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Political Unionism and Autonomy in Economies of British Colonial Origin:

The Cases of Jamaica and Trinidad

By CASWELL L. JOHNSON *

ABSTRACT. This investigation has shown that in *developing countries* an inconsistency arises between the need for more equitable *distribution of income and wealth* between classes and groups and the goals of an *industrial relations* system in which the trade unions are committed to '*political unionism.*' While the unions helped to achieve *independence* and thus *economic growth*, in Jamaica the country moved into independence with a legacy of hardship and conflict, and of bad labor-management relations. Legitimate union demands were suppressed, producing a situation in which latent *conflict* became manifest. This became a permanent feature; the unions are encouraged to become militant political organizations which in Trinidad were alienated from the formal political structure. The type of unions and industrial relations systems that emerged after independence proved unsuitable and undesirable for achieving sustained rapid rates of economic growth, making reform of the labor relations system and the electoral process mandatory.

I

ECONOMIC PRESSURES AND POLITICAL AUTONOMY

THE MOVEMENT to political autonomy tends to be slow and discontinuous. The rate at which countries of British colonial origin, such as Jamaica and Trinidad, move to political autonomy depends on the extent of their bargaining power with the metropolitan government, the net costs they are capable of imposing on the nationals of that government, the ability of the countries to assume political independence and the extent of the burden of administration to the metropolitan economy. The special (war and postwar) social and economic factors of the 1940s increased the relative bargaining power of both Jamaica and Trinidad and posed serious administrative problems for Great Britain.

* [Caswell L. Johnson, Ph.D. is assistant professor of economics, Carleton University, Ottawa, K1S 5B6, Canada.] This paper concludes my report of my investigation into political unionism as a factor in economic development of less developed countries. For my previous studies, see "Political Unionism and the Collective Objective in Economies of British Colonial Origin," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (October, 1975), pp. 365-80, and "The Emergence of Political Unionism in Economies of British Colonial Origin," *ibid.*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (April, 1980), pp. 157 *f*.

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These forces weakened Britain's administrative grip on the colonies and accelerated the rate at which they moved from partial to full political independence. Poverty, economic stagnation in all but a select group of industries and rising trade union aspirations acted as a catalyst to expedite the process of political liberation. The economic demands of the trade unions varied directly with the political successes of their allied political parties. By 1949, political objectives in the trade union movement in Jamaica and Trinidad had taken precedence over their modest traditional economic demands.

The incompatibility of the traditional labor relations with the new demands of the unions combined with the forging aspirations of the political parties also served to consolidate the merger of trade union and political organizations. The trade union movement was seen as the only vehicle through which the political and economic aspirations of the country could be realized. In 1948, Sir Alexander Bustamante (the leader of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and also of the Labour Party) used his derived trade union power to dramatize the need for political freedom as a necessary condition in the two-stage process of economic development. The new Constitution of 1944 granted only token and partial independence. The first elected (Labour) government under the leadership of Bustamante moved rapidly to develop "every possible employment opportunity in the country and to ameliorate the legacy of mass unemployment." The trade unions pressed for immediate and drastic action to obtain development assistance from any source; however, they expressed a preference for economic assistance from the United States and Canada. Economic and political dependence on Britain and the dollar crisis of the period forced the government to look to Britain for plant and equipment (1). However, such capital was not forthcoming. As late as 1948 nothing practical was achieved, notwithstanding extreme restlessness within the trade union movement and renewed violence from its allies. According to one government spokesman in the Legislative Council of the House: "It is not for want of giving assistance to these people (Britain), of using influence the government of Jamaica has that England says you must buy it (capital equipment) from us. The time it takes to produce the equipment in England is twice the time it takes to import it from Canada and America. England says 'you must find the dollars, we won't allow you the dollars to do it'; that is the dismal position that faces us" (2).

