

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to examine the labour supply and labour organization of the cocoa industry in Trinidad during the period 1870-1920. After 1870 the availability of land, labour, capital made it possible for the cocoa industry to expand by leaps and bounds. Thus it was not surprising that as early as 1900 cocoa had eclipsed sugar as Trinidad's major export crop, a position it retained throughout the period under review. This rapid development and expansion in the cocoa industry was also accompanied by socio-economic changes in the island.

During the period a large body of peasant cocoa proprietors emerged alongside large cocoa estates varying in size from ninety acres to about fifteen hundred acres. As the large estates developed, their method of production shifted closer and closer towards that of the plantation model. The emergence of these two methods of production that is, peasant and plantation, resulted in the co-existence of at least two types of labour systems. The peasant proprietors remained on the whole, semi-independent contractors; relying on the traditional family unit, only employing wage labour during peak periods. On the other hand the large estates employed wage labour - indentured as well as unindentured.

The contract system, immigration from India, Barbados and other West Indian islands, as well as retrained labour from the depressed sugar industry provided a cheap adequate ^x industrious and amenable labour force which greatly accelerated the rise of the cocoa industry. Indeed, during the period under review the cocoa industry became an increasingly significant employer of labour.

This paper attempts to identify the different sources of labour available to the cocoa industry during 1870-1920 and to analyse the changes. It will try to establish not only the sources but also the racial composition of the labour force and the areas in which particular groups were predominant. The study will also examine how labour was used during this crucial period of development in the cocoa industry. It will seek to examine the work of the labour force in relation to the specific culture of the cocoa industry. It will look at the changing relationships that developed during this period of cocoa boom. In particular relationships between planters and peasants, employers of labour and wage labourers, resident and non-resident estate labourers, indentured and unindentured labourers.

In this paper the focus is on labour because labour formed a high percentage of the costs on cocoa estates.

During the period under review, land was cheap, while the majority of the cocoa estates were not highly mechanized. Whereas the type of labour employed on a cocoa estate was both skilled and unskilled, the industry was heavily supervised because the yield and quality of the crop were very dependent on skilled attention and technical knowledge.

Against this background the paper raises questions about the mobility of the labour force, the conditions of work and livelihood of the labourers. During the heyday of the cocoa industry different forms of labour appropriation emerged as a result of the aggrandizement of large cocoa estates.

H.C.M., The Diversification of Cocoa, BICSA Series, No. 55, Augustines, Trinidad, p.17.