

ABSTRACT

The economy and polity of Trinidad were interrelated through three sets of interests: colonial class interests, colonial ethnic interests and imperial interests.

The Crown colony system theoretically assumed an impartial colonial administration. But the White, upper class in the colony expected that in practice its own interests would be supported, even when they conflicted with the interests of the other classes and ethnic groups in the society. The Colonial Office generally deferred, sometimes with reluctance, to the colonial upper class mainly because it regarded the pre-eminence of that class, linked to imperial interests by economic ties and racial affinity, as indispensable for imperial control.

The most radical challengers to the established order were the Negro working class leaders, who adopted alternatively the strategy of constitutional agitation or mass confrontation with the upper class and the colonial administration. Constitutional agitation proved to be a frustrating exercise. For it provoked rivalry from an ambitious Black and Coloured middle class leadership, sometimes in collaboration with lesser Whites, and an apprehensive East Indian middle class leadership, each of which sought either limited reform or no reform at all. This enabled the Colonial Office to grant the shadows of reform, while the Colonial administration continued to use

its legislative and financial power to bolster White, upper class interests, to the disadvantage of the other class and ethnic interests in the colony.

Frustration with constitutional agitation, pursued fruitlessly by Captain Cipriani and the Trinidad Workingmen's Association between 1925 and 1937, combined with depressed working class conditions, race consciousness, and new militant Negro leadership to produce, as in 1919, the disturbances of 1937. These were easily suppressed by the Colonial administration, but the subsequent attempt by Governor Murchison Fletcher to make concessions to the working class demonstrated only too clearly that a colonial governor could do so only at the risk of his own position.