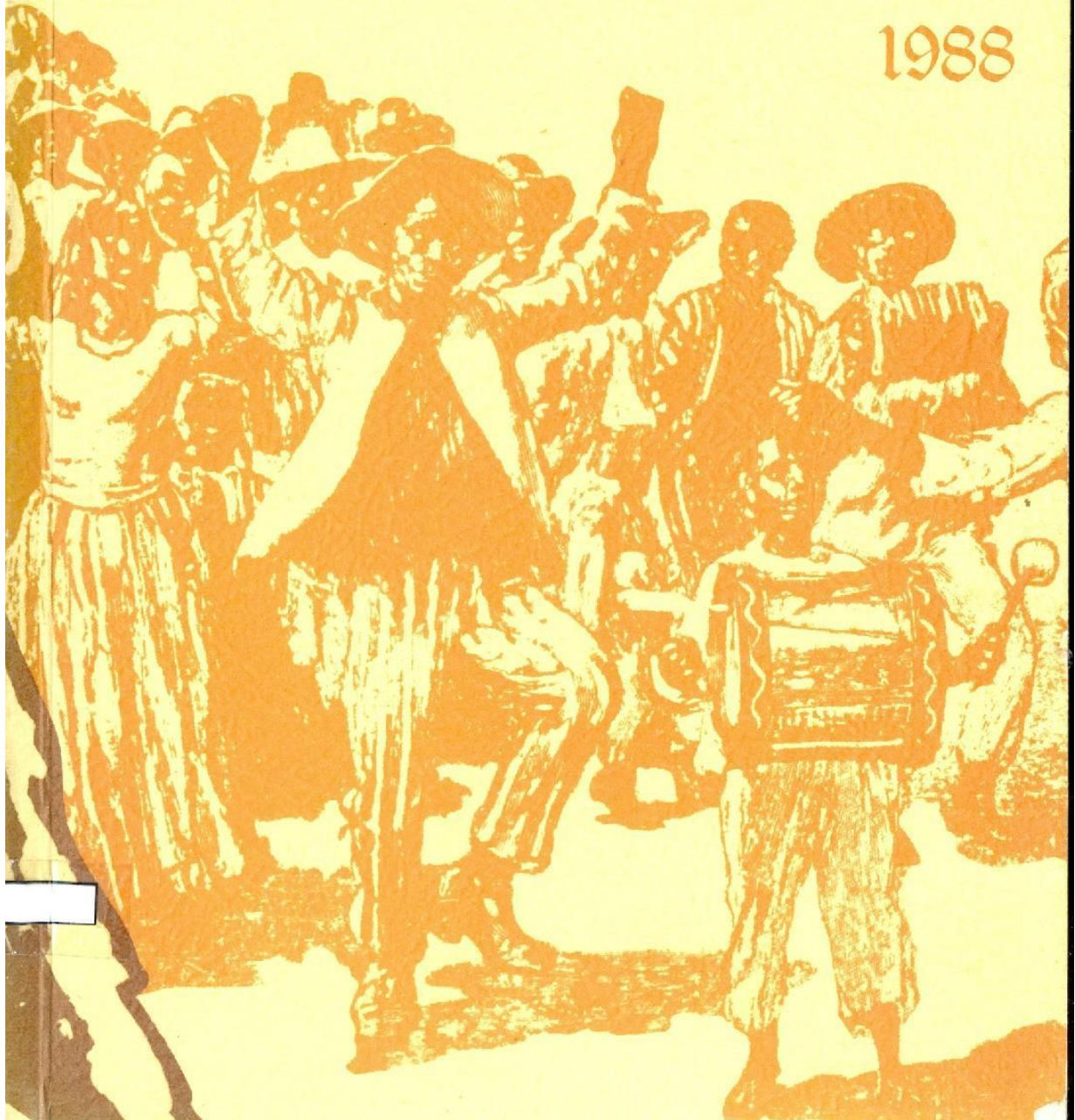


Emancipation II

A series of lectures
to commemorate
the 150th anniversary of emancipation

Sponsored by
the national cultural foundation and
the history department of
the university of the west indies, barbados

1988



EMANCIPATION II

Aspects of the post-slavery experience in Barbados

A series of Lectures to commemorate the
150 Anniversary of Emancipation, delivered
in February and March 1986.

Edited by

WOODVILLE MARSHALL

Sponsored by

National Cultural Foundation and
Department of History, UWI, Cave Hill

Bridgetown
1987

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Typeset and printed in Jamaica by
Montrose Printery Limited, Kingston, Jamaica.

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Introduction

This is a collection of the lectures "Emancipation II, Aspects of the post-slavery experience in Barbados", which were delivered at the Steel Shed in Queen's Park in February and March 1986. They constitute the second in the four-part series of lectures which the Department of History of UWI, Cave Hill, in close collaboration with the National Cultural Foundation, has organized to commemorate the 150th anniversary of slave emancipation in the Commonwealth Caribbean. These lectures, like the previous ones in the series, attracted large audiences and provoked wide discussion which indicated a lively interest in Barbadian and Caribbean history. This interest was no doubt sustained by the subsequent televised presentation of the lectures; and it is hoped that their preservation in this more permanent form will assist in the consolidation of that interest.

These lectures, as the sub-title indicates, were intended to resume the story from where it was left off in *Emancipation I*, and continue it to about 1914. Their focus was the variety and extent of the adjustments in Barbados which were set in train by slave emancipation and which were affected by international developments and British colonial and commercial policy. Briefly, then, they called attention to the elaboration of mechanisms for social control, to the institution of a "reliable" wage labour system to replace slave labour, to attempts at political and constitutional change, to the extent of provision of public amenities for the army of new citizens, to the difficult struggle of ex-slaves and their descendants to improve their standard of living, to the means by which the staple economy survived threats to its viability. But while the lectures feature the Barbadian experience, they also place that experience in its regional and international context. Therefore, we hope that the lectures and the Suggestions for Further Reading illustrate the extent to

which Barbadian history is inseparable from Caribbean history.

The publication is made possible through the financial assistance of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. The Department of History wishes to record its appreciation for the continuing support which the University has provided for its research and publishing projects. The Department also wishes to acknowledge once again the tremendous contribution which the National Cultural Foundation has made to the successful presentation of the lectures through its highly efficient handling of all administrative, technical and publicity arrangements associated with that event.

WOODVILLE MARSHALL
U.W.I., Cave Hill, 1987



1

Church and Society in Barbados, 1824-1881

JOHN GILMORE

In the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we read how Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica, and how some of their opponents complained that "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." Throughout the history of Christianity there has been a contrast between those who felt that the world ought to be turned upside, and those who believed that Christ's statement that "My kingdom is not of this world" meant that they had a duty to leave the world just the way it was.

For most of the first two centuries of its existence in the West Indies, the Anglican Church seemed determined to leave the world alone. Such ministrations as they offered were generally confined to the whites, and little was done for the slave population. There were of course exceptions. In Barbados, where white people were sometimes heard to express the opinion that any one who preached to slaves ought to be hanged, and where in 1823 a mob of white rioters demolished the Methodist chapel in Bridgetown, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a number of Anglican clergy who were prepared to attempt the Christianization of slaves. Among them, for example, was the Rev. William Duke, Rector of St. Thomas, who in the 1780s told slaves that Christianity would make them "more sober, more virtuous, more diligent, more obedient to your masters", but who also assured them that:

"Jesus Christ died for us all; for all mankind, without any difference or distinction of persons; for high and low, for rich and poor, for bond and free; so that the meanest of you all are capable of the salvation procured by Christ. . ."

In the early 1820s, the Rev. William Marshall Harte urged the

slaves of the parish of St. Lucy to be content with their lot, even suggesting that its hardness was a blessing in disguise:

“However fatiguing it may sometimes be to your bodies, take my word for it that you have reason to thank your Heavenly Father for giving you so much employment and work, that you have no time for listening to the temptations of the devil.”

On the other hand, he also gave the slaves assurances which his fellow slave-owners found disturbing:

“The poorest slave, who loves and fears his God, who believes and has been baptised in Christ, and studies to do as Christ says, and who walks his humble round of duty without murmuring or complaining, is in the road to salvation, to honour and glory with his Saviour, though he digs with his hoe all the day long and lies down at night on his humble bed and under his lowly roof. If his life shew forth the fruits of the Holy Ghost, if his heart be made clean and his thoughts are full of religious and good things, he will be owned by his Saviour, and angels will welcome him into paradise.”

The Social Context

However, Duke. Harte, and other clergymen interested in the conversion of slaves, such as the Rev. John Holhersal Pinder, Principal of Codrington College, worked under considerable difficulties. The planters were often hostile, and they were the people who paid the clergy. The Church in the West Indies had no proper organization, for it was supposedly under the care of the Bishops of London, none of whom ever crossed the Atlantic. No confirmations, no consecrations of churches or burial grounds, no ordinations of clergy could take place in the West Indies. Once the Bishop of London had ordained a clergyman for the West Indies, it was very difficult for him to exercise any effective supervision from several thousand miles away. Some of the Bishops had a real interest in the region and in the spiritual condition of the slaves, but they found it almost impossible to achieve any real change, as most of the West Indian clergy remained unresponsive to their calls for greater efforts. Eventually, however, in 1824, “under the full persuasion that religious instruction is the surest foundation for the melioration

of the state of the slave-population, and that such instruction will be most salutarily communicated if placed under Episcopal control", the British government finally created two sees in the region. The largest and most populous of the British islands received a bishop almost to itself, though the diocese of Jamaica also included the Bahamas and British Honduras. The "Bishopric of Barbados and the Leeward Islands" came to include all other British colonies in the region, but after the retirement of the first Bishop of Barbados in 1842, the formation of new dioceses of Antigua and Guiana reduced that of Barbados to the islands of Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Grenada, Tobago, and their respective dependencies. The withdrawal in 1868 of the grant which had been made by the British government for the support of bishops and clergy in the West Indies, and the circumstances which attended this, left the diocese consisting of the island of Barbados alone.

This was a period of great importance in West Indian history. The folly of attempts to "ameliorate" slavery soon became apparent, and anti-slavery agitation in Britain combined with fears produced by the slave rebellion in Jamaica in 1831-32 led to the passage of the Emancipation Act. This came into effect 1 August 1834, but was succeeded in nearly all the islands, including Barbados, by the Apprenticeship, a system of half-freedom almost universally condemned, which was brought to an end in 1838, two years earlier than originally intended. This was soon followed by the equalization of the sugar duties over the period 1846-54, which deprived the West Indian planter of his advantage in the British market over sugar producers elsewhere, particularly those of Cuba and Brazil.

The most significant feature of these years in Barbados was the steady increase in population which continued in spite of severe losses caused by cholera and emigration. In an island where, as one commentator put it in 1838:

"almost the entire surface is subjected to high cultivation, where there exists no back-country to which the idle may retire . . . where the labouring classes have no provision grounds independent of the estate, to the cultivation of which both they and their masters must look for their means of existence. . ."

there was no "flight from the estates" such as occurred in other colonies, and no shortage of labour for the planters at whatever price they cared to pay for it. Most people continued to work as agricultural labourers or in domestic service and the power which the pressure of population put into the hands of the employer was reinforced by the authority of the law. "An Act to regulate the Hiring of Servants and to provide for the recovery and security of their Wages", known as the Contract Act, passed in 1840, and other legislation gave employers such tight control over their workers that, nineteen years after the end of the Apprenticeship, one writer could still refer to the "present owners" of the emancipated labourers. Even if a slip of the pen, it is a revealing one.

The fact that it remained just possible to grow sugar at a profit in Barbados was due not to the adoption of improved methods of cultivation or manufacture by the planters, but to their exploitation of their labour force, men, women and children who in estate tenancies and "negro yards" lived in conditions which were possibly, in material terms, worse than those of the slavery period. At a time when some could talk of the return of better days, one upper-class Barbadian observer felt confident

"that many of us, who live close to our negro-yards, would stand aghast if we knew what was being perpetrated and enacted within a stone's throw of our own habitation. The melancholy circumstance is, that we do not know, and that many of us, alas! take no pains to know . . . Who has ever entered one of those wretched hovels, those almost loathsome scenes of human existence, without being shocked at the misery and extreme degradation in every corner of the dwelling? In a wooden hut, not twenty feet by ten, with the bare, unlevelled earth for a flooring, you not uncommonly find families of eight, ten, twelve in number, of every age and sex, crowded and herding together more like the beasts that perish than members of a Christian household."

A few planters were interested in improving social conditions, but as a class they did little, since it was felt that after the end of the Apprenticeship, or, as it was otherwise put, "In consequence of the recent changes in our Social System, individuals are in a great degree relieved of the responsibility which formerly

devolved upon them." A General Hospital was established as "a receptacle . . . for the destitute portion of the Community" and this was supported by collections in churches and chapels. The clergy also encouraged Friendly Societies, and played a part in what Schomburgk described as the "numerous charitable institutions" of the island, but all of this was completely inadequate to meet the need which existed.

The general reluctance on the part of the planters towards doing anything for the benefit of their labourers was based not only on a narrow view of their own self-interest, but also on that racial prejudice which formed one of the most unchanging features of Barbadian life. In 1859, for example, one writer observed that "The distinctions of caste are more strictly observed in Barbados than in any other British West India colony. No person, male or female, with the slightest taint of African blood, is admitted to white society." Nor was white prejudice confined to a refusal to meet non-whites socially, for both visitors and local observers noted the habitual use by whites of insulting language about black people in and out of the hearing of their black servants.

The established Church thus faced grave social problems which required attention at least as much as those questions of ritualism and "Romanising views" to which a great deal of energy was devoted. In an attempt to cope with these difficulties, a considerable increase was made in clergy and church-room during the nineteenth century. This, and the efforts made in the first decade of the resident episcopate, had, at least in appearance, the desired effect. In a charge delivered just before Emancipation, Bishop Coleridge gave a favourable picture:

" . . . large numbers of adults are under preparation for baptism – though it must not be concealed . . . that a very considerable portion of the slave population remain still unbaptized . . . there is an increasing thirst after religious instruction among the slaves, and a less repugnance on the part of the master to allow it."

Even in 1840 some remained unbaptised, but by 1871, when the Census first included religious statistics, virtually the whole population was Christian at least in name and the Church of England was by far the largest denomination. Nineteenth-

century observers wondered, however, if all this actually meant anything:

“The clergy may publish church and school statistics, which, I admit, go to show that scholars and churchmen multiply. But statistics on such subjects are not of much importance when they run counter to common everyday experience. To prove that the vicious put on a religious demeanour with their Sunday coat, and will listen patiently to a tedious, incomprehensible sermon, only makes the case worse.”

Hurrell Froude, an English clergyman who visited the island at the end of slavery and the beginning of the Apprenticeship, and who was, in spite of strong racial prejudice, concerned by what he saw as the failure of the Barbadian clergy to make any real impact on the slaves and apprentices, protested: “Is not baptism, unless followed by an attempt at a Christian life, as great a curse as receiving the Lord’s Body unworthily?” Bishop Coleridge appears to have been an incurable optimist, but in 1852 his successor stated that:

“... it is but too evident, I fear, that there has been of late, on the part of the peasantry, a great decay of religious feeling, or at least much less inclination to attend public worship than they were accustomed to exhibit before their emancipation, or for some few years after it.”

He drew attention to the low figures for confirmations, “a very melancholy fact; implying as it does in most cases a degree of unconcern respecting religion which is truly lamentable”, and, although the figures were in fact less marked than they were to be in later years, to the high illegitimacy rate, which led him to “most strongly recommend” that a “public rebuke” be given by following “the practice, not uncommon, I believe, amongst us, of solemnizing the baptisms of children born in wedlock and those who are not so born at distinct times.” Bishop Parry’s call for more clergy and for greater efforts on the part of existing clergy was perhaps not without point, and he may have been right that the peasant was ashamed to appear ill-clothed in a Church which had lost its novelty for him, and attendance at which was no longer “associated in his mind with a desire of advancement in worldly respectability, which the emancipation had excited, but which gradually subsided, as

the freedman became familiar with his new position." This however can only be a partial explanation.

Some difficulties would remain as long as the structure of society remained unchanged. For example, the Church, assisted by its missionary societies, by the British government's Negro Education Grant from 1835 to 1845, and from 1846 by a grant from the local legislature, maintained a large, though still very inadequate, number of schools in Barbados. In 1834, the total number of "Schools, in connection with the Church, for the Religious instruction of the Poor" (which included evening and Sunday schools) was 155, with an aggregate attendance of 7,447 out of a total population estimated at 101,298. Even much later in the century, however, the prevalence of child labour, encouraged by the poverty of parents and the policy of the planters ensured that many children simply remained out of the Church's reach. Other problems can only be attributed to the Church's leadership, and to the stamp their policies gave the institution.

The Conservative Bishops: W.H. Coleridge, T. Parry, H.H. Parry

William Hart Coleridge, first Bishop of Barbados, arrived in the island in January 1825. A number of surveys of his career, by both contemporaries and more recent writers, are extremely favourable. Nevertheless, he is certainly not beyond criticism. His extraordinary sense of his own importance led him to feel that the British and colonial governments should disburse whatever funds he requested, believing, for example, that £15,000 should be spent on the purchase of Gibraltar House (the present Bishop's Court) and the nearby Pine Estate, "for the enlargement of the Bishop's grounds, the removal of the negro dwellings belonging to that estate to a more distant spot, and providing a residence for the Archdeacon" – a proposal which enraged at least one member of the Barbados Council. He seems to have considered that he should be allowed to spend as much money as he liked on church building, and in the case of St. Mary's, "had pledged his Majesty's Government without waiting for a reply from Earl Bathurst", the Colonial Secretary. He advised

his clergy "Be humble . . . that you may be wise", but one contemporary complained about the "miserable littleness of soul" which led the Bishop to attach excessive importance to worldly dignity:

"Do we not weep for poor human nature, when we hear that a bishop arriving in a port, and discovering that it was after the hour when military regulations sanctioned the firing of a salute, preferred to remain until the following morning on board, so that then (and that too on the Sabbath) his presence might be announced by the thunder of artillery; interrupting the religious ceremonies of the day, assembling together all the idle of the station, and needlessly and cruelly harassing the troops, who are compelled to march several miles under a tropical sun for the purpose of forming a guard of honour?"

His travels around his extensive diocese, leaving newly formed committees wherever he went, unquestionably displayed great energy, and although he knew the text "the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands", he was a great builder of churches, many of them designed by himself. The provision of additional places of worship was justified by the argument that "To many families the distance of the parochial church acts as an effectual bar to the regular performance of their public duties as Christians", and allowance must be made for the rebuilding necessitated by the 1831 hurricane, but it is still possible to feel that since the goal was the effective Christianization of the entire population, some at least of the large sums involved might have been better spent on additional clergy, catechists, or teachers. For example, £1,850 sterling, or just under half annual average spent by the Church on building (not including schools) in Barbados alone during the period 1825-37, would have provided an additional seventy-four teachers at £25 per annum – a very reasonable salary by the standards of the day.

Coleridge retired to England in 1841, and the next bishop was Thomas Parry, first Archdeacon of Antigua, and since 1837 Archdeacon of Barbados, who was consecrated in 1842. A former fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, Parry had published a number of sermons, including an exposition of *Philemon* in which he referred to Christianity as "a far more powerful

principle of control, than slavery had been able to supply", and two more ponderous biblical commentaries which display wide, if conventional, theological and classical learning. Although the increase in the number of clergy and places of worship continued, Parry does not seem to have been a particularly effective bishop, and while he supported the two most important initiatives of his episcopate, the attempt to do something about the training of elementary school-teachers and the founding of the West Indian mission to West Africa, both of these were primarily the work of Richard Rawle, the Principal of Codrington College.

Parry retired to England in 1864, on grounds of ill health, though he officially continued to be Bishop of Barbados until his death in 1870. Left in charge as Vicar General was his son Henry Hutton Parry, Archdeacon of Barbados since 1861, who became Coadjutor Bishop of the diocese in 1868. He seems to have shared many of his father's views, and opinions were mixed as to his suitability for the post.

Both Coleridge and Thomas Parry publicly committed themselves to the Church's working for the spiritual welfare of all:

"Every soul is God's property; every soul in your parish must be your care. The soul of the master, and the soul of the slave, will equally be required at your hands.

All classes equally belong to Christ; all therefore equally have their claims upon His Church."

Coleridge abolished the "insidious distinctions" he found in Antigua between the conduct of funeral services for the different races, and staunchly supported Harte, whilst Parry, for example, singled out for special praise a recently deceased clergyman who had "died universally lamented, and by none more than by the poor, to whose wants both spiritual and temporal his attention was most exemplary."

Nevertheless both bishops were strongly conservative. Disturbed by his visit to the island of Barbados, where he found the manager an intemperate drunkard, Coleridge noted privately: "Here slavery appeared in its full horror." "Looking only . . . to the question of bodily comfort", he felt that the slaves of a good master were better off than the English peasantry: "But they are not that peasantry — nor ever can be, till they are

freemen." Yet he maintained, that a period of preparation was necessary, since "freedom must either be born with us, or preceded by religious and suitable instruction, and mental and moral improvement in the receiver or it will prove a bane to Master and Slave." This of course was why he had been appointed, and it is accordingly strange to find him noting elsewhere that whilst he was "equally anxious for the spiritual improvement of all classes", it was "for their spiritual improvement, not for their civil condition, with which, as Bishop, I have nothing to do." Far from making any public adverse comment on slavery, he told the clergy that the Christianization of the slaves required the cooperation of the slave-owners, and whilst this might be explained as a necessary compromise with reality, in his 1830 primary charge he urged the clergy to act in defence of the status quo:

"At the present moment of fearful political suspense, the Clergy are more especially called upon to preach by word and example the scriptural doctrine of submission to *'every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.'*

Existing ordinances may in many cases be open to improvement . . . but whilst an ordinance legally exists, it is binding, and must be respected and obeyed. Let it not be forgotten, however, that change is not necessarily improvement, and experience still subscribes to the prudential maxim of the wise Solomon, *'My son, fear God and honour the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change.'*"

It is not surprising that after they had had five months' experience of him "85 of the leading Proprietors" in Barbados should have signed an address to Coleridge in which they stated that they entertained no doubt that "under your Lordship's discreet and judicious direction, the spiritual interests of the slave will be shewn to be not incompatible with the temporal interests of the master." Thirteen years later, his description of "the conduct of our African brethren", then approaching the end of the Apprenticeship, shows his continued concern for those temporal interests, which demanded that the labourers, though free, should remain "sensible of the obligations which they are under to labour for their masters":

"They may not yet fully understand their position in the social scale;

. . . they may think that a state of freedom admits of more *liberties* than are consistent, as they will soon learn, with the various and continual demands of West Indian agriculture. But in a few months all the misapprehensions, unreasonable expectations, and even improprieties of conduct, assignable to the novelty of their situation . . . will have passed away. . . .”

This was Christianity of a sort the upper classes could understand, and many of them came to feel, as Thomas Parry later put it,

“. . . the conviction that, the restraints of Slavery being removed, the religious training of the peasantry, which before was looked upon by many with suspicion, and but coldly promoted by most, had now become a necessary security for the good conduct of the people, and for the well-being of society. With Slavery, religion was regarded as rather an interference; in a state of Freedom, it is considered a necessity.”

The kind of “religious training of the peasantry” which the “higher powers” had in mind is shown by a proclamation issued in May 1838 in which Governor Sir Evan McGregor urged those who were soon to be freed from the Apprenticeship “to think frequently and seriously” on such passages of Holy Writ as “the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the Ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (Rom. xiii, 1-2); “Obey in all things your Masters according to the flesh, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, serving God” (cf. Col. iii, 22); and “I have learned in whatever state that I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. iv, 11).

The planters showed a newfound enthusiasm for religion by helping the Church to build chapel after chapel, believing, as Thomas Parry told them, that in so doing they were “throwing up as it were, an embankment, to prevent the reflux of barbarism which the abuse of freedom by the ignorant might otherwise occasion.” In the legislature they assumed the burden of supporting district curacies which had previously been paid for mainly from English sources, increased their number, and raised the stipends of the curates. “We cannot be too thankful, under God,” said Bishop Parry, “to the sympathy and encouragement which the Legislature have so liberally extended to our

ministerial labours; nor too diligent in endeavouring to prove to them, by the value of those labours to the well-being of the community, that their liberality has not been misplaced."

This was interpreted to mean endorsement of the existing social structure and the racism this involved. For example, most schools were controlled by the Anglican church, and segregated education remained the norm in Barbados. C.J. Latrobe, in an 1838 report to the British government on West Indian education, noted of St. Matthias's. "This is one of the very few schools in the island in which the children of a few white parents may be found intermixed with those of a darker class." Latrobe also found it "singular" that the well-endowed Christ Church parochial school for poor whites could not keep up the full number on the foundation, "though there is no shortage of poor white inhabitants in the parish":

"The vestry, is understood, is not disinclined to open it for the admittance of those of the coloured classes; but such is the peculiar state of feeling in the island, that there is reason to believe that such a measure would not be productive of the good designed, or perhaps be acceptable to the very class which it is intended to benefit. . ."

Far from doing anything about this "state of feeling", Bishop Parry's official pronouncements indicated a belief in an educational system which provided almost no opportunities for social mobility, and taught children only what was considered necessary for their existing social position:

". . . some classes having obviously more time for the work than others, as well as occasion for different kinds of knowledge: that learning which to one would be a mere superfluity at best, if not a temptation to discontent and self-conceit, being, under different circumstances, and almost indispensable preparation for the actual duties of life."

Rawle similarly talked of the need for an education that would rid the young Barbadian of the "conceit that he is too good for the hoe, and that industry has a suspicious relation to slavery." In a Barbadian context this attitude was hard to distinguish from that attributed to Parry by a critic who alleged the bishop had "once said that all coloured and black boys should be only taught to read and write, and the four first rules of arithmetic."

Within the walls of the churches themselves, racial distinc-

tions continued to exist, as appears from Bishop Coleridge's injunction on the administration of the Holy Communion:

"Any marked interval of time, after the elements have been administered to the Whites, before the administration is resumed for the Coloured communicants, is an irregularity which almost destroys the very nature of a communion; and can only tend to degrade, irritate and estrange one party, and keep up in the other an idea of personal importance inconsistent with that faith, which embraces within its comprehensive pale all the nations of the earth."

On Easter Sunday 1827 the Rev. W.M. Harte had aroused the wrath of many of his white parishioners by his "disgraceful conduct" in having whites and non-whites at the communion table together, even though "the consecrated elements were administered in no instance to the coloured before the whites." Coleridge supported Harte, saying that "the same mode of administering Communion has been pursued under my own eye at the cathedral, as most suitable to the nature and dignity of the sacrament, and to the spirit of the gospel, which knows no distinction in matters of grace." Nevertheless, it continued to be taken for granted that whites would receive communion first, and on Ascension Day 1870, a black member of the Cathedral congregation was actually refused communion by the curate because she had come up with the whites.

Equally important were seating arrangements. Two English visitors described St. Mary's in 1837 by saying:

"Though the Rector is free from prejudice himself, distinctions of colour are still kept up in his congregation. Formerly black and coloured persons were confined to the gallery; now they are allowed to occupy the pews in the lower half of the church."

At the Cathedral non-whites appear to have been officially restricted to sitting in the galleries until 1870, when the rule was abandoned following an uproar which broke out when two coloured young men flouted it by sitting in the body of the church and refusing to move when requested to do so. Official segregation was reinforced by the system of pew-rents which existed in almost all Anglican churches and chapels.

How this worked in the 1860s was described as follows:

"Of course, the best seats in the best positions are those which in local phrase are "rented out," in order that the Pharisees may be enabled to "pray apart," but the poor are permitted to hear the "free gospel" from wretched galleries and from the worst holes and corners in the churches . . . Seats pertaining to persons in arrears of rent are not infrequently barricaded by the authorities, and the space is thus lost to the already too small buildings. In an instance known to the writer, where a chapel committee had run into debt, they calmly confiscated fifty-four of the few free seats belonging to the poor, and let them out for hire."

The clergy were said to be, with two exceptions, "ardent supporters" of the system, which was also upheld by the law, which punished those who trespassed on rented pews with fines or imprisonment in default of payment. Pew rents in Barbados continued into the twentieth century, long after they had been generally abandoned in England. In spite of occasional incidents arising from resentment of these arrangements, the system may have been quite effective in persuading the poor that the maintenance of wordly distinctions within the walls of the church was part of the natural order of things. In the 1940s, Austin Clarke records that his grandmother was in the habit of going into St. Matthias's for private prayer, but always stayed at the back, "*for she knew her place even in an empty church*", and even today we can see a tendency for congregations to seat themselves by social class.

Racial factors were also important in the selection of the clergy of the diocese. In 1837 it was stated that "No coloured student has yet been admitted within the walls of Codrington College", and in 1857, *The Barbadian*, in its report of a sermon by a Jamaican-born missionary to Africa who had been a student at Codrington, noted that "It was the first time in Barbados that a black man ever appeared in the pulpit." By the end of the 1850s, a few non-white clergy had been ordained to serve in the diocese of Barbados, but they were usually employed in the more badly paid parishes of the Windward Islands. Very few served in Barbados itself: in 1861 there were two in the island, and towards the end of the decade only one. The first non-white rector, as distinct from curate, was not appointed in

Barbados until 1884.

