

## ABSTRACT

Before 1834 every aspect of life in Jamaica was circumscribed by the plantation system and the lives of the slaves on which its survival depended were subject to the will of their owners. The owners of the slaves believed that education would make the slaves less dependable and less obedient workers; that it would make them psychologically unfit to perform the manual labour which the owners thought slaves were born to perform. The only instruction thought necessary was that which equipped the slaves to work industriously but left them loyal to their masters. Into this conservative milieu came the missionary teachers starting in 1754. These teachers who pioneered elementary education in Jamaica were soon seen as agents of subversion and part of a general conspiracy against the planter class. The tool of literacy which the missionary teachers gave the slaves was seen by the planters as socially explosive. The plantocracy refused, generally, to see that education could be a form of social control and a means of maintaining the social order. They saw it producing one result only, the overthrow of the society. Coinciding as this education did with agitation in Britain to end the slave trade and later slavery, the reaction of the planters against it is understandable. The missionary teachers rejected the charge of subversion as groundless. Their aim, through religious education and literacy skill training, was to save souls. So that such a charge before 1832, when some overtly sought to terminate slavery, may indeed have been without foundation.

When emancipation was proclaimed in 1834, it was widely

felt in Britain and Jamaica that widespread disorder would erupt and the society would retrograde into barbarism. The British and colonial government decided that teachers were to be used as moral reformers to prevent the fulfilment of the prophesied retrogression into uncivilized living. They were to inculcate a proper work ethic and the maintenance of the status quo in the new society of free people, and they were set to work with that aim in view.

However, by 1902 the colonial government had come to the conclusion that teachers could not achieve the moral reformation of the masses, who appeared as prone as ever to illegal and violent behaviour evidenced by riots in Montego Bay in that same year, and turned to the police force as a more effective agency for maintaining law and order. The government's reduced dependence on teachers as moral reformers meant that the teachers had not satisfied the government's expectation of them, but the government had failed to create the conditions to ensure the desired result. The government thought that a good christian character in the teachers was sufficient to guarantee success and therefore it kept teachers untrained or inadequately trained. It paid them poorly, it required school fees which stood as an obstacle to attendance in these institutions and above all it made schooling optional so that only limited numbers came under the influence of the moral reformers.

Despite the obstacles, the missionary teachers as preachers had managed to convert many members of the working class to Christianity. The teachers had managed to rescue many females

from prostitution to live respectfully in legal marriages and had helped many others to become respectable teachers and assistant missionaries. Additionally, they must have contributed in some way to the evolution of the working class that had been formed by 1902. The teachers continued to offer moral instruction and appeared inescapably destined to be moral reformers, character builders or at least moral guides.

A view of teachers as social workers was officially recognised only after 1940 although the teachers had been functioning as such ever since the pioneering days of elementary education. Before the specialist social workers came in the 1940's teachers provided the expertise for the social development of the community outside the classroom. They had pioneered social work among the slaves and free non-white population. They taught Sunday schools, conducted church services, visited and nursed the sick, cared for the aged and arbitrated local disputes. They continued to offer many of these social services after emancipation. Additionally, they assisted in establishing free villages and in preparing the ex-slaves for community living centred on the church and school. Some teachers also led 4-H clubs which were established after 1940 to train the youth in agriculture and related occupations. No compulsion was necessary to get them to serve. They did so willingly and voluntarily for they were, and continued to be, truly public spirited.

After emancipation the teacher was a social worker and was expected at the same time to be a moral reformer, both positive

images. Unfortunately, he was simultaneously portrayed negatively even if temporarily, as subversive, and more permanently, as incompetent. Some teachers attained a high level of efficiency but were too few to influence a change in the image of incompetence. This stereotype was partly derived from the fact that qualifications for teaching were, and still are, defined in such a way that satisfaction with the teacher's performance is permanently illusive. The teacher must qualify by training, but even after that he must keep constantly qualifying himself by refresher courses. But inadequate facilities for training, which for a long time were not even controlled by government, made necessary the constant employment of untrained staff. If this image of inefficiency were not to have been permanent, it would have been necessary for government, the missionary bodies and the charitable organizations that provided education to secure, over the years, the training of all untrained teachers and when that was achieved, to ensure that all new recruits were trained before they were employed.

Criticisms of the teacher as incompetent undoubtedly affected his status. During the early post-emancipation period incompetence was thought to be inherent in blacks but this claim was racist and false. The image of subversion also militated against acceptance of the teachers in the upper classes. Racism, alleged inefficiency and constantly inadequate remuneration combined to obstruct the teacher's climb up the social ladder. However, by education teachers made it into the middle classes, but there they

found that they were quite often worse off financially than civil servants of comparable training and experience and even unionised workers in private industry. In many cases they were unable to support financially the life-style which becomes middle class status and appeared, unfortunately, as inferior professionals. Of the images, it was only that of subversion which in 1980 had not stuck permanently to the teachers.