British export and import policy made firm the congruence of interests between trade unions and the political movement. The trade policy of the United Kingdom at the time was to export as much as possible to "hard currency" areas and import as little as possible from those areas. This policy placed the political entrepreneurs in an awkward position, since they relied wholly on Britain for the imports they needed. They could not get the machinery they needed from Britain and they could not exchange their staple products with the United States for capital goods: "England has now taken up this position that she has got to earn as many dollars as she can and, therefore, she is trying to sell whatever she produces to the hard currency areas." . . . She "says that when she sells in the hard currency areas she is earning dollars for us. Well, if she is earning dollars for us, then I say that when we sell our bananas and our sugar to England we should be given a certain amount of credit in dollars, because we can't sell our bananas or sugar anywhere else. We can, of course, earn dollars because . . . Jamaica can get sales in the United States and Canada for all the tomatoes she can produce . . . but we have not gotten the machinery for setting up a canning factory that would deal with the canning of tomatoes. . . . We want factories and we are told that we must get the machinery from United Kingdom sources. But if the United Kingdom says 'we can't sell them to you because you have not got dollars,' then I am afraid we are doomed industrially and it is time for us, with a population that is increasing alarmingly, to make some move" (3). In this way, the social and economic crises of the 1940s accelerated the movement towards complete political independence.

The demands of the combined forces were now accompanied by direct threats of general industrial anarchy and the destruction of British capital. Rational behavior on the part of the metropolitan government shuns the costs of total political and industrial collapse. The threat of the interest groups combined to bring the social and economic system to a halt forcing the metropolitan government to meet the demands of the political leaders. After winning independence, the political entrepreneurs designed new economic programs or plans. These plans are, in effect, political agenda. Each political party promises to achieve rapid (and sustained) rates of economic growth within a 'reasonable' period of time; to contribute to the social and economic gains of the working class, and to raise indigenous middle class workers to top administrative and managerial positions. "There is a strong

urge on the part of the new governments to play the role of private enterprise during the second stage of development, becoming 'ponderous,' inert juggernauts unwittingly smothering enterprises when they would foster them" (4). Both Jamaica and Trinidad heeded the forebodings of the *Economist* and for a while left industrial and commercial projects to private enterprise, while governments assumed the more elegant function of directing strategy in the background. In the Jamaican case the new economic strategy was advanced within the industrial relations framework of political unionism. By 1950 there were two ruling political parties—the Jamaica Labour Party (J.L.P.) and the rival Peoples National Party (P.N.P.). Paralleling these two parties are two ruling labor unions—the Bustamante Industrial Trades Union (B.I.T.U.) and the rival National Workers Union (N.W.U.). The BITU is the total affiliate of the JLP and the NWU the total affiliate of the PNP. The conflict orientation of the two rival parties was identical to that of the two rival trade unions (5).

II

A LEGACY OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

The country moves into political independence with a legacy of economic hardship and social conflict. The labor management antagonism of the pre-independence era was carried over into the post-independence era. The economy inherited the legacy of bad labor management relations. The conflict orientation of the new system of industrial relations cannot be easily reformed at the time of independence to become consistent with the new strategy of economic growth. Labor antagonism to capital and the managerial distrust of labor arise partly out of the lack of opportunities for the growth of business unionism and partly out of refusal by the ruling authorities, prior to independence, to upgrade the status of trade unions to legitimate business-oriented institutions (6). Such refusal stemmed largely from fear among management that such concessions would encourage the unions to make "excessive" demands which would escalate through a process of universal "leap-frogging" among the various unions and territories, but also from a general conviction that native workers should be kept in their place (denied the privilege of free collective bargaining).

The established structure of norms and the absence of constitutional management coupled with the location of major decision-making in Britain created a framework within which legitimate union demands

were converted into "excessive" demands. In the pre-independence economy, nearly all "excessive" demands are legitimate demands. There is a strong tendency for management to dramatize and exaggerate the extent of economic demands in the traditional economy. Basically, these demands are for a larger share of increases in wealth from economic growth. Local spokesmen also clamor for more employment opportunities, less unemployment and for a more (appropriately) educated and better trained population. The absence of an economic plan, foreign control of the economy and the institutional and political restrictions placed on native initiative encourage a shift of emphasis in the demands of trade union leaders from wage increases to the domain of (re) distribution and (native) consumption of (foreign) capital. These become truly 'excessive' demands. Success is sharply denied them, however, by the normative system and its complementary distribution of power. An enlightened willingness to promote genuine trade union organizations and to sponsor genuine political organizations might have stimulated an emphasis on growth and avoided the intense preoccupation with distribution.

