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It is a question of Power!

Trade unions' political intervention to change the system of governance in Trinidad and Tobago

ABSTRACT

The struggle between capital and labour continues to define today's modern world. In the middle of this struggle are trade unions and depending on how they understand their role in this moment workers' organisations must determine the tactics and strategies they intend to execute in order to advance the interest of their members. There are some who believe that trade unions are in fact being used to sustain capitalism by being a broker between capital and labour. However, there is another view that trade unions are the schools of socialism and must play a role in building consciousness among the working class to secure not just economic gains but political gains which would benefit the working class and the society as a whole.

In Trinidad and Tobago there are two types of trade unionism. Trade unions which are progressive are referred to as Butlerite trade unions. They represent trade unions that follow the approach of Tubal Uriah Butler, who led the labour riots of the 1930s. They are progressive, militant and political. The other type of trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago are referred to as Fosterite trade unions, named after the Foster report, which was produced following the labour riots. This report defined trade unions as reactionary and apolitical (i.e. not seeking to make political intervention).

It is the belief of the progressive Butlerite trade unions that trade unions must make political interventions in order to, not only advance the interest of its members but to advance the interest of the working class as a whole. This approach is consistent with the long tradition in the West Indies of labour's involvement in politics. In fact the political history of the West Indies is closely intertwined with the trade union movement. In Trinidad and Tobago the working class organised themselves politically with the formation of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association in 1897. This organization acted as both a trade union and a political party. The Trinidad Workingmen's Association became the Trinidad Labour Party in 1932. Out of the June 1937 labour riots, modern trade unionism was born. Trade unions continue to play an active role in politics in Trinidad and Tobago, having been associated with several political parties throughout the political history of the country from Butler's party in the 1940s; the West Indian Independent

Party in 1952; the Workers and Farmers Party in 1966; the United Labour Front in 1975; the Movement for Social Transformation in 1989; and today the Movement for Social Justice.

The Movement for Social Justice (MSJ) was established in 2010 and joined four other political parties in a coalition to contest the 2010 general election in Trinidad and Tobago. In the lead up to 2010 the progressive trade union movement in Trinidad and Tobago was fully mobilized and organized a Conference of Shop Stewards and Branch Officers which developed a 'Workers' Agenda'. The 'Workers' Agenda' can be considered the Trade Union Manifesto which dealt not only with workers' issues but also constitutional, social and political issues. Currently a formation called the Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM,) led by the Oilfields Workers Trade Union (OWTU) continues to play a key role in the politics of Trinidad and Tobago.

This paper will seek to trace how trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago have made political interventions using various strategies and tactics which include forming alliances. The paper will also analyse the nature of the alliances formed along with the mechanisms of mobilization used to advance the Workers' Agenda. The paper will determine whether the strategies and tactics used are consistent with the overall objective of the progressive trade union movement to transform relations of power where people live and work through a different system of governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of Trinidad and Tobago in general is uniquely intertwined with the history of the mass movement and the contribution of the labour movement. The contribution of the local trade union movement to the national landscape occurred both before and after the formation of modern trade unionism. Formal trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago emerged in the late 1930s out of a more general and broader active labour movement [Reddock, 1994] and became the institutions that would advance the interest of ordinary people in general. Therefore, in order to explore this topic fully it would be necessary to show the antecedents to the modern trade unions, the consistency and continuity of the role of organized labour in the political history of Trinidad and Tobago. Trade unions became legal in 1932 with the passing of the Trade Union Ordinance 1932. However, this piece of legislation was extremely restrictive in that trade unions were not immune against action of Tort. The modern trade union movement in the truest sense began in 1937.

The labour movement in the broad sense has always agitated for a change in the system of governance. Therefore, the nature and character of the system of governance that the labour

movement and trade unions felt needed to be changed, must be understood. The system of governance refers to the political structure which supported the system of production, whereby the society was governed by a Legislative Council, where the interest of the dominant economic elites were protected and advanced. The system of production influences the system of governance and not the other way around. Therefore slavery as a system of production produced a particular system of governance, which one can argue, has endured even up to today.

Lenin¹ made a clear distinction between economic trade union consciousness and the revolutionary socialist class consciousness, embodied in the vanguard party. There are some who argue that trade unions cannot act as a vehicle to advance a society towards socialism. They argue that by their nature, trade unions are tied to capitalism. Trade unions can bargain within a society but are unable to transform it. It was the belief that only a political party can advance the transformation of a society. I would like to show that these arguments may not apply to the early period of the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact it was the intervention of the British trade union movement (the Trade Union Congress) that attempted to separate trade unionism from its political moorings. It was this colonial intervention (colonial not in the sense of the colonial authority but in this case it would be the colonial trade union) that laid the foundation for trade union division in Trinidad and Tobago.

Kiely² introduced the approach, that to understand the politics of labour, one has to look at development theory and peripheral/core capitalist societies. In this instance he argued that the development of peripheral capitalist societies saw particularly political demands from trade unions which differed from trade unions in the core capitalist societies. Therefore the basic analysis that trade unions were not capable of making political demands or even political interventions, did not apply to the context of peripheral capitalist societies and it certainly did not apply to Trinidad and Tobago. Kiely uses a theory of uneven development accompanied by a human action approach to class, race and gender. He was of the view that it provided a framework to analyze labour in different periods of development such as slavery, indentureship and peripheral capitalism.

The question being explored in this paper, is how different tactics and strategies were and are being employed by the trade union movement to change the system of governance. It is clear that any movement or group that seeks to advance its interest must consider the necessary strategy and tactics. What is particularly interesting is that regardless of the nature of the movement or

¹Lenin's Collected Works, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, Moscow, Volume 5, pp. 347-530.

²Kiely R., (1996), "The Politics of Labour and Development in Trinidad", UWI Press

group whether social or otherwise, in this case workers, due to the nature of their struggle with capital, the strategies and tactics will become political.

According to Marx, “Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance — combination . . . combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups, as the capitalists in their turn unite in the idea of repression, and in face of always-united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. . . . In this struggle - a veritable civil war - are united and developed all the elements necessary for a coming battle. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.” Karl Marx.³

Clearly, Marx is suggesting that even as workers engage in a process of negotiating for better terms and conditions, as they organize themselves in pursuit of that aim, their struggle will move from an industrial relations struggle to a political struggle. This was particularly the case in colonial and post-colonial societies.

The strategies pursued by any movement or group will determine the direction and path that has to be taken in order to achieve the aims of improving the quality of life of ordinary working people. If working and living conditions are influenced by the system of governance which entrenches further the system of production, then the general strategy would be to change that system of governance, if it is believed that such a strategy will bring a decisive victory that can enable a better quality of life.

Strategies require analyzing what class and social forces can be allies within a particularly objective condition. Tactics are different, in that the group or movement must determine the ways, means, forms and methods of struggle. The success of a tactic is not only short term but has to be viewed as a step towards fulfilling the overall strategy. As Lenin says, “for millions to develop their consciousness of reality it is necessary for them to have their own experience in the social struggle for progress. For this to happen the main level of activity has to be the level on which masses are currently prepared to struggle, to act. That is the mass action or organization level, the level of issues, demands, forms of struggle and organization that the broadest masses are currently ready to move on.” Therefore the strategies and tactics are not simply theoretical, but are grounded in actual struggle, and with each struggle the movement learns and develops new tactics.

³*The Poverty of Philosophy*, p . 145, London and New York, 1936 .Ed.

Another principle is to take into account whether the general period of mass activity is one of 'ebb or flow'⁴. Issues, demands, forms of struggle and organizational change depending on the reality and a correct assessment of the situation. All movements in the country as a whole or on a particular issue like crime, discrimination, or in a particular area of the country have both periods of flow and ebb. It is important to understand that both are inevitable and become objective factors. According to Rubin they are expressions of the law of uneven development.

When in a period of ebb, tactics can take the form of educational activities, building consciousness through forums, study circles etc. rather than mass demonstrations. They are aimed at preparing the thinking of masses to go over to a period of flow. "We remember here Lenin's point that it will not be possible to reach a point where a majority of the people are ready to be continually in struggle for social aims over a long period of time until we are in a period close to communist society. The ebb and flow concept emphasizes a crucial point about tactics. They must be highly flexible" Daniel Rubin, 2007.

The issue of ebb and flow require a careful look at the question of retreat as a tactic. Rees in his pamphlet looked at the question of retreat:

"Knowing how to retreat is a necessary part of tactics. Some deny retreat is ever necessary. This proposition is voluntarism. If we will it, retreating will never be necessary. Retreat is closely related to ebb and flow as to why it takes place. It is also closely related to making a sober estimate of the existing relation of forces. Sometimes the existing relation of forces is highly unfavorable, and not because of mistakes of the people's forces. We often do not control major circumstances and so are confronted with a choice of trying to advance when defeat is highly likely due to a clearly unfavorable balance of forces, or to retreat. Then it is necessary to know how to retreat (not only in the military arena) in good order, preserving the main democratic and progressive forces for the next period when advance becomes possible, in part because of how the retreat was handled. Refusal to recognize the necessity to retreat and acting as if advance and a period of flow still exists can lead to bigger losses and dispersal of democratic and progressive forces. Recognition of the necessity at times to retreat leads to conducting it in terms of issues, demands, forms of struggle and organization that prepare the subjective side of things, the forces for progress, to be able to go over to advance when a new period of flow begins to emerge. It helps prevent demoralization, extreme discouragement, defeatism, paralysis and dispersment

⁴Rubin D "Tactics: A Marxist Guide", Political Affairs, 2007

when periods of retreat become necessary and, thereby helps move to a new period of advance.”⁵ [Rees 2010]

According to Rees “One of the most difficult tasks in deciding strategy and tactics is to draw out of the mass of information and events that swirl around us what our key goals should be and what basic methods we should adopt to achieve them. This, inevitably, means treating as secondary many facets of the situation that to others may seem vital.” Rees looked at the question of trade unions’ tactics and strategies. He identified trade unions as a “basic defence mechanism of the working class. They were first built to defend workers at the point of production from employers’ attacks on wages and conditions. They work best when they organise the widest possible sections of the working class irrespective of political, religious, ethnic, or any other kind of distinction.”

