

ABSTRACT

The Contribution of Labour to the Social and Political Development of Trinidad and Tobago 1897-1950.

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This dissertation is an historical analysis of the labour movement in a British Caribbean territory during the colonial era. The trajectory is the pre-eminence of Labour in the process of decolonisation of Trinidad and Tobago, and the contention throughout the study is that Labour has been the most potent force in the struggle for liberation from imperial governance and capitalist domination. In the ensuing dialectic between labour and capital the focus is on the working class which laid the foundations for subsequent nationalist movements in the colony. Therefore, the masses cannot be stereotyped as mere instigators of protests and observers in the social and political development of Trinidad and Tobago. This study examines the reasons for the frustration experienced by the advocates of peaceful constitutional reform and the significant role of the working class in achieving this objective through direct action, namely, strikes and demonstrations, extending from the 1920s and 1930s into the period of World War Two. This milieu of social crisis facilitated constitutional reform in a progressive direction culminating in adult franchise in 1946.

This study engages in an indepth analysis of the structure and functions of the

colony's first major labour organisation, the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, particularly its role in the evolution of working class consciousness from its rudimentary stages to the subsequent rise of the new trade unionism of the post-1937 era. Consideration is given to the seminal role of the Association as mobiliser and organiser of the working class both for participation in electoral politics, and as a catalyst for ethnic cohesion in Trinidad's post-indentureship society.

Against the background of initiatives towards self-government in the British West Indies, this thesis examines the pioneering efforts of the Labour movement in Trinidad in the promotion of both Caribbean political integration, and regional trade union solidarity. Finally, an analysis is made of the vicissitudes of trade unionism in the colony and the reasons for its fragmentation in the 1940s.

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