To some extent this was due to the prejudices of the laity, and perhaps not solely to those of the whites, for it was claimed that:

“ . . . while the planters actually contemn a black clergyman, however exemplary in character and respectable in attainments, the negroes feel themselves slighted whenever they have a shepherd of their own colour.”

The Church demanded an educated ministry, at a time when education was expensive, and many of the clergy in the diocese during the time of Bishops Thomas and H.H. Parry were middle — and upper-class white West Indians. These, however, did not provide enough candidates, and the shortage was to some extent made up by imports. A significant proportion of these were men not particularly distinguished by birth or education, and this leads to the suspicion that their main qualification was that they were white. Although Thomas Parry noted in 1861 that “. . . *Black* missionaries all the rage in Eng[lan]d”, he did not appear to share this enthusiasm, and shortly after his death the editor of the *Barbados Times* declared “that Bishop Parry is said to have hated a dark skin with venom . . . a fact acknowledged by everyone except a few lick-spittles.”

In spite of the considerable sums of money which it received from both the British and Barbadian legislatures, the Church did not have enough clergy or places of worship for the population to which it was supposed to minister. In 1857, when the island's inhabitants numbered well over 130,000, there were less than 28,000 seats available for them in Anglican churches and chapels, and only 42 clergy, three of whom were absent on leave. Nor was the work being done by other denominations, for in the following year there were only five Methodist and three Moravian clergy. This was pointed out by the Anglican writer of a letter to *The Barbadian*, who saw where at least half the difficulty lay:

“We want chapels in the most densely peopled portions of our island to cost not £2000, but £200, or less. We want pauper chapels, we want places into which the wretched, the outcast, the unfortunate may come without fear of scorn. . .”

He went on to argue "We need more, many more pastoral clergy" but insisted that:

"We of the Established Church cannot find it consistent with our deep sense of the importance of the Ministerial work to commit it to men who though of undoubted piety, have no training. . ."

While the Church continued to see an academic education as the necessary training for the pastoral office, the problem remained the same as it had been in the 1830s when Froude complained:

"These colonies are not ripe for supporting a learned clergy; the wealthy are too irreligious to pay towards the maintenance of any thing like a sufficient number to look after the population. The Bishop should take people of the caste in life that the Wesleyan ministers come from, and taking care to keep a tight hand over them, should ordain all who have sufficient zeal and knowledge to undertake the burden. I will not even insist on their giving up their trades; for if a parish priest can keep a school, I am sure he may make shoes without giving up more of his time . . . The notion that a priest must be a gentleman is a stupid exclusive protestant fancy, and ought to be exploded. If they would educate a lower caste here, they would fill the college directly."

Even with the best intentions, most of the clergy, whether white upper and middle-class West Indians, or white Englishmen, would have suffered from the same problem which beset gentlemanly clergy in England, who did not have racial divisions to cope with, but who found that class barriers were quite effective in preventing real communication between themselves and most of their parishioners. In Barbados, some clergymen occasionally saw that their problems were due to wider social questions, such as the one who wrote to *The Barbadian* in 1858 to complain that the reason why his services were so poorly attended in croptime was that estate labourers were kept working so late on Saturdays that they were too tired to come to church on Sundays. On the other hand, the Church often betrayed a lack of sensitivity towards the beliefs and circumstances of the mass of the population to whom it was called to minister. Bishop Coleridge dismissed the African funeral practices of the slaves, including burial under the dwelling hut, as

“heathen custom” — a proper plantation cemetery would not only be more Christian, but give “greater facilities to the Master to change the site of their dwellings when necessary for the good of the estate.” The repeated complaints about illegitimacy and immorality represented a failure to understand, or even to attempt to understand, patterns of family relationships which were deeply rooted in the black experience. The Church did not even have the excuse of ignorance for its failure to commemorate a date of the utmost significance for the majority of its members. The actual day of the end of the Apprenticeship (1 August 1838) was marked by special services of thanksgiving “for the happy termination of slavery”, but in 1851 Rawle commented that the anniversary “is ignored except by the negroes themselves, who consequently are injured by feeling that they have a cause of joy in which their superiors do not sympathise.”

The clergy in Barbados were “unaccustomed and averse to united action”, and received very little lay upper-class help. The institution of Scripture Readers, which was tried on a not-insignificant scale and which might have been quite effective, was handled with a stunning lack of imagination, though some of the Readers were actually drawn from the class amongst whom they were intended to labour. The Readers were allowed little initiative, it being emphasised “that care be taken not to allow the *Scripture-reading schools* to lose their character, and become irregular prayer meetings”. They were under the direction of the clergy, but it does not seem that any attempt was made to give proper training to those who needed it. Parry composed “a sample of the kind of Scripture Lesson and Exposition which I would recommend to my Reverend Brethren to prepare or provide for the use of their Scripture Readers”, in which he used the change of seasons in a temperate climate to explain the Resurrection, a metaphor which would of course have been completely alien to most Barbadians. Parry had lived in the West Indies for twenty-two years when he wrote this. As far as the Readers who were drawn from the labouring class were concerned, one critic condemned them as “illiterate” and insulted for their position:

"To a printed question, addressed to them by the Bishop and asking what character of service was used, one of them answered, 'The Nicene Creed, and the Service for the Visitation of the Sick!'"

The criticism may well have been justified, for as late as 1909 one incumbent complained: "My lay readers cannot sufficiently read", whilst others bemoaned the difficulty of finding "suitable" persons, but this was hardly the fault of the readers themselves, and clerical attitudes may have been a major part of the problem if those expressed by the Vicar of All Saints were in any way representative:

"We want the upper classes to take an interest in the above kind of Work. The ordinary Blk: or Cold: man as a *Reader* or Catechist I have no confidence in. He wants to be *Equal* to the clergyman if not above, and must be *kept in his place*. This is my experience with such. . ."

At the end of the Apprenticeship period, the Barbadian clergy were divided into a progressive and a reactionary group, the former, significantly, being known as "no bishop's men". Later they seem to have become a much more homogeneous body, and here change was certainly no improvement. The Church was supported by respectable pew-renters who elected gentlemanly fathers of bastards to chapel committees, but nevertheless enforced on the poor members of its friendly societies rules of conduct so strict as to ensure deference to employers as well as "good morals". In some Barbadian parishes the offertory of the whole congregation was used for the sole purpose of keeping down the poor rates paid only by the rich, and if on an occasion of widespread distress the clergy did hand out doles of food "to such persons only as should be known to be really destitute", they were cautioned to guard against "any abuse, to which such bounty might be liable in the hands of less worthy recipients". In Barbados the poor attended the services of the established Church because in most areas they had a choice of that or nothing, but the Church did little to secure genuine commitment, and this little was not helped by its support for the status quo, which in effect amounted to a policy of "let ill alone".

The Radical Bishop: John Mitchinson

In 1873 there arrived a new bishop, who was not prepared

to take the assumptions of the Barbadian upper classes for granted. John Mitchinson had been a public school headmaster in England, and he was a very clever man who appeared to be constantly disappointed by the fact that other men were not as clever as he was. He is probably best remembered for having complained, to a large audience of the most influential people in this island, about:

“ . . . the state of education amongst the higher class in Barbados, which was anything but satisfactory. The absence of culture, of literature and a taste for art and science was to be deplored. It exhibited itself in an odious self-complacency and narrow prejudices, the offspring of besotted ignorance.”

Later in the same speech:

“he compared Barbadians generally to the white snails of Hans Christian Anderson, who, living under burdock leaves upon which the rain-drops pattered, flattered themselves that the world consisted of white snails and that they were the world.”

These comments, his unfavourable remarks about the Barbadian press, his involvement in political controversy – even his replacing a white Cathedral choir which couldn't sing, with a black one which could – all combined to ensure that Mitchinson managed to make life very uncomfortable for himself, and he resigned in 1881. In those eight years he had been Chairman of an influential Commission on Education whose report was certainly not as radical as it might have been, but which nevertheless persuaded the Assembly to double its expenditure on the education of the poor. As Chairman of a Commission on Poor Relief, he submitted a minority report which, quite accurately, pointed out that nothing satisfactory would be done for the poor until the whole system of local government was changed. Mitchinson has been accused of racism, though I do not believe a close examination of the evidence supports this view. He certainly began to ordain black men as clergy because they were good Christians, without demanding that they should have an academic education – the abandonment of the “gentlemen heresy” for which Hurrell Froude had argued half a century previously. Like his predecessors, Mitchinson complained about

the vice and immorality of the poor, but he argued that white immorality was often worse than black immorality, and he saw that the Church's problems were social problems. Above all, he later recalled, "I was obsessed with the idea that I was come to be a reformer," and he preached a Christianity very different from that of Coleridge and Parry.

This can perhaps best be seen in the sermon he preached at the Easter Assizes of 1875. He took his text from Proverbs, XXX, 8-9 ("... give me neither poverty nor riches . . . Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain") and preached what can be read as a closely reasoned discourse on the nature of social obligations.

Mitchinson gave it as his opinion that, "in the majority of cases", crime in Barbados was the result of poverty, and that a community which wished to reduce its incidence of crime should do so by reducing the incidence of poverty. Education would be a help, but only when the educational system had been reformed. He specifically denied that public or private benevolence was of any use:

"... it is only . . . a residuum that in a healthy-organized community should ever be thrown for support upon benevolence. For benevolence . . . is a two-edged weapon . . . Undue or misapplied benevolence has a fatal tendency to pauperize."

He emphasised that poverty did not excuse theft, and he was far from sparing of what he saw as the vices of the poor, but he made it clear that the ultimate responsibility lay with the rich, who were able to implement the true answer to the problem:

"the great principle of justice, that 'the labourer is worthy of his hire', or as the same truth is otherwise put, that 'a fair day's work is entitled to a fair day's wage.'"

Mitchinson warned the rich that their position had its own temptations, differing from those to which the poor were subject, but just as dangerous: "self-indulgence and prodigal luxury", "oppression and injustice", "covetousness and unscrupulousness." He stopped short of proclaiming "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl", but from the same Apostle is

borrowed a verse of peculiar appositeness:

“Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” [James, v, 4]

Preaching as the sugar-cane crop drew to a close, to a congregation which must have consisted largely of planters and the relatives of planters, the bishop could hardly have made more explicit his belief that the upper classes of Barbados had failed in their duty and succumbed to those temptations of the rich he had so carefully described. He said that he did not intend “anything like the fixing of wages by law” and claimed that “It is often beyond the preacher’s province to prescribe remedies for the evils he lays bare . . . problems which must be left to social science to solve”, but there was no need to put forward specific answers, since acceptance of his argument that real Christianity inculcated “charity, courtesy, truth, justice, integrity, self-devotion, unselfishness” would of itself have led to radical change in Barbadian society. Without these vital principles, Mitchinson warned,

“Society in its morbid states collapses with a hideous downfall; and even in its apparently healthiest and most thriving phases, is but a ‘whited sepulchre, which indeed, appears beautiful outwardly, but within is full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness.’ ”

Mitchinson tried to bring into the Church in Barbados not so much a breath of fresh air as a howling wind of change, but after his departure the Church shut it out again, preferring to remain tied to the establishment and to things as they were. After Mitchinson, change continued, but at a painfully slow rate.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- A. Caldecott, *The Church in the West Indies*. London, 1970 (first published 1898).

Like Reece and Clark-Hunt (for which see below), this old favourite is occasionally still useful, but is sometimes inaccurate and misleading.

- K. Davis, *Cross and Crown in Barbados: Caribbean Political Religion in the late 19th Century*. Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, 1983.

Highly recommended, though Davis's picture of Bishop Mitchinson is perhaps more unfavourable than the evidence warrants.

- N.L. Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective*. New York 1981.

Not so much a Caribbean perspective as a specifically Jamaican one. The historian will want to quibble over a few particular details but this is a book well worth reading for its analysis of the historical relationship between Christianity and the black experience, and its discussion of the changing attitudes of theologians in more recent years.

- J.T. Gilmore, "The Rev. William Harte and Attitudes to Slavery in Early Nineteenth-Century Barbados." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XXX, 461-474 (October 1979).

_____ "Hurrell Froude and the West Indies: an Episode in the History of the Oxford Movement." *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, XXXVI, 144-157 (1980).

_____ *The Toiler of the Sees: a Life of John Mitchinson, Bishop of Barbados. Barbados 1987 (forthcoming)*.

- S.S. Goodridge, *Facing the Challenge of Emancipation: a Study of the Ministry of William Hart Coleridge, First Bishop of Barbados, 1824-1842*. Barbados, 1981.

Takes a more kindly view of the Bishop than the present writer.

- J.E. Reece and C.G. Clark-Hunt, *Barbados Diocesan History*. London n.d. (c. 1927).

This is not always to be trusted on matters of fact, and a new Diocesan History is much to be desired, but in the meantime this remains the only work which attempts to cover the history of the Anglican Church in Barbados from the Settlement to the twentieth century.

2

The Establishment of the Tenantry System in Barbados

BENTLEY GIBBS

The abolition of slavery, which had been so central to the social and economic organisation of the island since 1650, introduced the need for a thorough reconstruction of the society. The priority measures required were as follows:

- (i) the provision of the basic social services – education, health and poor relief;
- (ii) the creation of adequate machinery for the maintenance of law and order;
- (iii) the expansion of the island's infrastructure, particularly its road system and harbour and wharfage facilities;
- (iv) the abandonment of the existing ideology of racism which maintained an inequality of the racial groups, relegating the non-whites to a position of inferiority and second class citizenship; and
- (v) the establishment of amicable and humane labour relations on the sugar estates.

The formulation of programmes which stressed the indispensability of these measures to the development of the post-emancipation society found sponsorship both outside as well as inside the island in 1838. The Colonial office and the Emancipationists in the metropolis and the Head of the Executive and the coloured community in the island presented their agenda for change.

On 15th September, 1838, for instance, Lord Glenelg, the Secretary of State for the colonies, advised the island's legislature that the provision of law enforcement machinery, poor relief services, new labour legislation and the repeal of "obsolete and inapplicable laws", should be a necessary consequence of

emancipation. Inside the island, the Governor, Sir Evan MacGregor, in opening the first legislative session of the free society, informed the assembly that it was their duty

“to provide for the erection of a Hospital and Lunatic Asylum, for the encouragement of Industrious Labourers, by the establishment of Savings Banks, and for the furtherance of Education, of Religious Instruction and of such other public objects as the new position of the colony may render it eligible to promote.”

Those elements of the reform programme which were particularly favourable to the non-white population found their most vociferous proponents in a group of coloureds, led by Samuel J. Prescod. These reforms were given wide coverage in *The Liberal* a newspaper, of which Prescod was the editor.

The planters of Barbados, however, had acquired a reputation for their difficulty in seeing the implications of any change beyond the limits of their self-interest, and they lived up to this reputation when legal freedom became a reality. Their pronouncements, prior to full freedom, of the requirements of the new situation they were about to encounter were exclusively confined to the indispensability of maintaining law and order and plantation sugar production. This narrow and biased view of the scope and nature of the implications of emancipation was fundamental in determining the direction of post-abolition social development. For at emancipation, the task of devising and implementing the reform programme rested mainly with the Government, which was under the exclusive control of the planters.

My subject, “The Establishment of the Tenantry System,” deals with one item on the reform agenda – the establishment of a new planter-labourer relationship on the estates.

Before 1838, industrial relations on the estates were characterized by the coercion, predominantly in the form of physical punishment, which the planters applied to the labourers in order to get them to undertake the work programme of their estates. The number of work days per week and work hours per day as well as the level of labour productivity were unilaterally determined by the planters.

The enslaved population, in return, was provided with food, clothing, medical attention, housing accommodation and a small garden plot, where provisions were grown and livestock kept to supplement the contributions of the estate. Black labour, then, was treated as a species of property to be allocated to the plantation tasks without any reference to its wishes.

The Perspectives of Labourers and Employers

Legal emancipation in 1838, by removing the props of such a relationship, made the construction of a new planter-labourer relationship on the estates a necessity. The mere fact that a formerly enslaved population was now free called for changes in the system of industrial relations which would take account of the reality of freedom. From the perspective of the emancipated population, this meant that they should no longer be coerced into performing the labour functions of the plantation economy. They should be free to decide on the allocation of their services, a right which they did not enjoy before 1838.

The planter perspective was, on the other hand, that the nature and functioning of whatever industrial relations system replaced the old master/slave relationship should not operate prejudicially to the plantation economic structure, the foundation of their economic, social and political existence.

It was the plantation tenantry system which emerged as the basis of the new industrial relations as the former slaves and their former masters adjusted their economic and social positions in the post-emancipation years. The system, briefly described, was one whereby the emancipated labourers became tenants of land and houses on the plantations on terms and conditions specified by the plantations. The collection of people residing thus on an estate constitute the estate's "tenantry".

For the planters, labour had as crucial a role to play in the successful production after 1838 as was the case before. Legal emancipation, in their assessment, did not alter their accustomed labour requirement — a large volume of labour continuously devoted to the task of sugar production. This requirement, however, had been successfully met under the slave system

through the medium of physical coercion and control which a state of freedom ought to have eliminated. The planters' problem, as they identified it, was to construct a type of relationship with the emancipated people to ensure the continuity of that large quantity of labour and the regularity of its application to the plantations' operations.

The planters, in 1838, were, however, irretrievably biased in favour of retaining coercion as a basic ingredient in the relationship that had to be created with the free labouring people. Their views of the labourer's attitudes to work during his enslavement conditioned their view that the volume of service he would give to the estate when emancipated would be closely linked to the level of compulsion and control applied. The desire, then, to secure labour for the plantations on a sufficient and regular basis through the medium of some form of compulsion was an ingrained prejudice of the planter class and was a potent influence on the nature of the relationship which was created with the ex-slaves. And, indeed, the planters found little difficulty in perpetuating, after 1838, an industrial system in which coercion of the plantation labour force was an essential element because of their exclusive monopoly of both the state apparatus and the island's land resources.

The Legislature's Role in Creating the System

The island's planter-legislators clearly approved of the necessity for coercion and control when they set about to provide legal guidelines for the conduct of planter-labourer relations on the estates. These guidelines were contained in "An act to regulate the hiring of servants, and for the more expeditious recovery of wages by them", passed by the Assembly on 21st June, 1838.

This enactment made the contractual obligation the basis of the new planter-labourer relations by providing that:

- (i) every general hiring for service constituted a hiring for one year unless a specific period was agreed upon either in a written contract or verbally in the presence of "one or more creditable" witnesses;
- (ii) a legal and binding contract between employer and employee need not be in writing nor witnessed by

creditable persons — simply “an entrance into service and a continuance therein beyond the term of one week, without any objection being made on the part of the servant shall be deemed a general hiring for one year;”

- (iii) any person who “enticed” and employed labourers already bound by a general or specific contract to another employer was liable to a fine of £10 currency and monetary compensation to the offended party to the extent of the amount of wages which the employees would have earned in the employment of “his or her master or mistress”.

This legislation also gave the domestic servants, agricultural labourers as well as the employers the right to terminate the yearly contract by a month’s notice. Robert Bowcher Clarke, the Solicitor General, in commenting on the act for the benefit of the Colonial office, wrote:

“The principle of a yearly hiring is of trifling importance as regards domestics, but is essential with respect to the agricultural labourers as it tends to locate them on the different estates; and it cannot be harsh on them, because it may be ended by a month’s notice at any time.”

That the legislature intended it to operate harshly on the ex-slaves is clear from the range of activities which it held as constituting “breaches of the contractual obligation” and the nature of the punishment it prescribed for such breaches.

The legislation identified

- (i) absence from work (except in the case of illness);
 - (ii) failure to accomplish the “ordinary duty” or allotted work;
 - (iii) wilful damage to property; and
 - (iv) “any misdemeanor or misconduct”
- as breaches of contract and assigned the following punishment to the guilty:

- (i) imprisonment of up to 4 weeks;
- (ii) the withholding of a portion of wages; and
- (iii) termination of employment by a month’s notice.

Employers, on the other hand, were not liable to any custodial punishment for breach of contract – only monetary fines such as:

- (i) £3.15s currency for failure to provide medical assistance to sick employees;
- (ii) £10 for employing labourers under contract to other employers; and
- (iii) payment of wages to labourers up to three times the amount of wages unjustifiably withheld.

The island's Justices of the Peace, all members of the planter fraternity, were given the power under the Act to adjudicate in planter-labourer disputes, with appeal to the Governor-in-Council as a Court of Error.

The Assembly had thus done its job in providing labour legislation which promoted the contractual obligation as the basis of planter-labourer relations, specified what constituted breaches of contract and prescribed punishments and methods of adjudication. In so doing, it had demonstrated its support for the retention by the planters of as much of the pre-emancipation social and industrial domination of the ex-slaves as was consistent with legal freedom. The legislation was silent, however, on the "nature of the contracts" – this was left exclusively to the contracting parties, the planters and ex-slaves. The tenancy by the ex-slaves of land and houses on the estates emerged as the foundation of the "private contracts", thus giving birth to the island's tenantry system.

Land and Labour Resources

The planters were able to institute this system because of the existence of economic forces whose operation placed them in a position of unchallengeable strength vis-a-vis the ex-slaves. The land and population resources of the island were the vital economic determinants of the relative strength of the planters and emancipated classes as they set about to reorganise their relationships after emancipation. In 1838, the land resources totalled

about 106,000 acres, some 100,000 of which were estimated to be under some form of cultivation. By 1838, and indeed long before that year, the island had been generally occupied and its land resources owned. The distribution of land holding, however, was dominated by the plantation sector. In 1838, the existing 489 plantations extended over as much as 85% of the total land area. This aspect of the land ownership pattern indicates that the planters, after 1838, had a near-monopoly of the land market and that the possibilities of land acquisition were substantially dependent on their land resource and land policy. This strong economic position of the planters, derived from their almost total control of the limited land resources, was further enhanced by the population situation. In 1834, the population was about 105,000 and, in accordance with the tendency of the population to increase, it had reached 122,000 by 1844, giving respective population densities in terms of acreage of 0.99 and 1.2. The island's population, then, in relation to its land resources, had reached substantial proportions.

The bulk of the population fell into the category of "emancipated", being the former apprentices, who in 1834 for the purpose of compensation to their owners, had been computed at 83,150 or 79.4% of the total population. The majority of these people lived in houses on the estates and cultivated "garden plots" which were attached to their homes. The houses in which they all lived, however, and the garden plots they cultivated, did not belong to them; they belonged to their masters.

Emancipation, therefore, while offering personal freedom, created for them the urgent problem of finding land and housing accommodation. A numerous people, owning neither house nor land, was set free in a society in which the planters, their ex-masters, controlled a disproportionate share of the total land area. The plantations, then, by virtue of their substantial ownership of these assets, were the one institution capable of meeting this demand. It was to the plantations, therefore, that the emancipated people were compelled to look in very large numbers for the necessities of land, shelter and employment.

Ex-slave Pressure for Improved Living Conditions

Immediately after emancipation, therefore, the ex-slaves started to exert strong pressure on the plantations to increase housing facilities and land acreage devoted to their use. It resulted from a general interest among the emancipated on the estates in an improvement of their condition. Before 1838, the number residing in a slave hut and the amount of land allocated to that home for garden cultivation was essentially a function of the planters' will. With freedom, a new dimension was added: the element of choice. The new situation had created the opportunity for some residents of these old habitations to leave them in search of their own homes and land.

The planters, after 1838, evinced a general willingness to meet this pressure for land increases and additional housing facilities. They set about an immediate allocation of portions of their estate lands for the purpose of being surveyed and marked off for allotments of various sizes to be rented out to the labourers. The management of Newton estate, immediately after emancipation, made 80 new allotments available to the labourers. Drax Hall estate, the largest in the island, which had devoted only about 20 acres to its apprenticed population, contributed, in 1841, about 54 acres. With regard to housing, the planters proceeded to improve the condition of houses already on the estates and to enter on the construction of additional ones. Drax Hall, for example, in the years 1838 and 1839, spent a total of £746 on improved housing facilities for the labourers living thereon, and in 1842 constructed 13 new houses.

The general policy of the planters in making the land allotments and houses available to the ex-slaves was to institute a system of renting, the end product of which was the establishment on each estate of tenantry, and the replacement of the master-slave relationship with a landlord-tenant relationship. S.J. Prescod, reflecting in 1843 on the economic situation as it related to the land and population resources, considered that a "system of tenantry" involving the planter as landlord and the free labourer as tenant, was an inescapable development in the island after emancipation. Governor Grey, in 1845,

was also of the same opinion. Writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 31 March, 1845, he noted:

“Assuming it to be the normal condition of land tenures that there ought to be a resident landlord and a village tenant labourers, I know of no spot in the world, where at present it would be more in the power of the inhabitants than in Barbados to put themselves into that condition”.

The relative unavailability of competitive sources of land and houses outside the plantations gave the planters the power not only to create a tenantry but to determine its character and influence its functioning.

Details of the System

The planters had entered upon the construction of their new relationship with the ex-slaves with a specific bias. Each of them wanted to retain on his estate an adequate number of dependent labourers who could be called to give full-time labour to the estate, and the tenantry system was considered an ideal method of achieving this. Mr. George Carrington expressed the sentiments of his fellow planters on the eve of emancipation when, in giving evidence before the select committee of the House of Commons in 1848, he said:

“A considerable time before emancipation took place, I thought the only chance of securing labour was to encourage a system of tenantry”.

The establishment of a tenantry on the estate to serve as its labour reservoir was only one step, though a vital one, on the way towards the planters' ideal of an adequate amount of full-time labour. The other step was to secure exclusive control over the reservoir's contents. For the planters considered that the benefits derivable from the settlement of a numerically adequate tenantry population could be substantially minimised through an ineffective control over their labour. The terms and conditions on which the estates made land and houses available to the ex-slave were the mechanisms by which the requirement of control was achieved.

The general procedure followed by the planters in the formation of their tenancies was to allow the labourers to occupy the available houses and a certain portion of land on the estate without having to pay a direct rent. The amount of land put at the disposal of the labourers without their having to pay direct rent for it varied throughout the island. On some estates in St. Philip, for instance, it was one-eighth of an acre, and on others a quarter of an acre. In St. George, a quarter of an acre or sometimes as much as half an acre was given. Throughout the island, however these land allotments were generally less than a quarter acre. The tenure of these houses and parcels of land, while not incurring a direct rent payment, carried other conditions. The tenants were required to give their labour exclusively and regularly to their planter landlords at reduced rates. The planters' concept of regular labour meant working on the estates five days a week during the out-of-crop season, six days during the crop season and nine hours a day. For their daily labour, first class field labourers among the tenantry population were paid an average wages of 10d. At the same time, a similar class of labourers giving service to an estate on which they were not the recipients of a house or spot of land were getting an average wage of 12½d. per day. The occupation of a house and land, therefore, made it obligatory for the tenant not only to give regular labour to the estate but also to give it at a rate some 10-25% less than that obtained by non-resident labourers.

The wage differentials constituted, in effect, an indirect rent in the form of labour service. Moreover, the rent for the same house and spot of land was further enhanced when members of the tenant's family gave their labour to the estates. For each working member of the tenant's household was considered a located labourer and was paid at the reduced rate.

The planters incorporated into their so-called "rent free" tenantry system an arrangement whereby tenants, who did not satisfactorily meet the obligation of full-time labour on the estate, exposed themselves to monetary penalties. These penalties were considered by the plantocracy as a rent payable to the estate once the tenant had occupied the house and land during the working week without rendering the required labour service.

The monetary penalty imposed for non-attendance ranged between 5-10d per work day — the charge of 10d being predominant. These charges were collected in the form of a deduction from the wages at the end of the week. The tenant-labourer, therefore, for every working day of the week he gave his labour to the estate, his rent, paid in the form of labour service, was about 2½d. For every day he absented himself from the plantation work, his rent, taken from him in the form of a deduction from his wages, rose to 5 or 10d. Under this arrangement, therefore, the level of rent payable to the estate was a function, not of the value of the house and piece of land the tenant occupied, but of the quantum of labour he gave to the estate. In short, the less labour he provided, the higher his rent. The operation of this renting arrangement was applied, not only to the labour of the tenant himself, but also to the potential labour of those he sheltered in his home and who shared the benefits which his spot of land offered.

The planters, however, responded favourably to the wishes of those labourers of "the tenantry" who wanted more land than the mere garden allocated to them under the "rent free scheme". They were motivated into doing so by a desire to exploit the opportunities which the labourers' demand for extra land offered for realising sizeable rents. A policy of letting larger allotments at definite but highly inflated rents was generally pursued side by side with the rent-free location. In St. George, in 1839, a quarter-acre allotment on some estates incurred at stipulated rent of 15 cents per week and on others as much as 40 cents. On each estate, the majority of the tenants who paid direct rents for these larger allotments did so on a weekly basis, permitting a deduction from their wages to meet the rent requirements. However, whether the house on the estate was one of stone with shingled roof or one of all timber, whether the allotment of land was of a size which did not require a direct rent or whether it was large enough to involve the payment of a stipulated rent, the guiding policy of the estate management in the early post-emancipation years was not to sanction occupation unless the would-be tenant agreed to give his labour to the estate owner on the terms already described.