He further stated that “The old trade union slogans are, in this sense, fundamental truths: unity is strength; united we stand, divided we fall.” He did however identify a problem within modern trade unions pursuing political strategies and tactics to achieve the overall aim of improving quality of life. “Precisely because trade unions organise over the most basic economic questions, and because they aim to organise all workers – from the most politically conscious to the most conservative – a question arises about relationship between the politically conscious minority and the rest of the unionised workforce.....since trade unions exist within capitalism in order to bargain over the conditions under which labour is exploited – and not to abolish capitalism and exploitation – they inevitably exist in a state of compromise with the system. Even the most militant and successful strike will end with significant improvements for workers within a still-existing capitalist system. And many strikes will end with compromises that are worse than this.”

This analysis however, did not consider the development of political trade unionism in former colonial states. The question would therefore be, what political role trade unions played in pre and post-colonial countries, like Trinidad and Tobago. To understand this current role, this paper will trace the history of resistance and the long struggle to change the system of governance from the colonial conquest to the current political landscape.

2. THE SPANISH COLONIAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

Christopher Columbus reached the island of Trinidad on 31 July 1498. In the 1530s, Antonio de Sedeño, a Spanish soldier intent on conquering the island of Trinidad, landed on its southwest coast with a small army of men. He intended to subdue the Orinoco and the Warao, the two

⁵Rees J “STRATEGY AND TACTICS - How the left can organise to transform society, Political Affairs, 2010

major Amerindian peoples of the island, and rule over them in the name of the Spanish King. Sedeño and his men fought the native Carib Indians on many occasions, and subsequently built a fort. The next few decades were generally spent in warfare with the natives, until in 1592, the 'Cacique' (native chief) Wannawanare (aka Guanaguanare) granted the area later known as "St. Josephs" to Domingo de Vera e Ibargüen, and withdrew to another part of the island. The settlement of San José de Oruña (St. Joseph) was established by Antonio de Berrío and became the country's first capital.

Prior to the Spanish conquest of Trinidad and Tobago, the islands were inhabited by a thriving Amerindian civilization. Whilst Tobago the smaller island retained its original name from the Amerindians (Kalinago tribe), the larger island Trinidad was originally known as Kairi also from the Kalinagos. Their system of governance was tribal, where the Cacique or Village Chief who was elected by the village, exerted significant political influence and control over the tribe he was responsible for. There was no overlord over the island as a whole but each Cacique would have influence and control over his own village or tribe. One can consider them Independent Village-States. The idea of a Kairi (Trinidad) Nation or a Kairi Empire similar to Aztecs, Mayas and Incas on the mainland, ruled by one person did not exist.

The Spanish conquest introduced a new system of governance to the islands, one which was colonial and supported by the Encomienda System. The *Encomienda* was a dependency relation system where the Spanish monarch would assign a Spaniard with the task of "protecting" a specific group of Native Americans. In the *Encomienda*, the Spanish crown granted a person a specified number of natives of a specific community, with the indigenous leaders in charge of mobilizing the assessed tribute and labor. In turn, *encomenderos* were to take responsibility for instruction in the Christian faith; protection from warring tribes and pirates; instruction in the Spanish language; and development and maintenance of infrastructure.

In return, the natives would give tributes in the form of metals, maize, wheat, pork or any other agricultural product. In the first decade of Spanish presence in the Caribbean, Spaniards divided up the natives, who in some cases were worked relentlessly. *Encomiendas* in the Caribbean were often characterized by the geographical displacement of those enslaved and the breakup of communities and family units. Tied to the *Encomienda* system was the Church. During this period the division of Church and State did not exist, they were both intertwined. Therefore as the Spanish monarch and its representatives established colonies, through the *Encomienda* system, they also sent missions who had the specific role of converting the Amerindians to Christianity. The both systems went 'hand in hand' with each other.

Central to the Spanish system of governance on the island was the Cabildos. A cabildo administrative council governed a municipality. Cabildos were appointed in some cases and in other cases elected; but regardless of this they were considered to be representative of all land-owning heads of household (vecinos). In Trinidad, the Cabildos were elected. The cabildo was the legal representative of the municipality — and its vecinos —before the Crown, therefore it was among the first institutions established by the conquistadors themselves after, or even before, taking over an area.

According to Bridget Berreton⁶, the Spanish in fact created two republics; one for the Indians with the *Encomienda* and Mission serving as its key governance institutions, and the other republic for the Spanish, with the *Encomienda*, the Mission and the Cabildos as the key governance institutions. During this period the laboring classes were the Amerindians themselves, who were taken as slaves. Just as the peasants revolted under the feudal system, so too the Amerindian slaves revolted against the oppression and exploitation of their land and labour under Spanish colonialism. On 1 December 1699, Amerindians at the Church's encomienda at the mission at Arena revolted, resulting in the death of several hundred Amerindians, Roman Catholic priests connected with the mission of San Francisco de los Arenales, the Spanish Governor José de León y Echales and all but one member of his party. By 1717 the system of governance of Trinidad was one which saw the Island join the vice-royalty of New Granada.

With the Spanish colonization of the Americas, the institution of viceroys was established to govern the highly populated and wealthy regions of the north overseas: New Spain (Mexico and Philippines) and the south overseas: Peru and South America. Some 60 years by 1777, Trinidad was moved administratively to a borough under the jurisdiction of the captain-general of Venezuela.

⁶Berreton B. (1981) “A History of Modern Trinidad (1783-1962)”, Heinemann Publishers

3. PLANTATION ECONOMY

The nature of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and Caribbean economies in general, has been described by Caribbean economists such as Lloyd Best as a “Plantation Economy”. The Plantation Economy is where the entire economy revolves around the Plantation. In terms of the Caribbean and particularly Trinidad and Tobago, it would have been sugar plantations. There were of course other crops such as cocoa and coffee, but in main it was the sugar plantation that brought all the wealth to plantocracy⁷.

However, the Spanish focused on wealth produced by the mineral mines in Central and South America. Therefore the Caribbean islands, in particular Trinidad, were viewed only as a stop-off point on route to the wealth of neighbouring Venezuela and Central America. This meant two things, the population on the island remained very small for the majority of the 200 years of Spanish rule on the island and secondly, the plantation system was not really fully developed.

Since Trinidad was considered underpopulated, Roume de St. Laurent, a Frenchman living in Grenada, was able to obtain a Cédula de Población from the Spanish King, Charles III on 4 November 1783. A Cédula de Población had previously been granted in 1776 by the King, but had not shown results, and therefore the new Cédula was more generous. It granted free land and tax exemption for 10 years to Roman Catholic foreign settlers who were willing to swear allegiance to the King of Spain. The land grant was 32 acres for each free man, woman and child and half of that for each slave that they brought with them.

The Cédula was issued only a few years before the French Revolution. During that period of upheaval, French planters with their slaves, free coloureds and mulattos from the neighbouring islands of Martinique, Saint Lucia, Grenada, Guadeloupe and Dominica migrated to Trinidad, where they established an agriculture-based economy. These new immigrants established local communities in Blanchisseuse, Champs Fleurs, Paramin, Cascade, Carenage and Laventille.

Trinidad's population by the end of 1789 increased to 17,718, of which 2,151 were of European ancestry, 4,476 were "free blacks and people of colour", 10,009 were slaves and 1,082 were Amerindians. This total population moved from just under 1,400 in 1777. By 1797, the population of Port of Spain itself had increased from under 3,000 to 10,422 in five years, and consisted of people of mixed race, Spaniards, Africans, French republican soldiers, retired pirates and French nobility. The sparse settlement and slow rate of population increase during Spanish

⁷ “Plantocracy” refers to the plantation owners/planter class who held significant political and economic power in the British colonies

rule and even during British rule made Trinidad one of the least-populated colonies of the West Indies, with the least developed plantation infrastructure. This changed significantly under British Colonialism.

According to Best and other economists such as Kari Levitt, the plantation economy had three stages. The first stage was the “pure plantation economy”, which was the slave period, then the second stage was the “plantation economy modified” (1838-1938) and the third stage was “plantation economy further modified”, which takes us from the late 30s to about the 90s. However we now have to consider a fourth stage which is “plantation economy globalised”. We have to look at the first stage to understand the fundamental nature of our economy as this stage laid foundation. In essence, during this phase, the system of production was one where Europe provided organization, capital, decision making, transport, supplies and markets. Africa provided the Labour (subsequently India) and the Caribbean provided the land. Production of mainly one product (whether sugar cane in the past and now oil and gas) was, for export to European markets.

Norman Girvan’s paper, “Plantation Economy in the Age of Globalisation”⁸ gives an excellent description of the Plantation Economy in the modern world.

“The theory of the Plantation Economy is, therefore, as relevant in the age of globalisation as it was in the age of decolonisation, when it was invented. Clearly, the Plantation Economy was the creation of an earlier form of globalisation; and today’s globalisation is the latest stage in the evolution of the Metropolitan Economy. There are those who argue not only that globalisation is an irreversible concomitant of technological change, but also that passive incorporation into the global economy is the only option available. This is the meaning of a policy of indiscriminate opening of the economy to imports and to foreign capital; as prescribed by the rules of the World Trade Organization, the conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the terms of bilateral trade agreements with developed countries. But to argue that there is no option but to submit is like arguing that 19th century imperialism should not have been resisted because of the invention of the steamship and the Gatling Gun. There are always choices. And these choices should be informed by an understanding of the consequences of different courses of action, drawing on past experience.

⁸Foreword to “Essays on the Theory of Plantation Economy”, by Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt; University of the West Indies Press, 2009

The theory of Plantation Economy helps to inform us of the consequences of passive incorporation into the world economy. It tells us that this path cannot lead to sustained and sustainable development. It suggests the elements of an alternative approach to development for Caribbean countries, with possible lessons for others in the Global South.”

