

FABIAN SOCIETY

LABOUR IN THE WEST INDIES

The Birth of a Workers' Movement

by

W. ARTHUR LEWIS

With a Preface by
A. CREECH JONES, M.P.

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May, 1939

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PREFACE

Events in the West Indies in recent years have been ugly enough to our complacency. Warnings have gone unheeded: the condition of the people in this small but important corner of the British Empire would right itself. This pamphlet is written by a West Indian of African descent; he is a close student of Imperial, social and economic problems who has spoken and written much on these matters. His story here is of the rise and difficulties of the West Indian Workers' Movement. It is written before the Report of the Royal Commission is published and it is well grounded in his experience, observation and knowledge.

The size of the pamphlet places obvious limits on the degree of detailed study which can be given to a subject so complex. There is no room for the revelations of recent enquiries about the distressing condition of the West Indian labourers, their economic stagnation and the shameful squalor of their lives. The population is mainly agricultural; very little of it is industrial and urban; it is only in Trinidad that there is any mineral wealth. There is a big proportion of Indians from the indentured days in several of the colonies and there is a larger population of African origin from the centuries of slavery. What Mr. Lewis does is to give us the general conditions of life of the masses of the West Indian peoples, to indicate the nature of their problem in claiming a better standard of living and to describe the growth of a workers' movement for a wider political freedom and for a higher standard of living and working conditions. He shows the difficulties in creating a trade union and political movement, the progress already made and the demands already formulated. We see these things through the eyes of a man who is writing about his own people and who is identified with their struggle for a better and freer life.

We carry a grave responsibility for a colonial policy based on cheap labour and cheap raw materials. The facts are out and we can no longer plead ignorance and indifference. Of course, there has been official irresponsibility and the dominance of narrow calculating colonial interests. We can point to years of criminal neglect when official ineptitude and sloth have permitted affairs to drift and the islands to sink into unpardonable misery. Now a point has been reached when action is desperately urgent and British concern must be paid in hard cash. The hopeless squalor

of today is in a real way the measure of the shortcomings of our colonial policy and of our economic neglect.

In spite of Commissions and a few excellent books, the deterioration in social conditions has not been arrested. The workers in the West Indies want not only proper protection in employment, a sound labour code and free trade unionism, not only a colonial service which will implement and operate the instructions of Downing Street, but also drastic constitutional and political reform and imaginative economic planning and execution.

These people have come into the European tradition of culture and labour. The organisations are still confused and muddling. They make mistakes and are sometimes poorly led. But here is the surge forward of a working class, flinging up their leaders often by the circumstances of the moment but struggling by themselves for the justice they feel they are denied. Let us assist with our practical sympathy and advice, by patience, funds and by providing educational opportunities. It is a good sign that the British movement are extending an encouraging hand through the TUC and the recent Committee on West Indian Affairs.

The views of the pamphlet are those of Mr Lewis. I hope they will be widely read.

A. CREECH JONES, M.P.

5th April, 1939.

NOTE This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the member who prepared it. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement. It is the aim of the Society to encourage among socialists a high standard of free and independent research.

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November 1938

LABOUR IN THE WEST INDIES

The Birth of a Workers' Movement

INTRODUCTION

Nearly four thousand miles across the Atlantic lies a beautiful chain of islands forming a crescent from Florida in the United States to Venezuela in South America, and enclosing the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea. Though the British public seldom hears of them, the British West Indies are among the oldest and were once the most highly prized of British domains.

Since Columbus stumbled across them in his search for a westerly passage to India, the islands have had a chequered history. After Columbus came settlers from Europe, seeking with the help of black slave labour to make their fortunes in cocoa, coffee, cotton, tobacco and, above all, sugar. For two centuries the islands were a scene of great prosperity, but in the nineteenth century that prosperity vanished; the islands faded into obscurity and ceased to be a turbulent concern of European politics.

Once more they are in the public eye; but now on account of their poverty. For the last few years there have been continuous upheavals, and it is the purpose of this pamphlet to examine their causes and to trace the development of the Labour Movement to which they have given birth.

Just over 2½ million people live in the British colonies. Half of them live in Jamaica (1,150,000), the biggest of the other units being Trinidad (450,000) and British Guiana—a South American colony usually grouped with the islands—(340,000). Barbados is a tiny island with a population of 190,000. For administrative purposes the remaining islands are in two groups, the 'Windward Islands', of which Grenada, with 90,000, has the largest population, and the 'Leeward Islands', whose largest unit, Dominica, has 50,000. From this it will be seen that the colonies are all small and scattered, and these two factors are of great political significance.

This two and a half million includes many races, Europeans, Negroes, East Indians and Chinese being the main groups. The white population is relatively small, averaging about 3% of the total, this being exceeded only in the exclusively sugar plantation islands of Barbados (7%), St. Kitts (6%) and Antigua (4%). But this tiny white element dominates every aspect of West Indian

life. Economically and politically the white man is supreme; he owns the biggest plantations, stores and banks, controlling directly or indirectly the entire economic life of the community. It is he whom the Governor most often nominates to his councils, and for his sons that the best Government jobs are reserved. Socially, the whites in general constitute the aristocracy. They run their own clubs from which non-whites are excluded, and it is they who constitute the 'Court' life of 'His Majesty's Representative', the Governor. Their presence in the islands goes back to their early discovery and settlement. Some are descendants of aristocrats to whom European monarchs made grants of lands; others of rebels and persons deported from the mother country.

The East Indians constitute about 12% of the population, but are congregated mainly in British Guiana and Trinidad, where they form respectively a little less than half and about one-third of the population. They are the most recent comers, they or their ancestors having been imported during the last century to work as indentured labourers on the plantations after the emancipation of the slaves. They still largely retain their languages, customs and religions. But they are fast becoming westernised from contact with the other races, and their children, receiving a western education, are growing up with a European outlook.

The bulk of the population—80% or more—are of African descent, the children of slaves introduced from Africa in the 17th and 18th centuries, and emancipated in 1834. They have lost most of their African heritage, assimilating the ideas of their white rulers, and adapting themselves to European institutions. English is spoken universally (though there are remnants of a French patois) and Christianity has replaced the African religions.

Census returns show that some 50% of the population is engaged directly in agriculture. Of these the bulk are landless agricultural labourers, but there are also some peasants, especially in Jamaica, where the peasant class is of great social significance.

The other 50% is engaged in the towns, mainly in commerce, transport, light industry and domestic service. The class structure of the West Indian town differs little from that of an English town of corresponding size. At the top of the coloured ladder, challenging the white aristocracy on every front, comes coloured 'Society', Negro, mulatto, East Indian, and Chinese. 'In one sentence,' a keen observer has written¹:

'one might say that the net result of British policy in Jamaica in the last fifty years is that without changing the position of the peasant it has created a Jamaican bourgeoisie'.

¹ Kenneth Pringle, *Waters of the West*, pp. 95-96.

This 'bourgeoisie' is a small but important element. It consists of coloured professional men—lawyers, doctors, secondary school teachers, engineers and other university graduates; and of a small number of people who have managed to become large landowners, either with funds earned abroad, or through using professional earnings to buy land, or by inheritance from some Scotch or French ancestor who in the distant past married or associated with a negro woman. And finally it consists of a sprinkling of men who have made big money in business.

This element of society includes those educationally most fitted to lead the West Indies. Undoubtedly the factor most important in moulding the political attitude of this class is white supremacy. The West Indies have a most deserved reputation for freedom from racial antagonism. There is no racial legislation; white and black go to the same schools, play in the same teams and so on. Yet every one is conscious of the efforts of white people to maintain their supremacy and their privileges. These things reveal themselves in many ways—in social clubs, in official functions, in church, etc.—but the form which is most resented is the reservation of certain appointments, both by the state and by private concerns, for white men. Every West Indian knows that the Governor of the French West Indian island of Guadeloupe is a black man; but he knows too that so long as current British policy persists there can never be a black Governor of Trinidad or a black Bishop of Barbados. Coloured 'Society' feels these things most, for culturally it is not merely equal but superior to white society, being so much better educated. There are far more highly educated coloured men of university standing in any West Indian colony than there are white, since while the coloured people go so largely into the professions, the whites for the most part remain in agriculture and business.

The effect is as we should expect; some rebel, while others seek to conform. Many West Indians react by trying to identify themselves with the ruling classes. They try to marry white, or to marry some fair person, and thus much importance is attached to lightness of complexion, the 'high yaller' despising the brown, and the brown despising the black. Such persons do their best to cut themselves off from all contact with the masses; become often more reactionary than the whites; and in positions of authority often act with a harshness which makes many West Indians prefer a white master to a black. We have here a problem which can only be solved by destroying its root—the deliberate maintenance of white supremacy.

Others react in the opposite way. They ally themselves with

the masses, form trade unions and political parties, and seek to secure for coloured people a higher social dignity. This is not by any means the only reason why some of the intelligentsia are to be found in the Labour Movement ; it is simply a factor which forms the background of much of the political agitation in these colonies in the last twenty years.

This disunity has the most unfortunate results. It means, on the one hand, that the Government can always find coloured men willing to do its most dirty work ; and on the other hand, that there are many who refuse to associate themselves even with the most praiseworthy official enterprise. There is still room for political education of the middle classes.

2 SOCIAL CONDITIONS

So much has been written on this subject in recent months that it is hardly necessary to go into it in great detail. We shall therefore content ourselves with a summary of the position.

WAGES

Wages and the cost of living vary from island to island. Wages of agricultural labourers range from 1/3 a day in the smaller islands to 2/- a day in Jamaica. Receipts other than wages also vary. In some places the labourer is given a plot of land on which to grow food ; in others this can only be obtained at a fairly high rental. Similarly housing is provided at a low rental in barracks on some plantations. The money level of wages thus tells us very little. But in every island where official committees have investigated the earnings of labourers it has been found that they are so low as just to permit subsistence at a deplorably low level. And evidence of this jumps to the eye in the ragged clothing, dilapidated housing, and undernourished condition of the masses and their children.

HOUSING

‘ In no aspect of our inquiry,’ wrote the official Commission on the Disturbances in Trinidad in 1937, -

have we been more impressed by the evidence placed before us and by our own investigations than as regards the conditions in which large numbers of the working population, both urban and rural, are housed.

A good proportion of the agricultural labourers—as much as 50% in some places—lives on the plantations in ‘barracks’, constructed on the same principle as stables. To quote the same report, they consist for the most part

of a long wooden building roofed with galvanised iron, divided from end to end by a partition and sub-divided on both sides into a series of single rooms,

each of which would be occupied by a labourer and his family. A relic of slavery and indentured labour, they are almost always old, battered, and much too small for their inhabitants. The labourers’ own huts vary from mud or coconut branches to unpainted wood, but are also too small. Urban workers usually live in houses on the average somewhat better than the rural hut, though there are some terrible patches of slums.