The Tenants' Disabilities

The emancipated labourer who became a tenant under an agreement of this nature found himself entangled, to start with, in the snares of the plantation rent devices if he was guilty of unsatisfactory labour. He could also be brought before the Police Magistrates and punished – imprisoned or fined – in accordance with the labour legislation which, eventually found a permanent place on the island's statute books in January 1840. I must say that the Act of 1840, (well-known as the Contract Act) had not departed to any extent from its predecessor in terms of its fairness to the labourers, to justify its eventual acceptance by the Colonial Office. It is true that it abandoned the initial attempts to involve the ex-slaves in contracts for as long as one year, when it provided that contracts were to be for no longer than one month unless in writing. But it retained the custodial punishment only for ex-slaves, not employers, for breaches of contract, though the maximum sentence was reduced from 4 to 2 weeks. Imprisonment of up to 1 month, however, was introduced for labourers who refuse to quit house or land which they occupied on condition of providing labour service after the employment contract was terminated. They also had to pay the cost which the planters incurred in making application to the Police Magistrates who were given the power to effect the eviction of labourers from the estates.

The legislation also gave the planters the power to decide the fate of growing crops of evicted tenants. They could allow the ex-tenant to reap the crops or they could pay the tenant the value of the crops, which in cases of disagreement was determined by appraisement under the direction of a Police Magistrate, or the planters could take over the crops for any money which the labourer owed to them. Labourers who quit the estate of their own will were not entitled to either reap the crop or to receive compensation for them. These new additions to the labour legislation were considered vital since the planters had introduced the tenancy of land and houses as the fundamental element of their contracts with the labourers. So, in addition to monetary fines sanctioned by legislation, the right to expel the non-

conformist tenant from the plantation's house and land was a powerful instrument at the disposal of the plantation owners for forcing the tenant population to undertake the labour functions on the plantations' terms.

Samuel Prescod, the most outspoken critic of the plantation tenantry system, recognised early in 1839, the coercive potential of the planters' ejectment power. In a letter addressed to the *British Emancipator*, he wrote: "Ejectment is the grand instrument of coercion which has succeeded the cowskin". He also recognised that the tenantry system was an insecure and uncertain source of land and houses for the emancipated:

"The labourer is far from being as comfortable as he might be — he has no security for his comfort — cannot be sure of its continuance for another day. Liable every moment to ejectment from a bit of hired land he tills for his benefit, from the hut that he, perhaps, or his father built and has kept in repairs for years, he has no certain home; his industry is, in as far, a venture — a mere game of chance in which the probabilities, number and weight are against him."

What made the eviction power so much more distasteful was the fact that the tenant-labourers had an economic as distinct from the purely locational interest in their tenure. The task of appraising their growing crops was generally allocated to three "experienced" planters, chosen by Justices of the Peace or Police Magistrates. But class and family connections ensured that "19 out of 20 times" they arrived at undervaluations of labourers' crops.

The coercive mechanisms which were so functional a part of the tenantry system made it one which, in essence, restricted labour mobility, precluded the emergence of a free agricultural labour market, and forced the labourers to accept the lowest possible remuneration. It was the type of system Samuel J. Prescod was convinced, which only "men accustomed all their lives to slavery might be expected to adopt — the worst that the circumstances of the case would admit."

But if it was a system (as indeed it was) which only men experienced in the techniques of slave control could invent and put into operation, it was certainly not one which men, accus-

tomed to the position of slaves, would entertain with unquestioned acceptance, once liberated.

Ex-slave Response to the System

The liberated labourers, from the very first day of August 1838, came to assess the reality of their freedom primarily in terms of their ability to dispense with their labour in whatever manner they pleased. Their sentiments were no better expressed than by the three Commissioners, Thomas Parry, A.M. Maxwell and Joseph Garraway who were appointed by Governor MacGregor to examine the nature of the relations which existed between labourers and employers in the rural areas of the island during the first month of total freedom. Their report concluded:

“We would here distinctly repeat that the labourers so far from entertaining the idea that their new condition as free men exempts them from the necessity of daily labour, on the contrary readily admit the necessity of cultivating the soil, and express their determination to continue in the performance of agricultural duties; although this admission is qualified by certain reservations as to the terms of their labour to be conditioned by themselves”

That any attempt, real or suspected, to circumscribe their unqualified control over the disposal of their labour was anathema to the emancipated classes, was first given clear expression in their reactions to the plantations' efforts to conclude with them labour contracts in which they were required to give their services five days per week and nine hours per day. The response of the labouring population to these attempts was one of great dissatisfaction, characterized by the widespread refusal append their names or x's to any written agreement binding them to work for nine-hour days for a five day week, or to affirm, by their words, a labour contract of this nature. They were only prepared to risk a one day contract. Many labourers, too, resorted to strike action on the plantations. The failure and frustration experienced by the planters in their efforts to conclude five day contracts with the labourers was revealed by the planter, William Sharpe. In a report to Gover-

nor MacGregor, he disclosed that he had endeavoured to get "his" labourers to enter into five-day contracts and that he was prepared to pay them as much as 15d but "this offer was refused, the labourers saying that they would only work when it suited them and that they would only agree to work for one day at a time." This "spirit of insubordination", as MacGregor called it, arose simply because the labourers suspected the legal contract as a measure restrictive of their total control over their labour, a control, it was recognised, on which they placed the greatest premium:

"The General opposition to the five days' contract we are disposed to attribute to the impression entertained that an agreement of this nature entails a second apprenticeship on the labourer . . . [and] the feeling of unqualified freedom is, at this moment, too strong to admit a calm appeal to their reason."

The labourers, in the words of the calypsonian, were saying, in effect, "Tell them slavery done". Their dissatisfaction subsided when the revocation by the Colonial Office, on September, 7 1838, of the contract legislation passed on June 19, 1838 by the planter-dominated assembly brought a relaxation of the contract arrangements. But the same "spirit of insubordination" again descended on the plantations during the early months of 1840 when the passage of the Contract Act caused a reactivation planter pressure on the labourers to enter into legal contracts to work a five-day week and a nine hour day. This pressure was similarly viewed by the ex-slaves as a renewed attempt to circumscribe their freedom, and it was met by spontaneous dissatisfaction and opposition throughout the island, but more pronounced in St. George and Christ Church. The four-man commission, appointed by Governor MacGregor on 24th January, 1840 to examine the state of unrest prevailing in the rural areas, had found out by 3 March, 1840 that:

" . . . there existed on their [the labourers'] minds an impression that . . . a consent to work that particular number of hours, would be prejudicial to their freedom, if not fatal and that the new Act had something to do with it."

The labourers, in the early months of 1840, adopted their earlier methods of registering their dissatisfaction – refusal to enter into contractual obligations beyond one day's duration as well as strike action. *The Barbadian* reported on 1 February 1840 that 90 estates had suffered from a total boycott of labour for a short period.

Some labourers even decided to go beyond the 1838 methods of registering their discontent. These had taken "the more decided and important step of relinquishing their domiciles and leaving the estates on which they had been so long resident". The editor of the pro-planter newspaper, *The Barbadian*, decried the re-introduction of the Contract Act because, in his opinion, "the labourers were going on well without it"; but this did not prevent him from seeing another dimension to the labourers' expression of dissatisfaction. Noting the occurrence of as many as 27 reported cane fires in January alone, he did not think them unconnected with the anti-contract protests of the estate labourers. They were, to him, nothing else than "destructive incendiary work". But if the editor's assessment of the origins of these cane fires was correct, they were certainly of more significance than he was willing to admit. They were just not "destructive incendiary work" but a clear indication that there was to be no unchallenged tinkering with the newly-gained freedom of the working class.

Required Reforms

This widespread dissatisfaction which the plantation tenantry system engendered among the labouring classes in the immediate post-emancipation years presented, in itself, a very strong case for its thorough reconstruction. The simultaneous implementation of at least four reforms was essential for the complete liberalisation of the tenantry system and the elimination of the discontent of the labouring population. The first of these desirable changes was that planters should set a fixed, but reasonable rental value, payable only in the form of money, on each plantation house and allotment occupied by the labourers on their estates.

In addition, the responsibility for defraying the cost of renting should fall only on those persons who directly petitioned plantation management for the said houses and land. The second necessary reform was that the insistence on the provision of labour service as a condition of renting the plantation houses and land should be completely revamped and the tenantry population left to work where they pleased. Thirdly, there was pressing need in all the plantation tenancies for an extension of the cost of renting should fall only on those persons who directly petitioned plantation management for the said houses and land. The second necessary reform was that the insistence on the provision of labour service as a condition of renting the plantation houses and land should be completely revamped and the tenantry population left to work where they pleased. Thirdly, there was pressing need in all the plantation tenancies for an extension of the monthly tenure period – say to one year. Fourthly, labourers, when evicted, should be better compensated for their growing crops. Obviously, the implementation of these reforms would have the effect on neutralising the Contract legislation.

A reconstruction programme of this nature found its advocates in the post-emancipation years, for the emergence of the tenantry system was accompanied by the development and expression of reformist proposals which emanated from a very small number of Barbadians. The calls for change which were persistently made by Samuel Jackman Prescod represented, in sum, the contemporary reformist opinion. Prescod, through the editorial columns of *The Liberal*, constantly propounded his reform proposals, the object of which was the conversion of the existing 'unfree' tenancies into 'free' tenancies.

But there was much more than the discontent of the labouring classes to recommend a complete overhauling of the coercive tenantry system. Economic conditions, which had played so significant a role in its evolution were, ironically enough, a powerful force in favour of reform. The planters had anticipated that emancipation would create an undersupply of agricultural labourers and that the regularity and intensity of the labour which could be expected from those who remained in

that occupation would be drastically curtailed. These fears had prompted each planter to construct an illiberal labour tenancy on his estate so as to reduce the risk of depending on the open market for the labour he needed. But these planter predictions about the post-emancipation labour situation turned out to be very wide off the mark, for an undersupply of agricultural labour was not a feature of Barbados' economic life in the nineteenth century.

This situation, in combination with the desire of the emancipated to be rid of the remnants of coercion, created a strong basis for a change in the structure of the tenantry system after 1840. But the planters of Barbados, in general, paid little heed to ex-slave dissatisfaction with the tenantry system even though they, as employers, enjoyed a favourable labour situation that they themselves had not anticipated. This is demonstrated by examination of their responses, between 1840 and 1860, to calls for a liberalisation of the tenantry system.

The plantocracy, confronted by increasing pressure, not only from advocates of change like Prescod but also from 'the blacks that they would rather be put upon a regular system of rent', gradually conceded. As early as 1841, the payment of definite rents for land and houses, held by the labourers, was reported to be in existence, even though on a very limited scale in the parishes of St. Peter, St. James, St. Joseph and St. John. In 1843, *The Liberal* noted that "several proprietors" throughout the island were renting the labourers their cottages and land "at so much money rent per week", in place of the direct labour rent which was still predominant. This system of specific direct rents was generally incorporated into the tenantry system by 1860. The rents were generally paid by the ex-slaves in the form of labour service, that is, a deduction from wages. The planters, in addition to the general adoption of the direct renting system, relaxed, from the 1840s, their earlier insistence that all members of the tenant's family should sell their labour to the estate. These changes were important, but viewed within the context of the total changes required, they assumed only marginal proportions. But this was as far as the planters were

prepared to go along the road to the complete liberalisation of their system.

Reasons for Planters' Opposition to Reform

The explanations for the planters' reactionary stand are twofold – one psychological, the other economic. Planters just could not recondition their minds to accept a situation in which labourers, once their slaves and apprentices, were possessed of the unrestricted right to work when and how and where they liked and yet enjoy the occupation of houses and land on a minimum legal tenure of one year. But more importantly, they were not prepared to abandon a system considered so functional in providing them with labour at the cheapest rate possible. Complete liberalisation of the tenantry system was, to them, tantamount to dismantling a cherished mechanism of control over labourers resident on their plantations. The post-1840 years, therefore, witnessed their on-going struggle against all demands seeking the removal of the conditions of service in the renting of land and houses, an extension of the monthly tenure period and the removal of the contract legislation from the statute books.

The planters proceeded to defend the status quo in two ways. Firstly, they argued that it was an inherent characteristic of the black labourer not to work consistently unless under planter pressure. Economic necessity was not considered a sufficient stimulus:

“The labourer is a creature of impulse, his wants are few, and [he] will spend in idleness one week the money he acquires the other”.

The myth of the lazy, unambitious ex-slave who was naturally inclined to work only as much as would keep him delicately balanced on the subsistence margin was upheld, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, as an ideological justification for the nature of the tenantry system.

Secondly, they argued that, except for the first two and a half years after emancipation, the planters rarely invoked the contract legislation against the labourers, and that amicable labour

relations existed on the estates. There was no need therefore for any amendment to the Contract Act of 1840. Prescod's response to this was devastating. In an editorial in *The Liberal* in 1850, he wrote:

"We are told in opposition to the proposed change, that the evils complained of are only theoretic, the power held by the planter being rarely exercised to the detriment of the labourer. But those who argue in this way do so in seeming thorough ignorance of human nature and the influences by which it is affected, and the argument in this particular instance is, in point of fact, untrue. The power of ejection, we grant, is but rarely exercised by the planter, and from the very nature of things, could only be exercised rarely or society would be in a constant state of convulsion through this power, as some of us remember to have seen it in 1838 and 1839.

"The planter holds this power as his ultimatum to enforce submission to his will and pleasure. He has seldom occasion to exercise it; but his ability to do so at any moment and in any given case is undoubted, and has, in practice, the desired effect. There is nothing, we say, in the present state of the law or the prevailing public sentiment through the country to prevent any tenant labourer for any cause or for no cause receiving, at the very instant we are now writing, notice of ejection, and at the end of the legal month having his crops taken from him at an appraised value, his household rudely broken up and the members of it, infancy and decrepit age, mere boys and budding maidens, with those of riper age, all turned adrift to shift as best they can for themselves, until another location under precisely the same circumstances, and subject to the self-same chances, bring them, perhaps together again. This is evil. The exposedness of the labourer and his family to such treatment is the thing complained of. It is no answer to say that the power is rarely exercised. It ought not to be possessed".

In 1859, there emerged within the ranks of the plantocracy itself a movement which was sympathetic to the need for a fundamental liberalisation of the tenantry system. This planter initiative was centred around the Association for Improving the Social and Moral Condition of the Labouring Population, formed in St. John in November 1857 and around another association, of similar name, started in St. Philip in July 1858. The general consensus of these Associations was that the time had arrived "to give up the system of coercing our labourers

by means of the land we rent them to live on . . .". They therefore set about to work for the elimination of the "evil" which typified the existing tenantry system. Their approach was to recommend that their planter-brothers introduce on their plantations a minimum tenure period of one year "without the hated condition of labour".

These local efforts, however, foundered on the shoals of planter indifference and opposition. The general planter reaction was overtly displayed by the emergence of a planter counter-movement in St. Philip. At a meeting held at Sanford estate on 8th September 1858, a body of these reactionary planters declared themselves unreservedly opposed to the recommendations of the St. John and St. Philip Associations or any movement at all whose aim was "to effect a change in the social system of the labourers on the plantations". By mid-1859, the reformist associations, faced with continued planter opposition, had failed in their mission and were defunct.

Not all planters in the post-emancipation era were as staunchly reactionary as those who met at Sanford on September 8, 1858. A very small number of planters in four of the island's parishes, as early as 1841, were renting land to the exslaves without demanding labour from them. In 1844, this 'free rent system' was reported to be in existence on 15 properties in St. Philip. In 1860, 31 tenant-labourers of Drax Hall held their tenure on the same basis. But apart from these marginal injections of liberalism the tenantry system retained its coerciveness. The vast majority of the labourers on the estates were still forced to work on them for wages "varying from one sixth to one third less than the market rate".

Labourers' Acceptance of the System

That this il-liberal tenantry system survived was due not exclusively to planter insistence on its survival but also to its gradual acceptance by the labourers. The open discontent during the initial years of the system's existence was transformed from as early as the 1840s into passive acquiescence. But it was not a willing acceptance. This is illustrated by three factors:

the labourers' eternal quest for a "piece" of land of their own; the rapidity with which they constructed their own homes on the plantation land; and the increasing numbers of those who joined the non-located labour gangs. The labourers' acceptance of the system was based purely on material necessity; for the alternative to acceptance was economic hardship. Thus, in the post-emancipation years, the labourers on the estates came to place a greater premium on the material advantages to be derived from the system than on their earlier aspirations of total control over their labour which the system denied.

The plantation tenantry system offered a house to those labourers who had none and a house-spot to those who had a house but no land. It offered them, too, the opportunity of engaging in agricultural activity on their own account which was impossible for the many beyond the boundaries of the plantations. From their rented land, the tenant population were able to derive an additional income to supplement that of wage labour on the estates.

In addition, membership of a plantation tenantry was a qualification for the receipt of a variety of fringe benefits. There was the possibility of obtaining grass from the plantation pasture if one kept a few head of stock; there was access to any loans which the plantation owner might make available for the construction of houses. Credit for plantation yams and other provisions was easier to obtain, and there was the occasional gifts of food-stuffs, rum, molasses, as well as medical attention. In addition, tenant labourers were given preference of employment on the estate during the out-of-crop season. These benefits, in the estimation of the labourers, tended to compensate, in some measure, for the coerciveness of the system.

Some historians, influenced by the existence of these benefits and compelled for some reason to present an apology for the behaviour of our planter class, have characterized the tenantry system as a benevolent institution. I cannot, however, be that charitable nor, I dare say, historically inaccurate. For the tenantry system was instrumental in projecting beyond 1838 the economic exploitation and control of the black population

which had been so essential a feature of their economic and social life since 1650.

Though the plantations would have obtained adequate labour in absence of the tenantry system (as indeed they did in spite of it), it nevertheless played a vital role in circumscribing labour's freedom, prevented it from bargaining effectively with the plantation management, and forced it to accept the lowest possible remuneration. The tenantry system, too, helped to nourish a continuing working class dependency on the plantations and their white owners. The system, in short, made for an industrial and psychological subjection of the black masses reminiscent of slavery. It was a monstrous obstacle in the path of the social and economic progress of the free black population which emancipation had opened up for them. Its abolition or liberal reconstruction was imperative if the significance of 1838 was to be fully felt in Barbados.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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3

Public Amenities after Emancipation

RICHARD CARTER

Introduction

The term "public amenities" connotes what might, in modern social policy terms, be called the social welfare services, and would therefore include some or all of the following: education, housing, health and social security. Although occasional references are at times made to all of these areas, this paper deals essentially with two elements: (i) public health and (ii) poor relief – the only form of public social security existing in the 19th century. In view of the fact that there was no government provision of housing facilities during this period, the major substantial omission is therefore the area of education. Nevertheless, given that some measure of restriction was necessary if such a broad area was to be covered with anything approaching adequacy, the paper concentrates on public health and poor relief which are perhaps not as well documented as education.

The paper is basically restricted to the 19th century, although, towards the end, some brief analysis of early 20th century developments critical to the understanding of policy formation in these two areas is offered. The essential task, therefore, is a discussion of the transfer of social responsibility for matters of public health and poor relief from the plantation to governmental agencies during the 19th century.

Public Health and Poor Relief during Slavery

It is enough at this point to state that during slavery, public health and poor relief measures were virtually non-existent. Outside of the plantation these matters were the vague respon-

sibility of the Vestries but, aside from the occasional relief of a few of the "deserving poor" and limited emergency assistance following natural disasters such as epidemics, hurricanes or drought, very little was done in these respects. In general, the poor had to rely either on the personal philanthropy of their friends and family, or the Church, or on a few voluntary organizations such as the Ladies Association for the relief of the indigent Sick and Infirm, founded in 1825, and which incidentally is still going strong today.

On the plantation, most planters made some provision for the health care of their slaves. Many employed an apothecary to administer to the medical needs of the slaves, and physicians or surgeons were called in serious cases. A "Sick House" was also a feature of many plantations where slaves were kept until they recovered — or died. The condition and quality of these "sick houses" ranged from a description by Sampson Wood as "a horrid, unhealthy hole" to, in the words of a prominent planter, "there is a good hospital on almost every estate which is generally a clean well-ventilated building." Thus, as Davy, in *The West Indies before and Since Emancipation* noted, "during the time of Slavery, every planter intent on his own interest engaged a medical practitioner to attend his labourers and there was an infirmary on every estate. Since emancipation, no provision has been made by the Government to afford medical aid. . ."

Post-Emancipation to 1854

Before dealing with the actual poor relief and public health measures in the post-emancipation era, it is important to note that government's policy was conditioned by a number of ideological and practical forces operating either throughout or during part of this era. At this point I will merely list these forces, but they will be dealt with in detail later in the discussion. Among the ideological forces were:

- (a) the dominant social philosophy of the time — *laissez-faire* or economic liberalism;

- (b) this reinforced, and was reinforced by, a deep racism which survived well into the 20th century;
- (c) conceptions of the nature of man and more especially of the nature of the black labourer as being innately lazy and thriftless.

Among the practical features were:—

- (a) the fluctuating economic conditions which at times put severe pressure on public expenditure;
- (b) the limited state of knowledge especially on medical matters;
- (c) the continuing conflict between the obvious advantages of centralization and the parochialism and protectionist stance of the Vestries;
- (d) the fact that, at the local level, increased public expenditure in fact meant increased self-taxation by members of the Vestries.

Because of its over-reaching importance and influence throughout the period, a bit more should be said about the *laissez-faire* ideology. *Laissez-faire* is basically a world-view which holds that man is responsible for his own social welfare. The only dependence tolerated was dependence on self or on the family which was an extension of the self, or, in extreme urgency, dependence on the church or philanthropic voluntary organizations. The market was viewed as the most efficient and just means of allocating resources; state involvement was seen as contrary to individual freedom. Therefore, state intervention on behalf of its citizens was only to be used as a last resort — and a temporary one at that — until the proper mechanism — the market — could take over once more. At the time of Emancipation, *laissez-faire* ruled in the mother country and, needless to say, in the daughter as well. Commitment to this ideology had just been reiterated in the British Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which stigmatised and dehumanised the poor in the workhouses before any relief was given. It was a very convenient ideology for the local oligarchy too — for a philosophy which blamed the poor for their poverty and did not accept that the state was responsible for their relief fitted perfectly with local

ideas of the inherent indolence and thriftlessness of the black labouring classes. It is against this background, therefore, that the development of public amenities in post-emancipation Barbados must be seen.

The first thing that strikes the researcher about social policy in the immediate post-emancipation period is the immense focus — both in terms of statutory provision and expenditure — on the maintenance of law and order. Between 1834 and 1840, the statute books are dominated by laws to establish the police force, to build jails, to punish vagrancy, to prevent (what was termed) “riotous assemblies” etc., etc. Similary a look at central government expenditure reveals that, for 1838-1839, out of a total expenditure of £66,494, 50.8% was spent on law and order while education got 1.6%, poor relief and public health got zero, and communications, i.e. roads, wharfs and harbours got 15.3%. So if one were generous — and it *would* be generosity in this particular social context — and include communications, it means that expenditure on the social services was one-third that on maintenance of law and order. In fact, the situation gets worse before it gets better, for ten years later (1848-49) expenditure on law and order was 58.2% while that on education was 2.6%, poor relief and public health 3.2%, communications 3.0%. These figures give a combined public amenities expenditure of roughly 9%, less than one-sixth of that spent on law and order.

The situation at the local government level was not much better. Although the law vaguely charged the Vestries with maintaining and educating the poor, not a great deal was done in these respects. Apart from providing small sums to aid orphans and destitute mothers and small amounts spent on education, the situation was the same. Based on the 8 parishes for which data are available in 1840, only 2.3% of total expenditure went to the poor and 8.2% to education. Nothing whatever was spent on public health. The only parish which had an almshouse offering care for the aged and helpless poor was St. Michael — which in fact had two, one located in Constitution Road, the other off Cheapside, near St. Mary's Church. This “indoor Relief” (as it was called) existed in St. Michael

since the 1770s but it was not until 1862 that another parish Christ Church got an almshouse, and not until 1879 that this facility existed for each parish.

A Board of Health had been established by an Act of 1833 but its duties mainly concerned quarantine and preventing the spread of contagious diseases. Even in this respect it seems hardly to have functioned at all during the first decade of its existence.

There was, of course no piped water. The more wealthy of the St. Michael District could purchase water from vendors at a "bob" for 4 gallons. This water was obtained mainly from Beckles Spring (in modern Bay Land). Others got their water either from deep wells or rain-water tanks. Most of the labouring classes, especially in the rural areas, depended either on ponds or shallow wells – facilities which they often shared – although not with the same regard for sanitation – with livestock.

The sewerage system – if in fact it may be called a system – was worse. In the absence of the public health measures, drainage, sewerage and scavenging services were non-existent. The rural-urban migration and population expansion after emancipation led to the construction of several slum villages on the outskirts of the city. These were overcrowded and insanitary – a situation compounded by the common practice of pig rearing. Lewis Samuels, a Civil Engineer invited from Trinidad to examine the physical conditions of Bridgetown, summarised the situation in 1854:

"In supply of pure water, sewerage, surface drainage, judicious arrangement of streets and proper construction of habitations, Bridgetown is lamentably defective. . . Few towns can offer a greater accumulation of evils, arising from the want of good sanitary measures than this city".

In terms of statutory provisions for public health and poor relief the statute books for this period make very depressing reading. Under the Apprenticeship Termination Act, 1838, the owners/directors of plantations were required to maintain formerly apprenticed labourers who, through mental or physical incapacity, were unable to maintain themselves. This was of course provided that they had no relatives able to maintain them.

the plantation couldn't, then the law provided for maintenance to be afforded by the Church-warden of the parish at a rate of 2/6 weekly. It is not clear to what extent this Act, as it related to the plantations, was carried out, but examination of parochial expenditure shows that many parishes spent no money whatever on maintaining the poor whereas a few spent a few pounds providing for their burial.

The Government of the Poor and Prevention of Bastardy Act, 1838, laid down strict rules of settlement along English lines and empowered certain officials to "apprehend all roving and suspicious persons having no ostensible mode of livelihood, persons craving alms in any parish, road or street, and pauper women great with child." These were to be taken to their parish of settlement and set to work in the workhouse (to be established).

In keeping with the *laissez-faire* ideal of self or family dependence, this Act compelled first and second degree relatives of the poor or sick to maintain them under penalty of 20 shillings. Putative fathers of bastards were to be summoned before a Justice of the Peace who could rule on paternity and order maintenance of the child up to 7 years. In addition, the assets of any deserting parent were to be seized and used to maintain the child, and the parent could be jailed for up to 6 months with hard labour.

Similar in intent was the 1840 Vagrancy Act which included in its definition of vagrant any person judged capable of maintaining himself by labour but neglects to do so, or who begged or encouraged children to beg in a public place. Such persons were subject to confinement with hard labour for up to 14 days. The intention of the law was therefore clear: public expenditure on public amenities was to be kept at an absolute minimum, and the responsibility for such matters was not the state's but the individual's.

As noted earlier, private philanthropy was permitted, and even encouraged, under *laissez-faire* as long as it did not interfere with the operation of the open market. It is therefore not surprising that for most of this period the relief of the sick and poor was almost exclusively derived from private sources.

The work of the Ladies' Association in housing and caring for the sick, the homeless and the hungry has already been mentioned. This was joined in 1837 by the St. Paul's Daily Meal Society and Asylum which provided a daily meal for those of the district who could not afford it and ran a small asylum where the homeless were housed. Many of the Churches too operated "Clothing Societies" and donated significant proportions of their offertories to the poor. However, the most important institution (private) of this period was the Barbados General Hospital.

The first fund-raising efforts for the establishment of this hospital started in 1836, and in 1839 "Carlisle House" in Bay Street was purchased to be converted into a hospital. The Society was incorporated by an Act of 1840, and the necessary alterations were completed at a total cost of £3,850 sterling, raised entirely by voluntary contributions. The Legislature, however, contributed £2,000 towards the purchase of equipment. The hospital was opened on July 1st, 1844 for reception of 75 patients. In its first years, recurrent annual expenditure was too great to be raised by voluntary means and frequent appeals had to be made to the legislature. However, it was not until 1857 that an annual grant of £1,040 was voted for its support. In addition, some of the Vestries contributed funds and received the privilege of recommending patients in proportion to their contribution.

Separate facilities for mental health care were non-existent before emancipation. Most of the mentally ill were confined at the old Asylum in Constitution Road, but many were also to be found in the jails across the island. By an Act of 1844, the government purchased property (where modern District A Police Station is) at cost of £440 for the erection of a Lunatic Asylum. By 1845, the Asylum was completed at a total cost of £4,079 and supported by annual allowance paid from the Colonial Treasury of just over £780.

Similarly the Leprosy Act, 1846, authorised the Town Hall Commissioners to establish a Lazaretto for the reception of persons afflicted with leprosy. A spot next to the new Lunatic

Asylum was originally selected, but this was later transferred for the extension of the Lunatic Asylum, and it was not until 1852 that construction of the Lazaretto at "Blackstone", a small plantation in Black Rock, got under way.