4. CHANGING THE SYSTEM OF CROWN COLONY

Having lost the Colonies in North America, the British set their eyes on Trinidad. By the time the British had taken Trinidad, the Industrial Revolution was beginning to take root and the rise of capitalism, fueled by technological advancement and the wealth created from slavery, was beginning to make qualitative changes in Europe. In 1797 the island fell without much of a fight, to the British forces, which were led by Ralph Abercromby. The British had a dilemma as to how to govern this island which was far more diverse in comparison to the other British colonies. There were Irish, French and Spanish planters and of course the British wanted to settle their planters. The slaves came from many different parts of Africa and the Caribbean. “The British government took the decision that colonies conquered during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars should come under direct supervision of London.” [Bereton, 1981]

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, in 1809 there was a campaign to include an Assembly. However, the system of governance to be determined for Trinidad under the British had to first contend with its first British Governor, Picton. British capitalism and the Industrial Revolution came to Trinidad in 1804 with the first steam engine at the Camden Plantation in Couva [Bereton, 1981]. Within a few years, many plantations were using the steam engine.

In 1838 slavery was abolished in Trinidad and in most of the English speaking Caribbean. Former slaves began making demands to improve their standard of living, including control over their own labour and access to land. They wanted to become independent proprietors. They certainly never intended to continue working on the plantations, in government services or even in factories. To maintain the supply of labour, salaries were raised. However the Legislative Council, always acting on behalf of the planters, passed the Territorial Ordinance which prohibited the purchase of land below 100 Acres [Bereton , 1981].

According to Elder “Immediately after the abolition of slavery in 1838 and the taste of freedom, the demonstrations of spontaneous and planned aggression took on a new dimension. We are told that ‘the deep rooted aggressions that had been smouldering for years took on tangible forms.

Uprisings on the estates became very common. Murder, arson, assaults on white overseers by Negro workers became the rule of the day” (J.F.Elder)⁹.

The organization of slaves on the plantation gave birth to the mass movement out of which arose the modern trade union movement [Belgrave]. The first organization of workers came in 1844 “when 600 free Labourers, women and men, met at Couva, to form the Trinidad Free Laborers Society” [Reddock 1994].

Degrading and inhumane conditions of existence created the ideal political environment for insurrection by the mass movement. This was the context in which “Royal Jail Riots” took place in 1849. Even with the abolition of slavery the system of governance remained the same. Clearly with the end of slavery, the problem of a labour shortage arose. The planters immediately began complaining bitterly about the labour shortage and its effect on their plantations. They attempted to solve this problem by immigration. They thought that this will help drive down wages. The first wave of immigrants came from the Eastern Caribbean. Between 1839 and 1849 over 10,000 West Indians came to Trinidad. In addition, immigrants came from the USA, Africa, China and Europe. However, this proved to be insufficient, it was therefore India that would be the real solution to the labour problem. In May 1845, the first immigrant ship, the *Fatel Rozack* arrived from Calcutta with 225 immigrants. Many of the immigrants were Hindus and a small portion were Muslims. The celebration of Hosay, a Shi-ite celebration was joined in by Hindus and Africans. This was viewed in general as a form of resistance. By the late 1860s what had begun as a temporary measure to meet an acute labour crisis had become an apparently perpetual and regular importation of labour from India on a large scale.

In the mid-1800s the education system would emerge to be a critical ideological arm of the colonial state. Primary schools really began to emerge in 1846. These schools would give rise to a professional middle class of pharmacists, printers, doctors, lawyers like Henry Sylvester (15 February 1869 – 26 March 1911) and an upper working class of teachers, civil servants and clerks. Out of this class came a black intelligentsia such as J.J. Thomas (1841-1889) and H.A. Nurse. Many indentured labourers went to schools established by Canadian Presbyterians in 1870s. This would give rise to an urban Indian middle class. The Chinese labourers who arrived in the 1850s and 60s became shop keepers and merchants.

There also existed small groups of cocoa and cane farmers. The majority of indentured labourers and former slaves were being “proleterized” into a working class. The rise of the black working

⁹ Elder J. “Color, Music and Conflict - A study of Aggression in Trinidad with Reference to the Role of Traditional Music.” *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 8, No. 2 (May, 1964), pp. 128-136

class came through internal immigration from rural to urban centres and external immigration from other islands. They lived in 'barrack yards', particularly in the capital, Port-of-Spain. They engaged in domestic services, petty trading, shop-keeping, cab driving, dock work and shop work. As with most colonial territories, there was the rise of small industrial capitalism.

This 1870s saw the decline of the sugar industry and the expansion of British Imperialism. In the colonial Centre, British capitalism co-opted the trade unions with the formation of the Trade Union Congress in 1868. The social movement took the approach of reformism instead of revolution including the implementation of the Reform Act 1832, 1852 and 1867. This was also a period of imperialist expansion to facilitate the growth of capitalism. Consequently, of course, there was the rising militancy of the working class, as evidenced by the 1848 Revolution, and the formation of the International Workingmen's Association in 1864. This challenge to capitalism by socialist revolutionaries would define the political journey of humanity over the last 150 years.

The 1880s saw the rise of urban black culture with unemployed gangs and the Jammette Carnival which clashed with the colonial authorities in 1881 and again in 1884. The annexation of Tobago to Trinidad also occurred during this period. The economy of Tobago collapsed with sugar and it became difficult for Britain to continue to directly govern Tobago and so annexed the island in 1889. The Mayere system which developed in Tobago could not sustain the economy without major production.

From the 1890s to the beginning of World War I, there was a significant change in global capitalism with the internationalization of capital. There was also interestingly the rise of socialist ideas in the colonies and the US. In Trinidad and Tobago, there was a generalization of wage labour. The discovery of petroleum would transform the labour force, but it did not change the plantation system of the economy which was now supported by the Crown Colony model. The growth of the industrial working class in Trinidad would eventually give rise to trade unions. The introduction of multinationals further industrialized the working class. There was also a middle class constitutional reform movement that emerged in the late 1890s.

"Between 1862 and 1898 the Trinidad Legislative Council had an official majority, but this did not prove effective in providing opposition to the government." [Bereton 1981]. This ineffective opposition would remain a legacy in the system of governance to the contemporary period. The central fact about Crown Colony politics in Trinidad was that the planter-merchant community was able to exercise considerable influence over policy making. Property and wealth were the only qualifications to be an unofficial member and so mostly planters and merchants were the

un-official members. Social and economic power lay behind the plantocracy. As Crown Colony government actually operated in 19th century Trinidad, the large property interests were able to exercise considerable even decisive influence over policy making. Un-official members were treated with deference by both local authorities and the Colonial Office [Berreton, 1981]

“The first campaign for reform was led by French Creole, Phillip Rostant. In 1887 a Royal Franchise Commission was established and a report was produced, recommending elected members, but the Colonial Office rejected it.” [Bereton 1981]. *New Era*¹⁰ in 1885 wrote “Men who are selected for the business of government from a particular class will naturally be prone to give undue prominence to their exclusive interest... It is only in the natural order of things that our Legislature would be used as a machinery for the furtherance of the particular interest of the class whose supporters so largely predominate in its composition”. The Second Campaign came in the mid-1890s, but it too failed to bring about any reform in terms of elected members. C.P David, Secretary of the Reform Committee from 1892-1895 wrote that “the introduction of elected members would mean a revolution in Trinidad politics, a decrease in the power of the large land-owners.”

It took two hundred years from the arrival of the British to the formation of the first real organization of workers, being the Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (TWA) in 1897. The TWA was one of the most influential organizations of that period and was founded by a druggist, Walter Mills in the 1897. Walter Mills was probably influenced by a growing movement under the International Workingmen’s Association and even the London Workingmen’s Association which was Associated with ‘Owenite Socialism’¹¹. Trade unions did not exist as they were illegal in the colonies. Therefore organizations such as the TWA acted in part as a trade union which made demands on behalf of workers as well as made broad political demands.

A very important tactic by the TWA was to develop close links with the British Labour Party. Under the leadership of Alfred Richards (1862-1947)¹² links were established with the British Labour Party, in particular William Summerball and Joseph Pointer [Kiely 1996]¹³. Joseph Pointer (1875-1914) was actually a member of the Independent Labour Party, a socialist political organization. During that period in England the political organization of the working class was

¹⁰ The New Era was a publication of the educated black and colored middle class.

¹¹ Also known as ‘Owenism’ was a Utopian socialist philosophy of Robert Owen, a social reformer in the beginning of the 19th century.

¹² Leader from about 1906 until 1913

¹³ Kiely R. (1996) “The Politics of Labour and Development in Trinidad”, UWI Press

taking root and there was a strong feeling that it was necessary for working class representation in power.

However, Pointer who only understood class formation and contradictions in an advanced capitalist society was unable to properly interpret the situation in Trinidad when he visited and in particular could not grasp the indentured labour question and therefore the East Indian question. That would have to be resolved by the mass movement itself. Through events such as the 1903 Water Riots which were instigated by the Rate Payers Association (RPA) - 16 people were killed and 43 were wounded; and the TWA campaign for the restoration of the POS Borough Council in 1906, continued to build more consciousness towards changing the system of governance.

The early organization, operated very much like a trade union and represented working class interest, grounded on a socialist theoretical framework, but not necessarily revolutionary. Two international events would change that: the First World War and significantly the Bolshevik Revolution. The Russian revolution had an immense impact on working class consciousness throughout the world and Trinidad and Tobago would be no exception. The Russian revolution made real what could have only been a potential: the seizure of power and control of the state by the working class resulting in the working class therefore having the power to determine their own destiny. In other words, self-determination.

The working and living conditions of the mass of people were extremely poor. This included rampant poverty, very low wages, no labour legislation, no working class representation in the Council, for that matter, no democracy whatsoever. These circumstances created the conditions to awaken the mass movement. Literature from the Marcus Garvey movement and news of the Russian revolution both influenced the level of consciousness. However, it was the objective reality of inhumane living and working conditions that provided the fuel for the fire. The working class engaged in nation-wide strike action and insurrection in 1919. The word of the strike was spread through the TWA network and immediately workers throughout Trinidad and Tobago “From Cedros to San Fernando to Carapichaima to Couva to Chaguanas, then east from Sangre Grande to Toco, workers downed tools” [Rennie 1973]. This description gave us a very good picture as to the scale of the strike which represented a unity of African, East Indians and Tobagonians who all participated in the mass action.