Disrepair, absence of sanitary arrangements, high rents and overcrowding are the four main evils. An official Barbados report states that two-thirds of the population lives in dwellings of two rooms or less. Indeed the typical case is to find the family living in a single room.

Recently some plantations have started to improve their housing conditions, and municipalities are launching out on slum clearance. But progress is slow, and in the absence of legislation, depends mainly on public opinion for its driving force.

HEALTH

Malnutrition plays havoc with productive efficiency and resistance to disease. There are thousands of people too poor to eat as much as is necessary, and any teacher can give cases of children coming to school on a breakfast of sugar and water, with no prospect of lunch. But far greater numbers eat enough and are yet malnourished because their diet is unbalanced. There is an abundance of starchy foods, but milk, meat and other fats are so expensive as to be beyond the reach of the working classes, except as Sunday luxuries.

Consequently West Indians are prey to a number of diseases which weaken but do not kill, especially malaria, yaws, hookworm and venereal diseases. These could all be eradicated fairly easily by expenditure on drainage, injections and clinics, by propaganda and by improved nutrition. To the powers that be this presents a vicious circle; they claim that productive efficiency cannot increase until health improves; health cannot improve until more money is spent on medical services; and money cannot be found for medical services until productive efficiency increases. But there is no vicious circle for men of determination.

SOCIAL LEGISLATION

There is practically no legislation concerning housing or working conditions, and no unemployment or health insurance. Old age pensions are only just beginning to make their appearance; so are minimum wage machinery and a wholly inadequate system of workmen's compensation, which does not apply to agricultural workers. Truck Acts exist, but there is no one to enforce them, and they are consistently ignored. West Indian Governments have been wholly identified with planter interests, and have hitherto not been much concerned about these matters.

EDUCATION

An official Education Commission in 1932 began its report as follows:

An experienced observer of education in several parts of the world, after a recent visit to the West Indies, informed us that, in his opinion, primary education in the West Indies was the least progressive of any which he had encountered in the British Empire. In forming this impression, he had taken specially into account the money which was being spent, facilities for the training of teachers, and contact with modern educational thought. He noted also that the school buildings were the worst which he had ever seen. We, too, have had opportunities of studying education in other parts of the Empire. Our general impressions, as a result of our tour, are not unlike those of the observer whom we have quoted.

This statement is certainly a gross exaggeration, but it is unfortunate that so much of it should be almost true. There is more primary education in these islands than in any other British colony, and yet the number of children in school is only somewhere between 50% and 70% of the children of school age. In most of the islands there is a compulsory education ordinance, but as there are not enough schools, no attempt is made to enforce it. The result is that more than half the children get some sort of primary education, but as the Report quite rightly points out, it is given in unfortunate conditions.

CONCLUSION

Professor Macmillan has written two sentences which in a nutshell describe West Indian conditions.¹

A great many of the people everywhere show independence on a modest competence; but the masses are poor or very poor, with a standard of living reminding one of the native and coloured communities of the Union of South Africa even more than of the peasants of West Africa... A social and economic study of the West Indies is therefore necessarily a study of poverty.

This low standard of living is the background of recent political activity and we must keep it in mind.

¹ *Warning from the West Indies*, p. 44 (Penguin Edition).

3 THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

We can now go forward with our main task of examining the reactions of the working classes to these conditions. Even before the Emancipation the slaves rebelled frequently, and throughout the last hundred years there have been isolated strikes, riots, political organisations, and even trade unions. But not until recent years has there been anything that could be called a movement.

We propose to take the year 1935 as our starting point because it is the first year of the more recent series of upheavals. Early in that year there was a general strike of agricultural labourers in St. Kitts, out of which serious trouble developed. It was followed, in February, by a strike in the oilfields of Trinidad and subsequent hunger march, and later in the year by strikes in British Guiana, a serious disturbance in St. Vincent and a coal strike in St. Lucia.

After all this activity 1936 was a fairly quiet year, but there was widespread trouble in 1937. The strikes in Trinidad in June were followed almost immediately by an upheaval in Barbados and by strikes in British Guiana, St. Lucia and Jamaica. This series of protests first brought West Indian conditions to the eye of the British public.

But it was the general strike in Jamaica in the following year, immediately succeeded by further strikes in British Guiana, which really roused the public mind. By that time at least 46 persons had been killed in the course of suppressing these upheavals, 429 injured, and thousands arrested and prosecuted.

What accounts for this sudden burst of activity? Undoubtedly each occasion has had its own special features acting as the immediate spur to activity. But underlying it all have been certain factors common to all the islands.

In the first place it is generally agreed that the specially bad conditions which have ruled in recent years are a major predisposing factor. The prices of the principal West Indian exports were on the average almost halved between 1928 and 1933, and workers were forced to submit to drastic wage cuts, increased taxation, and unemployment.

A second factor has been the steady drift of unemployed workers from the plantations to the towns. There their numbers have been reinforced by labourers repatriated from Cuba and San Domingo. Long unemployment without any dole has made these workers very bitter and militant, and they have sometimes used periods of emergency for looting and demonstrations. The official reports are usually content to describe such people as 'hooligans', but

more often than not they are genuinely unemployed workers who have drifted into the towns and have no means of support.

Again, a number of factors have combined to increase the political consciousness of the workers. Foremost is the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. West Indians felt that in that issue the British Government betrayed a nation because it was black, and this has tended to destroy their faith in white government, and to make them more willing to take their fate in their own hands. News of sit-down strikes in France and America was also followed with the greatest interest.

Had there existed constitutional machinery for the redress of grievances, there might well have been no upheavals. But Government and employers have always been hostile to collective bargaining, and the political constitution is deliberately framed to exclude the workers from any control over the legislature. Consequently the general strike and the riot have been the worker's only weapons for calling attention to his conditions.

In the following pages we shall trace these upheavals island by island, paying particular attention to the trade union and political organisations to which they have given birth.

ST. KITTS

This island, which experienced the first of the recent series of explosions, is a tiny member of the Leeward group with a population of less than 20,000. It consists almost wholly of plantations owned by Europeans; there are hardly any peasants; and the general atmosphere is most reactionary. In the twenties and early thirties there was a fairly militant *Representative Government Association* led by some members of the middle classes, but this was mainly concerned with political questions. There have also been a number of working class societies, of which the *Workers' League* and the *Universal Benevolent Association* are the most notable, but they have not had a large membership.

Social conditions in this colony are so much worse than elsewhere that in 1929 a West Indian Commission made them the subject of a special report, but no action was taken on this.

In the year 1935 the beginning of the sugar cane reaping season was set for 28th January, and throughout the preceding weeks labourers were discussing between themselves the necessity for wage increases. Some workers felt that no increase could be expected at the ruling price of sugar, while others thought that an increase was justifiable. However, when the 28th arrived it turned out that the employers did not intend to grant any increase.

The Governor states in his official report that the strike movement was started by some of the unemployed labourers in the capital. A group of these started to march round the island persuading the workers on the plantations to strike for an increase of wages. Their numbers grew steadily; the news flashed round the island, and by next morning there was practically a general strike.

Trouble arose when a crowd invaded an estate to demand higher wages from its proprietor. He fired upon them, wounding three. The crowd determined to beat him up, and when the police arrived they were unable to disperse the people until they had opened fire, killing three and wounding eight. With this the spirit of the strikers was broken. The police arrested large numbers, a warship arrived, and in a few days everyone was back at work—except the many who were consigned to prison on various charges and others whom the employers refused to take back. Wages were not increased.

This sporadic upheaval left hardly any permanent mark. It was not led by any organisation, and with its collapse the workers were left merely with the discouragement of failure.

ST. VINCENT

Not so in St. Vincent, which exploded later in the year. With the death in the early thirties of the *Representative Government Association*, political conditions in this island of 50,000 had long been fairly quiet, until the October events came to ginger them up.

What precisely happened is still uncertain, as the Government imposed a strict censorship on the press, and no official report was ever published. It appears however that the trouble was due to the decision of the Government to increase the Customs duties. The public was strongly opposed to this measure, and on 21 October while it was being debated in the Legislative Council a crowd demanded to see the Governor and present a petition. The Governor would not yield, and the crowd appears to have got somewhat out of hand, breaking some of the windows of the Chamber. Some of the unemployed started looting, and in the course of the subsequent disturbances 3 were killed and 26 injured. The Governor declared a state of emergency, instituted a strict censorship of the press, and summoned a warship; and in a few days all was quiet. Then began a series of prosecutions culminating in a trial for treason so ridiculous that at the preliminary hearing the magistrate threw out the case without calling on the defence.

The reaction of the general public throughout the West Indies, even as far as Jamaica, was amazement and deep resentment against the repressive measures adopted. In St. Vincent it resulted in the

formation of a *Workingman's Association* with a radical programme, in the forefront of which stand land settlement and constitutional reform.

In three short years the Association has become the focus of radical opinion in St. Vincent, and a body of great political influence. It is not registered as a trade union, but represents the workers in all negotiations. It has also attracted wide middle class support, and its candidates were enthusiastically returned at the last General Election. It is one of the new organisations which is changing the orientation of West Indian politics.

ST. LUCIA

Some 60,000 people live in St. Lucia, and although the principal occupation is wage labour on plantations, there is also an important trade in supplying ships with coal. This trade was at its best in pre-war days, providing employment for large numbers in the neighbourhood of Port Castries, and contributing largely to the colony's revenues, but it has now largely declined owing to the increasing use of oil.

Politically St. Lucia is one of the quietest islands, its *Representative Government Association* having died some years ago. There have been working class societies from time to time, but they have never taken root. The most militant workers have been those engaged in coaling ships, and there is a long record of sporadic strikes among them in the last fifty years.

One such strike occurred at the end of 1935. It was quite free from violence, but the Governor, with the events of St. Vincent on his mind, decided on a demonstration. He mobilised the Volunteer force, summoned a warship, had marines patrolling the streets, and at night played the ship's searchlights upon the town, dazzling the inhabitants and disturbing their sleep. Well accustomed to coal strikes, the peaceful inhabitants of Castries deeply resented this show of force.

On the Governor setting up a committee to investigate the coal trade, the strikers returned to work, and in due course the committee reported, on the basis of evidence taken *in camera* from the firms concerned, that no wage increase was possible. There was much dissatisfaction but the matter rested there.