Legitimate demands for increased wages and for changes in the normative order are suppressed. Suppression causes latent conflict and encourages further 'excessive demands' from the unions. Latent conflict and 'excessive' demands increase directly with the extent of suppression of legitimate demands. Power is sought to impose these demands upon the ruling authorities. The feeding of truly 'excessive' demands into the collective bargaining system backed by relatively large amounts of political power from affiliated political parties transforms latent conflict into manifest conflict. The resultant conflict situation becomes a permanent feature of the industrial relations environment.

One striking aspect of the 'politics' in the trade union movement of these countries is the high level of antagonism towards the "indifference" and "affluence" of the "foreign" employers and the "foreign" corporations (7). This aspect of political unionism is carried over into the post-independence trade union era. While in the longer period after independence the economy does face the risk of substantial foreign capital emigration, there is very little movement in the immediate period due to the short-run immobility of capital and recognition by the new administration of the need for foreign capital. It is also important that the initial political ideology of the successful political

parties is never alien to the managers of foreign capital. However, during the early phases of the second stage of development there is a sharp demand for the services of the indigenous managerial group. In some cases, foreign managers are replaced by local managers. In other cases, new firms are established headed by indigenous managers. Indigenous managerial inputs increase in both private and public enterprises and an increasing number of indigenous employers must now confront the demands of the trade unions.

As the foreign management source of antagonism is gradually reduced, the weaponry of labor relations conflict is increasingly switched to the indigenous employers and to the State which now owns and operates an increasing number of public companies. The extent of the switch greatly depends on the degree of "deforeignization" after independence, on the extent of government's commitment to "voluntarism" and a free market economy and on the extent to which the "out-of-power" union (or unions) is willing to sabotage the economic policies and programs of the political party in power. In both the Jamaican and Trinidadian cases, local managers also tended to become strongly identified with either of the two major rival political parties and their economic programs. Such identification serves to enrich the paradigm of social and economic conflict.

III

THE SPECIAL CASE OF TRINIDAD

THE DIFFICULTIES of winning independence and the political necessity of using the trade unions in this struggle encourage them to become militant political organizations. The independent territories thereby inherited a militant trade union movement that has either to be integrated into the formal political structure (the Jamaican case), or alienated from the formal political process as a formidable political opposition or threat (the Trinidadian case). Prior to independence, when the collective objective is that of obtaining independence, the trade union movement is a powerful instrument for the mobilization of resources against the "foreigners." After independence, the country becomes saddled with an organization of obsolescent and counter-productive skills in relation to the objective of economic growth.

In the Jamaican case, the combination of political parties and trade unions was retained after the achievement of political independence. In the Trinidadian case, a new dominant party emerged from the out-

side on the dawn of independence and coexisted with the previously existing distribution of indigenous political parties and trade unions. In either case, the country entered into its second stage of development within a framework of a highly conflict-oriented industrial relations system. This framework tends towards fragmentation of the trade union movement and the development of 'organized anarchy' where no one local or union feels obliged (or is required) to account to any central labor organization or independent disciplinary body for its action (8). The framework is also characterized by a parliamentary establishment whose inner operation is seen by the various competing interest groups as the major source of social and economic well-being.

Trade unions and political parties become exclusive organizations offering selective benefits to their supporters and disadvantages or losses to their competitors (opponents). The jostling for special favors and gains encourages the business and commercial classes to divide into sympathetic affiliations with competing political parties. Contract and license (revenue) opportunities are the *quid pro quo* of party support by the business and commercial classes.

