

ABSTRACT

This study concerns itself with the development of a peasantry in St. Vincent between 1846 and 1912. The year 1846 is an important year. It was the year of the Sugar Duties Act. The crisis which accompanied that Act affected an already weak sugar industry and gave a boost to the development of a peasantry. The development of the peasantry is closely interwoven with the state of the sugar industry. The periodic crises which faced the sugar industry weakened planters' resistance to the demand of the ex-slaves for land and intensified the desire of those ex-slaves to seek an existence independent of the plantations.

Chapter I deals with the sugar industry, indicating briefly the factors which affected the industry and led to its collapse at the end of the 19th century. It was the collapse of the industry at the end of the century which heralded the introduction of a government-sponsored Peasant Land Settlement Scheme which represented the greatest step towards the development of a peasantry throughout the period.

Chapter II traces the origins of the peasantry, paying particular attention to the demand of the ex-slaves for land, and to

the introduction of a Crown lands scheme in the 1880s. Planters' determination to prevent the sale of Crown lands in small lots to the ex-slaves withered with the persistent demand of the ex-slaves for land and with the weakening state of the sugar industry.

Chapter III concentrates on the Government-sponsored Peasant Land Settlement Scheme introduced in 1899. The idea of a Peasant Land Settlement Scheme was one of the most important recommendations of the Royal Commission of 1897, which examined the economic situation brought about by the failure of the sugar industry. The idea of a Government-sponsored Land Settlement Scheme was, however, no original idea but had been voiced by witnesses before the Royal Commission and by Lieutenant-Governors throughout the period. The virtual collapse of the sugar industry by 1897 and the hurricane of 1898 which further affected the economic situation hastened the implementation of the scheme. It was therefore no surprise that the Peasant Land Settlement Scheme in St. Vincent was the first to be inaugurated in the British West Indies.

The year 1912, which ends the study, has no special significance. But it was two years after the acquisition of Union Island and thirteen years after the introduction of the Peasant Land Settlement Scheme in St. Vincent, thus allowing some time for a survey of the operation of the Scheme.