In August 1937 the agricultural labourers on the sugar plantations struck for higher wages. This most unusual action followed close upon the news of strikes in Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and British Guiana, and was largely inspired by it. Again there was no violence, but again the Government was moved to demonstrations of force, this time being severely criticised by its own nominees in

the Legislature for what they regarded as the waste of public funds entailed by unnecessary mobilisation. A committee was set up to investigate agricultural wages, and it recommended slight increases subsequently embodied in a minimum wage order.

No new organisation emerged in the succeeding months, but the evidence given before the committee and news of movements elsewhere created a profound impression, especially upon the minds of the younger members of the middle classes. The outcome of all this has been the formation in January 1939 of the first St. Lucian trade union, which proposes to function as a general union of agricultural and urban workers. It is as yet too early to say anything about its progress.

BARBADOS

This is a tiny island, with a population of over 1,000 per square mile depending for its existence on plantations almost entirely in European hands. Its Government is one of the most reactionary in the West Indies, and though in recent years a number of middle class leaders have appeared, until 1937 they had made little impression on either the Government or the masses.

In March 1937 one Clement Payne arrived in Barbados. He was a friend of Uriah Butler, the man who was later to lead the oilfield workers' strike, and came from Trinidad to urge upon the working classes of Barbados the virtues of organisation. He held a number of meetings and got so good a hearing that the Government looked around for some means of suppressing him.

They found it in the formalities associated with his entry into the colony. Payne was the son of Barbadian parents and had grown up in Barbados, but had been born while his mother was in Trinidad. On entering the colony, however, he had stated that he was born in Barbados, and the police charged him before a magistrate with wilfully making a false statement as to his place of birth. This happened just after the disturbances in Trinidad, and the Barbados masses, already excited by the news from the sister colony, realised at once its purport. Huge crowds followed him to and from the trial, and when on 22 July he was convicted and fined £10, he appealed and announced his intention of leading a procession to the Governor's residence to protest against the conviction. The police refused to let him see the Governor and as he persisted he and a number of his followers were arrested and an order issued immediately for his deportation to Trinidad.

On 26 July the Court of Appeal quashed his conviction on the ground that having been brought to Barbados very young he might not have known that he was born in Trinidad. Efforts by

counsel to have the deportation order rescinded were, however, unsuccessful, and the same day he was deported.

His supporters were furious at this treatment. A large crowd assembled on the wharf where Payne was expected to embark, but the police secretly sent him off from another point. To quote the official report,

when they learnt that Payne was already on board the steamer and that the possibility of preventing his deportation was gone, the passions of the crowd, which had been excited by the events of the day, became uncontrollable. A cornet sounded the assembly and the crowd marched to meetings in the Lower Green and Golden Square where they were again harangued. The mob then spread through the city in bands smashing motor cars and electric street lamps. When the police tried to stop these outrages the mob rained showers of stones and bottles upon them in a fray in which Sergeant Elias had two fingers fractured and three other police constables received injuries. The police, who were armed only with batons, succeeded with the greatest difficulty in restoring some sort of order; but it is noteworthy that in the face of the considerable disorder and damage to property they were unable to make a single arrest.

Next morning large crowds again collected and once more began an orgy of smashing shop windows and cars. The disturbances spread quickly. Groups of unemployed commandeered cars and buses and spread the news, and soon the country people were busily engaged in looting the shops and raiding potato fields. To quote again,

The lawless acts committed in the country were more purposive than those committed in Bridgetown; and it would appear that hunger or the fear of hunger coupled with the news of the disturbances in Bridgetown were the chief causes of the outbreaks in the country districts.

In attempting to restore order the police were forced to fire, killing 14 and wounding 47. Over 400 arrests were made, and many persons imprisoned for sedition, including a young man who was given ten years for a speech which 'tended to raise discontent or disaffection amongst His Majesty's subjects or to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different classes of such subjects' by urging workers to organise in trade unions.

These disturbances suddenly opened the eyes of Barbadians of all classes to the existence of poverty in their midst, an impression confirmed by the official Commission who attributed the trouble mainly to unemployment and poverty, and almost for the first time in Barbadian history directed attention to the conditions of the masses. Government, pushed by the Colonial Office, immediately began plans for old age pensions and legislation governing workmen's compensation, trade unions and minimum wage machinery.

Out of the succeeding middle and working class ferment the *Barbados Progressive League* was born in August 1938. Its main purpose is on the one hand to organise trade unions and on the other

to run candidates for election in an attempt to force the Government to provide adequate social services, to assist emigration, and to promote land settlement. Led by a prominent lawyer it has attracted widespread middle class sympathy, and is encouraged by the workers' response to hope that it will soon be able to sponsor trade unions for agricultural labourers, shop and clerical assistants, and waterfront workers; but it is handicapped by the continuous fear of victimisation which keeps away many who would otherwise support it. The views of the League are expressed through the *Barbados Observer*, a radical paper of many years standing.

BRITISH GUIANA

This colony, of which only a coastal strip has so far been developed, consists of a large portion of South America. Nearly half of its population are East Indians brought over as indentured labourers to work on plantations, and their descendants. There is also some Negro agricultural labour, but the bulk of the Negro element is to be found in the towns, in transport, or in the relatively small mining industry, extracting gold, diamonds and aluminium.

In 1919 the *British Guiana Labour Union* was formed, and its membership rose rapidly to 12,000. But with the general decline of economic activity which followed the slump of 1920 the union declined. It never ceased to exist, however, and its Secretary, Mr. Hubert Critchlow, is still active in preaching the virtues of organisation, though with most success among the urban workers.

Until 1932 the East Indian agricultural workers had their interests supervised by an official 'Protector of Immigrants' whose duty it was to enforce the elaborate legislation governing the employment of indentured labourers. This post was, however, abolished in 1932, and though the legislation remains, its enforcement is not very rigorous. Conditions on the plantations have always been very bad, since it has been regarded as axiomatic that the 'coolie' worker has the minimum of needs. Consequently there is a long record of strikes, dating from the nineteenth century.

In September 1935 a further serious outburst of strikes occurred. There was no violence, and the main demand was for increased wages in view of the record crop. The Labour Union was associated with the strikes, though it cannot be said to have organised them. The strikes were spontaneous, widespread and determined, and lasted off and on throughout September and October. A subsequent Commission of Enquiry stressed the need for setting up machinery through which the workers might represent their grievances to their employers.

Towards the end of 1936 the *Manpower and Citizen's Association* was formed, and it was registered as a trade union in September 1937. It has had remarkable success, especially in organising the agricultural workers. East Indian agricultural labourers have proved easier to organise than Negro workers. They have a greater sense of national solidarity, being bound together by their own languages, religions and social customs. The principal leaders of the union are themselves East Indian, and there has been some fear that this may become a cause of friction with the Negroes. This, however, is strongly denied by the leaders. They point out that the union is open to all, irrespective of race, and that all their propaganda is on class rather than racial lines. They point out, too, that there are a fair number of Negroes in the union, and that many of them occupy important administrative posts, especially in the country branches where the standard of literacy amongst the East Indians is not very high.

Within two years the Association attained a membership of 10,000, and though it has attracted the bitter hostility of the employers, the Government has been forced to recognise it as the body with which to negotiate in case of dispute.

Since September 1935 there has been a series of further strikes on the plantations. None of these has been called by the union, which exercises all its influence in favour of collective bargaining. Thus in June 1938 when serious and widespread strikes occurred in one county, the union advised the workers to return to the plantations, and succeeded by negotiation in securing wage increases for them.¹

The Association publishes the only labour paper in the colony, the *Guiana Review*, which campaigns for constitutional reform, an eight-hour day, a minimum wage, and reform of the trade union and workmen's compensation laws, the former to allow peaceful picketing, and the latter to include agricultural workers. At present it seems likely to capture the bulk of the agricultural workers.

Apart from this Association, there are several other small unions in the colony. Workers engaged in the mining industries (bauxite, diamonds and gold) are organised in the *B.G. Miners' Association*. There are also two general unions, the *B.G. Labour Union*, already mentioned, and the *B.G. Workers' League*. Water-front workers are catered for by the *Seamen's Union*, and Government workers by the *Transport Workers' Union* (railway and inland waterways), the *Post Office Workers' Union*, the *Subordinate*

¹ On 2 March 1939 the employers' association signed an agreement with the union recognising it for purposes of collective bargaining, giving it the right to negotiate in any case of dispute, and to hold meetings on the plantations.

Government Workers' Union, and smaller unions such as the *Medical Subordinates Union*, the *Hospital Attendants' Union* and the *Government Messengers' Union*. Most of these unions are represented on the *British Guiana Trade Union Assembly*, a coordinating body consisting of members of the Executive Committees of the several unions, which meets fairly often. Thus since July 1938 the transport and postal workers have been negotiating with the Government, and when in December the negotiations appeared to be breaking down, the *Trade Union Assembly* arranged for a general strike of all government employees in its constituent unions. The strike was, however, averted, and the negotiations are still in progress.

The British Guiana Unions are represented on the *B.G. and West India Labour Congress*, a body coordinating labour activities in all the colonies, of which more will be said later.

TRINIDAD

Trinidad is the only West Indian colony whose exports are not predominantly agricultural. An important extractive and refining oil industry has developed steadily in the southern part of the island since 1908, and today oil accounts for 60% of the value of the island's exports. Nevertheless the number of workers in the industry is relatively small, sugar and cocoa between them employing seven times as many people as oil. From the labour point of view, therefore, Trinidad must be regarded with the other colonies as being predominantly agricultural. A small peasantry has emerged, but the large plantation with its dependence on large supplies of cheap landless labour continues to be the basis of the system.

Working class activity in this colony has a long history. The *Trinidad Workingmen's Association* was formed in the early nineties of the last century, and its radical programme attracted much attention. It declined, however, after the serious disturbances of 1903 (the 'Water Riots') when the police seized the opportunity of prosecuting some of its most prominent members, and it was not revived until 1919.

Under the leadership of Captain Cipriani, a European born in Trinidad, who had learnt in the war the worth of the 'barefooted West Indian', the Association grew steadily throughout the twenties, and was able in the early thirties to claim a membership of 120,000, out of a total population of 450,000. It never functioned as a union, but devoted its attention to legislative reforms. As an opposition party much of its work consisted in useful amendments to bills proposed by the Government; but it also consistently agitated for proper trade union legislation, factory legislation,

social insurance schemes, minimum wage legislation, land settlement, constitutional reform, etc., and was responsible for forcing the Government to introduce workmen's compensation. Of the 26 members of the Legislative Council only seven are elected, but for years the Association has been well represented among the seven. It has also controlled the City Council of Port-of-Spain for many years, and used its power to improve the working conditions of municipal employees, to initiate slum clearance and other improvements which make Port-of-Spain one of the finest cities in the Caribbean area, and to acquire the tramway system for municipal ownership, after a long legal battle. The Association is affiliated to the British Labour Party, and fraternal delegations have been exchanged. When in 1932 the Government passed trade union legislation which did not permit peaceful picketing or protect against actions in tort the Association decided on the advice of the TUC not to register as a union, and changed its name to *The Trinidad Labour Party*.