Coming to the end of World War I, the system of indentureship was ended in 1917. The Oil industry had developed significantly to support the war creating an industrial working class. There were already small strikes in the oilfields during this period. Soldiers and naval officers who fought for the British Empire, upon their return to Trinidad began really questioning the

British system of governance, due to their experiences having fought during the war. In the context of this discontent, leadership was found in Captain Arthur Cipriani. There was also the influence of the Garveyite movement, which found fertile ground among the black working class. The government with the influence of employers passed the Habitual Idlers Ordinance in 1918.

The strategy and tactic employed in 1919 was militant strike action. There was the mobilization of workers and mass action. Starting in May 1919, workers with the leadership of the TWA, workers of the mass movement, the labour movement, and the working class engaged in a General Strike throughout Trinidad and Tobago. “During 1919, starting in March with dockworkers, East Indian sweepers and scavengers in Port-of-Spain, railwaymen, sugar workers at Woodford Lodge, Couva, Cunupia, Sangre Grande and D’abadie and government and estate workers in Tobago all went on strike.” (Rennie 1974)

Whilst the strike was for increased wages, it had broad political demands. In response to the strike there was some labour reform. But the real result of the General Strike was the establishment of the Wood Commission and its recommendations which were implemented. The main recommendation was the first ever elections to Legislative Council. This ended the direct Crown Colony system of governance. “The events of 1919 were the first time that Creole and Indian had cooperated on any significant scale: The 1919 Strikes “seem to indicate that there was a growing class consciousness after the war and this transcended racial feelings at times” [Samaroo 1972:218]” (Kiely, 1996).

Bukka Rennie in his book “The History of the working class in Trinidad and Tobago” outlined the significance of the 1919 Strike As follows: “the Waterfront strike tells us that the workers had developed the revolutionary spirit of struggle in their own interest to challenge the status quo”

He understood the 1919 Strike as a forerunner that would set the pattern of strategy and tactics for struggles. He stated that some of the significance of the 1919 strike were “The ideal of organizing and uniting at the bottom...the pinpointing of the possibility of a national mass movement cutting across racial lines.... It signaled that in struggle, the question of power is fundamental. The strike made it clear that the interests of the ruling class are directly opposed to those in the working class and that there is no compromise.”

The 1919 Strike was a major turning point for the working class and it propelled a movement that would indeed shape our future. In a statement in Europe, Vivian Henry declared “the people of Trinidad are revolutionary in content and any day they are given revolutionary leadership

would carry on revolutionary struggle” [Rennie 1973]. This declaration would prove to be prophetic and true 19 years later in 1937 and 59 years later in 1970.

Realizing that continued denial of democracy in the colony had the potential to lead to revolution, it was agreed to introduce limited adult suffrage. Major Wood and the Wood Commission had recommended that a ”measure of representation, subject to adequate safeguards” would be the way forward [Meighoo 2003]. The measure included increasing the unofficial membership from 11 to 13, seven of whom were to be elected. The working class saw this as a chance to have representation in power and Arthur Cipriani¹⁴, labour leader of the TWA ran for the Port-of-Spain seat and won. It is important to note that the TWA acted as both a trade union and as a political party. Another interesting note is that the three key people who represented labour in the Council were Cipriani (Port-of-Spain), Timothy Roodal (Victoria) and Sarran Teelucksingh (Chaguanas). It is interesting for two points, one, they covered North, Central and South Trinidad and two, they often referred to themselves as ‘socialist’, promoting socialist policies and programmes.

The 1925 Election was significant because it clearly showed that early on in our political history, labour saw gaining political power was a necessary. There was of course the question of a united mass movement to support this agenda. The foundation of our political history was built on the actions of the working class, ordinary men and women who were organizing themselves with a view of taking power, changing the system of governance and transforming their society. The Legislative Council and constitutional structure at the time was one with a “system of nominations of Executive Council member by the governor, irrespective of Parties.” This made Party organization work difficult. There was a limited number of elected members, there were limited powers and there was veto power of the Governor. .” (Meighoo, 2003)

The power given to the Governor under this reformed system was still significant as Hewan Graig explained. He was President of the Council, and Chairman when the Council was in committee. Under the Colonial Regulation 105 he was the single and supreme authority responsible to and representative of His Majesty. He was entitled to the obedience and assistance of all military, air force, and civil officers. He appointed all nominated official and unofficial members of the Trinidad Legislative Council. As the King’s representative he took precedence of all persons in the colony. He was the leader of society. This still stands when we consider the modern day Prime Minister under the Republic Constitution.

¹⁴Cipriani was one of the leading labour leaders and national figures that emerged out of the 1919 strike took over the leadership of the TWA and won a seat on the Legislative Council, a seat he held from 1925 to 1945.

The strategy by the labour movement shifted to one of legislative interventions. Using the influence it had on the Legislative Council to change laws to improve the working conditions of working people. The major question would be, was that strategy and tactic enough to fundamentally change the system of governance?

5. ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE (1926-1946)

Notwithstanding the change from direct crown colony rule to limited elected representatives, the change in the system of government did not go far enough, as Universal Adult Suffrage was still not achieved. The development of industry in this period led to the highly concentrated and potentially powerful labour force - 14,000 strong. Cipriani's strategy and tactic of constitutional methods and reliance on the British Labour Party did not find favour with the growing militant working class. The proverbial last straw was his lack of support for hunger marches in 1935 [Kiely 1996].

Following the passage of the Trade Union Ordinance in 1932, the TWA chose to transform into a political party instead of registering as a trade union under the 1932 Trade Union Ordinance, due to the harsh measures of the Ordinance. During this period the trend of no distinction between a labour leader and a political/national continued. New militant leaders did emerge. These leaders were all part of the TWA/TLP but broke ranks and formed other political organizations. Elma Francois formed the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association (NWCSA), Adrian Cola Rienzi formed the Trinidad Citizens League and the most famous and influential was Tubal Uriah Butler who formed the British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party.

Although they formed their own political organizations these leaders continued to work closely in mobilizing workers. They continued the traditional strategy of mass action for both industrial and political demands. The people who followed Butler and his strategies and tactics were considered "Butlerites".

1937 General Strike and Insurrection

"The Butlerites presented various political and economic demands, such as Home Rule (Independence) in the context of a Federation of the West Indies; Trade Unions; Universal Adult Suffrage (one-man-one-vote); and the Nationalization of the Oil Industry¹⁵. The demand for Universal Adult Suffrage meant an end to 'nominated' mechanism of the Crown Colony System.

¹⁵Belgrave I. (2011) "Dare to Struggle - A History of the Communication Workers' Union." Lexican Trinidad Ltd.

The Strike started on 19 June 1937 and lasted for some eighteen days, until July 6th. “The working people stood on the political stage of history for the first time as a class”. During the hostilities Corporal Charlie King was burnt to death when he attempted to arrest Uriah Butler. The general upheaval was eventually put down by brute force. It took almost 3,000 men (police, volunteers, including assistance from the warships AJAX and EXETER which arrived in Trinidad within six or seven days of the strike) [Belgrave, 2011].

Susan Craig in “Smiles and Blood”¹⁶ provides us with a very good picture of the impact and significance of the 1937 labour revolt.

“The period of the 1930s was a formative one in shaping the modern Caribbean. We have seen the combination of reforms which were sought by the authorities in 1937 as palliatives to labour, in the hope that the system would remain intact. The Moyne Commission was to expand on this by advocating universal adult franchise and political decolonization. Altogether, these reforms were important because, for the first time, labour had thrust itself into the political arena. The labour rebellions led, after the World War II, to mass political parties; and they opened the way for the West Indian nationalism and political independence. The vision of both the activists of the labour movement and the native intelligentsia in the 1930s was the building of a Caribbean nation organized into a Federal State”.

Following events of 1937, the colonial authority established a Royal Commission chaired by Walter Guinness, 1st Baron Moyne. It became known as the ‘Moyne Report’. The Commission arrived in Jamaica on 1 November 1938, for a tour of the British West Indies. The full findings were not released until 1945, after World War II. The Royal Commission’s primary task was to simply be an objective group that could verify the need for financial aid to the Caribbean colonies and, in turn, gain popular support for the actions funded by the British government.

The Moyne Commission urged health and education initiatives along with increased sugar subsidies to stave off a complete and total economic meltdown. The Colonial Office's response to the Caribbean crisis was to shift the revolutionary antagonism into peaceful reform by funnelling large sums of cash into the region. In an important ideological change, the metropolis, which previously asserted that welfare services were the sole responsibility of the colony, offered large sums of funding. With the recommendations of the Moyne Commission, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed in 1940 to organize and allocate funds to the British West Indies for the purpose of long-term reconstruction.

¹⁶Craig S. (1988) “Smiles and Blood – The Ruling Class Response to the Workers Rebellion in Trinidad and Tobago”, New Beacon Books

Interestingly no recommendations were made to address the stagnant economic system except to place greater emphasis on local food production and to build upon industries such as tourism, fishing and “craft earthenware”. It is clear that the Colonial Authority certainly wanted the status quo to remain, but they were forced to make some concessions. Activists, labour leaders and West Indians were sceptical and scornful of the Moyne Report. They asserted that it did not address the institutional roots of inequality in the West Indian colonies, the lack of freedom, responsible government or social reform.

After, the actions taken by ordinary men and women in the 1937 insurrection the Colonial Office made trade unions legal and this gave rise to several trade unions, including the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU), All Trinidad Sugar Estates & Factory Workers’ Trade Union (ATSWFTU), Federated Workers’ Trade Union (FWTU), Seaman & Waterfront Workers Trade Union (SWWTU), the Public Works and Public Service Workers Trade Union (PWPSWTU), and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU).

In addition to the formation of trade unions, the significant concession was the need for universal adult suffrage. This was one of the main demands of the Butlerites before and during the unrests. Winning the right to vote for most working people was a major victory for the mass movement and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it came as a result of extreme sacrifice and bloodshed.

The 1945 Constitution was introduced and provided for a Legislative Council (LC), Executive Council (EC) and the Governor who played the role of presiding officer and the establishment of the Public Service Commission. There were 9 LC members and 9 EC members. There was an increase in the electoral members’ participation in policy process. In addition to the 1945 Constitution, the Colonial Authorities also introduced the County Council System.

