temper of the party's campaign, too, had obviously antagonised the merchant-planter group and caused at least apprehension in the minds of the officials.¹ But it was in the actual business of government that the crisis arose. Friction was immediately generated by the Party's failure to make an immediate reply to the Queen's address, and by the tenor of Jagan's reply which repeated Party criticisms of the constitution. The refusal of the PPP Government to accept an invitation to send delegates for the Queen's visit to Jamaica, the repeal of the bill banning undesirable publications, the introduction of a bill to repeal the wartime law restricting the freedom to strike in essential services, and finally the Labour Relations Bill, all contributed to build up an atmosphere of tension. Except in the case of the visit to Jamaica, the PPP was attempting to remedy a grievance against which had protested. In fact, the last bill, which aimed at providing for a poll in jurisdictional disputes between unions, could be regarded as a constructive measure. Jagan had proposed it in the Council in 1952.² The question is, however, complicated by the background of conflict and rivalry between MPCA and GIWU in the latter's demand for recognition on the estates.

1. See B.G. Constitutional Commission, 1954, pp. 41-54 for a reflection of these attitudes.

2. ibid. p. 58.

Negotiations had been going on between the GIWU and the Sugar Producers' Association on the question of recognition of the union since August 13th, and on the 20th the SPA agreed to recognise the GIWU conditionally. A meeting of the Union called a strike next day, and Ashton Chase, as Minister, announced his intention of introducing the labour relations bill. Efforts to rush through all its stages in one day were frustrated by the Speaker, but it was finally passed by the House on October 8th. The provisions of the bill, while making polls compulsory, were inadequate.¹

The atmosphere of growing tension is evident from the report of the Constitutional Commission of 1954, though it seems not to have affected ordinary members of the public. A constitutional crisis was brewing over the Labour Relations Bill, which was to go up to the State Council for deliberation; the Party had made it clear that the Bill must go through at all costs. It never did - the Constitution was suspended before it could be discussed. The action taken in suspending the constitution was defended in the official White Paper published afterwards, which listed charges ranging from ministerial irresponsibility to undermining the loyalty of the police against the PPP Ministers.² Whatever the justice of these accusations may be - and some of them appear to have

1. ibid, p.63.

2. British Guiana Suspension of Constitution White Paper, 1953.

been based on very slender evidence - it is abundantly clear that the PPP leaders were guilty of gross political misjudgement coupled with an irresponsibility, born of their overwhelming success in the elections, which may well have been temporary. The suspension of the constitution, when viewed at this distance with as much objectivity as its contemporary character allows, has the appearance of an official coup d'etat to forestall a constitutional crisis in a situation of rising tension, rather than a necessary consequence of any of the events which led up to it. A confession of weakness on the part of the Governor in face of the strength and popularity of the PPP, it indicated that the constitution could have been made to work, had the pace of the PPP leaders' reforming zeal been slower.

The arrival of troops in the territory appears to have surprised most British Guianese, though it has been said that PPP Ministers suspected some such action.¹ It gave to most of the party's supporters an additional sense of grievance, and had the immediate effect of hardening support behind it in the country. In 1955, a split between Burnham and the Jagans occurred. The cause of the breach has not been made clear, but a genuine difference of opinion on the party's future tactics, along with the rivalry for control of the party which

1. See, e.g., B.G. Constitutional Commission, 1954, App. 11, p. 85.

had always existed, seem to have been responsible.¹ The split destroyed the hope of Labour unity in British Guiana, and gave to the territory's politics a racial complexion, the avoidance of which had been one of the PPP's main assets.

Amid the turmoil of political developments after 1949, trade unionism assumed secondary importance in the Labour Movement in British Guiana. During the years 1947 - 1955, 41 unions were formed, and 18 dissolved. The tendency to fragmentation has persisted in spite of a TUC plan in 1948 to amalgamate all its affiliate unions into one big union, with three sections for sugar workers, government employees, and others.² A list compiled by the Labour Department for 1955 showed 37 functioning unions with a total estimated membership of about 10,000. Two of these unions, the MPCA and the TWU, had over 5,500 members between them; 15 unions had less than 100 members, while none of the others had more than 500 members. The alliance between the PPP and the majority of the trade unions did not have the effect of creating bigger and stronger unions.