The weakness of the party was that it had no trade union basis. In 1929 the *Trinidad and Tobago Trade Union Centre* was formed as a rival organisation, and by 1930 had some 2,000 members, mainly engaged in transport. But it was in the south, among the oilfield workers, that the party's influence declined most rapidly, the workers there being prepared for more radical action than the party was capable of leading. The short oilfield strike of February 1935 and succeeding hunger march to Port-of-Spain were engineered by Uriah Butler, a man whom the party had expelled, and when in 1937 workers all over the island were coming out on strike the party was so out of touch that it could neither lead nor restrain.

The events of June 1937, destined to be a landmark in the history of Trinidad, started in the oilfields, and it is perhaps as well to start with a short description of the industry. Most of the twenty-two companies engaged in it are quite small, and in 1936 five companies produced 88% of the total output. The industry is pretty well organised as a monopoly, wages being fixed by the 'Petroleum Association' to which all the principal companies belong.

While some of the smaller companies are not faring very well, the major ones are prospering exceedingly. Profits of four of them in the year 1936-37 amounted to £1,540,000 on a total capitalisation (including all reserves and premiums) of £6,770,000. As the profits of these four companies were more than three times the total sum paid in wages by the whole industry (£473,000) it is not surprising that one company was able to declare a dividend of 30%, and another a dividend of 45%. It has been argued for many

years that the income tax is too light at 2/6 in the £, but so powerful are the oil interests and so closely have they the ear of the Government, that no attempt has been made to increase taxation. It is often said that the real rulers of Trinidad are not the Governor or his Legislative Council, but the representatives of the oil industry.

The specific grievances which led to the strike of June 1937 were first the rise in the cost of living, officially estimated at 17%, and secondly the 'Red Book', a system for identifying the workers which they felt was being used to facilitate victimisation.

To focus these grievances came Uriah Butler, already mentioned as organiser of a strike and hunger march in 1935. He formed in August 1936 the *British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party*. Butler was not a man of great education, and not always wise in his choice of language, but he impressed the Governor with his sincerity, and though practically unknown elsewhere in the island, had a sizeable following on the oil-fields.

The strike was no sudden storm. Negotiations had been pending for some time, and according to the official Report the police had expected it on 7 June, almost a fortnight before it actually occurred. On 19 June every single worker on the oilfields laid down his tools, and it is a measure of the general unrest and dissatisfaction in the colony that the oilworkers were soon followed by agricultural workers, and even by some of the workers in Port-of-Spain.

This strike might have remained a peaceful industrial dispute like its predecessors but for an unfortunate incident which turned it into a riot. The turning point occurred when the police attempted to arrest Butler while he was addressing a meeting on the first evening of the strike. The crowd succeeded in routing the police, and thus gave the signal for a general uprising. Responsible opinion in Trinidad has urged that there would have been no uprising if the police had had the sense to wait until Butler had finished his meeting before attempting to arrest him, but tact has never characterised the attitude of West Indian officialdom to labour leaders.

The Governor summoned the Navy from Bermuda, and with its help the disturbances were quelled, but not until 14 had been killed, 59 wounded, and hundreds arrested. The Government appointed a committee to mediate, and by 5 July most of the workers had returned to work. Subsequent history is best described under five heads (1) the oil industry; (2) the sugar industry; (3) urban unions; (4) the Labour Party; and (5) the general situation.

The Oil Industry

On the appointment of the Mediation Committee and the return of the strikers to work events moved fairly quickly. On 10 July the employers announced that the pay of the lowest workers would be increased to a minimum of nine cents per hour (three shillings a day). They also invited the workers to elect delegates for further negotiations. A meeting was held on 14 July at which the employers offered various concessions, notably an all round increase of one penny per hour, a pension scheme, one week's holiday with pay, and the replacement of the Red Book by a different system of identification. The offer was rejected by the delegates as inadequate.

On Sunday, 25 July, the *Oilworkers' Trade Union* was formed, and proceeded immediately to formulate its demands, the most important being an all round increase of threepence per hour and two weeks' holiday with pay. Almost immediately the Governor announced that the Secretary of State for the Colonies had appointed a Commission to investigate the entire situation in Trinidad. Negotiations were therefore suspended pending the arrival of the Commission, which was expected to act as a sort of mediator, and in the meantime the companies' increase of one penny per hour was accepted provisionally, and the Red Book suspended.

The Union set about the task of increasing its membership and has been so successful that it has now over 8,000 members in an industry employing 9,000, and fairly substantial cash reserves. Its power in the oilfields is unquestionable.

When the Commission presented its Report in February 1938 it was found that it had dodged the wage issue. The Union therefore immediately recommenced negotiations, on the basis of the demands put before the Petroleum Association in July. At first the Association refused to discuss the issue at all, but through the intervention of the Government's Industrial Adviser, and in face of the serious threat of strike action, it finally agreed to negotiations, and eventually to arbitration. Accordingly a special arbitration tribunal of five members sailed from England for Trinidad in November, two members being appointed by each side, with an independent chairman appointed by the Government. The tribunal took evidence throughout December, and after brilliant performances by both the union and the employers, failed to agree. The award was therefore made by the Chairman, using his special powers, and resulted in a victory for the union, which was granted 50% of its demands, i.e., an extra penny per hour beyond the penny already granted in July 1937, instead of the extra twopence which it was claiming. Both sides have agreed to respect this finding for a year.

The Sugar Industry

The leaders of the oilworkers' union also devoted their attention to organising the workers in the sugar industry, the south being also the most important sugar area. The *All-Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers' Union* was founded soon after the oilworkers' union, and started a membership campaign. It was more successful in recruiting sugar factory workers than field workers, though it had a fair following among the latter, especially in the south.

In January 1938 the union formulated its demands, notably an all-round increase of ten cents per day for field workers, and an increase for factory workers of 20% for those earning less than 4/- a day and 15% for those earning more. The companies, through their union, the 'Sugar Manufacturers' Association', rejected these demands, but owing to the intervention of the Industrial Adviser and the threat of strike action a conference was arranged for 31 March 1938. This conference resulted in a deadlock, and was adjourned to consider the possibility of arbitration by the Government.

But the members of the Union's strongest branch, the employees of the largest company, were determined on a test of strength, and forced the leaders to declare a strike. The Union's leaders have been bitterly criticised for calling this strike, but reply that though they realised its inadvisability they could not but associate themselves with it in view of the determination of their strongest branch. The strike was a complete failure. Practically all factory workers went on strike and a considerable proportion of field workers. But the strike was broken by the 'cane farmers'. In Trinidad nearly half the total output of cane is grown by small peasants who own land or rent it from the sugar companies and sell them the cane to grind; these are called 'canefarmers'. When the strike broke out the companies cleverly used such labour as they could get to grind their own canes, leaving the canefarmers' canes to rot. These in turn proceeded to break the strike. Some offered their labour to the factories, while others called upon the union pointing out the hardships they were suffering and demanding that the strike should be called off. Thereupon the workers started returning to work by the end of the first week, and eventually the union fixed 16 April for the termination of the strike.

The consequences of failure were terrible for the union. Hundreds of workers were victimised, and this served only to frighten other workers away from the union. The employers took the line that the strike was a breach of faith in view of pending negotiations, and adopted an attitude tantamount to refusing to recognise the

union. It will take much patient work before the union is able once more to gather enough strength to force the reopening of negotiations. A source of strength is its close association with the oilworkers' union, enabling it to bask in the reflected glory of the latter's successes.

Urban Unions

The events of June 1937 produced a great ferment in Port-of-Spain, especially under the leadership of the *Negro Welfare and Cultural Association*. With its more or less marxist philosophy and purely working class leadership this body was probably the most radical in the island. It had existed for many years, issuing leaflets, organising street meetings and demonstrations, etc., and it seized on the general ferment left by the disturbances to organise new unions. Its project for a domestic servants' union fizzled out after a number of meetings which struck terror into the hearts of Trinidad's housewives, but it met with permanent success in organising a *Seamen and Waterfront Workers' Union* and a *Public Works Workers' Union*. The former, after a successful strike in July 1937, was recognised by the seafront employers early in 1938; it includes about 30% of the eligible workers. The latter has a membership of 800 amongst employees of the Public Works Department, and has also succeeded in gaining wage concessions.

The leaders of the oilworkers and sugar unions have also founded a *Transport and General Workers' Union*, and a *Federated Workers' Union*. The latter operates mainly among railway and constructional workers; registered in September 1937 it entered into negotiations in January 1938 for shorter railway hours. Other unions are the *Amalgamated Building and Woodworkers' Union*, established in 1936 for building workers, and the *Printers' Industrial Union*.

In 1933 the Trinidad Labour Party founded the *Clerks' Union*, a section for shop assistants and clerical workers, which attained a membership of 500 but, in accordance with the general policy of the party, never registered as a trade union. Since 1937, however, a rival association, the *Trinidad and Tobago Union of Shop Assistants and Clerks* has been formed, with the intention of registering as a union, and seems likely to supplant the former organisation.

Another branch of the Labour party which must be mentioned here is the *Shipwrights' Union*, also unregistered, which is particularly notable in that it has started a cooperative section offering to build and repair boats for the public.

The Labour Party

All this trade union activity, proceeding independently of the Labour Party, has tended to cut the ground from under its feet, especially as the T U C has now written reversing its earlier opinion, and commending the formation and registration of unions. There has been a remarkable decline in the influence and activity of the party, and a tendency to forget its long record of service. It is still, however, very strong in Port-of-Spain, where it continues to control the City Council.

The General Situation

Some friction arose in the early days of the new movement through the difference in outlook between the various sections. The leaders of the south are essentially trade unionists; they are not wholly in sympathy with the leaders of the *Negro Welfare Association*, and are themselves regarded with suspicion by the leaders of the Labour Party, who are not quite reconciled to the rise of powerful new organisations outside their control. Fortunately the early mutual suspicion is disappearing, especially as cooperation in the *B.G. and West India Labour Congress* (of which more later) is proving that there is little essential difference of opinion.