Trade Unions and Political Parties in the 1946 and 1950 General Elections

Kiely highlighted that there was intense struggle for Labour’s vote as the country got prepared to hold its first general election under Universal Adult Suffrage. In 1941, the Trade Union Council formed its own Party, the Socialist Party (SP) of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1942 there was the formation of the West Indian National Party (WINP) led by David Pitt, Patrick Solomon and Roy Joseph, which was supported by the FWTU. The WINP dominated in the north whilst the SP dominated the south. At the regional level trade unions throughout the Caribbean formed the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC).

The 1946 election was contested by mainly labour based political parties [Kiely, 1996]:-

1. The United Front - Led by Jack Kelshall with the support from WINP, Indian National Council and the NWA
2. The Trade Union Council and Socialist Party led by John Rojas (President General of the OWTU) with support from OWTU, Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union and FWTU.
3. The Trinidad Labour Party led by Gerald Wight
4. The BEW&CHR Party led by Tubal Uriah Butler, who was just released from prison

In addition to participating in the election, Butler continued the strategy of mass action, organizing major strikes in 1946, the election year. However there was a split on not just tactic and strategy but also in terms of the fundamental question of the system of governance. The distinction between political trade unionism and industrial trade unionism became even sharper. On the question of the system of governance a constitutional reform committee was established to look at this question in 1947. In addition there was the intervention of the British TUC, particularly by Fred Dalley also in 1947. The intervention by Dalley, the national debate about constitutional reform and the role of trade unions on this question, should not be seen as a coincidence.

1949 was the beginning of the cold war and the split in the International Workers movement and it had a major impact on Trinidad and Tobago and trade unions. The 1950 General Election was no different as the election was dominated by trade unions and parties claiming a labour base:-

1. Political Progress Group (PPG) was a conservative party led by Albert Gomes
2. The Trinidad Labour Party (TLP) led by Raymond Hamel Smith
3. The Caribbean Socialist Party (CSP) led by Patrick Solomon
4. Trade Union Council
5. The Butlerites

The introduction of the 1950 Constitution was regarded as an advancement which sought to deepen the democracy in Trinidad and Tobago. It would enable a greater participation of the colonial members in the decision making process. However, this did not fundamentally change the system of governance as the economic relations of power did not change. It did expand the number of electoral members; appointed a Speaker; reduced the number of nominations of unofficial members to 5; elected members had a majority and therefore had more control than in

most other legislative councils in the Caribbean region. The 1952 County Council Ordinance expanded the powers of the Council, including greater responsibilities.

Butler had extreme success in the 1950 elections. The colonial authorities were not comfortable with Butler, bearing in mind the Butlerite political demands. The Butlerites were therefore excluded from the Executive Council. It was clear that the Butlerites would not support the 'smooth' transition to an advanced capitalist country. The colonial authorities then turned to a group of the professional middle class. The authorities were making moves to keep Butler out of the Executive Council.

In 1952, the left leaning side of the movement formed the West Indian Independence Party (WIIP). It comprised radicals such as Lennox Pierre and John La Rose amongst others. This party offered an interesting alternative to the existing parties. Trade union rivalry emerged in the late 1940s and early 50s, running along the line of political positions and the strategies and tactics necessary to advance the working class interest. The Butlerite trade unionism persisted. The colonial authorities decided to use strategies to bring the Trinidad and Tobago trade unions to the right of the international workers' movement.

In addition to the intervention of the TUC to deal with the militancy of the labour movement, another significant development during this period took place when Bhadase Maraj, President of the All Trinidad Sugar Union, formed the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 1953 and he brought together all seven Indian MLCs, Maraj, Ajodasingh, four Butler MLCs, and Simbhoonath Capildeo from the CSP [Meighoo 2003]. Bhadase and the PDP did not have a specific political philosophical outlook but rather had an ethnic outlook. In the meantime another middle class organization, the Teachers Education and Cultural Association (TECA) was beginning to organize itself politically. In 1955 they brought on board Eric Williams and formed the Political Education Group (PEG), which later became the Political Education Movement (PEM) and then organized a series of public lectures throughout the country, which were delivered by Williams.

On January 24, 1956, the People's National Movement was publicly launched at a massive rally in Woodford Square under the leadership of Eric Williams. Much of the rhetoric of Williams appealed to the mass movement particularly those of African descent. He would of course have had his political education through his association with CLR James and his talks with George Padmore, Aime Ceasar and Norman Manley during a visit to London, Jamaica and Paris. He therefore knew exactly what to say to sway the working class from its own left leaning leadership to the newly formed, well organized and disciplined party structure of the PNM. This

was the perfect opportunity for the Colonial Office to begin organizing to transfer administrative power from themselves to a class they felt most comfortable with.

The WIIP was the only party that had retained some semblance of Progressive politics. But the PNM had already captured the imagination of the African working class and the DLP had captured the imagination of the East Indian working class. The 1956 elections which still had remnants of the labour based parties, but represented a turning point in the political landscape in Trinidad and Tobago.

In effect therefore, three significant things occurred during the period of the 1950s, i) the formation of the PDP, ii) the Intervention of TUC advisers and iii) the formation of the PNM. These three occurrences paved the way for an end to labour as a political force and ushered the professional middle class and race into the politics of Trinidad. With labour out of the political picture, the East Indian Working Class gravitated to the PDP and the African working class gravitated to the PNM and would stay that way for another 20 years until the arrival of the United Labour Front in 1976.

Globally, the international community had passed the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) in 1947, and the IMF and World Bank were created. On the other hand, India had won its independence and Mao Tse Tung was successful with the Chinese revolution. By 1950 and throughout the 50s the clash between communism and capitalism was intensifying and was being played out in the Korean War. The decolonization of Africa and Asia began during this period, but not as 'smoothly' as the advanced capitalist countries were hoping. The Algerian war for independence began in 1954; Nasser overthrew the Egyptian monarch and nationalized the Suez Canal, which led to the Suez Crisis. The Mau Mau launched extensive attacks on the British Army in Kenya

Communism was proving to be a major stumbling block for the advancement of capitalism. It became even more necessary for global capital to ensure that the English speaking Caribbean did not go the way of Cuba. The Colonial powers, with their US successor were clear that progressive politics was taking root in the West Indies, the working class was not just willing to limit their organizational power to the shop floor, and they knew that they had to organize politically. The colonial powers and their successor therefore had to ensure that the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism was facilitated and this could not be assured with a politically organized mass movement under the leadership of labour with a working class agenda.

6. TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE - TRADE UNION COOPTION (1956-1962)

The question of Independence is one that requires a deep analysis as to how it was achieved and why. For sure the Butlerite movement had as one of its demands Self-Rule. In fact CLR James argued for Independence in his classic pamphlet “A case for West Indian Self-Government” (1933). The independence of any colony would mean a change in the system of governance. One can argue, that it depends on how we understand the system of governance beyond the legal and constitutional construct. In other words, did the construct of Independence negotiated at London House, London, really what the trade union movement was struggling for? In order for us to explore this question then we have to analyze the rise of the People’s National Movement (PNM), the party that brought the country to Independence and the tactics and strategies used by the trade unions in relation to the PNM and the road to Independence.

As stated earlier, the People’s National Movement was formed in 1956 and attracted as its base the mainly Afro-Trinidad working class. Indeed there were elements of the middle class East Indians (mainly Presbyterians and Muslims) who supported the PNM. But in general the majority of working class East Indians supported another new political party, the PDP, led by Bhadase Maharaj. Whilst the Crown Colony system no longer existed, as there was now universal adult suffrage which would enable the population to elect the members of the Legislative Council, the role of the Council did not change from what it was since its inception. The Plantocracy - Comprador Class - had been replaced by a growing number of petty bourgeois capitalists. The mainly white nominated members have been replaced by members who were now elected and came from the decedents of formers slaves, indentured labourers and other mixed race people.

The trade unions and their leadership had members in the Legislative Council, so what type of post-Independence system of governance, would they have been advocating for? In the first instance they certainly wanted a system of governance that would have guaranteed full self-determination, which would have included the nationalisation of key industries such as oil, gas and sugar.

The 1956 Elections would define the relationship between the trade unions and the PNM. In the lead up to the 1956 elections, the trade union strategy was to obtain concessions from the PNM and to secure candidates for the elections. However, the PNM rejected both. Eric Williams admitted in his book “Inward Hunger”¹⁷ that he did not want a replica of the Labour Party in the UK, where the trade unions are allowed to vote in bloc.

¹⁷William E. (2006) “Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister”, M. Wiener Publishers

One major issue that indeed provided the clear picture of where the PNM stood with regards to multi-nationals and the global capitalism had to do with the Texaco takeover of Trinidad Leasehold Limited in 1956. John Rojas, President General of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (OWTU) opposed the take over and maintained that the state should maintain a majority shareholding. Williams supported the Texaco deal [Kiely, 1996]. The PNM rejected trade union connections as well as the socialist models. Williams' strategy was to promote interest of small elite minority and to create a dynamic, local capitalist class. The strategy was also consistent with connecting Trinidad and Tobago with the strategic interest of western capitalism [Kiely, 1996].

The 1956 Elections did not give any party a majority. The PNM won 11 of the 21 member Legislative Council, which included 5 nominated members and 2 officials. The PPG which was a precursor to the middle class ONR and later the west-based middle class COP. The PDP won 5 seats; the TLP 2 seats; The Butler Party 2 seats; and Independents 2 seats. The governor felt that the US and its interests would be secured with the PNM and so they formed the government. The PNM had the choice to join with the Butler Party, and even the Trinidad Labour Party to form the government. Instead the Governor who wanted to ensure that the imperial interest was secured approached Williams and negotiated a deal which would see the PNM becoming the first party government in Trinidad and Tobago.

The PNM however continued to attract mainly the African population in Trinidad and Tobago. In 1957 nine opposition Council members formed the Democratic Labour Party (DLP). The DLP was then joined by the PDP, TLP and POPPG. The DLP attracted mainly the Indo-population. This formation of parties into racial blocks is the legacy of the 1956 elections, but racial politics would not become entrenched until 1961 elections. This was partly due to the loss of the PNM at the 1958 Federal Elections.