Although the construction of these institutions demonstrate that there *was* some limited effort towards the provision of health care facilities, this effort was hamstrung by the state of medical technology and by the superstition and suspicion with which developments were viewed. Thus, although medical science was advancing in the 19th century, the state of popular medical knowledge always lagged well behind. And, in keeping with the metropole-colony relationship, Barbados lagged even further behind. An example of this is the "Inoculation (Prevention) Act" of 1840 which subjected offenders to a penalty of £100 (current money) for every person inoculated. Similar ignorance characterises a letter written by James Walker, the Colonial Secretary, to the Board of Health in 1852 during a Yellow Fever outbreak, drawing their attention to the insanitary condition of the market place "as abounding in pestilential effluvia which must be dangerous to public health." This was in keeping with the belief which prevailed throughout much of the 19th century that the "impure miasma" generated by filth and stagnant water was the cause of many diseases.

So it can be seen that even before the cholera outbreak, a few halting steps had been made towards the provision of public amenities. Central expenditure on public health had reached 6% of total expenditure and education was given just over 3%. Law and order still took the largest share, but the approximately 37% expended under this head in 1853 (as against 52% in 1844) was indicative of the re-distribution that was slowly taking place. At the local level, too, changes were evident, with 1845 expenditure on education and the poor being more than double that of 1840 – although still amounting to less than 25% of total. Yet these statistics were reflected in very little change in the state of public health and the condition of the poor. It took the major catastrophe of the cholera to effect any real change.

1854-1874: The Impact of Cholera

In fact, the impact of cholera on public health policy in Barbados pre-dated the actual outbreak. Early in 1851, the fear of cholera (then prevalent in Jamaica) spreading to Barbados prompted the Board of Health to examine sanitary conditions in the city. Under the 1851 Public Health Act, severe penalties were imposed to stamp out pig-rearing in urban districts (£2.10 for every pig). Similar penalties were imposed for houses with unsanitary conditions e.g. open cesspools, stagnant water or other filth. The Act directed the appointment of Commissioners of Health islandwide whose duties were to ensure the cleanliness of their respective areas, to drain and fill up ponds, pools, open sewers etc. These Commissioners were given powers of entry and inspection and to seize any articles of food deemed unfit for consumption. In the event of cholera, the Act gave the Board power to make orders, establish dispensaries and any such measures deemed necessary to mitigate the disease.

1851 also saw some relaxation of the restrictive policy on poor relief though this was probably unrelated to the impending cholera. Under a new Government of Poor and Prevention of Bastardy Act, relief was to be given to any destitute person found in a parish in which he did not have a settlement, with the amount to be recovered on his removal to his proper parish. The Act also required each Vestry to appoint at least three of their body to be Guardians and Overseers of the Poor. Another (probably) unrelated development was the "Lunatics (Care and Maintenance) Act" of 1853 which placed the Asylum under a Board of Superintendent and provided £2,000 for additional accommodation. There was, however, no corresponding ideological shift, for the Act required the expenses of inmates possessed of property to be charged on their estate.

By 1853, the fear of cholera was intensifying and the Public Health Act was quickly amended, transferring additional powers to the Commissioners of Health and providing for the appointment of Sanitary Inspectors. In spite of all this, it was a case of "two little too late", for cholera came anyway and left an estimated 20,000 dead.

Although it is possible to overestimate the impact of the cholera, it is nevertheless true that it rudely awakened the oligarchy to the desperate conditions under which the poor lived and to the fact that their own health was inseparably related to the general sanitary state of the population as a whole. According to one contemporary commentator, J.Y. Edghill, the cholera revealed

“that our sanitary condition was scandalous. The accumulations of filth in Bridgetown and in many parts of our country were incredible. Cart-loads of abominations were taken from yards and spots that had concealed them for months and even years.”

Citing the abject poverty which prevailed, Edghill noted that in many houses there wasn't even a glass or spoon with which to administer medicine, while people lay on bare boards awaiting death without any covering of any sort. He continued:

“I heard more than one proprietor regret in 1854 that he had not cared more for the welfare of his labourers and I know that more than one after that year took a better interest in their temporal and social condition. It was from them that most of the infant schools started into existence and other agencies were floated for the common weal.”

Immediately after the epidemic it seemed as though the problem of what to do with and for the poor would be tackled by the local legislature. As an immediate reaction, Bridgetown was divided into seven districts with two medical officers appointed to each; grants-in-aid were made to private organizations such as the Cholera Orphange, the Daily Meal School and existing Soup Kitchens; the General Hospital came under greater financial and administrative care by the government; lime was provided for the washing and cleansing of homes; a daily distribution of water was instituted; the education vote was increased and the system of elementary education improved; a catechist was appointed for the jail; houses of refuge were opened and the colony's finances pledged in support of the first water company. Additionally, an Act was passed to prevent the occupation of derelict buildings and for their removal. This Act also incorporated plans for the erection of improved dwellings for the poorer

classes. The situation was such that Bishop Parry wrote in 1859:

“There never was before the same zeal for the public good, nor the same concord and cooperation in promoting it.”

The situation was however complicated by a number of factors beyond the control of the legislature:

- the bad seasons and low sugar prices, 1860-63;
- the high price of imported provisions due to American Civil War;
- restrictions by the Colonial Bank on credit facilities to plantations.

In addition, the conflict over a centralized system of poor relief as against the existing parochial system continued, and in fact reached new proportions.

Thomas Gill, Senior member for the City, was a zealous advocate of Poor Law and had been trying for many years to get the Assembly to commit itself to the principle of centralization. On the other hand, the Attorney General, the Hon. John Sealy, from a typically legalistic perspective argued that, under the Vestries Act, the parochial authorities were armed with adequate powers for looking after the poor; all that was needed was to make effective use of the Act. And, as yet another alternative, the President of the Medical Association, Mr. Grant Thomas, evolved a plan for an island-wide contributory medical service – a proposal which, when seen in perspective, can only be described as ridiculous since the wages of the labouring population hovered around, and often dipped below, subsistence. In fact a prominent local historian suggests that Thomas’ proposals were designed as much to restore the prestige and comfort of the medical profession as to save life and curtail suffering.

As for the others, Gill’s scheme of centralization was too far ahead of public opinion. In fact it is not until well over 100 years later, under the National Assistance Act 1969, that *de facto* centralization with uniformity of benefits etc. was attained. In order to work, Sealy’s solution would have required the application of sanctions by some central authority over the Vestries, and as far as the local oligarchy was concerned, this

was not much more palatable than centralization. What in fact happened was that the relief of the poor remained entirely at the discretion of the Vestries. And, in spite of a Government Commission of Enquiry into their condition, the plight of the poor remained the same until the Mitchinson Commission of 1875-77.

Following the epidemic, Governor Colebrooke, by a proclamation, virtually kicked members of the old Board of Health out of office and appointed a new Board. This was followed by the 1856 Public Health Act which provided for a nine-member Board of Health to be appointed by the Governor — two of them from the Legislative Council and three from the House of Assembly.

Under the General Hospital Act, 1858, £3,000 was granted for enlarging and improving the Hospital, the annual grant was increased to £2,000, and a further £300 was granted annually for the payment of three doctors and a Chaplain. As mentioned earlier, similar attention was given to education: under the Education Amendment Act 1858, the Education Committee was required to appoint an Inspector of Schools, and £5,000 was placed at the disposal of the Committee for the establishment island-wide of infant schools.

One of the most urgent measures in the wake of the epidemic was immediate planning for the introduction of piped water to the City. Governor Colebrooke secured the services of Lewis Samuels, a Civil Engineer who was Director of Public Works in Trinidad where he had constructed water and sewerage systems. Samuel's Report was completed in November 1854 but, for all its urgency, there was a long delay before action was taken. It is important to note that the Bridgetown Water Works Co., which was established and incorporated under an Act of 1857, was a private company. It was, however, guaranteed by a Government subsidy of £5,000 p.a. on condition that it supplied the City with half a million gallons of "pure and wholesome water" per day. E.G. Sinckler records that "the first sod of the Bridgetown Water Works was turned on December 5th 1859". The company obtained its first water supply from Newcastle Spring in St. John, and pipeline was laid from there to the City,

where piped water was first obtained on March 29th, 1861. It should be pointed out that, even before the epidemic, local entrepreneurs had been expressing interest in establishing a Water Works. For example, on November 23, 1852, a petition was laid before the House to that effect, but it took the tragedy of 1854 to spur the legislature into action.

It would have been overly optimistic to have expected the expansion of social welfare policy following the cholera to have been sustained. For this was in direct contradiction to the prevailing ideology of *laissez-faire*-individualism which still reigned supreme. Hilton Vaughan puts it this way:

“By the early 1860s, however, the brief expansion in social welfare was virtually over, the stream of collectivist legislation dried up.”

In fact, not only did the social welfare ethic die, but there was also a violent reaction and swing of the pendulum away from the humanitarianism of the late 1850s. The Assembly passed a Bill to make assaults punishable with imprisonment and hard labour; rushed through another to allow flogging of persons assembling under suspicious circumstances; passed what amounted to anti-emigration measures; increased customs duties by 25%; and threw out a Bill to provide for the registration of births and deaths. It was as if the legislature, perceiving some threat, became exceedingly concerned with the preservation of law and property; but it made no attempt to remedy those conditions out of which the threat to law and property arose.

This situation is reflected in statistical data too. Expenditure on poor relief and public health, which had been rising steadily after 1840, suddenly went into decline with 1865 expenditure being less than half the 15% of 1855. For the first time, too, expenditure on law and order which (in proportional terms) had been falling, began to inch up again after 1860.

Given the prevailing atmosphere, the poor could hardly have expected much sympathy from the Government House Committee on poor relief which was appointed in 1865. Even its composition reflected the tone of the period and predicted the results of its deliberations, for, of the twenty-three, all except

one belonged to the local oligarchy – either holding an official position, owning interest in land, or representing the Anglican Church. The Rev. James Young Edghill alone, then Superintendent of the Moravian Missionary and who had (deservedly) become known as a philanthropist, could be considered a friend of the poor.

Predictably, the Committee placed the blame for poverty securely on the doorstep of the poor themselves, citing that chief among the causes of poverty were the “wretched social habits of the people”. The Report however noted the increasing prevalence of previously unknown, nutritionally related diseases and also the fact that the existing system of relief was in many cases insufficient to reach the real poverty and destitution in the island. Although it must have been patently clear that a major revision of the system of poor relief was needed, the Committee’s recommendations may be summed up as “more of the same”:

- an increase in the poor rate i.e the annual amount voted for poor relief;
- the building of more parochial almshouses;
- the more efficient provision of medicine and medical service for the poor; and
- provision for laying an additional poor rate if necessary.

Although these measures were not given any legislative treatment, there *was* some marginal increase in the proportional expenditure on the poor. In the ten years between 1865 and 1875 this rose by about 5% to reach 34.6% of total. (We are dealing here with parochial expenditure – for up to this point central government spent nothing on poor relief.) However, one must be careful that these data do not convey the wrong impression – that the condition of the poor was improved to any marked extent. For example, a Joint Committee of Council and Assembly, reporting in 1869, stated that though it was unwilling to speak disparagingly of the Vestries, it felt that more ought to be done on the matter of poor relief, and that a more organized and uniform system was needed. G.Y. Chester, a visiting clergyman in 1867, uninhibited by official responsibility, referred to the “shameful and inhuman parsimony” which

prevailed in the Vestries. He wrote:

“The legislature permits but does not insist upon a portion of the parochial rates being expended on poor relief. The consequence of this is, that some parishes grant no relief at all, while others give a miserable pittance to a most limited and insufficient number of favoured objects.”

A few years later, Bishop Mitchinson made much the same observations, noting that the Vestries were hotbeds of class and race prejudice which showed itself especially in policy on education. Many exclusively white schools were maintained out of parish rates although little or no provision was made for elementary schools. In confidential correspondence to Governor Hennessy, he pointed out that the granting of outdoor relief was entirely haphazard since in practice it was left in the hands of the Churchwarden, who was usually unable to give sufficient time to his duties. There was also extreme diversity between the systems and methods of each parish.

By now it should be obvious that there was a clear difference in policy between the areas of public health and poor relief. In terms of poor relief, the local oligarchy attempted to maintain a delicate balance between maintaining work ethic among the labouring population and preventing social unrest. From their point of view, too much relief would encourage laziness in what was already a lazy group; on the other hand, too little relief could lead to declining social conditions and possible revolt. Sanford Freeling, who served as Acting Governor during 1875, also commented on this relationship:

“I am led to imagine they [the legislature] have rather endeavoured to prevent reforms and to keep the poor in their present low state, instead of to ameliorate their condition, and this, I fear, for the double reason of obtaining labour at the lowest possible rate, and of avoiding expenditure which would increase taxation.”

Public Health was another matter. The cholera epidemic had brought home very clearly the fact that public health measures were in the interest of the entire population, and improvements in this area proceeded steadily. Even after the humanitarianism of the late 1850s had faded and had been replaced by the repres-

sive legislation of the 1860s, a number of public health measures was still being enacted. In 1864, for example, the St. Thomas Vestry was given permission to erect and maintain the necessary works for collecting and delivering water from Porey's Spring to the inhabitants of the district. In the following year, £750 was granted for the extension of the Lazaretto. In November 1866, the Board of Health recommended the erection of a log hut on Pelician Island to be used as a quarantine for arriving passengers, and this was given legislative assent by a Vesting Act on July, 4th, 1867. During that same session, an Act was passed to encourage the destruction of rats. This Act permitted Parochial Treasurers to pay one penny for every rat head produced. In fact, this purpose was usually included in the poor relief expenditure of the parish since it was usually the poor who availed themselves of the opportunity. Sometimes up to £200 was paid out in this manner per parish and, since there were 240 pence in a single pound, this gives some idea of the number of rats which met their demise.

A British War Office initiative was responsible for the start of the Lock Hospital for venereal diseases in Barbados. In an effort to control the spread of venereal disease in ports and garrison towns, the British Parliament passed a series of Contagious Diseases Acts. These were the model for the 1868 law in Barbados which led to the establishment of the Lock Hospital the following year. The building cost £4,730, of which the British Government provided £2,500 and the Barbados Government the remainder. Britain also agreed to pay £25/bed/year for 25 beds. This £625 p.a. was matched by a local contribution of £245 p.a. Control of this facility was vested in the directors of the General Hospital.

Attention was also given to the Lunatic Asylum during this period. A Committee appointed to look into the Asylum reported that the area around District 'A' had become too noisy and that the Asylum itself was too small and out of repair. In 1869, the Committee was granted £2,000 for the purchase of a new site. A further Act of 1873 charged the Consolidated Board with the erection of an Asylum capable of holding 250 lunatics. The Board was authorised to spend £25,000 in erection of the

Asylum; but 15 years were to pass before the site was finally purchased and construction started.

Between 1869 and 1875 several Acts were passed granting money for the extension of the General Hospital culminating in the General Hospital Act (1875) which raised the annual grant to the substantial sum of £4,600 and provided a further £250 towards the construction of a new Ulcer Ward.

Post-1875

The last quarter of the 19th century, as far as public amenities are concerned, is dominated by the recommendations of (and legislation based on) two Commissions of Enquiry, both conducted by Bishop Mitchinson. These were the Mitchinson Report on Education, submitted in 1875, and the Enquiry into Poor Relief started that same year and on which a report was presented in 1877. Although I do not now have the time to go into Mitchinson's ideological position, some appreciation of this is important if one is to understand Mitchinson's own anti-plantocratic stance and the anti-conservative tone which colours both Reports. What I can note here is that Mitchinson was clearly influenced by the Romanticism which was at the time challenging the dominance of *laissez-faire* in Britain, and that the stress which the Romantic ideology placed on moral reformation and on social obligation is evident in Mitchinson's work.

The 1878 Education Act was based on the Mitchinson Report and provided, among other things, for:

- the establishment of an Education Board;
- the withdrawal of legislative aid from racially segregated schools;
- provisions towards compulsory education; and
- transfer of responsibility and obligation from the Vestries to the General Revenue.

The 1879 Poor Relief Bill was an impressive piece of drafting; it incorporated most of the major recommendations of the Commission. Here, finally, was the chance for the legislature to do something to relieve the extreme poverty which afflicted the lower classes. But the ideological tone of the legislature was

hardly such as to encourage optimism. During the latter half of the 1870s, the House threw out a number of Bills seeking to offer temporary relief to the suffering poor; and when the Governor himself intervened, the House of Assembly replied that they would regard it as a grave misfortune if the labouring classes should acquire the belief that legislation rather than self-exertion was the answer to their problems.

The major controversial issue in the Bill was that of centralization. The Report recommended the creation of a central Poor Law Board which would exercise authority over the individual Vestries and lead to uniformity and adequacy of relief. The local oligarchy would have none of that and, from its inception, the Bill was described as an attempt to subvert local government and to secure the "abrogation of the Vestry System and the establishment of an arbitrary and irresponsible Central Board in its stead. When the Act finally emerged, a purely cosmetic Poor Law Board was retained which had no power to enforce anything and whose functions for the next seventy years were restricted to submitting annual reports on the condition of the poor and their treatment by the Vestries. In fact, the legislature was willing to go so far to prevent centralization that provisions for establishing a Central Workhouse and a Juvenile Reformatory, which are indispensable to an effective Poor Law, were summarily excised from the Act. And, in all this, standing alone as a pillar of ultra-conservatism, and almost single-handedly leading the amendments, was Conrad Reeves.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the condition of the poor improved to some degree after the Act. In evidence before the Commission, doctors reported cases of people dying simply because they could not afford to pay for medical attention. A visit from the doctor often cost as much as six shillings, exclusive of the cost of medicine. And, in these days of limited medical technology, follow-up visits were necessary and frequent. I know readers will question my omission so far of the Friendly Societies which offered a rudimentary social insurance, including medical relief. But we must be very clear about the class of poor with which I am dealing. Many people could not even

afford a daily meal, far less shelter, clothing or a weekly contribution to a Friendly Society. In fact, the impact of the Friendly Societies in this period may well have been over-estimated because of duplication of membership, the lopsided distribution of benefits (largely bonuses) and their questionable administration.

In any case, the Poor Relief Act required each Vestry to appoint medical officers of the poor who would attend to outdoor paupers at the expense of the parish as well as the sick poor of the Almshouses. Dispensaries were also provided at each almshouse to facilitate the distribution of medicine. There, however, remained an administrative problem – the medical officer could only visit a pauper after that pauper had first been seen by the local Inspector of the Poor, and the visit approved. There are documented cases of people dying because the Inspector did not think the case was serious enough, or because in his opinion there were relatives alive who could afford the cost of medical treatment. It was also in the discretion of the local Inspectors to decide if a pauper qualified for outdoor relief which was usually a small money grant (Pension) of about two shillings monthly, or a food dole, or a suit of clothing. At his discretion people were put on or taken off of the relief roll, depending on his assessment of their circumstances.

Finally, there remained what was called indoor relief which was, in effect, institutionalization in the Almshouse. By 1880, nine parishes had Almshouses while St. Lucy and St. Peter shared one on their border. The Almshouse was not a very nice place in the 19th century. In it one could find the aged, the chronically ill, the blind, lunatics, the temporarily sick, orphans and abandoned children as well as pregnant women with nowhere to go. There was no segregation except in terms of sex. Inmates were subject to the strict discipline of a code of rules governing their conduct. Except for people placed on special diet by the Parochial Medical Officer, the food was seldom adequate in terms of quantity or quality – consisting most days of a meatless soup made primarily of potatoes and other ground provisions.

Naturally, few people wanted to enter the Almshouse unless

there was absolutely no alternative. So the Vestries, in their ingenuity, in the absence of a Workhouse, used the Almshouse as a deterrent. The Minute Books of the Poor Law Inspectors are full of cases where the 'Almshouse Test' was applied – that is, an applicant for relief was required to demonstrate willingness to be institutionalized in the Almshouse as a precondition of obtaining relief.

The use of the poor relief as a mechanism of social control in the doctrine of *laissez-faire* is very clear in this period. People were sometimes refused aid if they were living in a consensual union, or if they had relatives who were moderately well-off (whether or not these relatives cared two hoots about them). The idea was to enforce work, to inculcate the ethic of self-help and family responsibility. In fact, on the matter of self-help, the Mitchinson Commission noted that the people were thriftless and improvident and that this led to their poverty. As a result, one sees the Savings Bank (District Branches) Act and the Friendly and Benevolent Societies Act both passed in the same year in order to “facilitate and extend thriftiness”.

I have not so far examined the racial composition of the poor. The majority of the poor were naturally black, but there was also a small portion of white poor. I say “white poor” because there is a very clear distinction in 19th century Barbados between the “poor whites”, mainly descendants of the white indentured servants, and the “genteel poor” who had formally been better off but were victims of plantation or other commercial failure. As far as the local oligarchy was concerned, there was not a great deal of distinction to be made between the “poor whites” and the black poor. And in fact many were to be found populating the Almshouses and pleading with the Inspector of Poor just like the blacks.

However, in the interest of maintaining the caste-like system of stratification, the “genteel poor” had to be segregated. To demonstrate, I quote from the Mitchinson Report itself:

“there is still a class, and unfortunately a very large one . . . consisting of persons originally well or comfortably off, or sprung of parents who were so circumstanced, who, from adverse circumstances, have fallen from the higher sphere which they occupied or ought to have

occupied in society, into utter indigence . . . This class of poor, perhaps the most distressing of all, lies beyond the reach of legislative succour; their cause must be met by voluntary effort for the alleviation of their distress . . .”

This particular brand of ideological dualism – public relief for paupers, private relief for the genteel poor – is reflected in the work of the charitable organizations which existed in Barbados during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Although I do not have the time to go into details, the expenditure on poor relief during the last two decades of the 19th century is very revealing in terms of contemporary ideas about treatment of the poor. In the first decade of the operation of the Poor Relief Act, outdoor relief was reduced by half. Total expenditure on relief also fell, and the 1896 figure was about 15% less than that of 1881, despite the fact that hardship was increasing due to the depression in the sugar industry. Some would argue (and with some justification) that the depression caused the reduction in public expenditures. I am of the view that, even had there not been a depression, poor relief expenditure would have been cut back. From the recommendations of the Commission, from the House of Assembly Debates, from the Reports of the Poor Law Board and of the Poor Law Inspector, there is clear unanimity on the need to reduce poor relief as far as possible. So effective was this policy, that there was basically no increase in poor relief expenditure for nearly 35 years, until the start of World War I which led to spiralling costs, and therefore increased spending on poor relief.

In the meantime, there was a concerted effort in the area of public health to build on the facilities which had been established during the previous decades. During the drought of 1870-72, 189 out of 257 ponds in the rural areas dried up. Although the governor (Rawson) managed to secure an enquiry by the Superintendent of Public Works, J.W. Clarke, no action was taken on his report. However, the second water company, The Barbados Water Supply Co. was formed in 1886 and, like its predecessor, was offered a government subsidy of £5,000. By 1891, the first company had erected a pumping station at Bowmanston with a capacity of one million gallons per day.

A conflict between the two companies soon sprang up and, by the Water Works Act of 1895, government bought out both companies at a cost of £375,000, and the Water Works Department was established.

The work of the Barbados General Hospital was also increasing steadily. By 1890, voluntary contributions ceased, and the hospital was in effect a public institution. Its facilities were constantly extended so that by the end of the century it had a daily average residence of about 210, annual admissions of over 3,600, and was treating well over 20,000 outpatients annually. Gross annual expenditure was then roughly £7,000.

By the mid 1870s, both the Lunatic Asylum and the Lazaretto were extremely inadequate both in terms of accommodation and medical treatment. In 1877, the small estate, "Jenkinsville", was purchased as the site for the new Lunatic Asylum and, on 5 April 1893, the Government formally opened the new Asylum at a estimated cost of £35,000. After this, the Asylum was run on comparatively modern lines. Some attention was also given to the Lazaretto, because, by 1908, visiting officials declared it to be a model institution of its kind.

Despite the work carried on at the Lock Hospital for venereal diseases, the incidence of infection continued to rise, reaching 10% of the entire garrison by 1883. In 1886, the British Government repealed the Contagious Diseases Act, withdrawing its contribution and forcing the closure of the Lock Hospital. Appeals by the Barbados Government to the War Office proved unsuccessful and so the new St. Michael's Almshouse became heavily burdened with the cost of treating syphilitic and related cases. By contrast, however, the Isolation Hospital on Pelican Island remained in operation well into the 20th century and formed an integral part of the quarantine procedures which the island adopted towards the end of the 19th century.

The first Act of this elaborate system was the Quarantine Act 1880 which gave the Board of Health, in connection with the Harbour Master, control over entry to the island and the power to enforce a fourteen day quarantine. The Act was amended in 1892 and again in 1893, each time extending the powers of local officials with respect to incoming passengers

and cargo. Finally, following a conference of West Indian colonies on quarantine, the 1905 Quarantine Act was passed to adopt the uniform regulations agreed on at the conference. This detailed Act covered all matters of inter-colonial trade and travel with respect to the spreading of disease.

The closing years of the 19th century are also characterised by the increased attention given to what, in modern language might be called, consumer affairs. The Medical Registration Act (1885) and the Druggists Act (1894) required respectively that medical practitioners and druggists be registered and their qualifications to practice certified. Similarly, the Public Health Act (1888), the sale of Food and Drugs Act (1889), and the Slaughtering of Animals Act (1888) all required inspection by health officials of articles offered for sale to the general public. These laws, of course, also gave power of inspection and seizure to public health officers. Even the animals got protection through the Fertilizer and Feeding Stuffs Act, 1894. More seriously, this was designed to prevent the introduction of disease into livestock being reared for human consumption. Finally, legislation in 1894 for the enlargement of Westbury Cemetery, which had recently been acquired, also provided funds to improve the drainage of the City. Limitations were set (800 square feet) to the size of house-spots in urban areas. Regulations were also passed requiring Commissioners of Health to provide for sewerage disposal in villages, tenancies, etc.

There is no doubt that a great deal had been done in the provision of public amenities between Emancipation and the close of the 19th century. Perhaps some appreciation of the dimensions of these changes can be had by comparison of relative expenditure:

	Total Exp. £	Education %	Poor Relief and Public Health %	Public Works %	Law and Order %
1839	66,494	1.6	0.0	15.3	50.8
1899	207,884	8.0	8.4	23.1	20.6

It must be noted, however, that while these developments were significant, a great deal still remained to be done. Sanitary

conditions were still poor; medical relief was inadequate; and there was no provision for Old Age Pensions. But most pressing of all was the alarming level of infant mortality which at 420 per thousand in 1906 was by far the highest in the Caribbean and more than six times metropolitan levels. It took a long time before these matters received Government attention; and this was done in a new social order when repatriated emigrants with modern ideas, faced with continuing depressed social conditions, challenged the local oligarchy and promoted change. But that is another story.

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4

The Confederation Question

A. De V. PHILLIPS

In the years after emancipation there was a clash of ideas surrounding the best form of political constitution for Barbados. The Colonial Office put forward two inter-connected proposals, namely, Confederation with Crown Colony Government. These proposals were floated by successive Tory and Liberal Governments since there was no substantial difference of policy on these issues between the two British parties through a series of Governors.

The white political elite of Barbados, however, held different views. They were determined to retain political power and political control in their hands. Otherwise stated, they were defending self government, the representative principle, and local self determination or even, if you like, nationalism against control by the metropolis or mother country. Eventually, during the period 1875-1876, both these sets of views were agitated before the masses who were normally at that time shut out of political debate, and the masses naturally formed their own conclusions about how their interests would be best served.

The political system at the time of emancipation was inherited from the 17th century period of settlement. In the course of the 17th century and the 18th century there had developed a constitution formed by principles, which collectively came to be referred to as the Old Representative System. This is a system which had been found in all the several colonies of the First British Empire, including the North American colonies such as Virginia, New York, and Massachusetts which, of course, had left the Empire following their Declaration of Independence in 1776.

From both North America and the West Indies, the British authorities found evidence of problems associated with the Old Representative System. For example, one fundamental problem was that the elected assemblies had encroached upon the prerogatives of the executive government, notably by not simply voting money for projects but also by insisting on carrying them through by means of Boards and Committees. Secondly, there was no control of financial affairs since each member as an individual member of the assembly was free to propose expenditure at any time during a session so that there could be no estimates and obviously no annual budget. These were basic structural defects of the Old Representative System.

Further, the special social circumstances and the racial composition of the population of the West Indian colonies increasingly became a cause for concern to the authorities in London. It is perhaps necessary to stress at this point that the political and other circumstances in Barbados were necessarily affected by the fact that Barbados was a colony.

As a colony, final decisions in many important matters rested with London. However, Barbados, like the other colonies in the First British Empire, possessed what is referred to as constituent power. That is to say, their constitutions had been established and were deemed to be unchangeable except by the colonial legislatures themselves or by act of the Imperial Parliament. Note therefore that the British Cabinet, advised by the Secretary of State for the colonies, could not simply, by Order in Council, or by other prerogative act, change the constitution of these long established chartered colonies, as they were called. There was often a reluctance on the part of the Colonial Office to take matters before Parliament since such matters were often contentious and the West Indian colonies had numbers of champions and lobbyists to look out for their interests in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords.

The theory underlying the Old Representative System was that Englishmen had migrated across the Atlantic Ocean in the 17th century, carrying with them what were generally referred to as "the rights of free-born Englishmen" and that consequently the elected assemblies which had been established first in

Virginia in 1619, then in Bermuda and thirdly in Barbados in 1639, could be viewed as part of the heritage of the English settlers in the colonies.