Developments in Trinidad.

Developments in Trinidad have failed to produce either the two large pro-Labour camps of the Jamaican Labour Movement, or a Socialist Party with almost universal support like the PPP in British Guiana. Both the political and the

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1. See, e.g., The Great Betrayal, 1955, published by the Jagan faction of the PPP.
 2. Annual Report, 1948; Memo from TUC, 1948 in CLC Papers.

industrial sections of the Labour Movement in Trinidad reveal a degree of individualism among leaders which has resulted in the division of organised labour into a number of independent groups. Trinidad had possessed an active Labour Party before the disturbances, but the events set in motion by the working class revolution had passed the TLP by. It had virtually no support when Cipriani died in 1945, and though it continued to exist, its importance for the Labour Movement after 1939 is negligible.

The TLP was only one of a number of Labour or Socialist Parties which appeared on the Trinidad scene without making any impression, in this period. In its longevity it compares favourably with its rivals. Politics in Trinidad has centred, until 1956, around personalities rather than around parties, and in the era of adult suffrage and the importance of trade unions, few candidates were to be found who did not claim to be Labour candidates. This situation makes discussion of political developments in the Labour Movement in Trinidad more difficult than in the case of Jamaica or British Guiana, as no distinct trends are apparent.

In spite of the failure of party politics to establish itself in Trinidad, a number of parties emerged in the period 1940 to 1955, which were connected with the Labour Movement. The first and most important of these was the West Indian National Party, founded in 1942, and inspired by the example of the PNP in Jamaica.¹ Under the Presidency

1. Pitt to Manley, 18/7/1945 in CLC Papers.

of Dr. David Pitt, a Negro who has recently been adopted as prospective Labour Party candidate for Hampstead in London, its officers were all Negro, and included Roy Joseph and Dr. Patrick Solomon, as well as Quentin O'Connor of the FWTU. The uni-racial character of the membership obviously worried its leaders, who claimed that they had done all that was possible to encourage East Indians to join the party.¹ As its name implies, the Party meant to concern itself with the entire West Indian political scene; it had local branches in Grenada and British Guiana from 1944. Its programme called for, among other things:²

- 1) Adult suffrage and an Executive responsible to the Legislature; the abolition of property and income qualifications for candidates to the Legislative Council;
- 2) Re-distribution of land for land settlement;
- 3) Acquisition of the sugar estates for sale to peasants; co-operative growing and refining of sugar;
- 4) Eventual state ownership of sugar factories and of the oil industry; nationalisation of of public utilities;
- 5) Employment of local labour in 95% of all jobs in the oil industry; increase of the profit tax for use in a special fund to minimise the economic efforts of eventual oil exhaustion;
- 6) A 44-hour week, and holidays with pay.

The Constitution of the WINP was unashamedly copied from the PNP.

1. idem.

2. WINP, Statement of Policy; Programme and Constitution, 1945.

The WINP failed to attract, not only the East Indians, but also the important trade unions which formed the TUC - the OWTU, the ATSEFWTU and their tiny co-member, the ATTGWU. These unions had been founded by Rienzi who, after being interned in the early years of the war, had accepted a legal appointment in the Civil Service.¹ Personal rivalries and jealousy among union leaders had led to the secession of the SWWU, and the dissolution of a number of smaller unions had reduced the TUC to 3 units. The TUC leaders, Ralph Mentor, Macdonald Moses and John Rojas, had formed their own Socialist Party of Trinidad and Tobago, and contested the 1946 elections on a programme similar to the WINP. Pitt alleged that TUC opposition to the WINP was the result of his refusal to support Mentor's candidacy for Mayor of San Fernando in 1942;² Mentor accused the WINP, a body of "petti-bourgeois (sic)... middle-class intellectuals" of copying the TUC programme.³ The other labour organisation which the WINP failed to attract was the TLP.