Three labour papers are now published regularly in Trinidad, the *Socialist* by the Labour Party, the *Pilot* by the *Seamen and Water-front Workers' Union*, representing in general the views of the *Negro Welfare and Cultural Association*, and the *People*, an independent paper, giving full publicity to union activities.

Conditions are now fairly quiet. All the unions are busily engaged in increasing and consolidating their membership, and it is conceivable that the success of the oilworkers' union should lead to an increased demand for arbitration proceedings.

JAMAICA

Jamaica, with its population of 1,150,000, is the largest of the islands. It is also from the agricultural point of view the most fortunate; for whereas the other islands depend upon sugar, cocoa, coconuts, citrus or cotton, products whose prices have all been very low, the prosperity of Jamaica is bound up with the banana. In 1937 bananas accounted for 55% of the value of domestic exports while sugar accounted for 18%. Recently banana diseases have been making serious inroads, but the relatively high prices secured have saved the colony from the fate of most of the others. But though as a whole the colony has been able to withstand the effects of the decline in the price of sugar, those large

areas dependent upon sugar production have suffered severe depression and unemployment.

Jamaica is fortunate in possessing a relatively large peasant population, estimated variously at between 100,000 and 150,000 holdings. Their conditions are doubtless deplorable; they have not enough land—most holdings are of less than two acres; they have suffered from banana diseases; and the decline of the sugar industry has diminished the demand for their food products. But the existence of such a large peasantry has prevented unemployment and starvation from being as great as it might otherwise have been.

For the last few years there has been growing unrest associated with the decline of the sugar industry and distress amongst the peasantry. Adding to it has been the repatriation of labourers from Cuba, who have tended to remain in the towns, and with minds widened by travel, to be quicker to protest against bad conditions. Kingston has been particularly sensitive to the general unrest, and a Parliamentary reply by the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 9th February 1938, indicates something of this:

There was also a demonstration by unemployed and ex-servicemen at Kingston in Jamaica in August 1937, when it became necessary for the police to disperse the crowd with batons. A number of small strikes also occurred during the year in various parts of the Colony, but as I stated in reply to a question on 1 December, agreement was reached between the employers and the labourers, and increased wages have now been given in the case of the banana labourers who were those principally concerned. There was no disorder.

Until 1938 trade unionism in Jamaica made little progress, though various attempts were being made to organise labour. A survey in June 1938 revealed that there were then in existence twelve unions, mainly very small organisations on a craft basis. Only two were of any significant size, the *Jamaica Workers' and Tradesmen's Union* and the *Jamaica United Clerks' Association*. The former claimed to have a membership of 5,000 and was organised so as to embrace every class of labour, but the majority of its members were agricultural labourers and waterfront workers. The *United Clerks' Association* catered for shop assistants, and was very strong in Kingston.

Alexander Bustamante, who has recently sprung into prominence, was formerly a member of the *Jamaica Workers' and Tradesmen's Union*, but left it in 1937 and in the early months of 1938 conducted a strenuous campaign of meetings throughout the island, and especially in Kingston. Associated with him is William Grant, who had previously been a labour leader on his own. Both men have remarkable speaking powers and have stirred the imagination and won the loyalty of the working classes throughout the island.

In 1938 matters came to a head. One can do no better than quote the official Report :

On 5 January this year a strike, which may be regarded as the forerunner of the recent disturbances, occurred on the sugar estate of 'Serge Island' in (the parish of) St. Thomas. This necessitated the dispatch of reserves of Police from Kingston and a number of arrests. It was settled by wage concessions.

On 29 March the Governor announced in the Legislative Council that he had decided to appoint a Commission to enquire into and report upon the rates of wages and conditions of employment of field and day labour in receipt of not more than thirty shillings a week, and the first sitting of this Commission was held in Kingston on 11 April. As a result of representations made by members of the Commission, the Governor gave instructions for acceleration of the programme of the Public Works Department in order to relieve unemployment.

A serious disturbance occurred on 2 May 1938 at Frome in Westmoreland, where a strike, principally affecting labourers constructing a new factory for Messrs. Tate and Lyle (the West Indies Sugar Co.) resulted in a clash between strikers and police, four of the former being killed and nine wounded. This disturbance necessitated the despatch of the greater part of the Kingston police reserve, a part of which was still absent when the disorders under review occurred.

Between 11 and 20 May, a series of small strikes by wharf labourers occurred in Kingston, but these were quickly settled ; there was no general demand then for higher wages, the stoppages being due to a variety of causes. During the same period, however, a series of meetings was held in and around Kingston at which speeches of an inflammatory nature were delivered, and workers of all classes were urged to unite together so as to be in a position to enforce their demands for higher wages. The principal speakers at these meetings were Alexander Bustamente and William Grant.

On 16 May a contractor engaged by the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation on road construction in the Trench Pen area of St. Andrew attempted to engage labour, but the workers refused to work for him alleging that he cheated them when it came to payment of their wages. Nevertheless, he succeeded in engaging 45 men to begin work the following day. The next morning, however, a large crowd arrived at Trench Pen armed with sticks, pieces of iron, etc., and prevented any work being done. The police arrived on the scene and prevented any violence. In the result the contractor was induced to surrender his contract and the Corporation carried out the work by direct labour. This incident was not without its effect upon the labouring population of Kingston and St. Andrew.

This then was the chain of events which led up to the explosion of May and June. As we shall see the trouble began with a general strike on the waterfront on the 21st, followed by a general strike of street cleaners on the 23rd, and immediately by an upheaval which spread rapidly throughout the island.

On Saturday 21 May there was a general strike on the waterfront for higher wages, but a few ships were loaded and unloaded with labour procured from elsewhere ; this strike continued without disorder or violence that day and the next. Crowds and strikers loitered on the waterfront until midnight on Sunday and then dispersed peacefully.

On Monday the street cleaners employed by the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation failed to go to work with the consequence that dust bins filled with refuse remained unemptied in the streets. From an early hour mobs began to collect and parade the streets of Kingston. They rapidly became mischievous. Dust bins were overturned and their contents scattered on the streets ; some Chinese shops and bakeries were attacked and goods and money stolen . . .

Between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. the Police were able to control the situation by dispatching parties of 10 to 20 men to different points where disorder was reported. They succeeded in dispersing mobs without the use of force and without incurring the hostility of the crowd.

However, as time passed the mobs were much increased by men and women who might have gone to work if left to themselves, but who were either intimidated from doing so by the mob or were unable to withstand the attraction of having a day out. They continued to parade the streets and began to threaten shopkeepers with violence unless they closed their shops and released their assistants; as a result all shops in the centre of the city had to close.

Disorder then became general and the police were insufficient in numbers to control the situation. Persons of all classes going to business were set upon, public property was destroyed, streets blocked and tramcars attacked.

Thereafter disorder ruled for several days, despite the use of soldiers, the navy, and special constables. Moreover it spread rapidly throughout the island, and for the next fortnight soldiers and police were having to be rushed from one part of the island to another to suppress uprisings. It was clear that the unrest was not confined to Kingston; the whole island was seething with discontent. In the course of restoring order 8 persons were killed, 171 wounded, and over 700 arrested and prosecuted.

By about 10 June the island had more or less settled down to normal conditions. There were, however, further flare-ups during the rest of the year, which continued into 1939.

The events of May and June threw two men principally into relief, Bustamente, and Norman Manley, K.C., Jamaica's leading barrister. Arrested on 24 May, Bustamente became the hero of Jamaican labour, and after his release on the 28th devoted his energies to restoring order. Manley had not previously been associated with labour, but on the outbreak of the disturbances he came forward and put himself unreservedly at the disposal of the working classes, offering to negotiate on their behalf with Government and the employers. He quickly won the confidence of the masses, and his negotiations played no small part in the settlement of outstanding grievances. In the past few months Bustamente has concentrated on organising trade unions, while Manley has devoted himself to political organisation. After some initial friction, both men now work in close association.

The *Bustamente Trade Unions*, as they are called, date from July 1938, and already claim a membership of 50,000. The organisation takes the form of one general union with a central executive and seven divisions. The divisions are Transport, General Workers, Maritime Workers (including seamen and dockers), Municipal Workers (including workers employed by Government or municipal bodies on road or other constructional work), Factory Workers, Artisans of every description, and Commercial Clerks (including clerical workers but not shop assistants). It is expected that a new division will soon be formed for Hotel Employees. Bustamente is President of the whole organisation, and it is believed that the constitution reserves wide powers to him, including the

right of declaring strikes. The Central Executive consists of the President, the General Secretary of the whole organisation, and the Vice-Presidents, who are the heads of the seven divisions.

The division of General Workers has the largest membership, and includes agricultural labour. The most completely organised division is that of the Maritime workers, which must include well over 90% of the dock workers and seamen in the colony.

As is to be expected of a movement in its infancy, the unions are faced with difficult problems of organisation and discipline. Unauthorised strikes occur frequently, and in many cases the union heads are placed in a position of great difficulty because the strike may be about some very trivial matter or about some issue on which the leaders find themselves unable to support the men's contentions. This has thrown a great strain on the time and energies of officers, who have more than enough to do at present in trying to cope with the job of organisation. At the moment hardly anyone but Bustamente himself has any influence over the workers, and as we have seen his constitutional powers are very wide. As with Trinidad, however, where there was exactly the same sort of situation in the months immediately following the disturbances of June 1937, the passage of time, education in trade unionism, and experience, will bring home to the workers the need for union discipline and the true nature of trade union functions.

In September 1938 Manley launched the *People's National Party* at a meeting at which Sir Stafford Cripps was present. The party has had an enthusiastic reception, and proposes to affiliate with the trade unions. Its programme is Labour—land settlement, adult suffrage, social legislation, etc. The past few months have been spent in enrolling thousands of new members all over the island and there is no doubt that its formation has profoundly altered the structure of Jamaican politics.¹

¹ Since the above paragraphs were written, there have been important developments. Friction between the Bustamente unions and the older *Jamaica Workers' and Tradesmen's Union* led Mr. Bustamente early in February 1939 to declare a general strike. This action was very unpopular; the Governor declared a state of emergency; and after much high feeling the strike was eventually called off.

As a result of the general situation produced by Mr. Bustamente's action, Mr. Manley, after consultation with him and with the Governor, announced the formation on 22 February of a small 'Industrial Advisory Council' to advise the trade union movement. Its members are prominent in the People's Party, and are mainly of professional and middle class status.