□ In the slave societies, the political franchise and political rights had been regarded as a function of property and had been restricted to persons who were free, white, twenty-one, male, property-owners, tax-payers and Christian. Notice that women had no vote until this century. The dominant ideas of the time shut out that majority segment of society. Jews were also shut out and obviously the free-black and free-coloured population and the vast majority of the population which was enslaved until 1838.

The adult population was therefore divided into two segments, active citizens and second-class citizens, and that division continued after emancipation. When legal emancipation arrived in 1838, however, the entire population – white, coloured and black – then became equal in the eyes of the law and equally eligible to participate in all the institutions of the society provided, of course, that they could meet the franchise qualifications for the Assembly and the Vestries.

So the theoretical situation then was that in Barbados after 1838 the superstructure of British institutions was opened to the participation of the population, mostly of African descent. However, it was regarded as an axiom that only Englishmen had a special understanding, rooted in tradition, necessary for the operation of the system taken from England by the colonists. The dominant racist ideology of the Victorians assumed that blacks lacked political capacity.

Background to Crown Colony Proposal

Indeed, immediately after emancipation, Henry Taylor of the Colonial Office made a fundamental assessment of the political and constitutional requirements of the West Indian colonies in the new situation. He found that the newly emancipated blacks could not be expected to participate at once in political life; and that those black and coloured people who had been freed before emancipation had little education and were not politically sophisticated, though a minority of them were quite

articulate. The small number of white landowners and merchants still possessed "all the passions and inveterate prejudice growing out of the slave system." Every attempt, therefore, at maintaining a representative system in such a community would result in the installation of oligarchy. Only a small minority would satisfy the requirements for the franchise and would have the privilege (instead of right) of a vote. Further, the assemblies were not willing to undertake the task of providing the social amenities necessary for the education and general improvement of the people. The Colonial Office view, therefore, was that it would be a political solecism, that is, a basic mistake to alter the nature of the West Indian society so radically by emancipation and yet leave the political framework unchanged. The British Parliament had brought about emancipation and therefore ought, as a corollary, to abrogate the old political constitution.

Taylor further pointed out that the 1839 session of Parliament would be a most favourable opportunity for introducing this measure since Parliament was out of sympathy with the patent ill-will of the Jamaican Assembly. Also, looking to the future, the franchise qualification was sufficiently low that it was possible that sooner or later a coloured and black majority would dominate the assembly. In Taylor's vivid phrase, "that would change the complexion of the evil to be dealt with but not reduce its magnitude". Good government would be equally far away and the Imperial Government would be less at an advantage in that such an assembly would present the appearance of being representative of the mass of the population. The British Government should therefore bring a bill in the House of Commons for the abolition of all the West Indian assemblies and the substitution of councils based on the pattern of those already existing in Crown Colonies such as Trinidad in which the power of the Crown was dominant.

The British Cabinet, however, did not adopt the general policy outlined but decided instead to suspend or attempt to suspend simply the Jamaica Assembly for a five-year period. There was opposition to this proposal in the House of Commons. The Government was virtually defeated and had to resign in May 1839, and so the general principle was lost. But it is clear

that from that point onward the issue was in the open, namely, whether islands such as Barbados would retain the degree of internal self-government and home rule which they had inherited and developed or whether the paternalistic Crown Colony system would be implemented. The Colonial Office assumed that the Crown would act as an impartial arbiter, as a trustee for those unable to uphold their own interests and that it would provide, through the Crown Colony system, for the needs of these newly emancipated societies.

In short, the Crown Colony system aimed to replace a highly imperfect political system by a system essentially of administration. Politics involving the jostling of interest groups would be suspended. Decisions would be made by officials and experts – in the famous phrase ‘everything for the people, nothing by the people.’ In fact, however, those who held political resources such as wealth and education would still have been called upon and would have been in a position to influence decisions. In Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana and indeed throughout the West Indies this was the experience under Crown Colony rule. In all those places the late 19th century and early 20th century were marked by campaigns for the restoration of the representative principle.

The Executive Committees

After the general principle had not been followed through in 1839 there followed two divergent forms of development in the political and constitutional history of the West Indian colonies – essentially two opposite paths of development. In the first place, there was a development towards what is referred to as responsible government, that is to say, government in which the administration, in the form of Cabinet or Executive Committee, would be responsible to a majority in an elected House. This was the path adopted in Canada and in other colonies of white settlement. Jamaica embarked on that path in 1854 with the establishment of an Executive Committee, and the Jamaican example was quickly followed by Tobago and St. Vincent in the Windward Islands and less quickly by St. Kitts, Nevis and Antigua in the Leeward Islands. But the experiment did not succeed in

any of those territories, and as early as 1857 it had begun to misfire in Jamaica; and it was swept away with the abrogation of the old constitution following the Morant Bay riot of 1865. In 1863, Governor Sir James Walker suggested that Barbados should move in this direction, at least toward a Crown monopoly of the initiation of money votes. But the resolution to effect this was defeated 14:7 despite the support of the very influential coloured political leader, Samuel Jackman Prescod. This entire subject was then buried for another seventeen years until 1880.

Movement toward Crown Colony and Confederation

The other path was toward the Crown Colony system which should be viewed as a retrogression or a moving backward from the Old Representative System. This attempt to introduce the Crown Colony system was linked, in the case of Barbados, with the view that the island should be confederated with the other territories of the Windward Islands, namely St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada and Tobago.

Viewed simply, this two-pronged policy of the Colonial Office and the reactions to it from within Barbados caused a political quarrel between the Colonial Office and the white political elite in Barbados.

On the question of federation, ever since the 17th century, the imperial authorities had been impressed by the convenience of creating one federation or more than one federation among the islands of the Caribbean. A short-lived arrangement had been made in the 17th century with the Leeward Islands and again from the 1830s Barbados had been linked to the Windward Islands solely through its Governor who became also the Governor-in-Chief of the Windward Islands.

The tidy-minded officials in London, looking at maps of the Caribbean, were obviously impressed by the neat arrangement and the ease of administration which would be introduced through one or more federations in the Caribbean. For forty years from about 1834 to about 1874 the Colonial Office made a number of half-hearted efforts to create either a federation or a confederation of Barbados and the Windward Islands.

But the crisis which came so rapidly to the boil in 1876 derived from the increased attention paid to the question by the newly appointed governor John Pope Hennessy from November 1875.

To a large extent, the success of Sir Benjamin Pine in persuading the several Leeward Islands to combine into a federation in 1871 had led both Pope Hennessy and the Colonial Office to become increasingly optimistic about a similar scheme for the Windward Islands. Notice also that in other parts of the empire, notably in Canada in 1867, and also in South Africa, efforts were being made to promote the federal idea. It should be noted for the Caribbean that the Colonial Office had as an objective the joining together of the Leewards Islands federation and the proposed Windward Islands federation into a single large entity which would have included most of the English speaking Caribbean except for Jamaica, Trinidad, and the mainland colony of British Guiana.

This policy had been adopted by a series of Secretaries of State for the Colonies. In 1868 the Duke of Buckingham had sent out Rawson W. Rawson as Governor to attempt this confederation. His successor, Earl Granville, decided instead that Rawson should not proceed until enquires had been made about the state of feeling in several Windward Islands. Rawson reported adversely on the prospects for federation. He suggested that his position as Governor in the Windward Islands was very different from the position of Sir Benjamin Pine in the Leeward Islands at the same time. Among other things, the Leeward Islands had all by that time taken the step of abandoning their two-chamber legislatures for single chamber legislatures. The white inhabitants who dominated politics in Barbados and the Windward Islands were unlikely voluntarily to surrender their constitutions. So, Rawson was only a lukewarm advocate of confederation, and the next Secretary of State to express an interest in the matter, the Earl of Kimberly, chided him for his inactivity. Notice that the proposal was a two-pronged proposal with one section depending on the other, that is, the Colonial Office did not simply want a federation; it wanted a federation of a Crown Colony type.

Now, the Crown Colony movement was given a boost.

certainly in the eyes of the Colonial Office, after Jamaica abandoned its elective House in 1865 following what is referred to as the Morant Bay Rebellion. As F.R. Augier has shown, the whites in Jamaica opted for what they referred to as government by Englishmen, partly in order to frustrate the rise of a coloured and black majority in their House of Assembly. The creation of single chambers as a step towards the Crown Colony system took place in the Leeward Islands, and by the end of the 19th century, as is very well known, the Crown Colony system with nominated members, some paid government officials and some private citizens, became the norm in the Caribbean. It is also well known that Barbados, Bermuda and the Bahamas were the three colonies which held out against this trend.

Politicians in Barbados could see two ominous trends. The developments in Jamaica in 1865 marked one trend. The creation of the Leeward Islands Federation in 1871 marked the other trend. Both these trends suggested that the days of the Old Representative System were numbered.

Division of Opinion in Barbados

The 24th June in 1875 marked a point when the question of the confederation of Barbados with the Windward Islands on a Crown Colony basis became increasingly prominent. Propaganda was extensively used by both sides and political manoeuvres and intrigue became the order of the day. On 20 July 1875, at a meeting of the Executive Council, Sir Graham Briggs, a large land owner whose possessions include Farley Hill and Erdiston, informed the Governor and the others present that certain rumours had begun to circulate in Barbados that the government intended to change the constitution and to introduce slavery (perhaps we should say re-introduce slavery), and further that he, Briggs, was the cause of this.

It is to be noted that Briggs also owned property in the Leeward Islands and had supported the establishment of the federation there and was the main landowner in Barbados to support the federation project here. Briggs stated that the masses of the people had been led to believe the rumour and that as a result there was a general feeling of alarm and that people had issued threats against him. Notice that this stir began before

the arrival of Governor Pope Hennessy. Rumour and counter-rumour flew around Barbados throughout this period.

In this atmosphere elections were held for a new Assembly and there was a clear indication of a concerted campaign to oust from the House of Assembly anyone seeking to support the administration's efforts in favour of confederation. Members seeking re-election were required to pledge to the electorate in advance that they would not support any change in the existing constitution. Out of this came a side issue, an election petition in St. Thomas, which became a contentious matter between the Assembly and Acting Governor Freeling who chose to exacerbate the situation by dissolving the House of Assembly just four days before Governor Pope Hennessy arrived.

In those rather inauspicious circumstances, therefore, the new Governor at once issued writs for a new general election and sought to pacify feelings and to secure a certain measure of harmony on the political scene so as to ease his task in implementing the confederation proposals. He made a number of informal and unofficial probes of public opinion and engaged in social discussion with some of the white politicians on the subject of the extent to which confederation might reach. He chose to present the scheme as being essentially administrative. This would have involved a combination of certain offices in the civil services of the several colonies.

On 23 November 1875, the new legislative session was opened and the first weeks of the session formed what may be referred to as a honeymoon period between Governor Pope Hennessy and the politicians of Barbados. Hennessy, however, tended to gain favour with the politicians by one line of policy only rapidly to lose favour by some other measure. For example, the honeymoon feeling was soon eroded because of the action which Hennessy took with regard to the Executive Council. Under instructions from London, he created an Executive Council similar to the Councils of most other colonies, that is, one composed entirely of *ex-officio* officials who would therefore be answerable to him and ultimately to the Crown, as an institution for discussing questions of policy. This move, however, involved a radical change in the old pattern, which had survived

in Barbados since the 17th century, whereby the Executive Council had had the same membership as the Legislative Council. It had therefore been composed of a larger number of persons than normal, most of whom, moreover, were private citizens and not amenable to official discipline. So that move angered the members of the Legislative Council who were thus removed from Executive policy-making.

Pope Hennessy's campaign was marked also by an attempt to secure the support of some of the established Barbadian political leaders. Reference has already been made to Sir Graham Briggs. In addition, he made a determined bid to secure the support of Sir John Sealy, former Attorney General, and of Chief Justice Packer. In December 1875 Sealy went so far along the road to confederation as to propose that a conference on the question of confederation should be held by the existing legislative bodies of the Windward Islands, and the Governor hastened to support that proposal.

However, in the Assembly, this was widely regarded as simply "the thin edge of the wedge" and the press and public opinion generally opposed the move. By February 1876, Pope Hennessy recognised that although he might be able to carry sections of his policy, nothing like a comprehensive and final scheme of confederation could be carried in the existing "exclusive Assembly", as he termed it. The point to grapple with here is why Pope Hennessy decided to continue to press his policy when it was clear to him that it would be impossible to secure the support of the Assembly. There is an account of Pope Hennessy's career by his grandson, James Pope Hennessy, in which he makes a number of points about Pope Hennessy's psychology, including the view that he was willing to proceed despite the obvious difficulties in his way since he, as an eternal optimist, continued to hope. Further, James Pope Hennessy concludes that his grandfather was not entirely given to telling the truth and that he was very willing to engage in backroom intrigue and underhand activities which he would later deny. So, that is one aspect of the question.

Another striking aspect of the entire confederation question was the role of individuals and associations in England in the

crisis. It is to be remembered that despite what is sometimes thought, more than 50% of the land in Barbados was owned by absentees, that is, persons, mostly English, who were able to use their leverage with the Colonial Office to put a particular point of view. For example, in March 1876, Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Trollope wrote to the Colonial Office requesting that the coercive measures being put forward by Hennessy in connection with confederation should be checked until the views of the inhabitants against it had been heard.

In addition to Trollope, the Earl of Harewood, one Mr. J. Punch and several others used the West India Committee (an association of merchants and proprietors in London with interests in the Caribbean) as a clearing house for sending forward objections to the Colonial Office. Pope Hennessy was an Irishman, Roman Catholic in religion, in a colony which was dominated by English ideas and which was predominantly Protestant and Anglican. In addition, in his several earlier governorships, Pope Hennessy had acquired the cognomen of Stormy Petrel. He stirred up trouble and, where he went, trouble followed.

Hennessy vs the Barbados Defence Association

What happened essentially at this point, February, March, April 1876, is that there appeared a great divide within the political ranks in Barbados. The Governor, normally the leader of the political establishment, was at odds with the rest of the political establishment and had appealed, over their heads, to the great masses who were normally marginalized at this time. One indication of this is to be seen in the events of 3 March, when Pope Hennessy announced his federal scheme or what came to be called the Six Points: a common jail, use of a common lazaretto, an Auditor General in common, and a series of administrative measures of that kind. Hennessy gave an elaborate speech to the joint legislature on 3 March in which he tried to suggest the benefits which would accrue to Barbados from the policy of Confederation.

The argument in a nutshell was that Barbados had an excessive labour force while St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the other Windward Islands had available land which could provide for

better opportunities for the people of Barbados. So that, in this sense, Pope Hennessy was suggesting that his proposal would yield social benefits to the general masses of the population. One level of resistance by the Assemblymen and the Legislative Councillors was that they were reluctant, evidently, to have the labour force reduced in Barbados, with a fear that this would lead to higher wages and to shortages of labour. So, the interest groups lined up according to their perceptions of where their best interests rested.

Pope Hennessy projected himself as being a friend of the people and in his despatches to the Colonial Office insisted that he was regarded as such. There is this remarkable episode on 3 March after his speech. When he emerged to return to Government House, a crowd unhitched the horses from his carriage and themselves pulled the carriage past Queen's Park up to Government House. Hennessy, on his arrival here, met a number of black traders whom he had previously met in West Africa (they were part of the exodus, the colonization movement to West Africa, which included a large batch of about 360 who went off to Liberia in 1865). So, Hennessy insisted that he was known in West Africa and then in Barbados as being a friend of the people, that he had released a number of prisoners from jail who had deserved it on the good conduct principle and he had also expressed, in his messages to the Assembly, his concern about the state of the poor, about the state of education, about the oppressiveness of the Masters and Servants Act, and that all these measures collectively, including his private charity and so on, explained his popularity. Incidentally, he was careful to deny to the Colonial Office that he had entertained at his lunch table or dinner table numbers of black peasants and smallholders either in St. Phillip at Long Bay Castle or in St. Joseph. He claimed that after a conversation with them he had simply instructed his butler to issue them some refreshment, while he himself had withdrawn.

In other words, what he was attempting to do was to maintain that he was not fomenting rebellion, that he was not organising a movement to create a situation such as to force the hand of the Assembly.

The Assembly responded by creating the Barbados Defence Association, an organization which was designed to counter Hennessy's initiatives. It is striking that this association also organised large-scale open-air public meetings, which was an enormous move forward for the time, for at that time public meetings (political meetings) were usually held indoors, in school rooms and other such places. What was beginning to happen in early 1876 was that both sides were seeking to mobilise the masses in favour of Confederation and the Crown Colony system on the one hand and, on the other hand, in opposition to the Confederation system and in favour of the retention of the representative principle and the elected Assembly. Hennessy's claim came to be that the public agitation of the planters and their allies was the ultimate cause of the disturbances. In any case, the situation got out of hand, the crisis escalated and for a week, the Easter week, beginning of Easter Tuesday, for a typically Barbadian reason, namely that Easter Monday was wet, there began a series of riots.

These riots went on for about eight days and in the course of them eight black people were killed, mostly by the police and other defensive forces, no white person was killed, and just one white person was injured, namely, the Inspector-General of Police, who was struck by a stone and fell off his horse.

What Hennessy did, in defending himself with the Colonial Office, was to suggest that the riots were not at all or only marginally connected with the entire Confederation question. He made a big effort in a series of despatches to label the riots as potato raids, as being led on by the hunger and poor conditions of the people and he documented, for instance, the case of Byde Mill where the first significant movements had taken place, which he claimed had been particularly badly managed and that the manager and the overseers had been particularly cruel and that hunger was the critical stimulus to the rioting.

Now, it certainly is the case that large numbers of persons, moving in groups of sometimes 300 or 400, with leaders and with various kinds of banners and flags, went around from plantation to plantation, particularly in the middle core of the

island, St. George, St. Thomas, rural St. Michael, indicating through their slogans that they regarded what they were doing as Pope Hennessy's business. They regarded themselves as being justified and as promoting a measure which the Governor, as the Queen's representative, wished to see promoted.

There are several ways to interpret this, of course. One would be to suggest that Pope Hennessy's subordinates had exaggerated the extent to which the mass of the people would benefit from Confederation and that consequently the people had acquired an ill-informed conception of the entire situation. It is notable too that there was no action in Bridgetown; the action was entirely in the rural areas, but large numbers of white people took refuge on ships in Carlisle Bay, at the Garrison and at other strong points. The Police were inadequate to deal with the situation and, after some delay and with some reluctance, Pope Hennessy summoned the white troops stationed at the Garrison and sent them on patrols through the countryside. Also, a number of Special Constables, mostly white and middle class, were sworn in, but these were very soon disbanded.

This situation of riot in Barbados obviously created enormous alarm at the Colonial Office and in London. Representations poured into the Colonial Office. The West India Committee, the Colonial Bank from its London headquarters, Sir James Walker, a former Governor of Barbados, all urged the Colonial Office to take immediate action and to refrain from forcing Confederation upon the people of Barbados. The next step, of course, was to demand Pope Hennessy's recall.

Pope Hennessy sought to retrieve the situation and, because he had a good personal relationship with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Carnarvon, he was largely able to maintain his situation and it was not until December 1876 that, in his own words, he was promoted from Barbados to be Governor of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, one of the comments of the Colonial Office is interesting. An official paid compliments to Pope Hennessy on the way in which he had put out the fire, but, as he said, the question still remained as to how the fire came to be lit in the first place.

The immediate consequence of the 1876 crisis was victory

for the Defence Association. The white Barbadians were jubilant, of course, and this gave rise to this little piece in the *Barbados Times* of 8 November 1876, addressed to the public of Barbados: 'You are respectfully invited to attend the funeral solemnities of our deceased friend, Confederation, from his late residence Pilgrim to the interment of his remains in the Caribbean Sea.' So, in that sense, that arm of the two-pronged proposal had been effectively destroyed and we can just note that in 1884-85 Barbados was finally separated from the Windward Islands as the Governor of Barbados ceased then to be Governor-in-Chief of the Windward Islands.

The episodes we have just reviewed were marked with much Victorian pride and prejudice on all sides, but the white Barbadian politicians and the Colonial Office remained linked in a curiously symbiotic relationship.

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5

19th Century Crises in the Barbadian Sugar Industry

WOODVILLE MARSHALL

Crisis has apparently cohabited with the British West Indian sugar industry for much of that industry's existence. Crisis, if not ruin, has been forecast or asserted since the early 18th century – during the perennial Anglo-French wars, during and after the war for American Independence, during the Napoleonic wars, when the slave trade was abolished, when competition from Mauritius and east India emerged, and, of course when slavery was about to be abolished. The remarkable point is that this crisis-ridden industry survived all these shocks. This must mean that the industry had/has enormous powers of resilience, or that fortune smiled on it at the eleventh hour, or that it had powerful political or divine support, or that the rumours of its near extinction were exaggerated. I will not at this stage choose an explanation – but I will remind you that the stories of the industry's near extinction were told by those who either controlled or managed the industry.

The General Context

Not surprisingly, 'crisis' remained a feature of the industry's history after slavery had ended. Indeed, one way of looking at the sugar industry after 1838 is to examine how it survived the loss of the apparently essential input of forced labour. But while the industry was struggling to adjust to the new conditions of wage labour, signals of a new crisis were flashed, and these have never disappeared. Basically, this new crisis situation was created by a loss of control over the traditional market for sugar, by a credit and a profit squeeze and, later, by virtual loss of any market for sugar because of a ruinous competition with other sugar producers, particularly European beet-sugar producers.

This prolonged crisis (which was not ended until the First World War broke out) was called into existence by the commercial policies of European countries – Britain, France, Austria and Germany. Britain delivered the first blow with its extension of Free Trade policies to its colonial sugar trade. By the Sugar Duties Equalization Act of 1846, it announced the equalization of duties on sugar entering Britain from any source, a policy which became fully effective in 1854. This meant the destruction of protection or market support for British West Indian sugar. This protection had been the difference between the higher duty (\$317.60 per ton in 1843) paid by non-British producers and the lower duty (\$120.80 per ton) paid by British and British West Indian producers. This British action was at least as significant as slavery abolition; it reversed policies that had been maintained for about two hundred years, and seemed to announce the end of an era. The immediate (and expected) effect was that cheaper cane sugar producers like Cuba and Brazil enjoyed a considerable advantage over the British West Indies in the British market, and the additional sugar that these cheaper producers brought into that market depressed sugar prices by 22% to 40% between 1848 and 1854.

Apart from Britain's ideological commitment to Free Trade principles, what was responsible for this fundamental switch in policy was the clear political advantage to be gained by British governments in offering cheaper sugar to the British consumers. This political factor ensured that Britain did not budge for over seventy years from its declared policy, despite the howls of protest and desperate appeals for relief which came from British West Indian sugar producers over the next fifty years. Rather, Britain took the policy to its logical conclusion in 1874 when it abolished *all* duties on sugar. What this did immediately was to wipe out the small advantage that many British West Indian producers still retained in the British market. Because they produced raw sugar, muscovado, they enjoyed the lowest rates of duty since Britain protected its own refining industry by levying the higher rates of duty on semi-refined and refined sugar. So, for the British West Indian sugar industry, the late 1870s brought an additional mini-crisis which saw sugar prices fall by

about 20% between 1873 and 1883.

British action in abolishing all sugar duties was an important factor in the next calamity to befall the BWI sugar industry. The wide open and expanding British market became the target for beet-sugar producers in Europe – from France, Austria and Germany, in particular. But what gave them an advantage over cane sugar producers in this market was not so much their proximity to that market or any technological

TABLE 1: World Sugar Production (tons), 1840-1900

	Cane	Beet
1840	788,000	48,198
1845	1,003,000	60,857
1850	1,043,000	159,435
1855	1,243,000	246,856
1860	1,376,000	351,602
1865	1,506,000	680,685
1870	1,662,000	939,096
1875	1,816,000	1,337,336
1880	1,883,000	1,857,000
1885	2,300,000	2,172,000
1890	2,597,000	3,680,000
1895	2,840,000	4,221,000
1900	5,253,000	6,006,000

advantage in production they enjoyed, but rather an elaborate system of state subsidies, which we know as *Bounties*. By a deliberate miscalculation of how much sugar could be recovered from a quantity of beet-root, these European governments conspired to tax their beet-sugar producers at such a low rate that they not only encouraged these producers to seek an even lower rate of taxation by improving the sugar yield from the beet-root and to extend their production (see table 1) but also enabled them to greatly lower their cost of production (and the price of sugar) and still earn profits. So the amount of sugar on the British market rapidly increased while the price fell sharply. Cane sugar producers, with no elaborate system bounties or subsidies, could not compete, particularly since they were faced with large national governments competing among themselves.

The BWI producers, being, in the main, technologically backward in production when compared to the beet-sugar producers

and to the cane sugar producers of Cuba, felt the squeeze most keenly. Sugar prices in the British market tumbled after 1883: down by 30% by 1884-85, by 50% in 1897 and by 60% in 1902. British sources of credit dried up as profits from cane sugar production and trade disappeared. Effectively shut out of the British market by the cheap beet sugar (see table 2) British West Indian producers were forced to find outlets for their sugar in Canada and the USA, but both markets were unreliable – the Canadian being too small and the American being increasingly reserved for domestic and Cuban producers. Therefore, by the end of the century, the outlook was grim; falling and uneconomic prices for sugar, insecure markets and the withdrawal of metropolitan supports seemed to predict complete collapse of the industry and the economy.

TABLE 2: Beet Sugar and BWI Cane Sugar in British Market

	Cane Sugar	Beet Sugar
1865	176,593	80,027
1878	191,960	305,000
1884	168,000	559,000
1890	67,000	987,000
1895	85,000	1,169,000
1900	37,000	1,362,000

Main Features of the Barbadian Sugar Industry

To fully understand how the crises impacted on the Barbadian sugar industry (and economy) we must quickly review some of the main features of the Barbadian sugar industry.

1. *Many small units.* Barbados, between the ending of slavery and 1900, retained a multiplicity of small units which, on the face of it, did not suggest efficiency in management and production. While a process of amalgamation was taking place in Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica and Cuba, Barbados still retained most of the estates created in the early sugar era: 508 in 1834; about 440 in 1897. This situation can be contrasted with that of Guyana: 404 in 1838, 135 in 1870, 105 in 1885, 46 in 1904.
2. *Large local ownership.* Many of the estates remained locally owned and managed. In the early 1850s, roughly 65% of the proprietors were local residents. Again, this was in sharp con-

trast with Windward Islands and Jamaica where increasing indebtedness was throwing more plantations into the hands of British merchants.

3. *Good management.* Observers remarked in the 1840s and 1850s on the superior management and the maintenance of quality control of Barbadian planters. They apparently led the region in husbandry and garden-type cultivation. But they were slow to use implements in the field and the improved technology in the mills and boiling houses. While they relied on wind rather than steam, their use of manures and their ability to coax sugar cultivation out of most soils ensured a continuous increase in output and rising property values until the 1880s.

4. *Powerful political supports.* The importance of the industry to the economy (about 97% of value of exports) as well as the large and successful local ownership ensured impressive political support. Sugar was the economy and sugar planters and merchants were the politicians. Therefore one hand washed the other cosily. This union produced the legal basis for the tenantry system, established the rural constabulary to check the crimes inspired by hunger, created various legal and financial arrangements and institutions to protect local owners against foreign creditors and cushion the industry from the shocks of international depression.

5. *Large and cheap labour force.* The most important feature was the "large and disciplined pool of wage labourers" (W.A. Green). Because of high density of the population and the absence of competing employment opportunities, the industry was assured of cheap labour, very cheap and very plentiful compared with Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana before mass Indian immigration. In the 1840s, labour cost Barbadian planters roughly twenty to twenty-four cents a day while the comparable cost in Trinidad and Guyana was forty cents and fifty cents. It was this asset which could offset the disadvantage of overcropped soil, the cost of annual re-planting, the cost of imported fertilizers and the comparatively high costs of the small units of production. More than offset these, this advantage may have insulated planters from the impact of most of the crises and encouraged them to institutionalize technological backwardness.

Barbados and the first crisis period, 1846-1856

Barbados sugar producers declared that the enactment of British Sugar Duties Act of 1846 meant that their plantations were "fast dying a sort of natural death"; but fifty years later (even one hundred years later) it was still impossible to find the corpse. What the Sugar Duties Act inflicted on the Barbadian sugar industry was a temporary derangement. First, the fall in sugar prices which followed implementation of the Act seemed to have caused the elimination of some marginal producers, and there is evidence of increase in the sale of estates, particularly in 1851. Second, there was a credit squeeze which was stimulated by the collapse of several merchant houses in Britain which had provided advances to local planters against the sale of their sugar. This collapse had been prompted by the fall in the price of sugar and by commercial depression in Britain which itself had been partly triggered by falling commodity prices. The most distressing local manifestation of this commercial collapse and credit squeeze was the failure of the West India Bank with its headquarters in Barbados and branches in most eastern Caribbean colonies.