The approach of the 1946 elections witnessed the formation of a United Labour Front, in which the WINP, Uriah Butler, and the FWTU with Albert Gomes as President joined with a number of prominent independents with labour sympathies. Dr. Solomon, a Vice-President of the WINP, was Secretary-Treasurer of the Front. The Front was, in fact, little

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1. See Report on Trinidad, c. January 1953, in CLC Papers.
 2. Pitt to Manley, 18/7/45 in CLC Papers.
 3. Mentor, op. cit.

more than an election coalition; its platform was substantially the same as that outlined for the WINP above - but there was little difference between the programmes of the various competing caucuses.¹ Gomes had been expelled in 1944 from the WINP for supporting T.A. Marryshow's election campaign in Grenada against a candidate put up by the Grenada branch of the WINP, but he had been re-admitted in 1945 and had won with WINP support the Port-of Spain seat in the Legislative Council which Cipriani's death left vacant.² Butler, who had recently been released from his wartime internment, obtained permission from the Government to resume his trade union activity and immediately broke with the Front, re-forming his British Empire Citizens' and Workers' Home Rule Party and starting a union, the British Empire Workers', Peasants' and Ratepayers' Union. In the elections, 3 of the 9 Front candidates were returned, 2 of the 5 sponsored by Butler, 2 of the 5 Socialist Party candidates, and 1, Roodal, associated with the TLP. Gomes, sponsored by the Front, beat Butler in a straight fight to retain his seat in North Port-of-Spain.

The elections were followed, not only by the disintegration of the Front, but by the collapse of the WINP. This was in no small way due to the alignment of elected members in the Council. Gomes and Joseph, both WINP men, had been nominated along with C. Abidh (Socialist) and Roodal to the Executive Council; the other five elected members

1. Pitt to Manley, 18/7/1945, CLC Papers.

2. See Trinidad Guardian, 26th April, 1946.

formed an opposition coalition bloc, which meant that Solomon was now allied with Bryan (Socialist) against his old comrades. The first sign of strained relationships was the decision of the WINP to ask Joseph to resign his membership after he had refused to implement a Party decision that he table a motion for self-government in the Council.¹ By the end of 1947, the new alignments had been cemented; Bryan, with the support of the opposition bloc, beat Gomes decisively in the Port of Spain Municipal elections. Gomes' defeat was regarded as an indication of his growing unpopularity; his part in the 1946 waterfront strikes had been criticised,² his acceptance of nomination to the Executive Council had been a political mistake,³ and his own politics appear to have been veering steadily right.

Out of these new alignments the Caribbean Socialist Party was born in 1948. The three Negro members of the opposition bloc, Solomon, Bryan and A.P.T. James (who had been elected on the Butler ticket) were its founders and became President, 1st Vice-President, and 2nd Vice-President respectively. The alliance between this bloc and the TUC, which had seemed possible during the municipal elections campaign when Rojas and Mentor supported Bryan,⁴ did not come about however. C.P. Alexander, President of the SWWU

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1. Beacon, 7th December, 1946.
 2. See Col. No. 215, 1947, pp. 8-13.
 3. See Craig, op.cit., passim for popular attitudes in Trinidad to nominated members. See also, Mathurin to Hart, 3/11/1947 in CLC Papers.
 4. Mathurin to Hart, 3/11/1947 in CLC Papers.

and of TUC's rival the Federation of Trade Unions, became 3rd Vice-President.

The CSP stood for much the same things as the WINP, with the addition of one important demand for Federation:¹

- 1) immediate Responsible Government
- 2) Federation with Dominion Status, and internal self-government for constituent units
- 3) a planned Socialist Economy on a Caribbean regional basis

In spite of the party's obvious anxiety for Federation, which had been discussed at the Montego Bay conference in the previous year, it set as its "first and immediate" aim internal self-Government for Trinidad - a development, it was felt, which the Party's Socialist character made urgent as "it is obviously impossible to have Socialism in a Crown Colony".²

The CSP was not alone in the field, however. The TLP was given a new surge of life in 1948 by Raymond Hamel-Smith and Edward Lai-Fook, two solicitors, the one white, the other Chinese, and came out with a platform of self-Government and Socialism. By the elections of 1950 under the new constitution which the CSP opposed as not sufficiently advanced, the four Labour parties - the CSP, the TLP, the TUC party³ and the Butler group - had been joined by a more conservative organisation, the Party of Political Progress Groups,