The Council's first action was to take steps to heal differences between conflicting unions. On 25 February the *Jamaica Trades Union Council* was formed, and it has been successful in bringing the principal unions together. Its first meeting was attended by representatives of the Bustamente unions, the *Workers' and Tradesmen's Union*, the *Montego Bay Clerks' Association*, the *Builders' and Allied Trades' Union*, and the *Jamaica United Clerks' Association*. A constitution was adopted giving the TUC important advisory powers.

It is expected that the Council will soon urge that the constitutions of the Bustamente unions should be revised so as to make them more democratic, in view of continuous complaints of the autocratic position of the President.

SUMMARY

It is now possible to ask what has emerged from these years of working class upheaval, with their tale of strike and riot, death and victimisation. Two things ; the rise of trade unions, and the entry of the working classes into West Indian politics.

Trade Unionism

As we have seen, new unions have sprung up in the bigger colonies for all the principal types of labour, while in the smaller colonies there are either new unions, or other organisations which though not registered as unions, perform the same sort of function. The sections which have proved easiest to organise have been oil-field workers, and people engaged on the waterfront, in inland transport, on public works, and in shops. In most areas their unions have already secured important wage concessions. Agricultural workers, however, have proved exceedingly difficult to organise, and it is only in British Guiana, where special circumstances prevail, that there can be said to be a flourishing agricultural union.

The legal obstacles to the growth of trade unionism have frequently been pointed out. The unions have not the right of peaceful picketing or protection against actions in tort, two rights conferred in Great Britain by the Act of 1906. The Government of Trinidad has also on more than one occasion exercised its right of withholding registration from unions of which it disapproves. But it is not so much legal obstacles which have restrained the growth of trade unionism as the attitude of the Government and employers. The Secretary of State for the Colonies has announced his desire to foster the growth of trade unionism and collective bargaining, and has appointed Labour Advisers in each colony to assist in bringing unions and employers together. But the colonial administrations have not yet rid themselves of the notion that trade unionism is treasonable. Union leaders are in some places continuously shadowed by the police, and the mildest utterance may provoke a prosecution for sedition. The Government of Trinidad has frequently exercised its right of prohibiting street processions in order to prevent labour demonstrations from taking place. Again, trade unionists are often prohibited from travelling from one colony to another on temporary fraternal visits. This is not the sort of atmosphere in which the object to which the Secretary of State has committed himself is likely to be achieved.

As for the employers, in general they detest the unions and their leaders. They withhold recognition as long as possible, and only the threat of strike action is able to wring concessions from them.

The Labour Advisers are supposed to be of assistance in this connection, but whether because of their own lack of interest, or the obstinacy of the employers, the general rule is that they are never successful unless the union is already sufficiently powerful to be able to threaten the employers with strike action. The employers' principal weapon in fighting the unions is victimisation, and they use it mercilessly. In a small community where everybody knows what everybody else is doing and saying, it is easy for employers to keep each other informed of the names of 'troublesome' workers. Many discharged workers have found themselves not only unable to get work with any other employer, but also forced to give up at short notice the house or land which they may have been renting. It is this easy victimisation which is the main obstacle to the growth of the unions.

In view of all this it is surprising that the unions have met with such response from the workers. Indeed in many of the newer unions the leaders are faced with the problem that their members, with a bitter sense of generations of injustice, are over-militant, and anxious to strike on the flimsiest pretext. In the absence of trade union traditions it is a slow and difficult task to inculcate the subtleties of trade union strategy, and it will take some time before the workers have grasped the nature of trade union functions and methods, and grown to accept trade union discipline. That is why some leaders are tending to discourage strike action at present, and devoting themselves to consolidating and instructing their membership. In the task of education they are helped by the labour press which has been started in the larger colonies, by issuing pamphlets, and by regular meetings. There is also a great demand for literature on trade unionism, and any person or organisation in Great Britain who desired to help the movement would probably serve it best by sending out such literature, and by endowing club rooms where libraries may be kept and where workers may gather after work for social intercourse and for educational meetings.

As for the leaders, it must be admitted that one or two are irresponsible extremists brought into prominence by their genius for agitation in a period of unrest and upheaval. But such men are a tiny minority. Indeed one interesting feature of the last few years has been the way in which the agitator who led a major upheaval has given way after the upheaval to sober responsible men who set themselves the task of building up trade unions. The vast majority of the new leaders are extraordinarily capable and intelligent; a few are lawyers or other members of the educated middle classes, but most of them are just workers with a genius for organisation

and a capacity for sacrifice. They are very conscious of their responsibility, and though the difficulties in their path are many, they are confident of eventual success.

Politics

Important as have been the results on the trade union front, on the political front nothing short of a revolution has occurred. It is not merely that the British Government has been forced to appoint a strong Royal Commission specifically to investigate social conditions. Nor is it even the fact that Governments have already been forced to adopt all sorts of measures to meet the grievances of the workers—land settlement, fixing minimum wages, expenditure on public works and slum clearance, old age pensions, enactment of workmen's compensation, etc. This is indeed a revolution, for hitherto West Indian Governments have not regarded measures of this sort as of primary importance. But even more important than all this is the fact that the working classes have become organised politically, and that their interests have been forced into the foreground.

To understand the full significance of this revolution, we must take a glance at the history of West Indian politics. In our introductory chapter we described the political attitude of the educated coloured elements, pointing out that while some sought to identify themselves with the ruling oligarchy others rebelled and sought through political action to secure for the Negro a higher status in society. This has always been true of West Indian politics; even before the emancipation of slavery the free coloured people were in constant conflict with the plantocracy, and throughout the nineteenth century that conflict continued. It came to a head after the Great War with the formation of *Representative Government Associations* throughout the Lesser Antilles. These associations were narrowly middle class in their aims; they wished particularly to see more middle class representation on the legislative councils, and to increase the number of posts in the civil service to which educated Negroes might be appointed. Mass support was easily obtainable for such liberal ends, the urban workers willingly associating themselves in meetings, demonstrations and petitions with the demand for constitutional reform and racial equality in the civil service. But there was hardly anything in the programmes of these associations of direct working class interest, only the associations of Trinidad and Grenada (significantly called *Workingmen's Associations*) including in their programmes such things as slum clearance and workmen's compensation.

Agitation for constitutional reform was intense just after the war, and as a result the Colonial Office sent Major Wood (now Lord Halifax) to visit the colonies in 1921. His recommendations were followed by constitutional changes in Trinidad, the Windward Islands and Dominica in 1924, providing for the election of a minority of middle class members to the Legislative Councils on a very restricted franchise. This was a victory for the movement, but it was felt that the numbers to be elected were far too small, and agitation continued. At the same time the Associations became convinced that the colonies could not achieve much if they acted separately, and federation sprang to the forefront of their programmes.

This further agitation led the Colonial Office to appoint in 1932 a commission to consider the possibility of closer union between Trinidad and the Windward and Leeward Islands. So soon as the announcement was made representatives from these colonies and one from Barbados met in conference at Dominica in November 1932.

The main task which the Dominica Conference set itself was the elaboration of a West Indian constitution, on the two major foundations of federation and full elective control. All went well until the question of the franchise was raised, the representative of Trinidad leading the demand for adult suffrage. On this there was no agreement, and eventually the conference adopted a compromise solution permitting each colony within the federation to settle its own franchise qualifications. It was clear that many of the leaders of West Indian politics were unsympathetic to the aspirations of the working classes.

The real significance of the revolution of 1935-38 is that such narrow political thought has faded into insignificance. The major issues discussed today no longer revolve round the aspirations of the middle classes, but are set by working class demands. Federation and elective control are still in the forefront, but they are now desired in the interest of the masses, and side by side with them are new issues—industrial legislation, slum clearance, social services, land settlement, extension of the franchise and others—which were seldom discussed before. Initiative has passed into the hands of trade union leaders and new working class bodies like the *Progressive League* of Barbados, the *Workingmen's Association* of St. Vincent, and the *People's National Party* of Jamaica. These also have much middle class support, and many have strong middle class leadership, but their programmes are much wider than their predecessors.

Focussing all this new spirit is the *British Guiana and West*

India Labour Congress, newly established as a clearing house for labour opinion. Its inaugural meeting was held in British Guiana in June 1938, and was attended by delegates of trade unions and labour organisations from British Guiana, Dutch Guiana, Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica. The first meeting merely set up machinery and expressed solidarity, but on the announcement of the appointment of a Royal Commission a second meeting was summoned for November 1938 in Trinidad, and delegates invited from labour organisations in every colony.

It is a far cry from the Dominica Conference of 1932 to the Trinidad Congress of 1938. As will be seen from the Report quoted in the Appendix, federation and full elective control figured prominently in the resolutions, but even more attention was devoted to the demands for adult suffrage, dismemberment of plantations and creation of a cooperative peasant community, nationalisation of the sugar factories and public utilities, provision of old age pensions, health and unemployment insurance, and reformed industrial legislation. This was essentially a Labour Congress. It is mainly on the development of this united labour movement that future progress in the West Indies depends.

4 WHAT CAN BE DONE

We have described the social background of the working classes and the rise of the new labour movement. We propose now to discuss the objects of the movement, and to analyse the possible methods of attaining them.

The general aims of the movement are to raise the economic and cultural standards of the masses, and to secure for them conditions of freedom and equality. The attempt to raise the standard of living itself has two sides. First the total income of the West Indies must be considerably increased, and in the second place it must be more equitably distributed. It would be a mistake to ignore either of these two aspects. A considerable increase in the price of sugar, followed by increased wages, would not satisfy the movement's demands for redistribution and equality; and yet without a considerable increase in total income the standard of living would still be very low even if everybody's income were equal. Let us therefore begin by asking what can be done to raise the total income of these colonies.

ECONOMIC POLICY

Undoubtedly the major problem here is the low price of West Indian exports, and it is for this reason that West Indians ask for special treatment in British markets, and particularly for an increased preference on sugar. They ask too for assistance by way of loans at low rates of interest and free grants of money to make a radical attack on poverty—to open up new areas and finance land settlement schemes, to improve housing conditions, to build new schools, and finance the proper training of teachers, and to build and equip hospitals and clinics, to drain swamps and supply drugs for a concerted attack on malaria, yaws, venereal diseases, children's diseases, and other ailments of the people. Undoubtedly many of these things can be done in the next hundred years relying solely on local taxation and the capital market, but if any fairly rapid progress is to be made—and conditions are so bad that it is essential to adopt drastic measures—it can only be done with British help.