But within three years, Governor Colebrooke was speaking with enthusiasm about "the prosperous condition of the island", by which he meant the sugar industry and staple economy, for there was clear evidence of an increase in production and a significant reduction in the cost of production. Indeed, during this 'crisis' period of 1846-56, Barbados, unlike most of the British West Indies, experienced a massive increase in production: 62% over the previous decade, and 75% over the last decade of slavery. While estate abandonment and a fall in production were features of Jamaica and the Windward Islands, and while Trinidad and Guyana depended on Indian and African immigration for maintenance of production levels, Barbados experienced both increased production and rising property values. How and why did this apparent miracle occur?

The basic answer lies in those features that we have briefly sketched, particularly in the considerable advantage in cheap labour which the industry possessed. This made it possible for

planters, as a short term measure in 1848-49, to shift additional acreage to food production for home and regional consumption. This cut the imported food bill and helped to offset some of the losses in sugar revenue. Cheap labour also ensured optimal returns from improvements in cultivation; during this decade, the planters were credited with a shift to scientific agriculture, exhibited in improved techniques of manuring and use of implements in the field.

But, mainly, the planters cut their wage bill by nearly 50% (from twenty and twenty-four cents to twelve and fourteen cents) and, in the process, reduced their production costs by about 20% to 25%. This must be stressed. Wages were the largest element in the planters' costs, about 55%-65%, and wage reduction, as we well know, was the obvious and natural target of any economy drive. The important point is that, while all British West Indian producers attempted such reductions in times of falling sugar prices, only the Barbadian planters consistently succeeded in enforcing a reduction. While producers in the Windwards and Trinidad had to face prolonged and crippling strikes, or had to rely on immigrant labour to force down the level of wages, the Barbadian planters succeeded, without great difficulty, in imposing on their work-force one of the lowest rates of wages in the Caribbean (only Montserrat being lower at twelve cents).

Therefore, such crisis as existed, was mainly a crisis for the workers. The industry recovered and prospered "on the backs of blacks". The low wages which provided the profit margins for sugar producers depressed further the low living standards of the majority of ex-slaves. And they were not helped by a simultaneous rise in the cost of imported food. So they had a double squeeze — lower wages and higher food prices. Such a situation naturally bred pauperism, poor health conditions and encouraged crime, particularly the theft of food. There is ample evidence in the governors' annual reports to support Claude Levy's claim that the conditions of the Barbadian labourers in the 1850s were "the worst in the West Indies, and it can be shown that they became even worse during the 1860s and 1870s". Blacks, because of the living conditions to which they

were condemned by low wages and general government indifference, were the principal sufferers in the cholera epidemic of the 1850s; and though wages rose marginally in the late 1850s these increments were destroyed by rising food costs in the early 1860s. These conditions, therefore, helped to explain why workers saw an opportunity in governor Pope-Hennessy's reform rhetoric to make a violent statement on their condition, but they discovered, like many before and since, that they were writing on water. Their labour and their low wages made for the survival and prosperity of the sugar industry, but that survival and that prosperity in turn kept the workers poor and virtually demoralized.

The Bounties Crisis, 1884-1903

This long installment of crisis was far more pervasive in its impact than the earlier one. This was so because Barbadian sugar producers, like all cane sugar producers, did not possess the means to effectively combat the new competition. Basically this was a commercial war waged by major national governments with resources that the cane sugar producers could not hope to match. Therefore, there seemed to be no end in sight to the effect that the bounties would have on sugar prices. This meant that all cane sugar producers were faced with the problem of how to keep costs below or near the low price of sugar so that small profits might be salvaged or crippling losses escaped. (Table 3).

TABLE 3
Profit and loss in BWI Sugar Production

	Sugar Prices (per ton)	Cost of Production (per ton)
1840	\$235.20	
1848	\$124.80	\$112.80 – \$158.40
1884-85	\$ 63.60	\$ 48.00 – \$ 76.80
1897	\$ 44.20	\$ 35.20 – \$ 43.20

Realistically, the only defences seemed to be: outlawing of bounties by equally powerful commercial nations, principally Britain, and/or a level of technological sophistication in cane

sugar production which would also utilize all economies of scale and, therefore, hopefully provide the basis for some competition with the subsidized beet sugar.

The first alternative was perhaps not realistic at all. Most cane sugar producers had little leverage with major commercial nations, all of which, principally Britain, recognized the advantages of cheap sugar. The second alternative was perhaps, in the West Indian context, the more realistic because its adoption depended on the use of local resources, and because sections of the Trinidad and Guyana sugar industry had already demonstrated, through their technical efficiency, an ability to cope with old and new crisis. But here is where Barbadian sugar industry encountered a problem. To exploit this alternative meant far-reaching and expensive technological reform of an industry which, until the 1880s, had been insulated from the effects of its own technological backwardness. In other words, the Barbados sugar industry was faced with two elements of crisis: the virtual destruction of a market for its sugar, and its own structural deficiencies.

The Barbadian sugar industry, therefore, seemed to face, if not extinction, at least drastic modification, as the 20th century approached. Profit margins shrank or disappeared after 1884. By 1897, it was estimated that, based on average costs, the industry was producing sugar at a loss of one dollar per ton. Credit from British sources dried up, and this was dramatized by the collapse of Thomas Daniel, a British merchant firm involved in the West Indian trade and the largest proprietor of estates in Barbados. Plantation indebtedness increased as many more plantations found their way into the Court of Chancery or were forced to take advantage of the temporary financial relief offered under the Agricultural Aids Act. Property values fell, probably by as much as 60% to 65%, and by 1897 it was difficult to find purchasers for plantations. Only eight estates (6% of the industry) could be regarded as technologically advanced. And, over all, there was general uncertainty and pessimism because no one could predict how low the price of sugar would fall in response to increases in bounties, and because the traditional source of relief (Britain) seemed prepared only to sympa-

thize and to investigate the causes of crisis.

If this was the black side of the picture, there was at least a grey one as well. Sugar prices had started to tumble in 1884 but, by 1897, few, if any, Barbadian sugar estates had been abandoned. Sugar production, though exhibiting some fluctuation, remained fairly steady, at around 50,000 tons, while both Grenada and Tobago were abandoning production and Jamaican production in 1904 (9,903 tons) was only twenty per cent of the level of production of the 1830s. Indeed, in 1890, Barbados produced its largest crop to date, 74,606 tons (a level not reached again until 1928). Moreover, some estates, specifically those in the high rainfall areas of St. George and St. Thomas, were, according to the Royal Commission in 1897, just about making a profit even at the depressed prices. Moreover, Dr. Morris, the Royal Commission's agricultural expert, seemed confident about Barbados' prospects as a sugar producer. He felt that, with Barbados' excellence in husbandry and the open character of the country, only Antigua perhaps possessed as good conditions for low cost sugar production on a central factory basis. The industry therefore was at least limping along during what turned out to be the worst of the crisis. How did this happen?

TABLE 4

Sugar Production in Barbados and Jamaica (Tons)

	Barbados	Jamaica
1831 – 1840	18,049	54,590
1841 – 1850	18,939	32,387
1851 – 1860	31,873	24,176
1861 – 1870	38,417	25,623
1871 – 1880	42,415	23,505
1881 – 1890	54,240	19,969
1891 – 1900	47,415	20,848

The answer lies mainly in the political supports of the industry and in the cheap, plentiful, 'disciplined' labour force. The importance of the political supports is clearly exhibited in the success

ful assault on the Consignee's Lien, in the Agricultural Aids Act, in the establishment of the Sugar Industry Agricultural Bank, and in the Court of Chancery's administration of indebted estates.

The Consignee's Lien, even more than the preferential trading arrangements for British West Indian sugar in the British market, typified the dependent relationship between British West Indian economic enterprise and the metropolis. From the seventeenth century, British West Indian planters had developed an informal consignment arrangement with British merchants by which they shipped their sugars to those British merchants who had provided them with loans and advances, who had sent them supplies and who had serviced their debts in Britain and North America. However, by the early eighteenth century, in response to the deteriorating market position of British West Indian sugar, a special legal arrangement was developed which was intended to insulate the British merchants against the increasing risks of investment in British West Indian sugar property. By the Consignee's Lien, which existed in addition to the mortgages which the merchants usually held on West Indian plantations, British West Indian planters were *obliged* to send to the merchant-creditors all their produce, on board the merchant-creditors' ships, and to accept plantation supplies from them. Moreover, this claim on the plantations' produce (and its assets) was accorded priority over all other claims against plantations in the event of forced sales of the plantations, and it was upheld in British courts during the early nineteenth century.

All this amounted to *triple* insurance for the merchant-creditors. They received commissions on all the services they provided the planters; they held mortgages as protection for loans advanced; and they had a full claim on the plantations' export produce. It meant that merchant-creditors were usually more in control of the plantations' finances than the nominal owners, and it left them well placed to assume outright possession when proprietors, particularly in periods of depression, defaulted on their obligations to the merchants.

Experience of the operation of the Consignee's Lien in several British West Indian territories during and after the 1860s

clearly demonstrated its potential threat to local control and ownership of the sugar industry. As more plantations in other territories were "acquired" by these absentees through the operation of the Encumbered Estate Court, local proprietors of Barbadian plantations recognized the necessity for defending their property against a similar fate. The opportunity came in 1879 when Thomas Daniels and Co., a British merchant house owning nine plantations in Barbados, attempted to invoke the Consignee's Lien in Barbados by filing for priority in claims against an indebted estate in the Court of Chancery. Local proprietors and financial institutions closed ranks in defense. Through the Barbados Association for the Protection of Liens against the Plantations, they successfully contended that the Consignee's Lien was damaging to investment and to confidence in the viability of Barbadian plantations, and that precedents established in other territories should therefore not be extended to Barbados. The result of the spirited agitation was that the Colonial Office advised that Barbados, if it so desired, could legislate against the Consignee's Lien, and this the legislature did in 1882. Barbados, not for the first time, had significantly modified a general pattern, and had established a claim to distinctiveness in its local arrangements.

The Agricultural Aids Act of 1887 was a direct response to the credit squeeze caused by the 1884 fall in sugar prices. Under it, government permitted planters to borrow money to carry on cultivation, and the loans became a first charge on the growing crop and ranked ahead of other claims against the estate. This meant that, to some extent, the financing of estate operations was localized, and local financial institutions, banks and and the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society could substitute for the British merchant houses which were no longer interested in risking their capital on precarious West Indian property. By 1895, this support maintained about one-third of the estates and provided about \$500,000.00 in short-term financing.

The establishment of the Sugar Industry Agricultural Bank in 1902 was a logical extension of the government assistance furnished by the Agricultural Aids Act. Employing the

\$400,000.00 granted by the British Government for the relief of the planters, the Barbados Government wisely used the sum to assist the financing of the industry through the establishment of a bank.

The Court of Chancery's administration of indebted estates was another aspect of the localization of control of the sugar industry and of official support for the plantation-based industry. By this uniquely Barbadian variation on a British model, local owners were assured of considerable protection for their indebted property against raids by foreign creditors or against the possibility of the abandonment of cultivation, or subdivision. The receiver system ensured that the estate was kept in cultivation and that there was no quick forced sale, and the stipulation that estates could not be sold below appraised value and that the valuation would be done by knowledgeable planters kept creditors at bay and improved the chances of its recovery by its titular owner. Moreover, the court operated as an impressive barrier against widespread subdivision. Though property values declined, the Master of Chancery, supported by Chief Justice Sir Conrad Reeves and the Governor, set his face resolutely against the sale of indebted estates in small lots. Therefore, the Court could manipulate the land market and keep the ownership of large landed units inside a tight, privileged circle.

Labour, as in the earlier crisis, carried the main burden of the crisis. In the battle between production costs and falling sugar prices, they were the early and perpetual casualties. Labour costs were drastically slashed and the labour force was cut to the bone. Wages, which by the early 1880s had probably crept back to immediate post-slavery levels of twenty to twenty-four cents, were cut by 20% and floated (downwards) with the price of sugar. Many employers also withdrew allowances or "privileges" – the syrup, broken yams, potato 'grubbings', fodder for cattle, and grazing privileges for stock, etc. – which had become important wage subsidies for the located labourers. Unemployment and under-employment became even more characteristic features of the work force. Located labourers were assured of about 3-4 days' work in the week out of crop, and the non-resident labourers had to fend for themselves. Women were

paid between eight and twelve cents per day, and those contracted to 'farming' could not hope to earn any more than thirty-six to forty-eight cents weekly from estate employment. It was this *economy* in labour costs which ensure that Barbados' sugar production costs kept pace with the falling sugar prices: \$48.00 per ton in 1884-85, to \$38.40 by 1894 and \$36.80 by 1900, when the slavery level of production costs had been equalled!

The pressure of reduced wages and limited employment accelerated the distress among the mass of Barbadians, to the extent that there were fears that social disorder would follow any further reduction of wages. The memoranda and evidence given to the West India Royal Commission in 1897 provide some graphic detail on the conditions of living of most blacks: on the increase in mortality, particularly infant mortality, the increase in lunacy, the overcrowding of the small housing units, the poor diet. Whether this evidence is produced by officials, by clergymen or by representatives of the artisans and labourers, the message is clear: conditions of living were depressed and were likely to remain so. Governor Hay, the Inspector of Police, C.J. Lawrence, and H. Graham Yearwood, Member of the House of Assembly and Chairman of the Bridgetown Sanitary Board, did tell the Commission that the labourers were so well off that they could afford to work three days a week; that they were "vegetarians" by choice; and that they probably had a preference for sugar cane as food! But this clumsy attempt to disguise the truth was in itself revealing, because it corroborated all that was being reported about under-employment and inadequate diet.

Barbados, then, in the last two decades of the 19th century was in social crisis, provoked by the sugar crisis. This was clearly exhibited by shifts in population, by changes of employment and by some social disorder. Unemployment and under-employment sparked significant internal migration and, as Velma Newton shows, caused considerable out-migration. The census returns for 1871 to 1921 outline the extent of internal migration: in this period the suburban area of St. Michael doubled its share of the island's population and increased its own popula-

tion by 50% while the total population fell by about 3%. This meant that employment as well as residential patterns were changing. The formation of the urban tenancies and villages of Ivy, Bay Land, Spring Garden and Kensington were a main consequence of the search by displaced rural workers for the employment and emigration opportunities which were most likely to exist in the main urban centre.

The social disorder was exhibited by increases in praedial larceny, by an increase in cane fires and particularly by the looting of estates' potato fields. 1895 was the significant year for what Governor Hay called the "spirit of lawlessness" or what he might have seen, had he reflected on it, as the labourers' propensity to indulge their vegetarian habits. Eighteen potato fields on fourteen estates in eight parishes were raided between January and August as labourers, with even less earning power than usual because of the short crop caused by the 1894 drought and because of a recent wage reduction, demonstrated their notions of moral economy. They took from those who had taken from them.

It is possible, however, that some of this potato stealing was even more purposeful than it might at first appear. Two incidents in January and February 1895, the first at Boscobel in St. Andrew and the second at Wanstead in St. Michael, suggest that the potato field raiders were making a clear political point. In both instances, large numbers were involved – 350 at Boscobel, about 400 at Wanstead. There was evidence of organization and leadership. The raids or demonstrations took place early in the night. There was a disposition to defy the plantation security personnel. The raiders marched singing "Federation, Federation come again", and one of the Wanstead raiders told a bystander that the governor had given permission for them to dig the potatoes. The Wanstead potato raiders, it was reported, harangued the court at their trial for riot. It might then be cautiously suggested that class conflict was increasing in the Barbadian community, and that labourers and villagers had started to regard the plantation as a hostile institution.

Summary

1. There was a crisis in the Barbados sugar industry, particularly after 1884, which was created by a set of external factors. This crisis was caused mainly by bounty-fed beet sugar competition, and the crisis only started to ease when bounties were abolished in 1903. Full recovery, however, did not come until the First World War when sugar prices returned to pre-1883 levels. What the crisis illustrated was the extreme vulnerability of the mono-crop economy to the pressures of the international economy
2. The crisis in both its manifestations, 1846-56 and 1884-1903, had some positive effects on the sugar industry. In the first crisis, planters were forced to concentrate more closely on implemental husbandry and scientific agriculture, and this was a factor in the industry's ability to surmount its temporary difficulties. In the second and more severe crisis, various local initiatives helped to consolidate financing and control of the industry at the local level, but, equally important, attention was at last paid to the reform of the manufacturing processes.
3. The sugar industry did experience problems of credit shortage, profit squeeze and insecure markets, but was insulated from the full effects of crisis mainly by the extent of its political supports and by the availability of large supplies of cheap labour.
4. The crisis was to a large extent a crisis for the labour force mainly because the crisis brought massive wage reductions and retrenchment in the labour force. This ensured an aggravation of the already woeful living conditions of the mass of the people, as they were forced by the combination of economic and political power arrayed against them to shoulder the burden of sugar's troubles.
5. This crisis in the economy might therefore have created a social crisis of potentially alarming proportions since the workers may have started to identify the plantation and the planters as the agencies which condemned them to marginal and virtually demoralized existence.

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6

The Panama Question: Barbadian Emigration to Panama, 1880-1914

VELMA NEWTON

Most Barbadians have relatives who emigrated to Panama during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and many can trace the acquisition of property by their families to "Panama Money." In addition, the movement to Panama bequeathed to successive generations the image of the Panama man as one who left the island with nothing but the clothes on his back, but returned with a swaggering walk, foreign accent, gold capped teeth, and many stories of close encounters with death.

Background

The story of Barbadian emigration to Panama has its roots in the sugar crisis of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1846, the British government passed the Sugar Duties Act which removed preferential tariffs from colonial sugars and allowed these and foreign sugars to enter the British market at the same rate of duty. Competition from Cuban cane and, later, beet sugar grown in Europe and marketed at lower prices virtually forced sugar from the West Indies off the British market during the following decades. Sugar prices fell steadily from 34s a cwt in 1846 to 12s in 1914, and although Barbados and other islands sought alternative markets in Canada and the U.S.A. from the 1870s onwards, and turned more acreage over to food crops and cotton, the virtual collapse of the British market for West Indian sugars and the concomitant collapse of some merchant houses which had extended credit to planters, had far-reaching effects.

In Barbados, few estates were abandoned, unlike the case in some other territories. Indeed, most estates here managed to keep production costs steady, and therefore the losses recorded were not as heavy as they might have been. How was this done? By reducing the work force, offering employment a mere two or three days a week except during harvesting, etc. and most of all by reducing wages. Wages in Barbados, averaging 6d to 10d per day for most of the latter part of the nineteenth century, were slashed during the 1860s, and again during the 1890s. Indeed, wages in this island were probably the lowest in the West Indies by the late nineteenth century. These low wages, coupled with increasing prices for salted fish and other imported foods, eroded the already low standard of living of the labouring classes in Barbados and, naturally, adversely affected their health standards.

The occurrence of natural disasters such as drought and hurricanes at times during the latter part of the nineteenth century only worsened the situation. For example, suffering after a year-long drought in 1863 was so severe that for the first time the government of Barbados officially sanctioned emigration, and about 2,500 persons were allowed to leave Barbados for Antigua and St. Croix. Drought recurred in 1891, 1894 and 1912, accompanied by outbreaks of typhoid and dysentery. In 1893, a hurricane destroyed 1,800 labourers' huts, and destitution was so widespread that the governor launched an appeal for financial assistance in Britain and neighbouring islands.

Problems in the sugar industry, natural disasters and a rapidly growing population resulted in considerable unemployment and underemployment, both among agricultural labourers and town dwellers. Census returns of 1891 and 1911 showed an increase in the number of persons turning to self-income generating jobs such as shoemaking, plumbing, tailoring, hawking and dress-making. But, for the most part, these projects were more in the nature of job-creation than in response to a real demand for services. Large numbers of Barbadians were therefore eager for employment overseas during the latter half of the nineteenth, and early part of the twentieth centuries.

Already, since 1835, a considerable amount of intra-Caribbean migration had been taking place. During the 1860s and 1870s, Barbadians also emigrated to Honduras, Surinam and St. Croix; and during the 1880s they went to Panama, and from the 1890s and continuing into the twentieth century to the Congo Free State, Peru, St. Croix, Brazil, Surinam and other South American countries. But, by far the greatest number went to the Isthmus of Panama, where a canal system to improve trade between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was being constructed. The first attempt to construct a canal was made between 1880 and 1889 by the Universal Interoceanic Canal Company (hereinafter referred to as the First French Canal Company) formed by Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had built the Suez Canal. De Lesseps' project failed in 1889, and the work was continued from 1894 to 1898 by the Second French Canal Company – the *Compagnie Nouvelle*.

The unfinished canal, the Panama Railroad, and all the equipment belonging to the Second French Canal Company were purchased by the U.S. government in 1903. The American Isthmian Canal Commission decided to construct a lock canal instead of a sea-level canal, and completed the project in 1914.

The Size of the Migration

How many Barbadians actually emigrated to Panama? It is not possible to give accurate figures because, during the 1880s, no migration statistics were kept, and when, from 1903 onward, the Harbour Master prepared annual reports containing such statistics, they were virtually useless for estimating the size of emigration to Panama or elsewhere, since no arrivals, and only some departures were included. In the absence of regularly recorded migration statistics, the reports on censuses taken in the island between the 1880s and 1921 have had to be relied on. However, these statistics too are of limited usefulness since the census compilers could not show with any certainty how many people actually emigrated to, or returned from any one country. But what the census statistics did show was the extent

to which all inter-censal migration affected population growth, and the compilers attempted to estimate the volume of emigration to places such as Panama by looking at the difference between recorded natural increase or excess of births over deaths, and the population actually enumerated at the census.

From contemporary accounts and/or census reports, the picture which emerges is as follows: during the 1880s, an unknown number of Barbadians probably paid their own transportation costs to Panama, and at least 1,344 more were hired by the First French Canal Company's recruiting agent. In the absence of migration statistics, the island's governor had no idea how many Barbadians had gone to or returned from Panama, and, in 1889, when the First French Canal Company failed, he was forced to ask the British Consul at Colon how many were there. An unknown number returned home in 1889, some at their government's expense. This wave of emigration to Panama was not considered important enough to merit mention in the 1891 Report on the Census of Barbados. Indications are that it was small when compared with the second movement, which began in 1904 after the Americans took over the project. The U.S.-established Isthmian Canal Commission hired 19,000 Barbadians through its recruiting agents between 1904 and 1914. However, it must be pointed out that a greater number — possibly as many as 40,000 more — paid their own fares and emigrated to Panama independently. This means that total departures for Panama between 1904 and 1914 could have been as high as 60,000 or one-third the total population of Barbados. How many actually failed to return? Possibly, 42,000 or 82 percent of those who went were in this category. So, altogether, it can be estimated that at least 2,000 Barbadians emigrated to Panama between 1881 and 1889 and an unknown number returned, and that at least 60,000 went there between 1904 and 1914, 42,000 of whom never returned home to live permanently.

Who were involved in the movement to Panama? Hundreds of artisans, office workers, a few teachers, the unemployed and fortune-hunters from almost every station in life joined the departing crowd. But, it is still possible to draw a picture of

the typical emigrant. Such a person was usually a black male, usually an unskilled agricultural labourer or town dweller between 20 and 35 years old, and with little formal education. Some white Barbadians would have been in the crowd, but the Isthmian Canal Commission did not encourage whites from the Caribbean to emigrate to Panama because, as it will be shown later, this presented problems for the Commission in connection with its race policies. Some women were also among the departing groups. A few hundred of them would have been journeying to Panama on their own steam to find jobs as domestics, seamstresses, and the like, but most were probably wives or sweethearts of men already there.

Recruitment of Migrants

The next questions to be asked are how, and what did potential emigrants hear about Panama. First of all, they would have heard about employment opportunities there from the recruiting agents sent from Panama to Barbados, or from local agents. At some point between 1881 and 1887, the First French Canal Company sent one of its officials, Charles Gadpaille, to Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Martinique. When Gadpaille was recalled in 1887 he was succeeded in Barbados by Massiah Gaskin, a local businessman. In 1904, the Isthmian Canal Commission sent Mr. Karner from Panama to Barbados, where, until 1909, he hired Barbadians and Windward Islanders for the canal projects at Panama. Between 1905 and 1909 when recruiting was at its height, Karner was assisted by Mr. S.E. Brewster, the government's emigration agent in Barbados. After Karner was recalled in 1909, all recruiting and hiring were done by local agents.

The recruiting agents relied heavily on newspaper advertisements, posters and hired helpers referred to as "runners" or "scouts" to inform Barbadians of opportunities in Panama, and to encourage those who lived in the country areas to journey to Bridgetown when labourers were being hired.

Since it was known then, as now, that the basis of migration is the belief that conditions in the place of destination are

better, or at least, are no worse than in the place of origin, the newspaper advertisements were phrased to make potential emigrants feel that they had everything to gain by going to Panama. Thus, during the 1880s, the First French Canal Company's recruiting agent, Charles Gadpaille, informed readers of the *Barbados Herald* that 10,000 labourers were wanted immediately for the canal. According to the advertisement, there was no indenture – passengers could return when they liked; passage and food would be given; wages would be \$1.50 to \$3.00 per day; and medical care would be provided when labourers were sick. Actually, the First French Canal Company complained increasingly because labourers returned home when they liked (just as Gadpaille had told them they could) and medical care was not always provided to those who were ill, because often the contractors dismissed workers at the first sign of illness, or failed to inform the canal authorities and hospital personnel that they had given workers permission to seek medical attention. So, Gadpaille was clearly guilty of some untruthfulness.

Advertisements published by the Isthmian Canal Commission's recruiting agent, Mr. Karner, after 1904 were very detailed, but were flippantly addressed to those who desired a free "Excursion" to the Isthmus, and there is no evidence to support his assertion that the Isthmian Canal Commission repatriated labourers whose services were considered unsatisfactory, and it certainly did not always repatriate those who became incapacitated while working on the project. If a labourer was injured on the job, and there was proof that the injury was caused by his own negligence, he was dismissed and left to fend for himself, unless the British Consul at Panama could persuade the Isthmian Canal Commission to repatriate him.

Clearly, recruiting agents did not always tell the truth about the situation on the construction projects and in Panama generally, for their job was to encourage emigration. It is therefore unlikely that they would have informed prospective emigrants of the prevalence of disease on the Isthmus, or of the difficult conditions under which the Panama Canal and Panama Railroad were being constructed. This information was

obtainable from migrants who returned, and from the newspapers, which occasionally published vivid accounts of life and death in Panama. However, emigration was held in such high esteem as a way to economic betterment that most people probably found it easy to ignore tales of not-so-rosy-conditions. In addition, while the search for remunerative employment may have been the main reason why the majority emigrated, there were others who were prompted more by a desire to "broaden their experiences", learn a foreign language and seek adventure. There were yet others who merely followed the crowd, and a few others, as the dependents of emigrants, were not allowed to make a choice.

The Preference for West Indian Labour

One question which should be asked at this point is why did the canal and railroad builders turn to the West Indies for labour. They claimed that Panamanian labourers were insufficient; that they were unsuitable for all types of work, especially in the excavations; and that their inability to speak English was a problem. However, it is possible that to have hired more than the few hundred Panamanians whom all the companies employed would have upset the labour market on the Isthmus, and would have brought the construction companies into conflict with the Panamanian government over wages and other conditions of service.

So, few Panamanians were employed. But, what was the position in relation to labour from the U.S.A. after the Americans took over the project in 1903? White Americans were hired for supervisory and skilled positions but not as labourers. Neither the unions in the U.S. nor the Canal administrators encouraged them. It is possible that the Isthmian Canal Commission did not consider it desirable to have white Americans work in inferior positions, especially since they would have been doing so with black labourers from other countries. At the same time, the Commission did not want to employ large numbers of American blacks, for they may have felt that these workers would prove recalcitrant if placed under the supervision of white Americans,

especially if the latter were from the Southern U.S.A. Yet another, and probably the most important, reason was that black Americans did not fit well into the caste system established by the white canal administrators on the zone after 1904 because, although the system was based on colour, nationality was invoked to downplay its racial nature. It would not have been good publicity for people back home in the U.S. to hear that Americans (even black Americans) were employed by Uncle Sam on the same project, on the same terms, as black labourers from elsewhere. The result was that black Americans were only hired for a few sensitive positions such as overseeing West Indians.

Instead of looking to Panama or the U.S.A., the Canal builders turned to the West Indies. Even while criticising West Indians as hopeless incompetents, they still sought to import the islanders by the thousands. Why? Firstly, they were nearby, and steamship communication from the islands to Panama was regular from the 1870s onwards. Secondly, the proverbial willingness of Barbadians and Jamaicans to emigrate in search of remunerative employment was well known. Thirdly, between 1904 and 1914, it cost the commission a mere \$10 per head to import labourers from the islands. This cost included recruitment, medical examination and passage. Fourthly, and this may well have been one of the more important reasons, the canal companies knew that they could pay West Indians low wages and dismiss their demands for better conditions of service without incurring the wrath of any political power. The West Indians were unlikely to receive support from the French, U.S. or Panamanian governments (and Panamanians resented them anyhow). The West Indian governments were too far away to do more than issue general directives on how the labourers should be treated, and, in any event, as we shall see later, the government of Barbados in particular was not too concerned with how labourers were actually treated on foreign projects. Its main concern was to ensure that they did not expect to be financially assisted when they ran into trouble. The British government assumed a supervisory role but, for many years, had only one representative on the Isthmus, and even when he was given an assistant, after 1904, he was too

busy to deal adequately with all the complaints made by West Indians. Also, the British government was well aware that employment opportunities, especially in Barbados, were limited, and it would hardly have adopted a hard line against the Isthmian Canal Commission's policies.