After the Second World War, global capital needed a new global framework to operate and so a period of decolonization began. This was stimulated by the struggle by colonial people for freedom and self-determination. It was recognised that western imperial colonialism, built on capitalism was not necessarily the only model of development. There are fundamental reasons why decolonization took place, but this paper will not at this time seek to analyze these, but will state that the struggle against colonialism by ordinary men and women must never be understated or underestimated. Whilst we acknowledge that the governing colonial powers recognise the need to re-organize global capital to free up the periphery making them part of new global

economic system, we must also recognize the role of the mass movement and the anti-colonial movement.

Anti-colonialist movements had begun to gain momentum after the close of World War I. However, it was not until the end of World War II that they fully mobilised. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 Atlantic Charter declared that the signatories would "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live". Though Churchill subsequently claimed this applied only to those countries under Nazi occupation, rather than the British Empire, the words were not so easily retracted: for example, the legislative assembly of Britain's most important colony, India, passed a resolution stating that the Charter should apply to it too.

In 1945, the United Nations (UN) was founded when 50 nations signed the UN Charter, which included a statement of its basis in the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. In 1952, demographer Alfred Sauvy coined the term "Third World" in reference to the French Third Estate. The expression distinguished nations that aligned themselves with neither the West nor with the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War. In the following decades, decolonization would strengthen this group which began to be represented at the United Nations. The Third World's first international move was the 1955 Bandung Conference, led by Jawaharlal Nehru for India, Gamal Abdel Nasser for Egypt and Josip Broz Tito for Yugoslavia. The Conference, which gathered 29 countries representing over half the world's population, led to the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961.

Although the U.S. had first opposed itself to colonial empires, the Cold War concerns about Soviet influence in the Third World caused it to downplay its advocacy of popular sovereignty and decolonization. France thus had a free hand in the First Indochina War (1946–54) and in the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62). Decolonization itself was a seemingly unstoppable process. In 1960, after a number of countries gained independence, the UN had reached 99 members states.

The UK political directorate understood that decolonization was an inevitability, but the question was who would best be positioned to take over the colony of Trinidad and Tobago once independence was granted. In the first instance they supported the opposition.

The tactics and strategy of alliances have been used for a long time and would be adopted by the trade union movement in the more contemporary times. The 1958 Federal Elections showed the success of this strategy as the coalition won 6 of 10 seats. The PNM responded by emphasizing

nationalism and rallying a certain African consciousness. The PNM also adopted a strategy to co-opt the trade unions. Williams and the PNM supported the oil workers strike in 1960. He went so far as to state “If there is one group in the community which is going to defend democracy and self-government, that group is the workers”. In this regard he was right, the trade union movement from the early days even before they were legal to the time when they became established to the moments leading up to Independence. The trade union movement rallied behind the nationalist agenda, but the trade union movement was also anti-imperialist. Williams and the PNM did not go that far and once new leadership emerged it would have been only a matter of time before the two collided in open confrontation.

Kiely outlined the dynamics between the PNM and the trade union movement. “The Trinidad and Tobago Trade Union Congress (TTUC) which was created in 1957 from the re-unification of two rival federations, noted that the DLP supported restrictive labour legislation, while the PNM claimed to oppose any policy of this kind.” The TTUC also rejected too close an allegiance to the PNM. Kiely noted the statement of Cohen “For the Unions to stand consistently shoulder to shoulder with parties deriving their power base from traditional rulers or from members of the political class was tantamount to giving up any claim to represent the working class”. Therefore the strategy and tactic would require a careful dance of how to build alliances and what conditionalities can be negotiated. Kiely also noted that “even without this direct link, the TTUC still played a directly political role in the 1961 elections campaign”.

The elections did something else, one that will define the politics of Trinidad and Tobago. It entrenched the politics of race as racial tensions fueled by the public statements from both PNM and DLP during the elections campaign. This politics of race would significantly hamper the political organization of the working class. Even though the trade unions have been able to cut across the racial lines within their ranks, translating this unity into political organization became a challenge with emergence of the PNM and DLP.

Trade union militancy response came with the rise of the rebel movement in the OWTU, the return of Butlerite trade unionism under the leadership of George Weeks and the 1963 BP Strike. The OWTU under Rebel leadership was quite antagonistic towards the PNM. The Trade Union Congress under the Presidency of George Weeks boycotted the tripartite talks in 1964. The militancy of the trade union movement continued. The government responded with the Mbanefo Commission of Enquiry and the passing of the 1965 Industrial Stabilization Act (ISA) which was introduced to depoliticise trade unions. This led of course to a new round of antagonism. However, trade unions became split over the question of the 1965 ISA.

Following the introduction of the ISA, the Butlerite trade unions decided to join forces with radical forces to form the Workers and Farmer Party. This Party leadership included Caribbean radical thinker CLR James, OWTU President General, George Weeks, Lennox Pierre, Stephen Maraj (who left the DLP over the ISA issue) and Basdeo Panday. The party's attempt to appeal to class did not factor in the reality of how entrenched the politics of race have become. They therefore lost the 1966 General Elections significantly.

8. TRADE UNIONS AND THE BLACK POWER REVOLUTION

After the 1966 Elections Butlerite trade unionism became the key tactic and strategy used led by Weeks and Joe Young (the militant president of the Transport and Industrial Workers Union). The Economic and Social Background to the 1970 Black Power Revolution. The radical intellegentia was becoming more and more conscious. There was the establishment of the Moko Newspapers in 1968, Establishment of Tapia House, United National Independence Party By James Millette. Protest began around the dismissal of Walter Rodney by the UWI, Jamaica. 1968 March of Resistance was organized. In June of that year a major Bus Strike was organized. The February 1969 Formation of National Joint Action Ccommittee (NJAC). May 1969 the Bus Strike was organized.

During the late 60s was indeed a marked increase of strikes. The trade union leadership of OWTU and TIWU had close ties with the leadership of NJAC. OWTU expressed open support for the Black Power movement. The T&T Labour Congress also expressed support for Black Power. It was an intense period of resistance and minatory with work stoppages everywhere. Mutiny in the Army and the passing of the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) and circumstances around the IRA.

The defeat of the Workers and Farmers Party did not however send progressive labour into exile. The ISA had banned strike action and sought to tame the labour beast through a series of regulatory mechanisms. It was successful in the sense that only the OWTU stood as the last bastion of militant trade unionism. However Joe Young was elected President of the Transport and Industrial Workers Union (TIWU) and he along with George Weekes led several strikes, demonstrations and marches throughout the 1967/68 period. This kept the fire alive, a fire that would ignite the imagination of workers again.

As noted above, the late '60s was a period of counter-culture and social revolution taking place all over the world. In particular 1968, where hundreds of thousands of students and the new left

movement were engaging in demonstrations in Mexico and throughout Europe. Hundreds of thousands of students were also protesting the Vietnam War. It was also a period of assassinations and CIA backed coups and counter-revolutionary activities. Malcolm X, Martin Luther, Patrice Lumumba and Che were among the key radical figures assassinated during the period. The Civil Rights movement was at its peak and word had reached the Caribbean of the work of Stokely Carmichael, which resonated in Trinidad in particular as he was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968 added more fuel to the fire of consciousness.

In 1968 a mass socialist and student movement was spreading throughout most European countries. This movement further manifested itself in a massive student revolt in Paris in May 1968. The revolt included a general strike of ten million workers called by the trade unions. Word of the student revolt was spreading throughout the world and even in the Caribbean which was already becoming ignited by the revolutionary writings of renowned socialists like Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney which took root amongst the young people. In October 1968 when the government of Jamaica banned Walter Rodney, who was at the time a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, student riots broke out in Jamaica. Solidarity student protests were also organized in Trinidad.

In February of 1969 a group of Trinidadian students (which included Teddy Belgrave¹⁸) at the George Williams University in Canada was arrested for protesting against discrimination at the University. When Canadian Governor General visited Trinidad a major protest was organized by students in Trinidad, led by Dave Darbeau¹⁹ and Geddes Granger²⁰ who formed the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC). Attending that first meeting of NJAC included Lionel Beckles, OWTU Assistant General Secretary and John Commission. Many public meetings were organized and the speakers represented the militant and progressive trade unions as well as other community organizers and academics.

In May 1969 the TIWU led by Joe Young and Krishna Gowandan²¹ engaged in a fifty-seven day strike action demanding the nationalization of the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC). Many public demonstrations were organized and had the full support of the OWTU and

¹⁸ Teddy Belgrave later became the Chief Education and Research Officer of the OWTU

¹⁹ Dave Darbeau changed his name to Kafra Kambon

²⁰ Geddes Granger changed his name to Makindal Daaga

²¹ Krishna Gowandan had joined the leadership of TIWU

George Weekes. Also supporting the bus strikers were NJAC and several other cultural and political groups who were inspired by radical ideas [Meighoo 2003]. The bus strike ended with the police beating and arresting protesters as they formed a human barricade to prevent the busses from leaving the Terminus including the leadership of George Weekes, Joe Young and Geddes Granger.

Lenin has stated that nothing raises class consciousness as much as strike action. According to Lenin “a strike teaches workers to understand what the strength of the employers and what the strength of the workers consist in; it teaches them not to think of their own employer alone and not of their own immediate workmates alone but of all the employers, the whole class of capitalists and the whole class of workers.” He goes on to state that “...it becomes quite clear to the workers that the capitalist class as a whole is the enemy of the whole working class and that the workers can depend only on themselves and their united action.” The importance of strike action in building consciousness in particular class consciousness is clear. We cannot take for granted how the participation of the various organizations, the progressive trade unions and workers in general in the 1969 bus strike would have raised their consciousness about what is just and the extent to which the government was willing to go to defend and maintain the status quo. He further stated that “Strikes as we have seen show the workers that the government is their enemy and that a struggle against the government must be carried on. Actually, it is strikes that have gradually taught the working class of all countries to struggle against the government for workers’ rights and for the rights of the people as a whole”. The events surrounding the bus strike was witnessed by the general population and would have therefore laid the groundwork for the fire to come.

