

## ABSTRACT

Politics in Trinidad and Tobago, 1946-56:  
from personal politics to ethnic-based parties.

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Personal politics revolving around the patron-client nexus and relying on voting support in exchange for political patronage dominated Trinidad and Tobago's politics between 1946 and 1956. Despite the efforts of the left to promote a politics of principle, even left-leaning organisations were affected since there were personal politicians within their ranks. Only in the PNM in 1956 was there a successful presentation of an ideology albeit to the right of the other progressives and also having elements of personal politics.

In this period occurred the political eclipse of the foremost working class leader and demagogue, Tubal Uriah Butler. Eventually, the question of who was "fit to rule" was answered in favour of the middle class politician of African descent rather than working class leaders who did not possess the criteria of respectability and education expected of them by both the colonial rulers and a substantial portion of the local population. Furthermore, the left fell victim to the Cold War and to its own inability to overcome the peculiarities of the Colony's politics.

Inter-ethnic tensions increased with the widened franchise and the imminence of further constitutional changes. It became apparent that Africans and Indians had divergent political perspectives arising from different historical experiences and cultural concerns. Indians led in communal organisation in order to achieve their political and social aims. The predominant reaction of both the wider community and the Government to this was alarm and

growing fear of the possible political preeminence of Bhadase Sagan Maraj and with him the Indian community.

The PNM cannot be seen as primarily an African response to the political organisation of the Indian community. However in its philosophy and in political support it mobilized a large portion of the African community and paved the way for the further ethnic polarization of the politics of Trinidad and Tobago at the same time providing an important advance in the introduction of successful party based political organisation.

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