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1. CSP, Constitution, Programme and Policy, 1948.
 2. Extract from West Indian Crusader, 4/2/48 in CLC Papers.
 3. It does not appear to have been called the "Socialist Party" at this time.

to which Gomes then belonged. In the elections the CSP won only 2 seats, though it had contested them all. The TLP also won 2 seats among its 12 candidates, while Gomes held his seat in North Port of Spain. It was the Butler group which had most success, 6 of its 17 candidates being elected; of these 6, Butler was the only non-East Indian. No TUC candidate got in, though 6 independents did, among them Roy Joseph, who had been forced to resign from the old WINP.

After its failure at the polls - Solomon, its President, was defeated, though Bryan and James had been returned - the CSP collapsed. Politics after 1950 took on the same pattern as in the 1946-50 period, with unorganised combinations of members in the Council. Dissension soon reigned in the Butler group, which had never been close-knit anyway, and by 1955 it too was no more than a name. The TUC had one last fling at political activity, joining with the Workers' Freedom Movement, a group of young Marxists, which included Jim Barrett of the old Negro Welfare and Cultural Association, to form the West Indian Independence Party in 1952.¹ Among its demands were nationalisation of oil, sugar and asphalt, a 40-hour week, and full employment or unemployment relief.² The concern of the Trinidad Government over the association of the TUC leaders with the WIIP "which it is alleged, not without evidence, is communist inspired and to a

1. Report on Trinidad c. January 1953, in CLC Papers.

2. WIIP, Fundamental Programme, 1952.

large extent directed"¹ is mentioned by Dalley, who appears to have persuaded Quentin O'Connor of the FWTU to resign his post as treasurer of the party.² With the resignation of Rojas of the OWTU soon afterwards, the WIIP became little more than a name.

Organised labour had failed to evolve by 1955 any form of political party in Trinidad more lasting than the caucus which is usually associated with middle-class politics based on a property franchise.

Trade Unionism in Trinidad after 1939

The trade union situation in Trinidad after 1939 has been less chaotic than the political movement. There was little union activity during the war years; only three workers' unions were formed between 1940 and 1945, and none of them was still functioning by 1946. Existing unions had secured agreements with employers, the SWWU and the OWTU being notable examples.³ Developments in trade unionism in Trinidad after 1946 show many of the same trends evident in British Guiana and Jamaica - conflicts and rivalry between unions and the influence of political affiliations; a strong tendency to a large number of small unions is noticeable in Trinidad as in BG.

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1. F.W. Dalley, General Industrial Conditions and Labour Relations in Trinidad, (1954), p. 39.
 2. ibid, p. 31.
 3. cf. F.W. Dalley, Trade Union Organisation and Industrial Relations in Trinidad, (1947) passim.

The end of the war was marked by a number of strikes, and in the oilfields, by disturbances again associated with Butler's activities. He had been interned for most of the war, after he had lost the appointment of OWTU organiser given him by Rienzi in 1938 after his successful appeal against the sentence of imprisonment for his part in the 1937 disturbances. On being allowed to start organising a union again at the end of 1945, he returned to the oil area. In November 1946, he threatened a strike in the oil industry which he called finally in mid-December. When the oilworkers, well-disciplined members of the OWTU which had an agreement to honour, refused to stay out, intimidation and violence followed and ultimately led to police intervention.¹ Butler's influence was also held to be responsible for a strike on the sugar estates in May 1947.² Reactions to the strikes of 1946-47, and the intervention of members of the Legislative Council, illustrated the close connection between the trade unions and politics in spite of the absence of organised political parties. This was inevitable, as most of the elected members of the Council were officials of at least one trade union.