The Bus Strike whilst it eventually fizzled out, provided the watering and nurturing of the seed of consciousness. Militant progressive labour created the conditions and consciousness which would have allowed the message of the Black Power leaders to take root. TIWU and OWTU both had leadership that subscribed to the Butlerite tradition of militancy and radical politics a combination of the economic and political struggle. However, what was missing was a political vehicle. A vanguard working class party was not in existence.

The involvement of George Weekes and the OWTU in the 1970 Revolt would come as no surprise, when one considers the revolutionary and militant stance of the Butlerites. It would have been consistent with the traditional political role of the labour movement. Several terms have been assigned to 1970, from Black Power Revolution to February Revolution to 1970 Revolution. This paper is not intended in any way to clarify which term best describes 1970, such clarifications do not alter the significance, impact or qualitative changes that emerged.

Rather this paper is intended to clarify the role labour played in 1970 and more pertinently, to explain it as being part of a tradition of labour intervention into the political landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, interventions which have resulted in the shaping and re-shaping our society.

According to Abdulah “In the lead up to and just after Independence, foreign capital was therefore able to freely penetrate and exploit the region. Multinational aluminum, oil, hotel, banking and insurance and manufacturing companies entered the region with great ease, making significant profits as a result of the attractive investment “incentives” offered by governments. As one Trinidadian calypsonian described it in song “Trinidad is a paradise....but for (capitalist)”. And so in paradise the masses revolted once again”²². This analysis by Abdulah gives us a snapshot context which gave rise to the Revolution.

On the 26 February 1970, a demonstration organized by NJAC against the trial of the West Indian Students in Canada resulted in an intense confrontation with police as demonstrators occupied the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception and the Royal Bank of Canada. Having been prepared through the series of mass actions during 1969, this confrontation sparked the mass movement into action. In the early morning of 27 February the leaders of the protest were arrested. On Wednesday 4th March, a massive demonstration of about 10,000 people was organized in support of the arrested leaders. By mid-March the, movement had grown to encompass a broader outlook with its call for unity between East Indians and African. According to Kafra Kambon, one of the NJAC leaders during 1970 “Weekes was an active and leading participant in various stages of growth of the movement which consciously set out to transcend its mainly northern, urban, African base”²³. On April 6, a young student Basil Davis was shot and killed by police. From the very onset, progressive labour under the leadership of George Weekes, understood what their role must be as it relates to the mass movement in creating social and political change.

²² Abdulah D. (2008) “Social Movements in the Caribbean: Solidarity, Building of Alliances and Convergence, Struggles and the New Threats of Criminalization Of Protests

²³ Kambon K. (1988), “For Bread, Justice and Freedom - a political biography of George Weekes” New Beacon Books

In a statement issued by OWTU and published in the April 18th issue of the *Vanguard* stated:

“Let it not be said of the organized labour and trade union movement and particularly of us, the OWTU that in the finest moment of our country’s history we soiled our blue shirts and other uniforms by failing (because of reasonable but ever uncertain comfort of a relatively bigger pay packet than that of other workers) to rally to the revolution which has begun by our black brothers and sisters, the majority of whom have no pay-packet at all. **Rather let it be said of us, that by providing the reinforcements they now in turn need and standing, by, if called upon by them or when and if necessary, to lead the revolution on a new front onto a new stage, we too, like them, changed the course of the inglorious listing even now being further charted for our country by the enemies of the revolution**”²⁴

On the 21st April, just three days after this statement was published a State of Emergency was called and about 36 armed police men entered OWTU’s headquarters at Paramount Building and arrested President General George Weekes. They detained and questioned several OWTU employees and seized many of the union books. Both the OWTU and NJAC came under brutal attacks, with attempts to burn down the OWTU Paramount Building and fire bombs thrown into the office of the *Vanguard* [Kambon 1988]. On 24 April a car sprayed bullets at the Paramount Building and Palms Club²⁵ was firebombed. George Weekes and other leaders of the 1970 revolt spent seven months in prison.

9. TRADE UNIONS’ UNITED LABOUR FRONT AND THE FIRST REPUBLIC

During the 1973-1974 period, Trinidad and Tobago experienced an ‘oil boom’ as the price of oil reached record levels. However, this increase in revenue did not in a real way reach ordinary working people, as majority of the oil companies were still multinationals. After the Bus Strike of 1969 and the Black Power Revolution, some of the trade unions became more radicalised. Between 1971 to 1976 there were 397 work stoppages. The PNM in response to this radicalised trade union movement passed the IRA whilst the President General of the powerful and militant OWTU George Weeks was imprisoned. The Islandwide Cane Farmers Trade Union was formed by Raffique Shah, one of the leaders of the 1970 army mutiny²⁶. Leadership of the All Trinidad

²⁴ *Vanguard*, 18 April 1970 “OWTU Statement on the February Revolution”

²⁵ One of the Union’s property in San Fernando

²⁶ During the 1970 Black Power Revolution Raffique Shah and other officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment led a mutiny in support of the mass movement

Sugar Estate and Factory Workers Trade Union passed to Basdeo Panday, who was legal advisor to the OWTU and former WFP candidate. George Weeks and the new Leader of the TIWU, Joe Young, continued to be active and militant.

On March 18, 1975. The trade unions led a march which the authorities responded to with riot police which became known as Bloody Tuesday. Following Bloody Tuesday, there was a lot of discussion about forming a Labour Party. Trade union mass action was considered not a sufficient strategy to bring about the necessary changes for the time. On 3 and 4 January, 1976 a Conference of Shop Stewards and Branch Officers (COSSABO) was held and it was agreed that the Founding Congress of the United Labour Front will be held on 21 March 1976. The Formation of ULF also had the involvement of left parties.

The ULF was formed as an alliance of 4 trade unions (OWTU, ALL Trinidad, TICU and ICFU). It became clear that changing the system of governance would require a major political intervention. Many tendencies existed within the ULF. There was the New Beginning Movement, The National Movement for the True Independence of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Liberation Movements, Students for Change, the Union of Democratic Students, the United Revolutionary Organization and the National Union of Freedom Fighters (NUFF)²⁷. Notwithstanding this broad based support inclusion, the party did not have a broad based appeal beyond the race, religion and geography. The PNM won 24 seats whilst the ULF won only 10 seats. Meanwhile on the political front, a Joint Select Committee was established to draft a new Constitution on June 16, 1975.

The First Republic began on 24 September, 1976. In becoming a republic, Trinidad and Tobago had to combine its republican status with its British Colonial system. The role of the presidency under the Republic Constitution was not different to the role of the Governor-General of any Commonwealth country. To this end, certain aspects of the United States Constitution appeared attractive enough for a process of hybridization to take place. In trying to balance the shift to republicanism and yet maintain the impartiality associated with the Crown, the use of the Presiding Officers of Parliament as eligible persons in a chain of command for the presidency was a political response given to the framers of the constitution.

After the 1976 Elections, the ULF began showing signs of problems, which were both ideological but also the reality of the politics of race. There was a clear difference in terms of strategy. The question of armed struggle versus electoral struggle, to bring about fundamental

²⁷ NUFF was a revolutionary organization operating in the 1970s and used the tactic of armed struggle against the Eric Williams government.

change. Not necessarily revolutionary change, but definitely fundamental. Two factions on the basis of different views of what strategy to use, emerged. These factions eventually led to a split in the ULF and other than the All Trinidad Sugar Union, whose President was the leader of the ULF, most progressive trade unions began withdrawing support from the ULF.

10. CLS AND MOTION (1989)

In 1981 the Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS) was formed. The early 80s was still a time of revolutionary fervor in the Caribbean. The Grenadian Revolution led by Maurice Bishop had just taken place in 1979. With the split of the ULF, the more radical intellectuals and militant trade unionist came together to establish the Committee for Labour Solidarity. [Kiely, 1996] Whilst the founders of CLS would have considered itself to be preparing to form a political party, it did not participate in the 1981 General Elections. In fact the established and governing PNM won that elections with massive 26 seats. The emergence of the middle class Organization for National Reconstruction (ONR) a precursor to the contemporary Congress of the People (COP), did not win any seats at all. The ULF which still had some semblance of moderate trade union involvement won 8 seat.

However, many consider the PNM victory of 1981 as more a sympathy vote as its leaders and the so called “Father of the Nation” Eric Williams had died earlier that year. However, that nostalgia of Eric Williams would soon wear off. Making matters worse, in 1982-1983, the economic downturn began and the country entered a period of recession. It could have been a moment for the progressive trade union movement with the right political organization could have made a decisive political intervention. However, a major blow came not only for radical political trade union movement and the radical movement in the Caribbean with the betrayal of the Grenadian Revolution and brutal murder of Maurice Bishop and members of his government in 1983.

The Grenadian Revolution had a significant impact on the progressive trade union movement, as Maurice Bishop was both a socialist and a strong supporter of workers’ rights. In a speech delivered at the Third Trade Union Conference for the Unity and Solidarity of Caribbean Workers he stated “Workers in a revolutionary country like ours, who are under a progressive and democratic leadership in their trade unions, do not see trade unionism solely in a narrow, economic sense. They do not see their responsibilities stopping only at their fundamental tasks of improving their members’ wages and working conditions. They see themselves deeply involved in all aspects of the social and political life of their country, their region and their world. Our unionized workers have consistently shown solidarity with all other struggling

workers of the world. They see this as an internationalist duty to all trade unionist organizing for their rights and fighting for social and political justice... “

The Local Government elections defeat of the PNM in 1983 since 1959 meant that support for the PNM was decreasing. The loss of popularity of the PNM in how they were dealing with the economic crisis and the retreat of radical politics left a vacuum which the middle class would attempt to take advantage.

The idea of the Party of Parties pushed by Lloyd Best was now taking root and a strategy of the moderate trade union, business class, intellectual class and professional middle class entered into grand alliance which give rise to the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR). This strategy worked in terms of attaining political power, as the NAR won the 1986 General Elections with the largest majority by one part up to today, with 33 out of 36 seats. It also broke the politics of race as both African and Indians voted overwhelmingly for the NAR. Interestingly, joining the NAR as a Senator was the militant trade unionist George Weekes. With such a large majority such, it give the NAR the constitutional majority to significantly bring about a change in the system of governance.