The scarcity of these opportunities and the pressure on politicians to make good their promises are readily reflected in the extent of selective rewards to supporters and punishment to opponents. Punishment is measured in terms of the inequality of access to economic opportunities in various markets. A large component of rewards and punishment involve non-pecuniary benefits and disadvantages, respectively. Most are determined by the non-price rationing of economic opportunities. Strong partisan and discriminatory control of economic and social policy result. The economic consequence involves marked distortions in resource allocation (inefficient utilization of manpower) and arbitrary (and inequitable) distribution of incomes (9).

During the preparation for political control and State planning, Trinidad faced both the independence and the growth problem of economies of British colonial origin. The twin objectives of the territory were: (a) progress to full internal self-government and (b) correction of the economic and social deficiencies, which the country inherited, by way of accelerated rates of economic growth.

Political independence in Trinidad was also accompanied by a strong push for economic autonomy and growth. The process of political independence, however, occurred gradually in a non-violent framework of successive political compromises. Unlike in Jamaica, the pre-inde-

pendence political entrepreneurs pursued political independence cautiously. The desirable rate at which independence was to be achieved did not require drastic inputs such as militant collaboration with organized labor and the militant trade union movement failed to produce charismatic and forceful political entrepreneurs. The image of the "best" political entrepreneur excluded the style and technique of their "good" trade union leaders. As a result, the trade union leaders internalized their political aspirations within the trade union movement.

Six factors stand out in the explanation of the exclusion of trade unions from the formal political process:

First, early trade union leaders possessed little or no political skills.

Second, the ease of political transition within an extended time horizon of the Independence Plan during the War years made successful politicians out of educated but mediocre middleclass Trinidadians who cooperated with the Colonial Administrators.

Third, prior to the entry of Dr. Eric Williams there was no clear-cut party system and no major political or economic issue.

Fourth, Dr. Williams introduced a major political party (The Peoples National Movement) and a major political and economic issue (accelerated independence and accelerated rates of economic growth) but he himself was an 'outsider' as viewed from the ranks of organized labor.

Fifth, Dr. Williams rejected the entire class-oriented structure of institutions, including the system of industrial relations. These institutions might have served the British purpose well but they would hamper Trinidadian development. He therefore refused to incorporate the trade unions into his political strategy. In the first instance, their political support at that time was not necessary in the struggle for independence. In the second instance, he saw that the long-run economic interests of the country would be better served if the unions became primarily engaged in advancing the economic interests of their members through working for improvements in wages and other conditions of their employment and were only secondarily concerned with the broader programs of political and social reform.

Sixth, the trend was well established towards the granting of independence. The Colonial Office was not inclined at the time to resist the legitimate political aspirations of a popular leader (10).

A major asset of the Trinidadian development program is its isolation of organized labor from the formal political machinery. A major

liability and policy error, however, was to have ignored them and omitted the formulation of complementary industrial relations reforms from the development program. There was a vital need in these economies to match technological changes with appropriate institutional reforms. Commenting on this need, Eugene Stanley observed that "if capital investments and material technology are pushed energetically in an underdeveloped country while little or no attention is given to deliberate promotion of appropriate social and psychological change—the result is likely to be either a failure of the development process to 'take' and become 'self-generating' or creation of a menace to the free world"(11). The Trinidadian program of development, like the Jamaican, failed to integrate the industrial relations system into the formal processes of industrial organization and economic growth (12). The dramatic oil price increases in recent times by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), to which Trinidad and Tobago belongs, provide a margin of wealth—large enough to pursue its development programs and satisfy the wage demands of organized labor. This windfall allows Trinidad to avoid (or postpone) Stanley's dismal prediction.