What claim have West Indians to demand such sacrifices from the British people? Briefly this. It is the British who by their action in past centuries are responsible for the presence in these islands of the majority of their inhabitants, whose ancestors as slaves contributed millions to the wealth of Great Britain, a debt which the British have yet to repay. Moreover, if the islands were under French or American control they would come within the ambit of highly protective systems which make the prosperity of Guadeloupe or Porto Rico put to shame the poverty of the British possessions. If it were possible for the inhabitants to migrate distress would not be so acute, but restrictions on migration prevent this solution. Either Britain must help, or the people must remain very poor.

Yet, essential as it is that increased preferential treatment and grants and loans from the Imperial Treasury should be accorded if we are to see in the near future any noticeable improvement in West Indian conditions, no one proposes that these islands should live permanently on the charity of Great Britain. It is therefore necessary to discuss what measures can be taken in order to secure that in the long run they may be able to stand permanently and prosperously on their own feet.

First, what can be done permanently to improve the conditions under which the world's sugar is marketed? West Indian producers have always claimed that in the absence of foreign tariffs and quota restrictions discriminating against them, they would be able to hold their own in the world market, and this view was supported by the Sugar Commission of 1930. Not only do foreigners shut out

their sugar, but even Britain by means of a subsidy produces as much sugar as all the islands put together. Recently an international sugar agreement has been signed in the hope of raising prices by restricting output, but it seems unlikely that the islands will gain as much from any slight increase in prices which it may bring about as they are certain to lose from restriction of output. More might be gained from an attempt to renew the Brussels Convention.

Secondly some attempt should be made to reopen the American market by a trade agreement. The United States' share of West Indian exports fell from 26% in 1930 to 7% in 1933 as a result of American restrictions, and is still very low. Great things had been expected from the recent Anglo-American trade agreement, but hopes were frustrated, and there is now a demand for a trade agreement to be negotiated directly. The United States is the natural outlet for West Indian exports, and it is vital that it should be open.

Finally, new sources of revenue must be found to replace the existing staples. It is possible that with care and encouragement fruit growing may become an important industry; also a greater cultivation of foodstuffs and greater attention to the home market would doubtless be profitable, and this is bound up with the question of land settlement discussed later. But despite this it is difficult to feel much confidence in the future of agriculture, and it seems necessary for the islands to seek other means of livelihood. The tourist trade offers some prospects, but seems unlikely ever to become a principal source of revenue. The policy which seems to offer most hope of permanent success is for these islands to follow in the footsteps of other agricultural countries in industrialisation. There is scope for factories for refining sugar, making chocolate, utilising copra, making dairy products, etc. Such enterprises would need to be subsidised at the start while local labour was trained and the local market won, but after the initial period should be able to stand on their own legs. No other policy seems to offer such permanent prospects as the development of local industries.

REDISTRIBUTION

Now we can turn to the other aspect of the problem, redistribution of income to secure to the masses an adequate share of what they produce. There are four main weapons which can be used for this purpose: (1) collective bargaining and minimum wage machinery; (2) industrial legislation; (3) taxation; and (4) redistribution of property.

Collective bargaining and minimum wage machinery

These can be discussed together since their economic effects are more or less the same. The struggle for higher wages is the method of redistribution which appeals most strongly to the worker since it is the weapon he can most effectively use by direct action. But unfortunately it is probably the least efficient method of redistributing income, since it is so liable to have effects different from those which are intended. Much of the wage increases secured by one group of workers often falls not on the employers but on other groups of workers. This is because in general (we shall say something about the exceptions in a moment) the employer combines labour with other factors in whatever proportion is cheapest at existing prices. If then wages rise, he will react in one of several ways. He may use less labour per acre, and more capital, discharging some of his workers who will either become unemployed or be forced into less paid occupations, reducing wages there still further—one group of workers will have gained at the expense of another. Or he may raise the price of his product, if it is one being sold in the local market; and if it is bought mainly by other workers, it is they who will suffer. A special illustration of this is the way in which wage increases granted to municipal and government employees are passed on in the form of increased taxation, which may well fall on other workers. Or again the employer may react by reducing the price offered to some other grade of worker. For instance an increase in the wage of dock labourers may simply reduce the price the peasant gets for his bananas, just as an increase in the wage of workers in sugar factories may mean unemployment and lower wages for field workers, or lower prices offered to peasants for their cane. An increase of wages gained by one group so often falls upon another group that it has to be regarded as one of the least efficient methods of trying to redistribute income. And unfortunately the result is the same even if all workers are highly organised; an all-round increase in wages may simply be followed by an all-round increase in prices (as recently in France) or an all-round increase in unemployment.

The exception to this arises in three cases. First an increase in wages may stimulate employers to be more efficient; this is not likely to be of much importance in the West Indies where years of low prices have already taxed employers to the utmost. Secondly, by enabling workers to eat better and to live in better conditions it may so increase their productivity as to pay for itself; this point is likely to be of some importance in these colonies where malnutrition is responsible for a low productive efficiency. And thirdly, in so far as employers are combined monopolistically to keep wages

low, an increase will not affect prices or the volume of employment ; this point also may be of some importance. In so far as the last two conditions apply, the attempt to increase wages by collective bargaining and the issue of minimum wage orders will be entirely to the benefit of the workers, without one group of workers being driven to exploit another.

Discouraging as this picture is, it is no condemnation of trade unionism, for trade unions do not exist solely for wage fixing purposes. The union is the worker's solicitor, representing him in negotiations with his employer, and increasing his status and dignity ; it is also his insurance company, protecting him against illness, accident and unemployment ; and it is his political machine, through which he may hope to improve his conditions by legislative action. If its successes may sometimes be gained at the expense of other workers, this is merely an argument for close inter-union cooperation to prevent actions which may be mutually harmful.

Industrial legislation

Here again much of the cost of industrial legislation falls not on the employers but on the workers themselves. Shorter hours, workmen's compensation, better working conditions, restrictions on child labour, social insurances—all these things either cause employers to raise prices, or reduce the wages they are able to pay, or the volume of employment they are able to offer. But to point out that the cost in large measure falls on the worker, and not, as he may be tempted to think, on the employer, is not to say that such legislation is undesirable ; on the contrary, it is well worth having, and paying for. And the part of the cost which falls on the worker can be reduced by appropriate taxation and subsidy.

Taxation

High direct taxation offers the best method of redistributing income, since we can be more or less certain where its burden will fall. It has, of course, its limitations. If it is too high, it will reduce the savings of the rich, and this in the long run will reduce the standard of living of the workers if it results in the community consuming its capital ; or again if it is too high it will discourage foreigners from investing capital in the islands, and this can only help to keep the workers poor. This is a consideration of great importance, since the future development of the colonies will mainly depend on their power to attract capital from abroad. Yet direct taxation is at present so low, that it should be possible to increase it considerably with hardly any of these unfavourable effects.

At present the bulk of the revenue is raised by indirect taxation, especially import duties, which fall most heavily on the poor. It should be a major aim of the labour movement to reverse this position, using the proceeds of high land taxes, income taxes and death duties to provide adequate social services, especially health, education, and social insurances.

Redistribution of property

The present distribution of land is the last legacy of West Indian slavery. In those grim days all the cultivated area was concentrated in the hands of a small white slave-owning aristocracy, and despite the rise in the past century of a not inconsiderable number of smallholders, the position remains more or less the same today. The consequences of this land monopoly are far-reaching. In the first place, the planters, few in number and bound together by social and racial ties, are able to and do combine to fix wages at the level which suits them best. Secondly, the distribution of income, and in particular the right to the rent of land, is most inequitable, the poverty of the masses contrasting sharply with the luxury of the landed aristocracy. Thirdly the shadow of the plantation carries with it the touch of serfdom, depriving the labourer of that sense of dignity and independence which would be his in a society in which property was more widely diffused, and this is a factor most important in debasing mentally and spiritually the West Indian labourer. Finally such a concentration of property gives to the planters in the political field a power which they have always used to advance their own interests. All independent authorities are agreed on this, and two Royal Commissions (1897 and 1930) have said :

No reform affords so good a prospect for the permanent welfare in the future of the West Indies as the settlement of the labouring population on the land as small peasant proprietors, and in many places this is the only means by which the population can in future be supported.

Granted the social advantages of such a measure, it is pertinent to consider how far it is economically advisable. Three considerations are relevant here. First it appears to be generally agreed that the greater cultivation of food and rearing of cattle which would result would not merely increase the national dividend but also reduce the effect of cyclical fluctuations. Secondly, the relative efficiency of peasant and plantation production is a subject much debated. To establish a prosperous peasantry it is necessary not merely to provide land, but also to provide instruction through schools, societies, and peasant advisers, to establish peasant banks or cooperative credit societies, and to provide for cooperative

processing and marketing of the product. Given these essential institutions, there seems no reason why the West Indian peasant should not learn to utilise the land as capably as the planter. With the exception of the sugar-cane, most of their products are eminently suited to peasant production; and even in the case of cane smallholders in Trinidad already contribute almost half the output, despite the absence on any adequate scale of the institutions essential to peasant success. Finally the ratio of land to labour is highly relevant in determining how far a peasant policy can be pushed. In a community like Barbados, where severe overpopulation demands intensive cultivation of every inch of soil, definite limits are set to peasant agriculture, such as do not exist in British Guiana with its abundant spaces. In all these colonies it is necessary in addition to dismembering the estates to open up new areas which for want of roads are now uncultivated, in order to make available new land for peasant settlement. It is very desirable too, that roads and drains should be provided to open up the vast lands of British Guiana and British Honduras as outlets for surplus island populations; these are projects which have long been discussed and are now a vital necessity.

POLITICAL QUESTIONS

The Labour Movement is committed to this programme of redistribution, but there are many difficulties in its path. A major obstacle is the present constitutional structure.

The theory underlying these constitutions is that all power is vested in the Governor who through his control of the Executive Council (to which he appoints all the members) and of the Legislature (to which—except in Barbados—he appoints the majority) is able to put through, with the consent of the Colonial Office, any policy which appeals to him. When this type of constitution was extended to Jamaica and other islands after the emancipation of the slaves, these powers were given with deliberate instructions to use them to protect an inarticulate Negro proletariat against a vengeful white plantocracy. But it is a sad commentary on the failure of the system that the people who are most in its favour are those whom it was supposed to attack, while it is detested by those whom it was supposed to protect. Such has been the antagonism of Government to proletarian needs, and so close its connections with vested interests, whose representatives are generally the only people chosen by the Governors for nomination to their councils, that the impression is now widespread among the people that the Governors and officials are little more than the tools of a white oligarchy of planters, merchants and

bankers, in whose society they spend most of their time, and whose will it is that really governs the islands; indeed, that the policy of the Government is the policy of the local club, decided on, perhaps, over a round of golf or a whisky and soda.