The strikes of 1946 also illustrated the problem of general unions competing for the allegiance of workers in the same plant. This was a problem which had been raised

1. cf. Dalley, 1947 Report, App. 3, p. 41.
2. ibid., pp. 19-22.

before by the Industrial Adviser,¹ and efforts were made to rejuvenate the TUC and to make it really representative of organised labour. This period of trade union unity was brief. In 1951 the TUC was split once more, this time on the question of its international affiliation; it had been affiliated with the WFTU in 1945. On the formation of the ICFTU, the old TUC leaders, Rojas and O'Connor, refused to disaffiliate, and the Northern Unions, headed by C.P. Alexander of the SWWU formed the Federation of Trade Unions in its stead.² This division in the trade union movement persisted up to 1955, the TUC being comprised of the OWTU and the FWTU only.

The official encouragement given to the ICFTU group of unions soon developed into Government hostility to the constituent unions of the TUC, whose leaders were regarded as communist.³ In 1954, Government withdrew recognition from the FWTU as the bargaining body for some of its workers.⁴ There is little doubt that pressure was being put upon the TUC unions to break their communist connection - they were associated with the WIIP at this time - and that this pressure achieved its purpose.⁵

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1. e.g. in his Report for 1945.
 2. Dalley, 1954 Report, p.36.
 3. cf. Report on Trinidad, c. January, 1953 in CLC Papers.
 4. Annual Report, 1954.
 5. Dalley, 1954 Report, pp.36-40.

It is difficult to make any evaluation of the growth of trade unionism in Trinidad because of the inadequacy of information about trade union membership.

From 17 registered unions in 1945 it has grown to 27 unions with an estimated membership of 20,000 in 1948, and to 52 unions with approximately 40,000 members in 1955.¹ $\frac{3}{5}$ of this membership in 1955 was concentrated in 5 unions, one of them, the OWTU, having $\frac{1}{4}$ of all unionists in its ranks. 14 unions had less than 100 members, 14 others less than 500. 7 unions were defunct. Personal observation confirms the acceptance of trade unionism in industrial life, and the existence of a number of sound trade union leaders who impart to the movement a maturity which it lacked in earlier days.

1. Report of Industrial Adviser, 1945; Commissioner of Labour's Report, 1948; Estimate of Trinidad Labour Department, 1955.

POSTFACE

It is not the intention to formulate any set of conclusions about the character of Labour Movements in the British Caribbean. A number of features have become obvious, however, in the course of this historical survey, mention of which may prove to be of interest at this point. They are set out briefly and precisely without any attempt at illustration by an abundance of examples; they are, however, based upon the development of Labour Movements in the three territories as outlined in previous chapters.

1. These Labour Movements must be regarded as movements of social protest in the broadest sense, with interwoven implications of economic and social class and of racial and political relationships. Not only is this characteristic the result of conditions in British Caribbean society which gave rise to Labour Movements; it also gives to organised labour a form and direction which makes separation of the trade union and political wings of these movements unlikely, (we might almost say impossible), and which is likely to have a racial content, not always apparent at first sight, as long as a noticeable correlation between race, class and ownership remains.

2. Labour leaders in the area have been overwhelmingly middle-class in occupation and outlook. This is partly a

consequence of the need for intelligent leadership (as is emphasized by the example of the Butler movement) which has had to be gleaned from outside the ranks of the working class for the most part. Middle class leadership has been facilitated by the degree of social mobility which education makes possible, so that a lawyer labour leader, for instance, may well be the son of sugar estate workers. It has been made possible, too, by the identity of interests between the coloured, Negro and East Indian middle class and the Negro and East Indian working class in the face of white economic and political dominance, and by the values current in the area, which encourage the absorption of working class leaders into a class with higher social status. Working class leaders, like Butler, who have remained working class are not generally accepted.

3. A great deal of the leadership of Labour Movements in the three territories is charismatic in character, and depends on personality rather than on the prospect of solid achievement. This is not only conducive to irresponsible leadership, but may also pose problems of discipline and loyalty when the first glamour of improved material conditions has faded, or when economic circumstances make some sort of distress unavoidable.

4. The emphasis on self-government in the political Labour Movement follows from the political and economic circumstances of the three territories, and is strengthened

by the predominance of middle class leadership. Paradoxically, Nationalism has not been accompanied by a desire to sever the British connection; only the extreme left-wing of the Labour Movement in any territory has been seriously accused of being anti-British. Butler's "British Empire" associations are only blatant examples of an attachment that appears to be instinctive.