There was not broad based support by the militant trade unions for the tactic of a grand alliance. This would prove to be a correct analysis as the NAR within a few months of coming into power, actually adopted a neo-liberal agenda and began implementing severe austerity measures. By 1988 the moderate trade unionist led by Basdeo Panday formed Club 88 and subsequently thrown out. This move led the country back to the politics of race, and it became clear that there was a lost opportunity to change the system of governance. The politic elites were prepared to accept and work within the existing post-colonial state.

The trade union response was the March 6, 1989 General Strike “Day of Resistance” organized by the Council of Progressive Trade Unions (CPTU)²⁸ and TTLC. Club 88 on March 16 adopted the party name United National Congress (UNC). On April 22, 1989 there was a March Against Hunger. The loose unity of the two federations formed the basis for the Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM). Between March 6, 1989-July 13, 1990 the trade unions engaged in 17 protests, demonstrations, work stoppages etc. Mass action was the strategy and tactic used by the militant trade union movement, however the strategy and tactic did not stop there, as it was also felt that it required a political vehicle. The CLS eventually formed itself into the Movement for

²⁸ The CPTU was formed in 1971 by militant trade unions who wanted an alternative trade union federation to the Trinidad and Tobago Labour Congress

Social Transformation (MOTION). MOTION held its founding conference on September 10, 1989, but soon collapsed under the weight of internal conflicts and contradictions.

A new strategy of broadening mass struggle beyond trade unions and involve wider community and other social movement struggles led to the formation of the Summit of the People's Organization (SOPO) on February 8, 1990. However, one of the members of SOPO embarked on another strategy which was not mass action but actually armed struggle and on July 27, 1990 Jamaat Al Muslimeen²⁹ attempted a coup d'état, which failed within a few days.

These developments meant that the progressive trade union movement had to use different tactics and strategies. After the failed Coup against the NAR, meant that the party had lost its appeal and it provided an opportunity for the PNM to return to power in 1991 under a new leader, Patrick Manning. The Manning Administration in 1991-1995 period was indeed a neoliberal administration. The administration continued an intense programme of structural adjustment in 1992-1995. It was clear that Patrick Manning wanted Trinidad and Tobago to become part of the global economic system. Globally, it was a period of aggressive expansion of capital with WTO and the free market movement. The Manning Administration embarked on reform programs and the divestment and privatisation of 26 State Enterprises.

The progressive trade union movement responded with its usual strategy and tactic of mass action. Some trade unions once again tried to use the newly formed United National Congress (UNC). The activities of the trade unions provided an opportunity for the UNC to win 1995 elections. However, the UNC continued the neoliberal agenda with privatisation, retrenchment, encouraging low pay jobs. In August 1995 there was the Petrotrin and Trinmar Strike. On September 15, the Public Servants held a one day strike. There was some trade union support for the UNC. The allegation of corruption grew. On November 21, 1998 there was a major demonstration. Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association held a work to rule between 1996-1997. OWTU UWI strike took place in 1998. The National Trade Union Centre of Trinidad and Tobago split and the Federation of Independent Trade Union and NGOs -FITUN was formed during this period. On September 10, 1998 a national demonstration was organized.

A good example of the internal governance problems and the collapse of the 1st Republic has to be the constitutional crisis and hung parliament between 1999 and 2002. The Constitutional crisis of 2000 involved a stand-off between the President and the Prime Minister just after the 2000 General Elections, which the UNC won. The progressive trade unions continued with their

²⁹The Jamaat al Muslimeen is a Muslim organization within the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago led by Imam Yasin Abu Bakr

mass action organizing major demonstrations on July 6 and August 29, 2001. The crisis led to a collapse of the Panday Administration and the country was back to polls in 2001. The 2001 General Elections led to a hung Parliament and it was back to the polls again in 2002. Between 2000 and 2002 three General Elections were held. This was another example of the collapse of the 1st Republic and the urgent need to change the system of governance.

11. CONTEMPORARY TACTICS AND STRATEGIES OF THE TRADE UNIONS (2008-Present)

In 2008, the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union had a change of leadership. This change signaled a new era in political trade unionism, as the new President General, Ancel Roget, supported by the long-time political and trade union activist David Abdulah, would re-ignite Butlerite Trade unionism, bring some semblance of trade union unity, and engaged in strategies that aimed at bringing about a change in the system of governance. The vision statement developed under Roget made it clear that the task of changing the system of governance in Trinidad and Tobago was still very relevant even in the first part of the twenty-first century. "Continuing the tradition of the mass movement towards achieving a society with the power to determine its destiny on the basis of equity, social justice and a decent standard of living for all," OWTU Vision Statement.

This vision statement makes it clear that the society (Trinidad and Tobago) did not have the power to determine its destiny. The question would be what kind of strategy and tactic would the new leadership undertake to achieve this new society. Two particular strategies would be identified, one was to unite and "Butlerise" the trade union movement and the next would be to through mass action attempt to influence the political directorate to make certain legislative changes to change the system of governance.

In the latter years of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the country was governed by the People's National Movement under Prime Minister Patrick Manning. The first step by the progressive trade unions was the formation of the Workers' Agenda and the establishment of a loose grouping of Trade Union Leaders called Joint Trade Union Leaders who then supported the formation of a political vehicle, Movement for Social Justice (MSJ). The MSJ was first led by former OWTU President General Errol K. McLeod. During the 2009 and early 2010, the trade unions embarked on a strategy of mass actions throughout Trinidad and Tobago. This led to the Prime Minister calling an early elections, one year earlier than was scheduled.

In this context the preferred strategy was the formation of alliances. In this regard a coalition of opposition forces including the official opposition party UNC³⁰ came together to form the People's Partnership. Tactically the trade unions in particular the OWTU was not part of the coalition but rather channel the interest of trade unions and working people were represented by the MSJ. The Joint Trade Union Leaders evolved into the Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM) similar to the JTUM of the 1980s. However, the current JTUM unlike the JTUM of the 80s rather than remaining a loose federation, actually registered and became a formal Trade Union Federation, with most of the country's trade unions participating representing all sectors of the Trinidad and Tobago economy.

However, within a short time it became obvious that the coalition was not about to make good on the necessary changes that were promised. Changes which included constitutional reform, labour reform and transformation of the economy, which would have seen changes to the system of governance. The trade unions broke ranks with the coalition and embarked on a campaign of intense mass action. The Movement for Social Justice then left the coalition. With the elections of 2015 drawing near, the trade unions then undertook another tactic which saw for the first time in political history the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the major opposition party, the PNM and the leader of the Joint Trade Union Movement, Ancel Roget.

12. CONCLUSION - Trade Union Tactic and Strategy towards the Second Republic

The idea of the Second Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was popularized by David Abdulah, leader of the MSJ. It has become clear that the institutions of the first republic have failed. Violent crime remain completely out of control; the Criminal Justice system is broken; the Integrity Commission does not ensure integrity in public life and itself has displayed a lack of integrity on many occasions; other Commissions outlined in the First Republic Constitution (Police Service Commission, Public Service Commission, Teachers Service Commission etc) have not functioned; white collar crime goes unpunished and the Financial Intelligence Unit reports thousands of "suspicious transactions" totaling billions of dollars every year but nobody is ever charged or "makes a jail". The education system does not give an equal opportunity to the children of working people and poor; the health care system continues to be a nightmare for both patients and their families as well as the health care workers themselves; the prison system is a time bomb waiting to explode and whilst some are amassing obscene wealth tens of thousands live in poverty.

³⁰ The other Parties included the COP, Tobago Organization of the People (TOP) from Tobago, MSJ and NJAC

As the celebrated West Indian historian Elsa Goveia wrote in “Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands” – “Ever since the time of emancipation... we have been trying to combine opposite principles in our social system, but sooner or later we shall have to face the fact that we are courting defeat when we attempt to build a new heritage of freedom upon a structure of society which binds us all too closely to the old heritage of slavery” (and we can add in Trinidad and Tobago’s case – indenture).

According to an MSJ Policy Statement, “This reconstructing of our society and the reformation of our institutions will be the foundations of the Second Republic.” “The Second Republic which will be built on a new structure of society, one where all can participate in the process of national development and where, as our Constitution promises, “the economic system will be organized so that the resources will subserve the common good”.

The question therefore is what would the trade unions strategy and tactic be to bring about the Second Republic. The options, when considering the objective conditions in the political landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, will be to either engage in mass action to bring about revolutionary change, further work towards strengthening the party that has openly indicated its support for working people or both. In which case it would be crucial for the consolidation of Butlerite trade unionism under the Joint Trade Union Movement.

A necessary tactic for the trade unions would be to focus the struggle against neoliberalism as pursued by the governing party and the main opposition party. Building workers’ consciousness in this moment when we consider the crisis of global capitalism, will be absolutely necessary. If we consider that the general aim is to achieve a society with the power to determine its own destiny, social justice, equity and a decent standard of living for all working people, then the only strategy for the trade unions would be to change the system of governance. The tactics to achieve this change in the system of governance would be clearly to ignite the mass movement to engage in militant mass action and make a decisive political intervention.

The strategy and tactics that have brought about the most significant changes has been one of mass political action involving the labour movement. Dating back to the resistance on the plantations, the riots of the late 1800s, the 1919 Strike, the 1937 Labour Riots and the 1970 Black Power Revolution. These strategies and tactics would be consistent with what CLR James describe as the rebellious nature of the West Indians. When we consider modern time, the question of Parliamentary revolution arises. In other words it is actually not a question of simply constitutional reform. Constitutional changes must be made around a revolutionary change in the

system of governance, the system of production and therefor the relations of economic and political power.

At the centre of this question of power is the role of trade unions. Lenin described trade unions as the school of socialism. This has to be expanded to include revolution on the curriculum. The educational work of trade unions has to go beyond industrial relations and must include teaching and understanding neo-liberalism, imperialism, international relations, etc. Fundamental change requires a fundamental shift in how we see the world. Understanding the true nature and character of the global economy and where the centres of power are, can help guide our current strategies and tactics. The Joint Trade Union Movement based on its current strategy and tactics have all intentions to make a decisive political intervention to change the system of governance and bring in the Second Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

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