The Attitude of the Barbados Government

Having decided that it was expedient to hire the bulk of the labour force in the West Indies, the next step taken by the canal builders was to seek permission from Caribbean governments. During the 1880s, the government of Barbados made no attempt to check or regulate emigration to Panama. By this time, the island's planter dominated House of Assembly had been persuaded that emigration was the best means of ridding the island of some of its large population, and that it could take place without adverse effects on the sugar industry which was already in the doldrums.

But, while the Barbados Assembly and the Executive Council welcomed the employment opportunities provided on the canal works, they did not feel that emigrants or the dependents whom they left at home should expect assistance from government. Thus, in September 1883, a notice in the *Official Gazette* warned Panama-bound emigrants that government would not refund any money spent for their relief, maintenance or repatriation. And on May 18, 1886, the Assembly agreed to refund the small sum of \$37.60 to the British Consul at Colon only after it was clear that he had used the money to save the lives of two ill and destitute Barbadians found on the streets of Colon. Three years later, when the Consul asked Governor Lees of Barbados whether he could assist destitute Barbadians at the government's expense, Lees replied that the Executive Council had not entertained the request because the members were sure that the House of Assembly which controlled the government's purse would not agree to vote money for the repatriation of native Barbadians who had emigrated to improve their condition.

Evidence of this callous attitude was seen again in 1889 when the Secretary of State for the Colonies sent a cable to the

governor of Barbados informing him that the first French Canal Company had collapsed, and that the government should be prepared to assist natives who wanted to return home. The Executive Council shared the Assembly's view that those who emigrated on their own steam to better themselves ought not to look to government for assistance. At first, it informed the British Consul General at Panama that the government would aid Barbadians only if necessary "to prevent their deaths from want of the necessaries of life", and that, if possible, unemployed Barbadians should be assisted to emigrate to other countries rather than be repatriated, since the existence of a large labouring population made it inexpedient for thousands of unemployed to be thrown back on the island. The Consul General quite correctly asked the governor of Barbados how his officers were to determine whether death would ensue if relief was not afforded a Barbadian, and informed him that they could not undertake to disburse relief under such restrictive conditions. In the end, the island's Colonial Secretary persuaded the House of Assembly to vote \$2,400.00 for the purpose of assisting destitute Barbadians in Panama, so that Barbados' good reputation overseas would not suffer. The Assembly reluctantly agreed, and \$1,200.00 were actually spent.

Not surprisingly, in 1893 when the British Government urged West Indian legislatures to enact legislation to prevent agents representing foreign companies from hiring labourers without offering them contracts to sign in which they were promised repatriation, the Barbados Government was the first to act. The *Emigration (Amendment) Act* incorporated the suggestion, and was amended in 1904 to provide that, if the employer did not keep his promise to repatriate the labourer, the agent who signed the contract would be required to defray any expenses incurred by the government in repatriating or otherwise relieving the destitute labourer.

Having moved to ensure that it would not be left holding the bag, the government of Barbados placed no obstacles in the way of the Isthmian Canal Commission's recruiting agent until 1911 when the Executive Council decided that Barbados should cease to be a recruiting ground. The reasons given for the decision

were, firstly, that the island had been deprived of too many able-bodied male labourers and that labour shortages had resulted; and, secondly, that it was unfair to other West Indian islands to allow agents to continue using Barbados as a recruiting base from which to entice their people away. Actually, it was probably the labour shortages rather than concern for neighbouring islands which was behind the legislation. After 1911, only 500 labourers were hired for the canal works in Barbados. By then, the canal was almost completed, and the Commission was making plans to retrench rather than increase its labour force.

Barbadians in Panama

Some of the Barbadians who reached Panama found jobs in Colon and Panama city – areas which had been expanding rapidly since the 1850s when the Panama Railroad was built with the assistance of Jamaican labour. Others set themselves up as petty traders and engaged in peasant activities along the canal and railroad lines. However, at all times the majority were employed on the canal project. The First French Canal company used hundreds of the Barbadians and other West Indians as work supervisors, office assistants, carpenters, plumbers, etc. and were willing to employ them in any capacity suggested by their skills. The American canal builders also employed large numbers of West Indian artisans and other skilled persons but few were put in supervisory positions because this would have been contrary to the concept of black inferiority which was institutionalised on the Canal Zone after 1904. The majority of the Barbadians would have been pick and shovel men who worked on the excavations and toiled, for a minimum of 10 hours a day for the most part, often in mosquito-filled swamps and jungles.

The French Canal Companies and the Isthmian Canal Commission all classified non-white employees as West Indians, non-white or black but not according to nationality. Therefore, it is not possible to state from the official records how many of them were Barbadians. However, it is clear from information given in other sources that, all times during the 1880s, and

between 1904-1914, no fewer than 50 percent of the average number of employees were from the British West Indies. Thus, of the average 11,396 employees of the First French Canal Company between 1881 and 1889, 6,837 or 60 percent were British West Indian and, of the average of 44,617 persons employed by the Isthmian Canal Commission between 1903 and 1914, 26,851, or 51 percent were from these islands. At all times after 1904, Barbadians and Jamaicans predominated.

Living and Working Conditions

How were they treated? The French Canal Companies paid their cadre of white supervisors much higher wages, and provided them with housing superior to the labourers and artisans, but there is no evidence to suggest that there was a determined attempt to institutionalize racism on the canal project. This was to change when the Americans took over canal construction. Within months, they established a system of racial segregation which was to become more and more complex over the years. It began in 1904 when they adopted the Panama Railroad's policy of different payrolls — gold for American citizens and silver for non-citizens. Silver rates were always lower than gold, a disparity heightened by the fact that, until 1909, silver currency had only half the nominal value of gold. In addition, benefits such as spacious furnished housing, sick leave, and paid home leave were tied to the gold payroll.

At first, since to be on the gold roll was a prestigious achievement, a few blacks considered especially deserving were placed on it, and in 1906, about 100 of them, both West Indian and American, were on this roll. However, in September 1905 the canal authorities prohibited transfers from silver to gold on the grounds that such transfers complicated their book-keeping and violated the colour line. By the end of 1906, they went a step further and put gold roll blacks who were not U.S. citizens on the silver roll at the same pay. Some men objected to the loss of prestige, and a few black machinists and supervisors were left on the gold roll. In addition, black teachers, postmasters, and policemen stayed on the gold roll because they required a

higher status to exercise authority in the West Indian community. But, this was not to remain for long. By 1908, colour became the main criterion applied in assigning men to gold or silver rolls as shown in an exchange between two Isthmian canal executives:

"I have been endeavouring to transfer all negroes from the gold to the silver roll. Under the former operations of the Panama Railroad, this question was not given very much attention . . . some of these people resent this transfer. The situation is getting somewhat awkward, as we have divided the gold from the silver employees in our commissary. It is the policy of the Commission to keep employees who are undoubtedly black or belong to mixed races on the silver rolls".

After 1908, the gold-silver distinction took another turn when the nationality test was applied, and, under pressure from William Taft who was responsible for canal affairs in Washington, from then onward only U.S. citizens and Panamanians would be appointed to the gold roll. It should be added that the Panamanians were included only after protest by their government. Gradually, the blacks who had been allowed to remain on the gold roll in 1906 were shifted to silver – even the few American blacks who had been on the gold roll were shifted to silver. The canal officials – always ingenious at this sort of thing – devised for them a special category which provided sick and home leave privileges, but not access to gold housing, commissaries or clubhouses. The American blacks also continued to earn more than West Indians due to skill and nationality. But, because they did not fit well into the gold-silver system, canal authorities hired them only for a few sensitive positions, usually overseeing West Indians.

The Europeans also caused problems for canal authorities, since gold and silver in reality meant black and white. Spaniards, Italians and Greeks were therefore called "semi-white", and were put on a special silver roll package earning less than white Americans but twice as much as the West Indians alongside whom they worked. However, the Europeans were not given home leave and paid vacation, for this would have equated them with gold roll employees.

What about white West Indians? In 1907 there were about 800 of these on the Canal Zone. It is not clear how many were

Barbadians, but the majority were from Jamaica. Recruiters in Barbados and the other islands avoided sending them to Panama because they found that this group disliked heavy labour and was sensitive about racial treatment. However, many emigrated on their own to Panama where they posed as former British supervisors who could get West Indian blacks to work harder because of experience in handling them. But they too presented a problem for the canal authorities. At first, they were hired on both gold and silver rolls, but, after 1908, when the nationality criterion was applied, they suffered status anxiety when demoted to silver. Naturally, their numbers on the project dwindled rapidly after 1908.

From 1904 onward, the gold and silver distinctions were also applied to other areas of life on the Canal Zone. The purpose was clear – to establish a system of racial segregation under which gold hospitals, villages, post office, recreational facilities, eating cars and even pay cars were provided for white Americans and similar but inferior services labelled silver for Europeans and West Indians.

It is not known what happened if Europeans accidentally used gold facilities, but blacks were treated harshly if they did. The colour line was so deeply drawn that there was virtually no contact between persons of different races outside working hours. The system was to remain intact until the 1950s, by which time the Canal Zone exhibited worse features of segregation than Mississippi.

The Americans offered several explanations for the institution of the gold and silver system. Some writers attributed it to the fact that most of the canal supervisors were from the Southern U.S.A. This is not true. Two-thirds were from the North and Midwest, and only one-third from the South. Others, including Southerners who were anxious not to be blamed for a system which all knew to be iniquitous, attributed it to the long established racist policies of the Panama Railroad, and even tried to blame upper class racist Panamanians for having a part in it. But, Panama Canal historian John Haskins places responsibility squarely on the Commission which, in his words, “worried about the trouble growing out of the inter-mingling of

“races.” Presidents Roosevelt, Taft and Wilson all knew what was happening on the Isthmus, and did nothing to disturb the system. Together, imperialism and racism ensured that it remained rigid.

Wages

All the evidence available suggests that Barbadians and other British West Indians who worked on the canal and railroad projects earned higher wages than were obtainable at home. However, the value of Isthmian currency in which they were paid from the 1880s onward fluctuated considerably, and it is not always possible to show its worth in pounds sterling, the currency then used in the British West Indies. During the 1880s, the unskilled labourers employed by the First French Canal Company normally earned between 12 cents an hour or \$1.20 per day, and 20 cents an hour or \$2.00 per day. They were paid more if they chose piece work at 20 cents a task. Skilled workers earned between 20 cents an hour or \$2.00 per day and 50 cents an hour or \$5.00 per day.

Some thirty years later, the American Canal builders established wage scales for its West Indian work force which were similar, and the very fact that they could do this with impunity points to the helpless and defenceless positions in which Barbadians and other West Indians found themselves in Panama. First of all, the Commission adopted an elaborate classification scheme under which its West Indian workers were called boys, labourers, artisans and the monthly paid. There were then subdivisions within each group. For instance, boys were Boy A and Boy B, and labourers were Labourers A, B and C, and so forth. The boys were young unskilled men who were put to work as messengers or water boys, and they earned 10 cents to 14 cents an hour. The robust, unskilled pick and shovel men were classified as labourers A and paid 20 cents silver an hour or \$2.00 a day for tasks such as road mending, trench digging and clearing bush. Labourers B were paid 26 cents an hour, and many of these performed task requiring some skills. Indeed, at all times, several hundred of the labourers in

the B category were in fact good artisans. So too were all the West Indians classified as Labourer C and paid 32 cents an hour. This meant that, even though skilled, these men earned eight cents an hour less than most of the European pick and shovel men who were paid the starting wage of 40 cents an hour. Few West Indian artisans ever reached the artisan level where they would be paid between 40 and 84 cents an hour. The Isthmian Canal Commission reserved most of these positions for white Americans. The circumstances under which black West Indians were put in the artisan category were rare indeed. In the words of a canal official, they had to be "of utmost value to the works" and had to be specially recommended by their foremen in a letter to the Chairman of the Commission. In September 1909, only 30 of a total of 3,763 employees listed as artisans earned the maximum for this category which was 84 cents an hour. The majority, some 2,247 of them, made the labourers' pay of 16 cents an hour.

The few West Indians who were given white collar jobs as clerks, stenographers, typists, storekeepers, timekeepers, included the better educated blacks and some whites. They were paid monthly, and their wages ranged from \$30.00 to \$150.00 per month unless they worked overtime.

As far as overtime was concerned, most West Indians were eager. Before 1909, they were paid time and a half for every hour worked beyond the normal schedule which was 10 hours a day on most sections of the canal works. In July 1909, the Commission decided that too much overtime was detrimental to the health of employees, and thereafter West Indians could only work 50 hours overtime per month. At the same time, the Commission decided that they would only be paid for overtime on weekdays after giving two hours of free labour. In this way, it unofficially reintroduced the 10 hour day, and capitalised on the men's need for extra money, most of which was probably sent back home. How did the wages paid West Indians compare with those paid Europeans and Americans? It is sufficient to say that the basic pay for European labourers who toiled side by side in the trenches with black West Indians was 40 cents silver an hour — twice the pay of most West Indian

labourers. This minimum pay earned by a white American, regardless of the work which he did, was \$150.00 per month, which, by contrast, was the maximum pay for West Indian teachers, office workers, etc. In addition, the Americans were given at least three weeks' holiday and sick leave with pay, which West Indians did not get. Any sick leave or holidays were at their own expense.

Housing

The French Canal Companies housed some of their black and other unskilled employees in wooden barracks and thatched huts, while the skilled workers and white officials were given spacious quarters with garden plots and verandahs. It could not provide enough lodgings to house the bachelors among the unskilled, and made no attempt to house the married. Therefore, many bachelors and families established villages along the canal line which were to survive until the twentieth century, or they rented rooms in Colon or Panama City.

When the Americans took over the canal project, the French Barracks, built nearly twenty years earlier, were put to use, and, in addition, the Commission built about 200 new buildings. All its quarters were free but, in accordance with its policies, those for gold families and bachelors were the largest, most well situated and maintained. No lodgings were provided for single women — the Commission did not want to encourage any relationships which might prove distracting for its large male work force. While the married gold employees were furnished with mosquito-proofed cottages with a minimum of five rooms and extending to two storied structures with porches on both floors, the bachelors were given rooms in barracks, referred to as hotels, which were also mosquito-proofed, and spacious. By contrast, West Indian families were offered barracks, each divided into five or eight compartments, each apartment containing two small rooms, at most three, for artisans and monthly paid. These quarters were not mosquito-proofed. The bachelors fared worse. Hundreds of them lived in converted boxcars which were shifted back and forth along the line depending on where the

men were needed. Others lived in barracks ranging in size from 30 x 50 feet to 36 x 50 feet in which 72 men slept. One Jamaican journalist who visited Panama in 1906 reported that the practice could never be commended. However, the Commission's explanation, both for the small and crude quarters provided for black bachelors and for families, was that they were better quarters than elsewhere on the Isthmus. The bachelors complained of lack of privacy, high noise level, of having to walk several yards from the barracks to toilets, and, furthermore, that they could not be seen loitering or resting in camp during the day unless certified sick by a doctor, or unless returning to camp to collect some personal item and leaving immediately, or they would be arrested for loitering. Not surprisingly, most bachelors refused to live in camp, especially after 1907 when the "privilege" of occupying free quarters could only be had if they bought meals from the Commission's kitchens. They lived elsewhere on the Canal Zone in shacks which they constructed for themselves, or moved to the overcrowded and then ramschackle Colon, or Panama City. In these cities the West Indians gained independence, and could cook what they liked, but the dwellings were expensive and in poor condition. Needless to say, the Isthmian Canal Commission roundly condemned them for spurning its quarters.

Food/Health/Recreation

During the 1880s, and until 1905, the West Indians on the Canal Project relied heavily on Chinese traders and Panamanian shopkeepers for food supplies. However, these charged exorbitant rates, and food shortages were constantly being experienced. In 1905, to remedy the situation, the Commission opened silver commissaries from which West Indians could obtain supplies at lower prices. In 1906, it opened a series of kitchens in which it proceeded to serve what it considered nutritious meals. Since the cost of meals was deducted from the pay of bachelors who lived in the Commission's barracks whether or not they ate, the kitchens always received some patronage. However, many West Indians complained that the food was

unpalatable, the menu monotonous, that little attempt was made to serve yams and the other vegetables to which they were accustomed, and that if they complained about the food, they were arrested for bad behaviour by the policemen sent to keep order in the kitchens at meal times. Eating in the kitchens was also a humiliating experience some of them claimed – for while the Americans were provided with tables and chairs in their “hotels”, and the Europeans with benches and tables in their mess halls, the West Indian kitchens were bare, and the men had to stand outside, and eat in any convenient place. A number of them had yet another reason for not wanting the Commission’s food. They found it cheaper to prepare their own, even though the meals in the kitchens cost 10 cents each. The Commission was baffled, and employed more West Indian cooks, but the complaints continued, and large numbers stayed away from the kitchens. Yet, the I.C.C. maintained that its food was more nutritious than that which West Indians obtained elsewhere, and reported an improvement in the men’s health due to the meals.

It is more likely that any increase in stamina shown by West Indians was due to daily doses of quinine, and a better health service on the Canal Zone. Before the 1890s, Panama was known to the world as a pest hole and death trap largely because, during the 1850s and 1880s, Malaria, Yellow fever, Cholera, Pneumonia and Typhoid Fever had killed at least 60 in every 1,000 canal workers. In addition, a large number, later estimated at 60 percent of the total work force, was always being treated for illness. During the 1890s, a team of American scientists working in Cuba discovered that the mosquito was responsible for many of the diseases for which the Isthmus had become infamous. Armed with this knowledge, the sanitation department under Colonel Gorgas conducted a vigorous campaign which involved clearing and fumigating bushy areas, draining swamps, spraying homes and giving employees daily doses of quinine. As a result, the average number of deaths officially recorded by the Commission declined from 41 per thousand between 1905/6 to 8 per thousand between 1913/14. But, at all times, there were more black than white deaths. For instance, when 123 whites

or 16 in every thousand died between 1905/6, the corresponding figures for blacks were 1,150 or 46 per thousand. Between 1904-14 the deaths officially recorded totalled 6,530, and of these, 4,500, or 69 percent were blacks.

Approximately one quarter of these deaths was caused by violent accident rather than by disease. Virtually all the old-timers had vivid memories of accidents – train derailments, dynamite explosions, landslides and boat sinkings which took lives. In 1913 alone, 38 blacks perished in railroad accidents, 23 drowned and 15 died in explosions. These statistics do not disclose the true picture, however, for a large number of canal and railroad workers lived outside the Canal Zone where sanitation and medical treatment were inferior, and often cases of illness and deaths, outside the Zone, were not included in the Isthmian Canal Commission's statistics. The total number of deaths in the West Indian community probably approached 15,000 or one in every 10 immigrants. It is no wonder that so many of the old-timers gave thanks to the Lord for their survival over the dangers of construction days.

As far as sickness is concerned, the black labourer who had not been hospitalised often, several times in one year, was an exception. During 1914 alone, which was near the end of construction, 24,723 or nearly half the total work force had been in hospital. And although only 14 employees died of malaria in 1913/14, more than 2,200 were treated for this disease alone during that year. Most of the sick, like the dead, were West Indians.

In his Report for 1906/7, the Chief Sanitary Officer noted that "the white man stands the conditions on the Isthmus just about three times as well as the Negro". Apparently, he did not realise, or care to admit, that living conditions for the two groups were different. The white Americans were mainly office workers and supervisors who lived in spacious, well ventilated and located quarters. Their salaries were large enough to allow them to save for holidays back home, and to live comfortably on the Zone. The West Indians, on the other hand, especially the common labourers, earned pittance by comparison with their white counterparts, often ate poorly, since they were

saving every penny, and they were required to work strenuously, often in heavy rain, and in swampy areas, and usually lived in quarters which were not screened against mosquitoes. Frequently, they slept in, and wore, damp clothes to work when there was no time to launder them, or during the rainy season when the clothes did not dry quickly.

Those West Indians who managed to keep out of hospitals or to stay alive were fortunate indeed, and, according to one "old-timer", to show their gratitude, most of them attended church in large numbers. At first, they used school buildings for worship, but soon erected chapels with the help of the Isthmian Canal Commission. The Anglican Church proved the most popular, with 15,000 members, followed by the Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals and Catholics. In the words of George Westerman, "the church was a forum for expression on many issues. It preserved the self respect of the workers, and stimulated their pride".

For recreation, the West Indians organised their own clubs, since the Commission had no intention of spending money for this purpose, and they were occasionally given permission to use some of the Commission's buildings for fairs, dances, sports and other events. The Barbadians formed a Barbadian society and its cricket team played against teams from other islands. There was a dispute among Barbadians and Jamaicans over which group took the lead in organising social and recreational activities for West Indians on the Canal Zone.

Social Control

The Isthmian canal Commission encouraged church-going and recreational activities (even if it did not spend large sums of money for these purposes) because these were two means by which it exercised indirect social control over its large labour force. More specific devices were the police force, verbal abuse of blacks by whites and the educational system for black children.

About one-third of the police force was black. Most of these men were from Barbados and Jamaica, and they were employed

to patrol the black labour camps, to stand guard at the kitchens at meal-time, and some of them were said to be spies, reporting to their superiors on any suspicious activity. But, from all accounts, the West Indians were for the most part law-abiding, and arrests were usually few.

In the Republic of Panama West Indians were subjected to a considerable amount of harassment by the Panamanian police who took any opportunity to demonstrate their own intermediate position in the pecking order. Mallet finally persuaded the government of Panama to hire West Indians to police their own neighbourhoods and apparently tensions lessened as a result.

Yet another form of social control was physical and verbal abuse of blacks by whites. Of course, everyday verbal abuse was not recorded, but "old-timers" recalled the intimidating treatment which they received as "niggers". In the words of one, "life was some sort of semi-slavery."

A final method of social control, at least in the long term, was the educational system for West Indian children. Children playing near work sites could cause accidents, and moreover, full-time child rearing could distract West Indians from the primary job of Canal construction. It is not known what educational facilities the French Canal Companies provided but, from 1904, the American Canal authorities operated schools. At first, they operated five racially-mixed schools accommodating 140 whites and over 1,000 black children in segregated classrooms. In mid-1906, the school population was separated. At all times the black children were taught by black teachers, but no matter how good these teachers were, they could hardly have taught much with an average class size of 115 students in 1909, which was reduced to 65 by 1915. Black children marked time in overcrowded rooms using cast-off supplies from the white schools, and the teachers were required to emphasise American history, discipline, oration, manners, the three Rs and subjects such as gardening and carpentry which would equip pupils for life as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in inferior positions on the Canal Zone and elsewhere. The same thinking militated against establishment of a high school for black children when one was constructed for whites in 1911.

The only higher education considered necessary for black children was advanced classes in agriculture, sewing, cooking and domestic labour.

This then was the situation by 1914. The Jim Crow system kept West Indian adults in line, and inferior education ensured that most of their children would be good for nothing but menial labour. On the whole, the Barbadians and other West Indians learned to live peaceably with the system. They worked too hard during the week to do more than fall into bed at night, and on weekends hobnobbing with friends and going to church were the favourite pastimes. But this is not to say that they did not find ways to hit back at the system. They did not resort to strikes or sick-outs. Instead, many of them deserted the works when their labour was most needed, worked slowly, wandered from one section to another giving false names to obtain easier jobs without being detected, and, above all, made fun of those supervisors who were clearly less knowledgeable than their charges.

Migrants as Permanent Residents

In 1914 when the Canal was opened to traffic, 15,000 or 65 percent of the workers chosen to operate it were West Indians, with Barbadians and Jamaicans predominating. Thousands of others who were discharged moved to Cuba, Santo Domingo, Guatemala, the U.S.A. and elsewhere. But, in addition to the 15,000 who were being offered permanent employment on the Canal, another 22,000 West Indians decided to stay on in Panama. All of these, and more than half those to be employed on the Canal, had to find housing in the Republic of Panama because, very soon after the Canal was completed, Colonel Goethals decided to evict from the Canal zone, all Panamanians and West Indians for whom the Canal administration could not provide living quarters. This is the reason which he later gave for the eviction: "I did not care to see Panamanians or West Indian negroes occupying the land, for these are non-productive, thriftless and indolent." Ironically enough, this was said after he had publicly praised the West Indians for their dedication and hard work in canal construction.

So, 15,000 West Indians would work on the completed Canal and for the next four decades or so, the group would be paid wages which they consistently said were too low, be ineligible for pension unless employed on the Panama Railroad (this was until the 1940s) and fired or otherwise victimised if they dared to resort to industrial action.

For these West Indians and the thousands of others who were forced to seek employment in Panama itself, their horrors had only just begun in 1914. Over the years native Panamanians had developed a love/hate attitude to West Indians. The landlords and merchants depended on their rents and grocery money but, like other Panamanians, regarded them as culturally and economically inferior. Panamanians also hated the Americans for the superior attitude which they adopted to native Panamanians, and for bringing in the West Indians. But, since they could not touch the colossus, the Panamanians vented their anger and frustration on the West Indians.

Anti-West Indian laws culminated in the 1941 constitution which denied citizenship to children of prohibited immigrants (West Indians were in this category) born in Panama after 1928, and declared that those born before that date would be considered naturalised. This meant that thousands of Panamanians of West Indian descent were stateless. Fortunately, this situation only lasted until 1944, when the new President, De La Guardia replaced Arnulfo Arias. He abrogated the 1941 constitution, and restored citizenship to those who had lost it. Yet, the West Indian community continued to be the subject of derision and scorn. The Panamanian government hired almost no blacks except those appointed for political purposes, banks and financial institutions hired whites only, a policy which they communicated with want ads phrased "Persons of good appearance only".

It was not until the late 1970s when the Canal Treaties were negotiated, and West Indians, now styled "Afro-Panamanians" by President Torillos, were as vociferous as Latin Panamanians in their desire to see Panama gain control over the Canal Zone, that native Panamanians seemed to accept the fact that the community was there to stay. They also seemed to realise that

persons of West Indian descent were as loyal to Panama as persons of native ancestry.

There is no time to discuss the role of West Indian newspapers such as the *Panama Tribune*, founded in 1928, of the labour unions, and the politics of the West Indians such as George Westerman who became Presidential Advisor, and later Panama's Ambassador to the United Nations. It is sufficient to say that, by the 1940s, few of the old-timers and even fewer of the first and second generation West Indian Panamanians thought of the West Indies as home. Home was in Panama or the U.S.A. Today, a few intellectuals of West Indian descent are trying to keep the ties between the community and the West Indies alive in their writing, but this is a small group.

Effects of Emigration on Barbados

There is no information on the 1880s, but, the post-1904 movement was of tremendous importance for its social, economic and demographic consequences. Firstly, the demographic consequences. Since most of those who emigrated were male, the population structure was affected. The sex ratio was reduced from 801 males to every 1,000 females in 1891, to 694 in 1911, and by 1921, when emigration to the U.S.A. and Cuba had also taken their toll, the island had 675 males to every 1,000 females. This excess of females occurred mainly in the age group 21-40, and especially in the ages between 31-40 where men were like gold dust – rare! With regard to the total population, the figures speak for themselves. Barbados had always been a crowded island, and by 1891 the population was 182,900 with a density of 1,033 persons to every square mile. Largely due to emigration to Panama, the population actually declined to 172,300 in 1911, and to 156,000 by 1912. This happened, even though natural increase was at the rate of 1.3 per cent per year during the thirty year period between 1891 and 1921.

Some 60,000 persons may have left for Panama between 1904-14, and 42,000 may not have returned. In addition, from about 1914, when the exodus to Panama stopped, Barbadian emigration to the U.S.A. increased, and this would have reduced the population as well.

What about the effects on plantation labour? Naturally, the withdrawal of so many persons must have had adverse effects. Between 1906 and 1911 planters complained of labour shortages, more women had to be employed in jobs traditionally handled by men, and, indeed, in 1911 when the government decided to put an end to recruiting by the Isthmian Canal Commission's agent, the existence of labour shortages was one of the reasons given for doing so. Sugar production declined from 57,300 tons in 1891 to 24,900 in 1911. This means that by 1911 the crop was less than half the size of twenty years earlier. This decline could be attributed to two factors: emigration, and agricultural diversification — a deliberate move on the part of estate owners to curtail sugar production because of the low prices obtainable for sugar on the world market.

What about the positive economic effects? Even though it was stated earlier that West Indians were probably better paid on the Canal and Railroad projects than they were at home, the cost of living on the Isthmus was often described as high, especially by those who lived in Panama City and Colon, and paid exorbitant rents for squalid quarters there. Yet, Barbadians and others managed to remit large sums to their families. According to reports on the Post Office, Money Order remittances from Barbadians in Panama to their families were valued at £545,939 or 43 percent of all the Money Orders paid in Barbados between 1901 and 1920. Money was also sent home in letters, through banks, and in parcels! Of course there is no record of how much was involved in these cases. Emigrants also returned with large sums of money. Between 1881 and 1900, Barbadian emigrants returning from British Guiana, Trinidad and elsewhere allegedly returned home with £70,000. Between 1909 and 1910 alone, returnees, many of them from Panama, brought back approximately £200,000 and between 1911 and 1920 another £200,000. Of course, part of the money brought back home between 1911 and 1920 would have been from Cuba and the U.S.A., but a large proportion of this, and most of the £200,000 brought back between 1901 and 1910, came from Panama.