5. Most Labour manifestoes have shown a desire for agrarian reform irreconcilable with their socialist platform; proposals for state ownership of sugar estates often co-incide with plans to redistribute estate lands at low cost to a settled peasantry. This may be a reflection of the two complimentary strands in these Labour Movements which blend essentially middle class ideals with more practical working class demands. It may also be a reflection of the essentially nationalist character of the Labour Movement which often unites cane farming peasants and sugar workers in the same union.

6. Socialist demands, and many Labour demands for social reform, have often left the impression of borrowed tools, the adaptation of which to local conditions has not been attempted. Demands for the nationalisation of factors of production, for example, have been made almost in the same breath as proposals to attract foreign capital investors. The difference between the socialist platform of the WIIP, for example, and that of the PPP appears to lie in the

degree of intellectual conviction with which these platforms are advanced.

7. There have existed in the trade union movement concurrent trends towards huge general unions and towards a multiplicity of small industrial or occupational unions. The small size of industrial employment units is probably responsible for the latter trend.

8. All three Labour Movements have been split on ideological, racial or personality differences, or on a combination of these. This appears to indicate the absence of any deep underlying philosophy which might have a unifying effect.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT.

General:

CLC	-	Caribbean Labour Congress
ICFTU	-	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ISA	-	International Sugar Agreement
WFTU	-	World Federation of Trade Unions

British Guiana:

BGCA	-	British Guiana Clerks' Association
BGCGW	-	British Guiana Congress of General Workers
BGLP	-	British Guiana Labour Party
BGLU	-	British Guiana Labour Union
BGWL	-	British Guiana Workers' League
BGPOWU	-	British Guiana Post Office Workers' Union
BGSU	-	British Guiana Seamen's Union
BGSU (2)	-	British Guiana Sawyers' Union
GIWU	-	Guiana Industrial Workers' Union
MMU	-	Moulders' and Mechanics' Union
MPCA	-	Man-Power Citizens' Association
PPP	-	People's Progressive Party
SGEA	-	Subordinate Government Employees' Association
SMEU	-	Subordinate Medical Employees' Association
SPA	-	Sugar Producers' Association
TWU	-	Transport Workers' Union

Jamaica:

BATU	-	Builders' and Allied Trades' Union
BITU	-	Bustamante Industrial Trade Union
JAFU	-	Jamaica Artisans' Federated Union

JDA	-	Jamaica Drivers' Association
JESTLU	-	Jamaica Ex-Servicemen's Trades and Labour Union
JHEA	-	Jamaica Hotel Employees' Association
JLP	-	Jamaica Labour Party
JUCA	-	Jamaica United Clerks' Association
JWTU	-	Jamaica Workers' and Tradesmen's Union
NWU	-	National Workers' Union
PNP	-	People's National Party
PWLA	-	Printers' Welfare League Association
TUAC	-	Trades Union Advisory Council
TUC	-	Trades Union Congress

Trinidad:

ABWU	-	Amalgamated Building Workers' Union
ATSEFWTU	-	All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factories Workers' Trade Union
ATTGWTU	-	All Trinidad Transport and General Workers' Trade Union
CSP	-	Caribbean Socialist Party
FWTU	-	Federated Workers' Trade Union
NLF	-	National Labour Front
OWTU	-	Oilfields Workers Trade Union
PITU	-	Printers' Industrial Trade Union
PWPSWTU	-	Public Works and Public Service Workers' Trade Union
RWTU	-	Railway Workers' Trade Union
SWWTU) SWWU	-	Seamen and Waterfront Workers' Trade Union
TIU	-	Tailors' Industrial Union
TITU	-	Tobago Industrial Trade Union
TLP	-	Trinidad Labour Party
TWA	-	Trinidad Workingmen's Association
TUC	-	Trades Union Congress
WIIP	-	West Indian Independence Party
WINP	-	West Indian National Party

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WIIP Fundamental Programme
WINP Statement of Policy: Programme
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