It is difficult to explain in any other terms the indifference or hostility of Governments to measures advanced by the people's representatives for improving the conditions of the masses, and even to the recommendations of Royal Commissions. Take for instance land settlement. This has been advocated by Royal Commissions for forty years, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the only reason why it has made comparatively so little headway, is that given by the Commission of 1897:

The settlement of the labourer on the land has not, as a rule, been viewed with favour in the past by persons interested in sugar estates. What suited them best was a large supply of labourers entirely dependent upon being able to find work on estates and consequently subject to their control and willing to work at low rates of wages.

It is manifest (as the Sugar Commission added in 1930) that where the economy of a community depends practically entirely, as that of Barbados, St. Kitts and Antigua still does, upon a single industry carried on by the employment of wage labourers on estates, the public policy of the class most influential in guiding the Government must almost inevitably incline to this economic view. If they encouraged action which, in their belief, must tend to diminish their labour supply, they would be cutting away the branch upon which they sit.

Vested interests, in close alliance with Government, have held unchallenged sway in these islands for three hundred years, opposing not merely land settlement, but any measure which in raising the standards of the masses would react unfavourably (from their point of view) on the level of wages. They have so whittled down workmen's compensation ordinances, that they exclude the bulk of the workers, and have steadily opposed other industrial legislation. Proposals for cooperative marketing of fruit met with steady resistance for many years, and when a cooperative association did come into existence in Jamaica, a trading combine used its political and economic influence to wreck it. They are careful through the use of indirect taxation to keep the burden of taxation mainly on the masses, and they refuse to tax themselves sufficiently to provide decent educational, medical and other social services. Their power has lasted long, but its end is in sight.

The Labour Movement knows that measures of the kind which it proposes can only be enacted if there is strong mass pressure on the Legislature. That is why constitutional reform is in the foreground of its programme. Unconstitutional mass pressure in recent months has already forced through many measures, and unless constitutional methods are provided, it is likely that the masses will have to continue to resort to unconstitutional means of securing their ends as the only measures open to them. The alternative before the British Government is to provide in these islands the

constitutional machinery which will make unnecessary a resort to violence.

It is fashionable in modern Europe to speak contemptuously of the vote. It is indeed no panacea, nor is it an easy instrument to handle. Yet it is the best method yet evolved for securing the freedom of the ordinary man and enabling him to protect and advance his interests. West Indian constitutions reserve the vote to the few, and permit only men of substance to set up for election. Until the franchise is extended as widely as possible, the income and property qualifications for membership of the Legislature removed, the number of nominated members reduced, and the elected members given a real control over the policy of the Government, it is unlikely that there will be any substantial improvement in the standard of living, and useless to dismiss the inevitable disturbances as 'political agitation'. Constitutional reform which will enable it to get into power, is the first aim of the Labour Movement.

One other important political issue is that of Federation. The demand for it is based on two sets of reasons; first West Indian national aspirations, which are a powerful force in its favour; and secondly economy. The latter argument has been accepted by most official reports since 1897, and has long been obvious to the people themselves. Everyone knows the benefits which have been derived from establishing one expert agricultural service for all the islands—such as no single one could by itself afford—and it has long been accepted that education, health, police, the judiciary, and in fact most of the services could be administered much better and at a smaller aggregate cost if expert central departments were established in place of the present independent services. Indeed tentative beginnings have been made with education in the Windward and Leeward Islands, and plans for many other services have long been drawn up.

What has stood in the way of federation is not the sea; that is no obstacle in these days of aeroplanes and wireless telephony. The real stumbling block has been the opposition of small local potentates, fearful that their voices, all-powerful in a small island, will be unheard in a large federation. Nevertheless it is essential in the general interest to ignore these small magnates and to proceed with the federation of Trinidad, Barbados, the Windward and Leeward Islands and British Guiana in the immediate future, leaving Jamaica perhaps until a later date when better communications have been established.

The Labour Movement is on the march. It has already behind it a history of great achievement in a short space of time. It will make of the West Indies of the future a country where the common man may lead a cultured life in freedom and prosperity.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS PASSED BY THE BRITISH GUIANA
AND WEST INDIES LABOUR CONGRESS, NONEMBER, 1938

1. FEDERATION. (A draft bill embodying a constitution for the creation and governance of a Federated West Indies was agreed.)

2. CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM. This Conference calls upon the Royal Commission to recommend the granting of self-government with adult suffrage to the several West Indian colonies providing for

- (a) Purely elected legislatures.
- (b) Qualifications of elected members to be solely on an educational basis.
- (c) Executive Council to be elected by members of the Legislature and to be responsible to the Legislature.

(d) The Legislative Council to elect its own president.

(e) The constitutional position and relation of the Governor to the Legislature to be similar to that of the King to Parliament, i.e., the Governor as representative of the King to exercise the King's prerogatives on the advice of the Executive Council.

3. LAND AND FACTORIES. This conference agrees with the principle of nationalisation of the sugar industry, and suggests to the Royal Commission a recommendation that legislation be enacted in the several West Indian colonies providing for

(a) The purchase by Government of large sugar estates for redistribution among peasants on easy terms of sale.

(b) The prohibition of the ownership by a single individual, firm or company, directly or indirectly, of a sugar estate of more than 50 acres in extent.

(c) The ownership by the Government alone of all sugar factories.

(d) The establishment of a single Government purchasing agency in each colony for sugar, such agency to be the sole exporters of sugar.

4. PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT. This conference further suggests to the Royal Commission to recommend that any increased preference on sugar granted to the sugar industry in the West Indies shall be granted by the Imperial Government on the condition that such preference be given as to 10% to the employers and 90% to the cane farmers and field and factory workers by way of increased wages and pay.

5. COOPERATIVE MARKETING. This conference asks the Royal Commission to recommend the establishment of cooperative marketing of cocoa, rice and other agricultural products.

6. LOCAL PRICES. This conference suggests to the Royal Commission to recommend that no sugar and oil manufactured and refined in the colonies should be sold to local consumers at more than the export value plus 5% for distributors' profits.

7. PUBLIC UTILITIES. This conference recommends that all essential utility services, viz., railways, water, electricity, tramways and telephones should be owned by the state or municipality.

8. SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION. This conference suggests to the Royal Commission to recommend that legislation be enacted in the several colonies providing for

- (a) Old age pensions.
- (b) National health insurance.
- (c) Unemployment insurance.
- (d) An ordinance to penalise unfair labour practices, similar to the National Labour Relations Act of the U S A.

(e) A 44-hour week without reduction in pay.

(f) Minimum wages for all workers.

(g) Workmen's Compensation on the lines of Great Britain, including agricultural workers and domestic servants.

(h) Trade Union law, including the immunities and privileges enjoyed in Great Britain.

9. CONCILIATION MACHINERY. This conference is of the opinion that there should be uniform legislation throughout these colonies for the establishment of Wages Advisory Boards and of a Labour Officer (where there is none at present) to whom all disputes as to wages and other conditions of employment shall be referred, and that provision be made for representation on these Boards of Labour and Trade Unions in each particular trade and industry.

10. **FACTORY LEGISLATION.** This conference urges the enactment of legislation throughout these colonies to provide for factory inspection and other provisions of the Factory Law in Great Britain.

11. **MINIMUM WAGES.** While this conference accepts the principle that there should be a minimum wage for all workers (including shop assistants), it is of the opinion that in view of the differences of supply and demand and otherwise in the separate colonies, each colony should accordingly prepare for submission what may be considered the minimum wages for workers in the different categories of trade and industry.

12. **COURTS.** This conference is of the opinion that the West Indian Court of Appeal should have its adjudication enlarged so as to permit of its hearing appeals in criminal cases.

The Conference deprecates the existing practice in certain colonies of the appointment of persons holding the dual position of Police Magistrate and Judge of the Supreme Court, and is of the opinion that all such posts should be held by separate individuals.

13. **POLITICAL OFFENCES.** This conference demands that the law relating to sedition in these colonies be given the same interpretation and be employed only as in the United Kingdom, and that the existing law whereby the Executive is empowered to declare what is a seditious publication be repealed.

This conference is of opinion that the practice of trial by special jury in the criminal courts be abolished.

This conference urges the early introduction of prison legislation similar to that which obtains in the United Kingdom for dealing with political offenders.

14. **POLICE.** This conference is appreciative of the fact that there is no statutory bar to men of the ranks attaining commissions in the police forces, but is aware that no facilities are in fact afforded for the promotion of men from the ranks beyond the grade of Sergeant Major or First Class Warrant Officer; and is of opinion that Sub-Inspectors and Assistant Superintendents of the police forces should be recruited as far as possible from the ranks; and further, the conference demands the cessation of the practice of racial discrimination in appointments to Commission rank.

15. **EDUCATION.** This conference regrets the neglect in the past by governments to provide technical schools for vocational training, and is of opinion that throughout these colonies institutions similar to the Tuskegee Institute of the U.S.A. be established, that liberal bursary systems be introduced, and that special regard be paid to the establishment of agricultural farms.

In the case of secondary schools this conference stresses the necessity for a more liberal grant than now exists of free exhibitions from the primary schools.

The Conference is emphatic in its demand for the introduction of free compulsory elementary education throughout the colonies up to the age of 15 years, with provision of free books, and a daily milk ration for those in need.

16. **HEALTH.** This conference is of opinion that the Imperial Government should send to the colonies a commission of water, sanitary and sewerage engineers to make a survey of conditions in each colony with a view to improvements; that the cost of all such improvements be met in the first instance by advances made by the Imperial Government, and repaid in due course from local revenues, free of interest. Further, that throughout these colonies the whole question of hospital administration be reviewed by a Medical Commission to be appointed by the Colonial Office.

The Conference is of opinion that there should be clinics to deal with ante-natal cases, child welfare, tuberculosis, cancer and venereal diseases.

17. **MINOR INDUSTRIES.** This conference is of opinion that the governments should extend the present help being given to the creation of new and minor industries in each colony, more especially in those colonies whose principal source of revenue is sugar.

18. **IMMIGRATION.** This conference is of opinion that, having regard to the deplorable conditions in the West Indies, though it is in full sympathy with the depressed minorities in certain states, it must deprecate the settlement of any aliens in these colonies, until such conditions shall have been materially improved for the wellbeing of the West Indian masses, and until suitable arrangements have been made for the settlement of surplus island populations. Further, that alien immigration of types of people who would lower the standard of living be fully restricted, both as to numbers and areas.

19. **POPULATION.** This conference suggests to the Royal Commission that an immediate census of the population be taken, and an economic survey made, with special reference to housing, dietary, and conditions of employment.

SELECT LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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