

INTRODUCTION

This research paper examines some aspects of agricultural development in Trinidad during the period beginning just before the close of the Second World War, and ending in 1973. This period seemed both a logical and practical choice for the purposes of this paper - logical, because the time span allows us to deal with post-war developments, until the oil-boom in 1973 radically changed the picture; and practical, because the period is long enough for shifts and trends in policy and performance in the agricultural economy to be detected. This period also witnessed the change over from colonialism to political independence in 1962 and subsequent attempts to reorder the economic structure of the new nation to accord with the new dispensation.

For many years, popular opinion in Trinidad has held that agriculture was grossly neglected, both by the Colonial Government, and also by its successor, the Government of the People's National Movement which came to power in 1956. This opinion was naturally shared by the members of the Opposition Parties. This, however, contrasts sharply with strident official denials that agriculture was being neglected.

See Robert Sturges, A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 10. Also see Frank Ramphall, "Growth and Structural Change in the Economy of Trinidad and Tobago, 1951-1961," Trinidad and Tobago Central Statistical Office Research Papers 1963-67, No. 1.

It is indeed remarkable, given the attention and criticism paid to agriculture over the years, that no thorough study of official policies towards agriculture and the performance of the agricultural sector exists for the period under consideration in this paper.

In A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962, Bridget Brereton has a short section on "Post-War Economic Development" and Frank Rampersad, currently one of the Government's leading economic advisers, did produce in 1963 a research paper entitled, "Growth and Structural Change in the Economy of Trinidad and Tobago, 1951-1961."¹ Apart from these, one would find some studies such as Edwin Carrington's "The Post-war political economy of Trinidad and Tobago," George Beckford's "Towards an Appropriate Theoretical Framework for Agricultural Development Planning and Policy" and K.A. Leslie's "Contribution of Agriculture to Economic Development. A Case Study of the West Indies 1950-1963," but there has been no real exhaustive study of this topic. The available literature seems to suggest that government officials as well as academic researchers were more preoccupied with exploring the concept of Planning and the imperative of Industrialization than with agricultural development. This research paper hopes to fill this gap.

¹ See Bridget Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962. (London, 1981) and Frank Rampersad, "Growth and Structural Change in the Economy of Trinidad and Tobago, 1951-1961." Trinidad and Tobago Central Statistical Office Research Papers 1963-67. No. 1.

Section I of this paper examines governmental policies relating specifically to agriculture. The major policies dealt with are enshrined in the following documents: the 1943 Report of the Agricultural Policy Committee of Trinidad and Tobago; the First Five-Year Economic Programme, 1951; the Second Five-Year Economic Programme, 1956-60; and (under the Government of the People's National Movement), the First Five-Year Development Programme 1958-62; the Second Five-Year Development Plan 1964-68; and the Third Five-Year Development Plan, 1969-73.

Section II examines the overall performance of the agricultural sector in an attempt to discover whether the agricultural sector did meet or fulfil the stated policy objectives. This investigation proceeds by examining production or export figures of the four main traditional export crops - Sugar, Cocoa, Coffee and Citrus; and some Domestic food crops - Rice, Green Vegetables, Root Crops, Pulses and some other crops.

It was extremely difficult to accumulate data on production or export figures of crops over the entire thirty-year period. Sometimes, especially for the early part of the period, figures simply did not exist; where they existed, the data was not always in the same category. The officers at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Central Statistical Office expressed surprise when I went to collect data for this paper, and one or two of them

were even amazed that somebody should want to spend time on this topic. Figures on the contribution of Agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product did not go back as far as 1943. In fact, the first review from official sources started only in 1966. While production figures for Sugar, Cocoa and Coffee were available, only in export figures in the case of Citrus could be found. Very little data seemed to exist for domestic food crop production before, and in 1963; for the later period, the Central Statistical Office's publication of 1971, the Quarterly Economic Review, and the Government's White Paper on Agriculture, 1979, did provide some, but not much, information. It was a bias towards the plantation and the cultivation of sugar, and it was this merchant-plantocracy which, together with the Colonial Office and its officials, actually determined the fortunes of Trinidad at least until 1936. Bridget Brereton stated that both the Colonial Office and the local officials tended to accept the idea that the plantation was a "civilizing agency" necessary for the control of the Black and Indian labourers and that this made them hostile to any measures which might facilitate the growth of a peasantry and the consequent depletion of the estates' labour force.

The 1930's and early 1940's appear to be periods of stagnation in Trinidad's agriculture. This was reflected in the production figures for the export crops, especially sugar and cocoa. Sugar production

¹ Bridget Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, 1763-1962 (London, 1981), p. 94.