IV

CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE MORE TYPICAL and complex form of political unionism in economies of British colonial origin is represented by the Jamaican case. In this case, two rival political parties are affiliated with two rival trade unions which support them in terms of ideology, resources and manpower. Trinidad possesses an atypical kind of political unionism that is less complex in the pattern of group affiliation than the Jamaican case but more effective as an instrument of policy obstruction. Unlike most economies of British colonial origin, political aspirations and programs for broad social reforms in the Trinidadian case are wholly internalized and used from within the movement as a threat effect rather than externalized in the form of direct affiliation with any formal political party.

The type of trade unions and systems of industrial relations that emerge in economies of British colonial origin have been remarkably appropriate for the objective of winning political independence but are quite unsuitable and undesirable with regard to the objective of sustained rapid rates of economic growth. The growth capabilities of

the former British colonies and their long-term comparative economic efficiency must worsen with continued integration of trade unions into the formal political process. The forces surrounding the emergence of political unionism in these economies and the complex nature of affiliations and/or rivalry between political parties and trade unions are such that trade unions cannot easily be abandoned or ignored in the formulation of a national growth strategy. A specific and forceful policy of labor reforms in conjunction with reforms in the electoral process must be formulated and implemented if trade unions are to serve a complementary economic role in the process of development.

The technical conditions for sustained rapid rates of economic growth cannot be met within the time frame set by the planners and political entrepreneurs as long as the institutional contradictions and inconsistencies that are associated with political unionism are allowed to persist. The industrial relations system must be reformed to make it less sensitive to the political process and more responsive to the economic demands of the collective objective (13). There are, however, three other alternatives that are open to the society: 1) continue within the present framework of normative disorder and economic distintegration; 2) abandon the collective objective and allow the society to readjust to a traditional economy, or 3) abandon the principles of 'voluntarism' and industrial democracy if, at the margin, democracy becomes less important than growth. We do not believe that either of these countries will opt for any of these alternatives.

1. Britain could not cope with the surge in the demand for gold after the stock market crash of 1929. For this and other reasons, Britain suspended convertibility in 1931. The United States followed suit in 1933. In 1948, the United States was the dominant source of machinery and equipment for development. The dollar was the benchmark of world currencies and 'hard'. Imports from the United States to Britain coupled with exports to the United States dominated British trade. The entire resources of the colonies, including scarce dollar credits in Britain, were mobilized for the war effort. Britain blocked direct trade by the colonies with the United States. Consequently, they could not export to the United States to earn the dollars they required to buy the development-oriented imports from Britain.

2. Government of Jamaica, *Hansards Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, Vol. 1 (1948), p. 214.

3. See E. R. D. Evans, Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Commerce, *Hansards Proceedings*, House of Representatives, Vol. 1, Sessions 1948, p. 241.

4. "Juggernauts in the Colonies," *The Economist*, Vol. 151, No. 5391 (December 21, 1946).

5. See the discussion in "Political Unionism and the Collective Objective," *op. cit.*

6. This point is made in the report of Major Orde-Browne, Labour Advisor

to the Colonial Office. See Great Britain, *Labour Conditions in the West Indies: Report by G. St. J. Orde-Browne* (London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 6070, 1939). See also "Labour Conditions in the Colonies," *The Economist*, 130 (February 5, 1938), p. 285.

7. Hirschman discusses the role of "pariah (foreign) entrepreneurs" and their susceptibility to expropriation. See A. O. Hirschman, *Development Projects Observed* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, October 1967), p. 52.

8. "Labour Conditions in the Colonies," *op. cit.* This viewpoint is also emphasized by Urias Forbes, *Some Aspects of Industrial Relations in Trinidad and Tobago, op. cit.*