These sums of money, often referred to as "Panama Money",

provided the means whereby many labourers, small holders, renters and others acquired land which was made available by the depression in the sugar industry during the first and second decades of the twentieth century. Mr. E.P. Boyce, compiler of the 1911 census, described the process in the following terms:

“It is known that emigrants to Panama have not been forgetful of those left behind, and have remitted money, sufficient in many cases, to enable them to pay the deposits and obtain possession of small holdings. I have no doubt that the opportunity thus afforded of acquiring land on easy terms was sufficiently alluring to cause quite a large number of such persons to settle in St. James.”

This use of Panama Money resulted in substantial redistribution of land. In 1905/6 alone, 49 estates were sold in lots or rented in tenancies. The most extensive subdivisions seem to have taken place in St. Michael and St. James. By 1912, land at the Bay Estate, Brighton, Spring Garden and Goodland in St. Michael; at Appleby, Carleton, Mt. Standfast, Sion Hill, Westmoreland, Weston and Prospect in St. James had been sold in lots or rented to tenants; several estates in St. John, St. Thomas, St. George, St. Andrew, St. Peter and Christ Church also sold land in lots during the first decade of the twentieth century. Marshall, Marshall and Gibbs estimated that probably 4,000 acres of estate land were put on the open market between 1900 and 1920, often in two to three acre lots, for which the holders or recipients of Panama money may have paid in installments. The average price per acre was about £47. Another 860 acres may have become available for rental. So, it may be said that Panama Money helped alter the landscape of Barbados in no small way during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In St. Phillip alone, small holdings increased dramatically from 902 in 1894 to 1,013 in 1910, and to 1,771 in 1916. The largest increase was in the plots between one and three acres.

- It should be noted that most of this land was marginal land sold when it became obvious to planters occupying estates near Bridgetown, or on the shallow black soils of St. James, St. Michael and Christ Church that it was far more profitable to

turn their estates into residential areas, tenantries and peasant settlements than to continue cultivation.

Some Barbadians who decided to stay in Panama also invested in land back home. The one outstanding documented case is that of the Panama Estates. Around 1941, members of the Barbadian Progressive Society which had been launched in Colon and Panama City in 1907 decided to purchase lands in Barbados for the benefit of members of the society. From 1941 to 1943, five plantations were purchased for the sum of £53,000. These plantations were Colleton and Four Hills in St. Peter, and Trents, Lascelles and Mt. Prospect in St. James. Each estate was conveyed to representatives of the Society to be held in Trust for the benefit of members of the society which was neither incorporated nor registered in Barbados. Unfortunately, due to lack of working capital and know-how, the estates were in an appalling condition by 1952, and, during that year, the trustees, who had by now been quarrelling among themselves, sought to resolve their problems by having the court declare each estate independent of the other, and that the estates were not being held on trust for the Society, but that the legal estate was vested in those who were managing them. The Barbados Court of Error and later the West Indian court of Appeal held that the estates had indeed been purchased on behalf of the Barbadian Progressive Society, and that a receiver should be appointed to protect its interest in the estates. Three of the estates were later sold and the Barbadian Progressive Society lost so heavily on the deal that it later went into receivership, but, the proceeds from Four Hills and Mt. Prospect are still held by the Registrar's office on behalf of the Panamanian shareholders. Thus ended what was probably the largest venture on the part of a black Barbadian group to gain a toehold in what may have seemed to them the symbol of local power — the plantation system.

Finally, let us attempt to put the movement to Panama in perspective. At least 1,344 Barbadians emigrated there during the 1880 and about 60,000 between 1904-1919. It was the first movement of any consequence from Barbados to a foreign country. It was in part evidence of the abject poverty in which large numbers of Barbadians lived during the latter half of the

nineteenth century while the sugar planters stayed afloat at their expense. It was also a quest by black men for freedom from plantation labour with its taint of slavery, and for steady remunerative employment elsewhere, the earnings from which would be used to improve their economic and social status on return home.

The movement restricted population growth and increased the preponderance of females in the reproductive age groups. It resulted in a redistribution of land during the first two decades of the twentieth century as planters sold or rented plots of marginal land to formerly landless (mainly black) people with Panama Money. And the individual success stories associated with the Panama movement contributed considerably to the current conception of emigration as a means whereby economic and social expectations can be met outside the limited potential of the Caribbean region. An important characteristic of the migrant ideology to which Barbadians and other West Indians have subscribed during and since the Panama movement is that success overseas depends as much on one's luck and approach to life as on conditions in the new environment. Thus, it was easy for Barbadians to ignore reports of unemployment on the Isthmus between 1910 and 1912; to live with the hostility of native Panamanians during and after construction days, and, later, to ignore reports of not so rosy conditions in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. Emigration had become a part of the Barbadian social environment, an institution in its own right, perpetuated by its own dynamic.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- M. CONNIFF, *Black Labour on a White Canal: Panama 1904-1981*. Pittsburgh 1985.
- F. HASKINS, *The Panama canal*. New York, 1914.
- W. MARSHALL et al, "The Establishment of a Peasantry in Barbados, 1840-1920" in T. Matthews (ed), *Social Groups and Institutions in the history of the Caribbean*. Puerto Rico, 1975.
- V. NEWTON, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850-1914*. Jamaica, 1984.
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7

Black People in the Colonial Historiography of Barbados

HILARY BECKLES

If power can be defined as the ability to interpret events and processes and to have them accepted and implemented, then the evidence suggests that the white elite in Barbados, with its external allies, have enjoyed a virtual monopoly of power for over 300 years. The concentration of power and authority in the hands of this social/racial minority, whose dominance of productive resource ownership and economic decision-making survived the reformist attacks of the mid-20th century Black-led democratic movement, has been greatly enhanced by the writings of its supportive historians. The evidence shows, furthermore, that from the time of the tiny island's colonisation by the English in 1627, the works of these writers have represented critical elements in the hegemony of the metamorphosing ruling elite.

This literature, by its very nature, has been, and continues to be, hostile to the positive aspirations and interests of the Black demographic majority. From this perspective, the traditional historiography of the island constitutes part of the elite's intellectual ammunition deployed against the Black community. It has, therefore, to be resisted and defeated if the historically formed mythical images of Blacks are to be exploded and the record of their sojourn on the island liberated from the ancient racist mentality of these white chroniclers.

In this presentation, the primary objectives are to analyse this aspect of the island's White colonial historiography and to illustrate the structural continuities and supportive ideologies

within that tradition. The analysis is confined to those works which carry the title, or purport to be, general histories of the island. Given this guideline, we therefore exclude those monographs which deal with specific sectional aspects of the historical experience. The list, then, would include only five works – all of which were written by persons without African ancestry, and whose political support for elements of the heterogeneous white (and near white) ruling class characterised their ideological vision. These persons, without exception, have alienated themselves from the possibility of exposing the cultural richness and philosophical complexity of the African dimension found on the island. These writers are Richard Ligon, Henry Frere, John Poyer, Sir Richard Schomburgk, and Sir Alexander Honywood. Their books were published in 1657, 1768, 1808, 1884 and 1978 respectively. The first three of these books were written towards the beginning, middle and end of the slavery period; the fourth in the immediate post-slavery decade; and the fifth, a mere twelve years after the island had become a constitutionally independent state.

Ligon

Ligon's work, published some 30 years after English mercantile forces had taken control of the colony, is now recognised as a classic in Barbadian/West Indian colonial historiography. The author arrived on the island in 1647 (20 years after Africans had been introduced there as slaves) and stayed until 1650. The book was written, or so we are told, while he languished in a London prison serving time for unpaid debts accumulated in Barbados. He witnessed, and described with typical English mercantile imperialist fascination, the socio-economic transformation of the colony, following its general adoption of slave-based sugar production. As a managerial participant in the industry, he socialised with those elite Englishmen who conceived and shaped the colony's political, legal, and ideological structures which were imposed upon over 20,000 enslaved Africans as agencies of oppression. His characterisation of these slave owners, who were envied by other New World colonists

for their obvious ability to rapidly accumulate large fortunes from 'sugar and slavery', imbues them with the best of renaissance progressive features, while for the unending stream of Africans there is nothing but contempt, abhorrence and savage denunciation.

The primary ideological argument advanced by Ligon is that the introduction of Africans into Barbados/West Indies was a positive development for all parties concerned. Slavery, in his view, though problematic to rationalise and accept at the Christian theological level, was a modernising force, and the plantation, a civilising institution. In this way, the darkness of Africa could be countered by advanced English technology and progressive Protestant socio-cultural values. Blacks, he stated, 'are as near beast as may be, setting their souls aside' [p. 47] and the plantation regime was the only hope for their gradual elevation. He described them in ways, and with language, which became stereotyped as Carlylian in the mid-19th century. For him they were child-like, totally unsuited for any task other than the mechanical and repetitive. 'Religion', he wrote, 'they know none; yet most of them acknowledge a God; as appears by their motions and gestures.' But they could not comprehend even the basic principles of Christian theology as a result of their inability to grasp conceptual issues. Logically, then, Ligon reported that in spite of their admirable fidelity for playing music, they could not understand the laws and general principles which governed its construction. In sum, he found them intellectually primitive, even more so than the Amerindians who in his estimation were relatively more 'apt to learn anything sooner.'

Ligon's racist, Eurocentric conceptual parameters meant that he was unable to perceive or describe the ways in which Africans made important contributions to early colonial development, for example, in the area of agri-science and animal husbandry. He made casual references to their manipulation of the plant life for medical and dietary purposes, but reduced this to a level of unquantifiable insignificance. Yet, it is now widely accepted that Africans, like the Amerindians, made critical scientific contributions to the agro-economy in its formative stages.

Certainly, the English had to be taught how to cultivate the soil under an unfamiliar and harsh sun and with cosmically different botanical materials. These facts are ignored and suppressed by Ligon, and Blacks are given visibility only in the production process as mindless, culture-less homogeneous units of manual labour. It was with Ligon, however, that the conceptual patterns used in analysing Black peoples' history in Barbados were established.

Frere

Frere is not within the same methodological tradition as Ligon, though they share similar conceptions of the role and location of Blacks within the historical process. Even by 18th century colonial standards, his political history is weak and shoddy. It is no more than a loose descriptive chronology of political events and administrations, based upon the assumption that the colony's history revolved entirely around the policies and postures of Governors, planters and merchants. His few references to Blacks are incidental and replete with allegations of their immorality and demonic tendencies. Such a race, in his perception of history, did not constitute worthwhile data, and hence he failed to grasp the elementary point that the socio-ideological culture of Whites was partly shaped by the very presence of over 35,000 Blacks.

Furthermore, Frere was unable to comprehend the ways in which social and demographic creolization, which was generally discussed in his time, was expressed in the struggle of its Euro and Afro elements for survival and dominance within the emerging Barbadian syncretism. By 1768, the Barbadian identity, both Black and White, was neither fully English nor fully African, but characterised by an uneven and uneasy admixture of both – as reflected in popular language, social attitudes and other cultural traits.

Probably most important of all, Frere conceived a work on the political history of Barbados without serious reference to the primary political concern of the time – the endemic nature of slave resistance. For him, the mainstream political process

was expressed in, and confined to, debates and squabbles in the House on trade, taxation, imperial relations and the American question. For the bulk of colonists, however, the primary political conflict was between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery social forces; between Whites and Blacks (not forgetting the notorious mulatto schism); slave owners and slaves. The anti-slavery movement, which Blacks kept firmly in the consciousness of all Whites, was never a secondary political issue. It informed most laws passed by the legislature, the size of revenue expenditures, and shaped the pattern of social life within the white community. Keeping Blacks enslaved in spite of this persistent movement was pivotal to the colony's political culture. Frere's attempt to ignore the Blacks as historical material, though partly informed by tradition, ensured the continued distortion and debasement of historical interpretation.

Poyer

By 1808, when Poyer's work appeared, the social formation had greatly matured in many respects. Clearly identifiable political ideologies were developed with a distinct proto-nationalist flavour. In addition, political and social institutions were being forged to meet the new demands of 'Barbadian' interests – as opposed to those clearly imperialist. Elite society was also caught in the fatal grip of increasingly powerful Caribbean and European anti-slavery forces, and responded in ways it knew best. A strongly backed policy of resistance to imperial abolitionist procedures and ideas emerged from most debates in the House. But the consciousness of all parties concerned had shifted. Fear of the Black revolutionary anti-slavery Republic of Haiti, now four years old, was evident everywhere in the White community. Barbadian Whites, like their slave-owning counterparts throughout the Americas, wished the Haitian limb amputated lest the gangrene of revolution spread and thereby infect the entire body of plantation America. This was Poyer's political and ideological context, and being a Barbadian with strongly held nationalist views, his work carried the tone of stern defence against the reformist ideas of the metropole and the revolutionary postures of local Blacks and their coloured allies.

Poyer was a self-declared racist, and like most of his contemporaries, he subscribed to the so-called natural law of Black inferiority. His *History of Barbados* is intellectually informed by this pseudo-scientific idea, and represents the basis of his ideological defence of white society. Thus, in 1801, when Governor Seaforth arrived at Barbados with an imperial mandate to reform the slave system by modernising its laws, Poyer became his primary opposing ideologue. In an 1804 letter to the Governor, which was incorporated into his book, Poyer outlined the theoretical basis of his view of society – which was popularly accepted among Whites:

“In every well-constituted society, a state of subordination necessarily arises from the nature of civil government. To maintain this fundamental principle, it becomes absolutely necessary to preserve the distinctions which naturally exist in the community. With us, two grand distinctions exist: first, between the white inhabitants and free people of colour; and secondly, between whites and slaves. Nature has strongly defined these differences, not only in the complexion, but in the mental, intellectual, and corporal faculties of these different species. We have acknowledged and adopted these natural distinctions.”

Poyer's theory of social structure, accompanied by a fervent white nationalism, was also expressed in a suspicion and contempt for people of mixed racial ancestry, and in an acute negrophobia. He attempted to use historical analysis to foster support in the white community for a frontal attack upon the upward social mobility of the free-coloured population. He campaigned for the placing of strict limitations on their ability to accumulate property and for their exclusion from the mercantile professions. His objective was to ensure that no section of the coloured population was placed above the 'poor-white' class in the socio-economic structure. Race rather than class, argued Poyer, was the demarcating force in slave society, and legislation should be used to enforce this principle.

The Blacks, in Poyer's ideal world, had no place outside of the cane fields. They should be kept from acquiring artisan professions, and not allowed to work in the towns. Slave artisans, both on the estates and the towns, he suggested, kept

respectable employment away from the unpropertied whites, and was the principal factor in their social degradation. His plan to rehabilitate this class resided upon the successful removal of Blacks, free and slave, from the more privileged sections of the labour market. As a social group, Poyer recognised that the 'poor-whites' represented the living empirical evidence that a white skin did not naturally confer intellect and survival skills. They were a contradiction to his social theory, and he wanted them elevated above the ranks of all non-whites.

In addition, the Blacks were described by Poyer as 'an ignorant, superstitious, vindictive race', and the advancement of White civilization in Barbados depended upon their permanent subjection. As a result, he fully opposed the 1804 legislative reform which made the murder of Blacks by Whites a capital felony. In fact, he opposed all reformist proposals that would reduce the total authority at Whites over Blacks.

In 1816, the slaves of Barbados, and their free-coloured allies revolted in an attempt to overthrow the world which Poyer so adamantly defended. After four days of bloody combat, the rebels were crushed, but race and social relations would never be the same. Neither could there be any doubt that the slave community had nurtured over the years an anti-slavery ideology which threatened to impose a Black world view upon the society, thereby revolutionising the historical process. The anatomy of the revolt, furthermore, revealed that the central dynamic within the political culture revolved around the actions of Black people in their quest for legal, cultural and social freedom.

Schomburgk

In 1834 and 1838, the Imperial government pre-empted the Black community's revolutionary strategy by abolishing slavery by legislative action. In the colonies, the implementation of freedom constituted at best a socio-legal adjustment of the relations between labour and capital. Blacks remained, in general, landless, constitutionally powerless, and with little enthusiasm for the future. Whites consolidated their power via new police

and magistrate systems and labour laws. Blacks had just recently suffered the heaviest military defeat in their history, and entered legal freedom with their militant leadership on the defensive. Now, and for reasons not difficult to account for, they threw their political support behind men like Samuel Jackman Prescod, a remarkable and able free-coloured leader – but not a direct product from their ranks. This political condition was new. It was the first time that a non-Black had assumed the local leadership of the struggle. It was within this context that Schomburgk researched, wrote and published his *History of Barbados* – a massive collection of information (722 pages) containing everything but an investigation of the slave and ex-slave community. Schomburgk has continued to impress historians with his stunning array of empirical data, especially those historians who believe that historical writing is about the compilation of facts and not about their interpretation and conceptualisation, as if the so-called facts do not need to be interrogated by theory and concepts in order to test their validity.

Schomburgk considered himself a critical supporter of the planter class and, as Professor Goveia noted, his best chapter is a stern defence of Barbadian sugar interest. He castigates the British government for mal-handling these colonists during the emancipation debate, thereby injuring its ancient and loyal supporters. He saw emancipation as an administrative problem for the British government and a managerial dilemma for the planters. He did not consider it an important historical event for Blacks because their socio-economic position remained structurally unaltered. He had no fear that the planter hegemony would survive in the long run. In the unfortunate event that it decayed, his solution resided not in forming an alliance with the 'Poor Whites', as Poyer suggested, but in the cultivation of a sober and well-conducted body of the coloured class. He suggested that the educated and genteel coloured men should be integrated into the mainstream of political and professional life. Such an alliance of Whites and mulattoes would ward off the menace of Black savagery and backwardness from below. In this sense, Schomburgk and Poyer differed only in terms of

the social agency for achieving the same objective.

Blacks in Schomburgk's analysis, then, are outside of the main historical narrative, and this location, he hoped, would be maintained by ensuring their continued socio-economic repression. He described them as backward and, in general, committed to the free indulgence of the passions and other retarding vices. His imprisonment by the most extreme of early Victorian social ideologies, which he freely applied to the ex-slaves, undermined the possibilities of achieving the analytical objectivity which many of his admirers claim he unquestionably possessed. Virtue, he stated, is not found among the Blacks as among the lower orders in a European civilised society. But he offered, unlike Ligon and Poyer, some hope as the Christian clergy had been let loose among them to plant some of the decencies of civilized life.

The advancement of Blacks in the 'free' society was conceived by Schomburgk in terms of their degree of absorption of Christian theology and social culture. Involvement in secular education was therefore not considered a meaningful criterion. As such, this was ignored, and Schomburgk made no references to the intellectual renaissance which was taking place among Blacks in rural villages and the suburbs of Bridgetown. The almost paranoid pursuit of literacy, confined in the slavery period to the labour elite, and now stimulated by the education grants between 1835 and 1845, was island-wide among the freed persons. Schomburgk did mention the number of schools built, but paid no attention to their organic role in the experiences of the Black community. In contrast, here is what the late H.A. Vaughan said of the people at this time:

"There was a general craze for education and self-culture. All over the country and in every negro yard and village a man could be seen professing to teach children. Nor were the grown-ups content with sending the young generation to school; they too, wanted to learn. It was no uncommon thing to see men and women, some of them of advanced years, with spelling books and primers. Circulating libraries, reading rooms, literary and debating societies abounded."

Thus stimulated, argued Vaughan, Blacks expressed their intellectual opportunities in newspaper articles, magazines, poems, travel books and essays. Such ideas and information are not to be found in Schomburgk's history.

Hoyos

One hundred and thirty years elapsed before we received our next 'history'. By this time, Barbados was no longer a colony, but an independent nation searching for its past in order to build the foundations for a secure and stable future. Hoyos, clearly aware of the time span, was less sensitive to the requirements of the day, and conceived it as his humble duty to remain loyal to the conceptual tradition of his predecessors. Barbados had broken constitutionally with its colonial past, but our author hung on to its ideological legacy, and with great tenacity.

On gaining independence Barbados could no longer be defined as a society of 'Whites' with a mass of Black auxiliaries, but as Afro-West Indian with a White ethnic minority. Yet Hoyos' book retains this traditional Eurocentric bias. After dismissing the Amerindian Carib Ancestors as 'warlike', 'fierce' and cannibalistic (the English colonial invaders for him were genteel), he allocates the first 40 pages of the work to the activities of planters, putting aside a mere two pages for the African folks. After this two-page diversion, another 40 pages describe the nature of European rivalry, militia forces, imperial troops, and planter politics. On page 76, he makes explicit his ideological position – clearly an apology for slavery and slave owners. He wrote:

"It may be agreed that conditions on the estates were no worse than those which prevailed in other parts of the world in the 18th century. In England and elsewhere in Europe, the criminal codes were harsh and punitive. The cruelty that was practiced on the estates was characteristic of a harsh and brutal age."

The Barbados-England comparison is clearly an absurdity. Nowhere in 18th century England were the labouring poor

defined by law as chattel and real estate. Nowhere in that country could children be alienated from their parents and sold as property at public auctions. Neither were their wanton murder and rape not seen as criminally offensive and morally repugnant. Yet Hoyos, in line with Ligon and Poyer in particular, apologises for slavery on the grounds that it was merely part of an international norm – even in ‘civilised Europe’.

His interpretation of post-slavery Barbados also shows anti-Black ideological currents. Emphasis upon the entry of the coloured elite into the mainstream of political life, in the form of men like Prescod and Reeves, should not be used as evidence of Whites consciously democratising institutional life in response to the demands of Blacks. In fact, the co-option of these very gifted men by the planter-merchant elite for public service was part of their general attempt to derail the popular agitation of ex-slaves. In spite of their presence and leadership, political culture still continued to be dominated by Blacks’ demands for full civil and human rights and more humane social relations.

It is not correct, then, to accept Hoyos’ subjective and plantocentric argument that the origins of Barbadian democratic culture resulted from the imaginative reformist policies of the merchant-planter elite and their co-opted coloured and Black intellectual allies. If democratic developments are so conceived it would be a denial of the centrality and primacy of the Black struggle for reform and liberation on the island since 1627. To sprinkle the names of a few Black professionals (planter-loyals) and wealthy coloureds (merchant-allies) onto the record of labour struggle, and suggest their heroic contribution, is merely to distort the social history.

Much of Hoyos’ assertions are based upon an inadequate methodology and an embarrassingly weak empirical base. Largely because his grasp of the historical process is that of the amateur, he blindly moves into the traps of mythical progressive liberalism. For example, he conceives the planter-merchant elite as conscientious, though conservative; enlightened, though sometimes blinded to their self-interest; committed to cohesive social advancement and high standards of civil life. Yet the evidence shows overwhelmingly that as a ruling class they

were generally uncultured, anti-intellectual and aesthetically unsophisticated. They possessed, unlike their counterparts in Jamaica and Cuba, for instance, no obsessive desire for self-culture: they built no grand theatres, erected no permanent monuments in respect to culture, nor did they decorate their towns with symbols of art. But they continued to suffocate Black cultural expression by outlawing all things African in civil life.

As a ruling class, furthermore, they remained committed to their monopoly of economic life, social apartheid and political exclusivism. Their vision of Barbados continued to be that of a plantation with no space or place for popular democracy, creative ideas, art or critical literature. Blacks were left fully responsible for the cultural and artistic revival and the democratic revolution. Whites resisted, and the cost to the Black community was great and damaging. Yet Hoyos' book covers up all these facts and processes, and glosses over the historical narrative with a heavy, but transparent, layer of white paint.

The Future

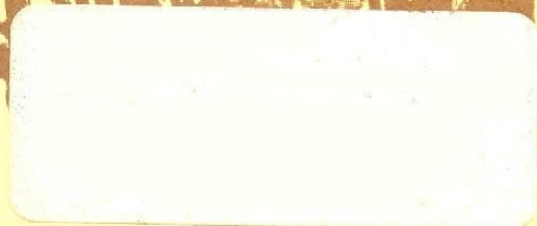
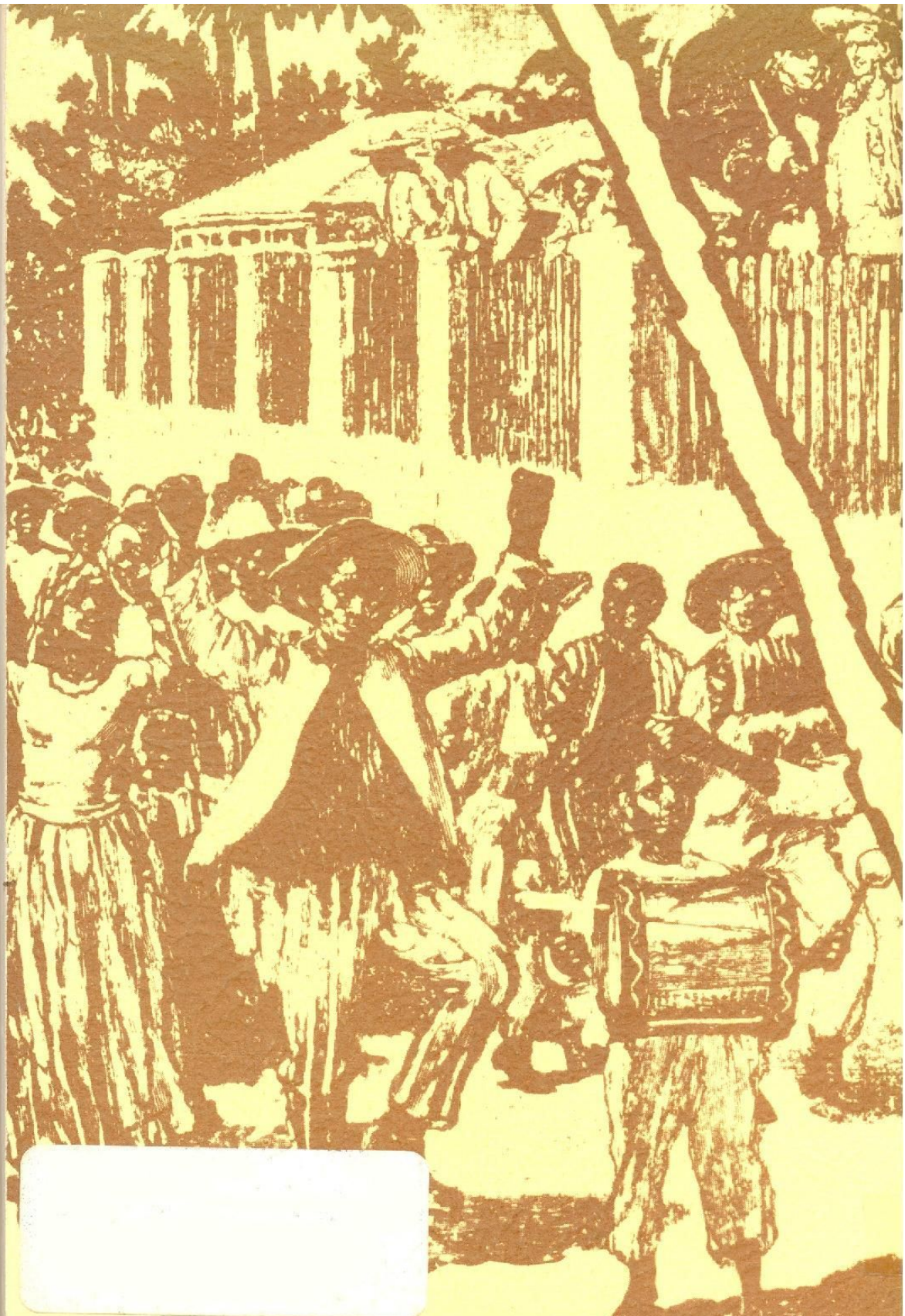
What, then, can be said of the white tradition of historical writing? How do we depart from this 'rightest' 'whitest' path and prepare the history of Barbados as scientifically as possible? Certainly we cannot afford to replace the Eurocentric colonial approach with one which is mythically Afro-centric. Our call must be for an unbiased approach and conception, based upon close investigation of the evidence. It must exclude any abuse of the data for direct political purposes, as was the case with Hoyos and Poyer in particular. I agree, then, with the vision of Professor W.K. Marshall that we must unearth the history of rural village life, the experiences of urban-villages, and plantation tenancies. Detailed studies must be made of popular culture and social thought. Political and economic institutions must be analysed and their functions in relation to different classes explained. We must look more honestly at social and race relations and present our findings with the sensitivity and clarity as found in Lamming's classic work, *In the Castle of my Skin*.

When we are well into this task, then the process of historiographic decolonisation would be entrenched, and the full credibility and legitimacy of the history of all Barbadians established.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- R. Ligon, *A true and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*. London, 1657.
- H. Frere, *A Short History of Barbados . . .* London, 1768.
- J. Poyer, *History of Barbados*. London, 1808.
- R. Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados . . .* London, 1848.
- F.A. Hoyos, *A History of Barbados . . .* London, 1978.
- E.V. Goveia, *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies . . .* Mexico, 1956
- H. Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: the Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1834*. Bridgetown, 1984.





HMP *Emancipation being celebrated in Barbados, nothing could surpass the good conduct of the labourers under this extraordinary change in their condition . . .*