9. A highly stylized, but not atypical, example of selective benefits, (and disadvantages) and the use of non-price criteria in the allocation of scarce resources or income opportunities might help the reader to understand the extent of the problem under political unionism. The government in power (the PNP) gets a \$1 billion loan from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to build a bridge of relatively enormous proportions somewhere in the eastern extremity of the country. We will call this project, Project E. All the project managers, subcontractors and highly qualified manpower are recruited on the basis of their affiliation to the PNP. They, in turn, recruit labor (who invariably turn up for recruitment on the job site) under the criteria of party affiliation. In short, only members of the NWU are recruited—regardless of their relative appropriateness for the job in progress. The project eventually gets under way but is slow on target due to frequent shutdowns, labor management unrest, political interference, long down-times and low worker-management productivity. The project is only halfway through and there is another election. By then Project E has become a symbol of PNP mismanagement of borrowed money and the economy. The JLP wins the election. Project E is discontinued and replaced by Project W—different only in its political location which is at the western extremity of the country. Bridge E was a misdirected exercise. W is the "correct" decision in terms of the new planning priorities. Additional funds are provided by CIDA and the government. This time all the project managers, subcontractors and highly skilled manpower are recruited on the basis of their affiliation to the BITU. They, in turn, recruit only those workers who are affiliated to the JLP—*i.e.*, members of the BITU—regardless of their relative manpower capabilities. The project gets under way, eventually, and again it is beset by labor unrest, political intervention, etc. By the time Project W is halfway through, there is another election. The PNP wins this election and proceed to reinstate Project E, and so on. While political unionism in this supposition does provide a mechanism for sharing the (CIDA) money among rival segments of labor and the rest of the population, it prevents the growth of goods and services that the economy needs to pay interest and eventually repay the debts as they become due. Because of political unionism, the cost of such government (and private) expenditures, in terms of current production foregone, is enormous.

10. Eric Williams, Premier, Minister of Finance to the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago, *Budget Speech* (Trinidad and Tobago: 12th April 1961, Government Printing Office, 1961).

11. Eugene Stanley, *The Future of Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), p. 203.

12. Unlike Jamaica, Trinidad has recently undertaken a drastic program of labor reforms in an attempt to bring the trade union movement within the purview of government social and economic policy. A major industrial relations act was passed by parliament in 1972 but the details of this Act and its implications for the trade union movement have not yet been fully analysed. See Trinidad and Tobago, *The Industrial Relations Act, 1972, 1st Session, Third Parliament, Trinidad and Tobago, 21 Elizabeth II* (Trinidad and Tobago: Government Printery, 1972).

13. It is interesting to note that Michael Manley (Prime Minister of Jamaica and *de facto* leader of the National Workers Union) now advocates a movement to end "the pernicious trade union rivalry" in the country. Speaking at a Seminar for unity of trade union leaders, sponsored by the Trade Union Educational Insti-

tute of the University of the West Indies, the Prime Minister urged trade union leaders to take action "to put an end to, and reverse the trend towards intense union rivalry which misdirects workers' action, and fractures workers' concepts of the values of worker unity." ("P.M. Urges End to Trade Union Rivalry," *The Daily Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica, Vol. 88, No. 12, May 12, 1977). Unfortunately, this proposal was generally construed by the wary public as a Machiavellian one—as an effort by the Prime Minister to create a labor coalition as a step toward a centralized One Party State.

History of Economics Society: 1981 Meeting

THE 1981 MEETING of the History of Economics Society will be held June 1–3, 1981 at Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. Suggestions for topics and speakers are invited, as are proposals for papers. They may be sent to the president-elect of the society, Warren J. Samuels, department of economics, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 48824. It will be helpful if they are received before December 1, 1980.

Information concerning membership in the Society can be obtained from James L. Cochrane, secretary-treasurer, department of economics, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, 29208. [From Professor Cochrane.]

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FOR A SPECIAL ISSUE on the physically disabled woman, the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* invites contributions on such topics as employment, rehabilitation, sexuality, social interaction, cross-cultural perspectives, dependency, attitudes toward self and others and of the feminist and advocacy movements. Send mss. before September, 1980 to either co-editor: Nancy Brooks, department of sociology, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas 67208, or Mary Jo Deegan, department of sociology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb. 68588.

Conference on Utopian Studies

THE FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE on Utopian Studies will be held at the University of Colorado/Denver, on October 11–14, 1980. For information write Michael S. Cummings, department of political science, University of Colorado/Denver, 1100 14th Street, Denver, Colo. 80202.